

DONALD ASHWANDER (1929–1994)

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

Donald Ashwander, piano

80724-2 (2 CDS)

DISC 1

[TT: 74:08]

1. *Request* (1979) 2:44
2. *Saratoga Rag* (1974) 2:53
3. *Sunday Night, Manhattan* (1975) 4:05
4. *October* (1974) 3:17
5. *Old Streets* (1971) 5:27
6. *Summer Garden* (1976) 2:27
7. *The Garden at Night* (1977) 3:42

Traditional Patterns

8. *Dove in the Window* (1970) 2:22
9. *Crow Tracks* (1971) 1:48
10. *Road to California* (1971) 2:25
11. *Drunkard's Path* (1970) 1:06
12. *Sunshine and Shadow* (1979) 2:10
13. *Pine Tree* (1970) 1:46
14. *Goose in the Pond* (1971) 1:55
15. *The Moonflower Vine* (1971) 1:45

16. *Nocturne in E* (1959 and 1979) 2:06
17. *She Laughed at Him* (1950)* 2:05
18. *Betty, The Belle of Baytown* (c. 1958)* 2:47
19. *Thelma* (1956)* 4:12
20. *Peggy, The Pearl of Pensacola* (1958)* 3:00
21. *Chili Billy* (1965)* 1:50
22. *Bar* (c. 1951)* 5:13
23. *The Sinatra Line* (1981)* 4:12
24. *Pedro at Baseball* (1980)* 2:57
25. *Street Corner Pierrot* (1980) 2:59
26. *The Locust* (1953)* 2:03

*Sharon Moore, vocals

DISC 2 [TT: 74:00]

1. *On the Highwire* (1985) 5:36
2. *Forgotten Ballrooms* (1983) 4:20
3. *Moving Man* (1988) 3:12
4. *Perdido Bay Moon Rag* (1988) 5:26
5. *The Waterloo Rag* (1972) 3:30
6. *Here and Gone* (1977) 4:40
7. *Mobile Carnival Rag-Tango* (1966) 4:37
8. *Empty Porches* (1969) 4:58
9. *Friday Night* (1965) 4:21
10. *Astor Place Rag-Waltz* (1966) 4:01
11. *The Brooklyn Stop and Start* (1984) 4:37
12. *Wax Paper Dance* (1967) 3:02
13. *Business in Town* (1966) 2:38
14. *Peacock Colors* (1967) 5:52
15. *Evanescence* (1979) 5:46
16. *Yard Sale Rag* (1992) 3:33

17. *Daybreak in Alabama* (1991)** 2:59

**Sharon Moore, vocals; Catherine Styron, piano; Charlie Chadwick, bass; Peter Hyrdak, violalin

Sunshine and Shadow is an ideal title for this recorded tribute to Donald Ashwander. It is the name of a pensive piano solo on Disc One, and perfect shorthand to describe both the composer and his work. Donald Ashwander radiated the Sunshine of ready humor and deep humanity. The Shadow was cast by his profound sense of irony and tragedy. Both resonate in his compositions, from the rollicking rhythms of his rags, the dour humor of his poetry, and the haunted memories imbedded in his freeform piano essays.

Donald Ashwander was my friend throughout his thirty-odd years in New York, a friendship repeatedly broadened by my respect for his immense talent. From its beginning, our friendship was shared mutually with the author and critic Rudi Blesh, so my remarks in these notes, based on memories of those friendships, will be homely and informal, unlikely to turn toward the academic or analytical. Mr. Ashwander will be Donald henceforth (never Don); Mr. Blesh will be Rudi, quoted often from the notes he provided for most of Donald's recordings.

Rudi was the co-author with Harriet Janis of the seminal book *They All Played Ragtime*. Combining deep research with a highly readable narrative, this book on the early history of ragtime has informed the renaissance of the music ever since. It triggered the popular "honky-tonk" phase of the 1950s, then the more serious attention to the genre that followed during the 1960s, with faithful piano recordings of classic and contemporary rags appearing on major labels by Donald, William Bolcom, Ann Charters, Nurit Tilles, Josh Rifkin, and this writer, among others. As the rediscovery unfolded, there was a companion effort by many of these same musicians to create, as Rudi later wrote, ". . . a 'New View' of ragtime—more than a nostalgic backward look at yesterday, but a new start from where yesterday stopped." He said this in praise of Donald as a major contributor to the New View, just as Donald could be said to have revered Rudi for his evocation of the 'Old View' as chronicled in *They All Played Ragtime*.

TAPR, as it was soon acronymed, inspired an anxious telephone call in 1965 from Donald to Rudi, a call that seeded their lasting friendship. As Donald recalled it, "I had read *They All Played Ragtime* in 1950, and felt an immediate and deep affinity for its authors, but it wasn't until I moved back to New York from Alabama that I composed my first rag. I finished it on a Friday night. Next morning I awoke thinking about the piece and about ragtime. I looked in the Manhattan phone book and found the name Rudi Blesh. I dialed the number, and there was the man himself! I told him about *Friday Night* and he evinced interest, so I said I'd play it for him over the phone."

Rudi would later write of that telephonic audition: "I could scarcely credit my ears. If *Friday Night* was a fair sampling, here was the needed New Breed, the Composer-Player." He suggested they meet the next day at the home of his friend, the writer and critic Marshall Stearns. "There was a fine upright," Donald later wrote. "I was able to give the piece a half-way decent reading. Thus began for me one of the most important and satisfying friendships of my life, lasting until Rudi's death in 1985."

You'll arrive at *Friday Night* on Disc Two, having basked often in Donald's Sunshine. En route you will also have stood in his Shadow. Here's how he described the composition of *Mobile Carnival Rag-Tango*: "I had thought to write a piece reflecting nothing more than the frantic gaiety of this Gulf Coast Mardi Gras Carnival. To my surprise, however, it began to turn very dark. I decided to go with the turn it had taken, to a place that was completely unpremeditated." Rudi agreed. He sensed that Donald had already added significantly to what he termed "content." He meant *emotional* content. "Untapped in ragtime until Ashwander appeared," he said, "was the expression

of deep sorrow and even despair. Suddenly it will intrude into the gaiety. In *Mobile Carnival* you will hear it, in slow, elegiac tango, pure strophes of memory caught in a limbo of grief.”

Is it still “ragtime?” Of course, if we are willing to expand the strict boundaries that had been set for this intoxicating music with the odd name. *Friday Night* and *Mobile Carnival* are definitely *rags*, if defined by form. Both are set solidly in ragtime’s time signature of 2/4. Both offer four distinct themes in the time-honored sequence AABBACCDD, firmly established in 1899 by the Rosetta Stone of ragtime, Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag*. To the ear, both pieces enter as rags; then, tapping into our emotions, *Mobile Carnival* transcends the form.

Donald’s legacy forces us to examine our annoying need to attach labels to our music—and our musicians. Donald is called a “ragtime” pianist, and indeed he was—an exceptional one. But as a composer for the instrument, he defies category. Listen again to the elegiac mini-concerto *Request*; visit the impressionism of the near-atonal *Street Corner Pierrot*; factor in the Kurt Weill influence behind *She Laughed at Him* or *Thelma*. The ragtime pigeonhole expands exponentially. Rudi put it this way, in his notes for the original *Sunshine and Shadow* album of 1979: “[Donald’s work] will surely take its place as an enduring contribution to seriously conceived, and seriously wrought, classic American piano-forte music.”

Donald Ashwander was born in 1929 in Birmingham, Alabama. As the Great Depression deepened, his family returned to their farm near the village of Hanceville. Donald grew up there, and his childhood in the Alabama country would eventually coalesce with the sophistication of his adulthood in New York to create the “Sunshine and Shadow” of his life and his music. Piano lessons in high school were followed by serious study at Sacred Heart College in nearby Cullman and then at Birmingham Southern College. In 1948, at the age of nineteen, he enrolled at the Manhattan School of Music in New York. In spite of completing studies there in 1952, he realized he had no interest in composing in the prescribed “International Style” of the time—the 12-tone, serialist expectations of his colleagues. As he wrote some years later, “I realized that none of the musical languages I had studied would be right for me. I would have to derive a viable language from my very American but seemingly fragile musical legacy. I felt it would eventually result in music that was truly of myself, firmly anchored in the world that I knew.”

If his years at the Manhattan School did not endow him with a settled approach to composition, they did refine a skill which would serve him well in the years to come. He became a master of musical notation. “Copyist” does not begin to describe the level of Donald’s art; it must be described rather as superb calligraphy. This talent would become part of his professional identity—a master of pen and ink, transcribing his own compositions and frequently those of others, at handsome fees.

The need to make a living led him away for a time from the harsh New York musical arena. He returned to Alabama, to Mobile now, where he worked in the shipyards, served a hitch in the merchant marine, and paid his dues playing the piano in the bars and cocktail lounges of the Gulf Coast. “These new experiences away from New York,” he later wrote, “were nourishing. Musical composition continued to be the core of my life. But chasing the popular hit was definitely not for me. It seemed I was fitting into neither the academic nor the commercial world.” But he would soon find himself in both worlds.

Donald returned to New York in the early 1960s, where a life-changing opportunity set him on a new course. He signed on as composer and musical director for the Paper Bag Players, the

touring company that to this day delights children all over the world. He was with them until his death in 1994, and his twenty-eight year stand with this celebrated company did two things: it furnished him a steady livelihood, and it provided him the time and financial security to pursue a companion career in serious composition.

For “The Bags” Donald took on the multiple roles of composer, lyricist, and performer, working tirelessly on show after show with Judith Martin, for years the guiding light of the company. Donald’s first seasons with The Bags were spent at the piano, but before long he switched to the electric harpsichord. It became his solo “orchestra,” and he was soon exploring its broad tonal and percussive capabilities to better fit the company’s madcap scenarios. Judy Liss, for years the Managing Director of the Players, remembers him fondly. “Donald was a real Southern gentleman,” she says, “an exciting, can-do person. His music was the soul of the company.” Most of his scores for Bags compositions call for execution on the electric harpsichord, but *Wax Paper Dance* and *Here and Gone* were also scored for piano, and are included here. Donald’s music for The Bags was Sunshine music of variety and nonsense. There may have been occasional Shadows, but it was always *fun*. Upon learning of Donald’s death, Charles Osgood, of the CBS-TV program *Sunday Morning*, said this: “He was, in fact, a serious composer, but a couple of generations of children loved him because onstage with The Paper Bag Players, he was anything but serious. Goodbye to a hero of glee.”

Programming on these New World discs retains the sequencing that Donald, the singer Sharon Moore, and consultants such as Rudi Blesh and Nurit Tilles devised for the earlier recordings, and I assure you that listening in that order will reward your ears. But I’d like to jump around a bit now, paying close attention to selections that I feel testify to the range of Donald’s invention. I’ll return to the beginning with *Request*. I wish I knew whence the title. He copyrighted it in 1979, long after his dues-paying rounds in the saloons and cocktail lounges. But I like to think he’d been ad-libbing it years earlier in response to requests by dedicated Ashwander fans seated around a gritty Alabama piano bar, contending with the shouts of half-stoned philistines: “Hey, Donny! Play *The Saints!* Play *Melancholy Baby!*” I picture him preferring to acknowledge the wishes of his friends and playing *Request*, suddenly quieting the room. It is a sumptuous piece of piano literature, defying category. Rudi deemed it “proud of its romanticism in this very unromantic present time,” confirming his view that Donald was “an intuitive composer who draws on memory and the unconscious.”

I first heard the opening tracks of this New World CD in 1979, on Side One of the original *Sunshine and Shadow* album. That qualifies me to suggest that you “leave the needle down” for Track Two, as I did then. Be prepared for surprise. After the first sixteen bars of *Saratoga*, you’ll understand why Donald was properly celebrated as a player/composer of ragtime. In *Saratoga* you’ll feel the kind of elation experienced by ragtime’s first audiences a hundred years ago, when its gifted young African-American virtuosos moved the ancient matrix of the march to the keys of the piano and syncopated it into a new groove that changed American music forever. Donald again tips his hat to them, his ground plan for *Saratoga* again matching that of Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf* and other early classics. The duple time signature remains 2/4; the bass never varies from the octave/chord oom-pah beat of the march, providing a consistent rhythmic continuum to underpin the extravagant syncopes of the treble. Formula and structure aside, it is pure joy, composed, as Rudi wrote, “. . . of whirling, rollicking, hurdy-gurdy themes.” Now again, don’t lift the needle! *Sunday Night*, *Manhattan* will enlarge your conception of what ragtime can be, here in Donald’s mastery of its offspring. Still a rag, it now also implies *stride* piano, evoking memories of

Fats Waller and James P. Johnson, as the downbeats of the bass have become exclusively tenths rather than octaves.

Special attention must be paid to *Street Corner Pierrot*. It appears within the vocal sequence of the closing tracks on Disc I. No other work in this collection settles as thoroughly the impossibility of fixing labels on the work of Donald Ashwander. Seeking descriptive words, I hear modal, atonal, and dissonant to describe it *musically*; haunting and disturbing to capture its effect on my emotions; private and totally impressionistic to portray the approach of the pianist, who seems to be improvising as he watches a scene unfold. Donald sketched this scene in a preface to his manuscript copy: it's a hot summer night in Greenwich Village; a costumed Pierrot places his bank, a cigar box, on the sidewalk. "Yearning for the moon," he then mimes the drama of a failed love affair he observes unfolding through the window of a flat across the street.

In earlier times this strange little piece might have been called a *toccata*—a succession, according to one musicologist, ". . . of scenes, an exhibition of imagination without any restraining or binding principle of form." To me it evokes the work of a perceptive silent film pianist, improvising to scenes he's watching for the first time. No nickelodeon pianist, however, would ever have reached into the harmonic puzzles of this beguiling work. I set out to diagram the chord progressions and quit after one page, deciding Donald's subtle suspensions and inversions were best served by the ear, not the intellect.

In early 1995 at a club in New York's East Village, a company of Donald's fellow artists staged *Particular People: The Music of Donald Ashwander*, a memorial revue following his death in 1994. The pianist was Nurit Tilles, a consistent champion of Donald's work, and herself a leading performer of contemporary piano and dance literature. Nurit inspired New World Records to undertake this tribute to Donald, for which she has acted as a co-producer.

The famed composer and performance artist Meredith Monk headed the cast of *Particular People*, offering a memorable dance interpretation of *Street Corner Pierrot*. Ms. Monk has spoken often of her deep affection for Donald as a friend and a fellow professional. During a radio interview on the tenth anniversary of his death, she recalled him as "a man of incredible integrity, his music a waterfall of creativity." In a recent exchange she spoke of how deeply she appreciated his unfailing support of her own work. "Even though our music was so different," she said, "Donald was interested in all kinds of music and in other people's work. That generosity of spirit is unusual in our world."

I regret not having seen this 1995 production or its week-long revival in 2006, but I had already met most of those Particular People—Betty and Billy, Thelma and Peggy—on the 1981 album of that name. Here I found yet another Donald Ashwander—the songwriter—or better said, the poet, setting his verses to music. To record them he made the inspired choice of Sharon Moore, his niece, a professional singer and entertainer. Here's Rudi: "Sharon takes the songs from the written page and creates high art material with all the immediacy of the best of modern music."

My favorite of the songs is *Bar*, Sharon's treatment praised by Rudi as a "soulful interpretation of this finely crafted jazz song." Its lyric ranks with Harold Arlen's *One for My Baby* and echoes Billy Joel's *Piano Man*—comparisons not implying imitation but high praise. And I think Donald would be pleased that I would compare his *Peggy*, *The Pearl of Pensacola* to the soiled characters conjured up by Robert W. Service, and its music to the work of that other icon of American music named Joplin, who sang in similar iambs of *Bobby McGee*.

I was honored when asked by members of Donald's family to be among the speakers at his memorial service in November 1994. We joined for the last time to share the sunshine and shadow of his life. The overwhelming shadow, of course, was his sudden death. But sunshine kept intruding. We laughed often as we remembered him, knowing he'd have wanted it that way. More than once it was said that he would have treasured the timing of his last exit at a Bags rehearsal, knowing we would envy the style of his final bow.

THE BEQUEST OF *SUNSHINE AND SHADOW* IN HIS MUSIC IS NOW HANDSOMELY SERVED BY NEW WORLD RECORDS. I BELIEVE IT WILL PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN CREATING A NEW WORLD OF APPRECIATION AND PERFORMANCE OF DONALD ASHWANDER'S MUSIC.

—Max Morath

Max Morath is a semi-retired entertainer, pianist, and writer whose one-man theatricals dealing with the ragtime era toured the USA and Canada for more than fifty years. A Vanguard recording artist, he is the author of 'The NPR Curious Listener's Guide to Popular Standards and I Love You Truly, a biography of the American composer Carrie Jacobs-Bond.

Composer Notes for *On the Highwire* (Disc Two, tracks 1–16)

At Manhattan School of Music I became adept at musical notation. I was not interested, however, in writing music in the "International Style" which was the accepted academic mode of the time (1951). I realized that none of the musical languages I had studied would be right for me as a composer.

If, as I had planned, I was going to spend my life composing music, I would have to try to derive a viable language from my very American, but seemingly fragile, musical legacy.

The attempt to understand this legacy led me to re-listen, with new purpose, to the hymns, Sacred Harp music, southern black music and the popular music of the 1930s and '40s that had been the throw-aways of my growing-up years. My efforts to define personal musical roots led me back through the spectrum of American music to its beginnings.

All the while I was setting American poems using the simplest of open harmonies and trusting in melody to carry the day. More complicated melodies, harmonies and rhythms began to come forth. People responded well to what I was doing and I was encouraged.

The process I found myself in seemed to be very slow-growing, requiring much patience. But I felt that this process would eventually result in a music that was truly of myself, and firmly anchored to the world I knew.

The necessity of making a livelihood led me away from the New York musical world into the world of the shipyard worker, the merchant seaman, the cocktail and piano-bar pianist, and other more or less interesting stop-gaps. Instead of being detrimental, these new experiences away from the New York music scene were nourishing. Musical composition continued to be the core of my life.

I deeply wanted my music to be liked. But a life spent chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of the popular hit was definitely not for me. When well-meaning family and friends would suggest that this was

the only “realistic” course to be taken in this day and age, I would instantly be thrown into a profound and morbid depression. At times it seemed I was neither fish nor fowl—fitting into neither the academic nor the commercial world. Those were dark moments.

It was not until my late thirties [that] it began to dawn on me that the musical language and method of work I had struggled over had begun to materialize. That was a very fine time for me, filled with assurance and contentment. The process continues.

—Donald Ashwander
May 1, 1989, Brooklyn, NY

On the Highwire (1985)

Many years had passed since I had been to the circus. I went and was instantly delighted, terrified and thrilled as I had been during my childhood.

One image that lingered was that of the single figure in the spotlight climbing higher and higher to the platform where he began his perilous journey. The elegant nonchalance of this artist left me breathless.

Forgotten Ballrooms (1983)

The preservation movement in America as it exists today is truly something new. Only a short time ago one would be hard put to find persons with a stylistic appreciation sophisticated enough to encompass a derelict railway depot or a 1920s filling station. Not so today. Many young Americans dream of finding, restoring and using such structures.

One of the more rarefied examples of this new appreciation is Ballroom Archeology. All over the country, ballroom archeologists are opening doors to ghostly rooms filled with the atmospheres of dreams long past.

Forgotten Ballrooms celebrates this dedicated movement.

Moving Man (1988)

Standing on a corner watching the endless stream of runners in the New York Marathon is, for me, hypnotic. The participants leave Staten Island, cross the Verrazano Bridge following the designated route. By the time they reach my Brooklyn neighborhood, a communal rhythm, as implacable as natural law, has been established.

This year, I watched until the spectacle began to blur—then turned away. Leaving, I retained a vivid memory of that rhythm and the image of a single, unknown runner who had quickly moved in and out of my range of vision.

That same day I began writing this piece.

Perdido Bay Moon Rag (1988)

Perdido Bay Moon Rag is dedicated to the memory of a very elegant lady who was a great dancer and who, many years ago, suggested this title.

One summer my friends Edith and Edwin Zelnicker and I were at Bear Point, Alabama, a peninsula that juts out into Perdido Bay. We were recalling the days when, as children, we spent hours under the huge magnolia trees hanging with Spanish moss, digging in the ancient Indian mounds for pottery shards. Edith said, "Donald, why don't you write a piece called 'Perdido Bay Moon Rag'?" I liked the title and promised I'd do it. When I got back to New York, I wrote a piece, but it somehow got away from me. Nevertheless, I drew an appropriate cover and mailed it off to Edith and Edwin in Mobile.

On subsequent visits, *Perdido Bay Moon Rag* would always be lying in a prominent place on their piano. Edith would say, "I've tried to play that piece but it's too hard." I'd agree and the piece would remain unplayed. More years passed and Edith became ill.

On my first visit to Mobile after Edith's death, I spent the night in their home. The atmosphere that had been created by Edith was everywhere apparent. There lying in a prominent place on the piano was the *Perdido Bay Moon Rag*. From that moment my number-one priority was to write a totally new composition. This time the piece seemed almost to write itself.

The Waterloo Rag (1972)

Friends in England invited me for a weekend in the country. I left from Waterloo Station. All that morning I had been humming a little ragtime tune. As the train pulled out of the station and began to pick up speed I realized the click-i-ty-clack of the wheels fit the rhythm of the little tune. I jotted it down in my manuscript book and at odd moments, over the weekend, added to it. By the time I was on the train returning to London, several themes existed and when I arrived back at Waterloo Station, *The Waterloo Rag* had almost arrived too.

Here and Gone (1977)

This little rag was written to accompany a Paper Bag Players skit detailing the histories of people who had lived in a New York City tenement. In the skit, the building was represented by a tall, narrow refrigerator box. Windows with faces peering out were drawn on the box as the story unfolded.

It was a lovely skit conceived by Judith Martin.

Mobile Carnival Rag-Tango (1966)

With *Mobile Carnival Rag-Tango* I had thought to write a piece reflecting nothing more than the frantic gaiety of Mardi Gras. To my surprise, however, the piece began to turn very dark. Instead of trying to force it back on the track of my original intention I decided to go with the turn it had taken, and we ended up in a place that was completely unpremeditated.

Empty Porches (1969)

It was twilight when I returned to the street where I had lived and played as a child. The houses, with their large, comfortable porches still existed but the atmosphere had completely changed. The excited sounds of children playing “Knock the Can,” the muted conversations of visiting neighbors, ice tinkling in glasses, the to-and-fro squeak of swings had all disappeared.

The summer night was now defined by the steady hum of air conditioners and the flickering lights of television through sealed windows.

Friday Night (1965)

I had read *They All Played Ragtime* by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis when it first appeared in 1950. I felt an immediate and deep affinity with its authors and what they had to say.

Though my music had always incorporated elements of ragtime, it wasn't until 1966, after I had moved back to New York City from Mobile, Alabama, settled into a Greenwich Village apartment and acquired a second-hand upright, that I composed my first rag. I finished it on a Friday night. Thus the title.

On Saturday morning I awoke thinking about the piece and the authors of *They All Played Ragtime*. On a long chance, I looked into the New York phone directory and lo-and-behold there was the name Rudi Blesh. It had to be the same person. I dialed the number and there was the man himself!

I told him about my new rag and he evinced interest. My compositions are often beyond my piano technique, requiring much practice for me to make them known. *Friday Night* is one of these. Nevertheless, I told Rudi I would play it over the phone. I somehow stumbled through the piece and resumed our conversation. We agreed this was not the best way to hear music. Rudi suggested we meet the next afternoon at the house of his friend Marshall Stearns (author of *Jazz Dancing*) on Waverly Place, where there was a fine upright.

Meantime, I got in some practice and the next day was able to give the piece a half-way decent reading. This began for me one of the most important and satisfying friendships of my life, lasting until Rudi's death in 1985.

Friday Night was choreographed in 1974 by Kenneth Macmillan for the Royal Ballet production of his *Elite Syncopations*. It was first performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London.

Astor Place Rag-Waltz (1966)

Astor Place in New York City for me harbors ghosts. Nothing remains from the days when it was the stopping-place of Abe Lincoln and Mark Twain and was the scene of the bloody Astor Place riots. Still, there *is* an essence.

My friend Rudi Blesh lived around the corner from this historic street. One of Rudi's many gifts was making the best “Stingers” I've ever tasted. According to Rudi, the Stinger was *the* quintessential 1920s drink. Many were the stories emanating from Rudi about that glittering period which he illustrated with his great collection of 78-rpm records as the two of us did justice to that fine concoction. Our supplies for these time trips came from the famous Astor Place

Liquor Store. Because of this and because the rag-waltz was a favorite of Rudi's, I have dedicated *Astor Place Rag-Waltz* to him.

The Brooklyn Stop and Start (1984)

I wrote this fantasy as a dance with caller. It was given its premiere by Nurit Tilles. This brilliant pianist played it in a concert on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the fall of 1984. The concert took place, appropriately, at the Picnic House in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York. I acted as the "caller." The audience soon caught on and began coming in at the right places. Great fun! Perhaps someday there will be an actual dance.

Wax Paper Dance (1967)

This is another dance composed for The Paper Bag Players. Dancers, moving quickly, pulled streamers from boxes of wax paper. Lines, loops, circles and curves were formed until the piece resembled a classic scarf dance.

Business in Town (1966)

My Grandpa Blackerby was a farmer during the Great Depression of the 1930s. His farm was located some miles from Bessemer, Alabama. One year, during those hard times, my brother Dan and I were billeted with the grandparents while our parents were in Florida on business. For myself, a child whose imagination thrived on visions of cities and movies, farm life was a pretty pallid affair. My constant craving was to be off. To go somewhere. Anywhere!

Our only means of transportation was Grandpa's horse and wagon. For some reason my grandfather always called his horse "Maud," whatever its gender. There had been many generations of "Mauds." I lived for the time when Grandpa hitched Maud to the wagon and said to Grandma, "I've got business in town. I'll take the children." Hallelujah!

In a state of sheer joy we'd climb up the spokes into the wagon bed and settle ourselves on the worn-out patchwork quilts Grandma had put there to serve as a buffer against the awful roads over which we must pass. Even though the roads were almost impassable, even though Maud seemed gleefully to hit every pothole, rut, rock and cranny, nothing could dim our enthusiasm for our trip to town.

Business in Town was suggested to me by the memories of those wagon trips and those terrible, terrible roads.

Peacock Colors (1967)

In June 1967 I woke to a wonderful rainy morning. As the coffee dripped, I was filled with the luxurious feeling of having a day completely unscheduled. A perfect day for writing a new rag—the kind of rag that had never before been written. A Blues Rag-Waltz, I thought, that's the ticket! The composition, however, would not stay darkly blue as I had intended. Purples, browns, greens and in-betweens began to creep in. When the piece was complete, it had become an Iridescent Rag-Waltz.

Sitting on top of my piano was an Art Nouveau vase filled with peacock feathers.

Evanescence (1979)

I completed this piece on a day that Rudi Blesh was coming to dinner. Rudi arrived and over drinks I announced I had just completed a new, yet un-named rag. The first word from Rudi after hearing it was, “Evanescence!” “What’s that?” I asked. The word wasn’t in my vocabulary. Rudi defined it as, “vanishing” or “fading” and the rag was titled.

Nurit Tilles recorded it for her album, *Ragtime Here and Now* (JCE-87). I love the way Nurit plays the piece though my version is very different. It intrigues me that the rag can lend itself to such different, yet completely legitimate, interpretations.

Yard Sale Rag (1992)

Riding through the countryside in summer would make one believe that yard sales have become the national preoccupation. I love them! Though I have enough of these “bargains” to last several lifetimes, passing up a yard sale casts me into a state of complete panic. What surprises undiscovered! What treasures lost! To exorcize this black mood I wrote a rag. It also takes up less space.

Sharon Moore is the composer’s niece. She grew up listening to Donald Ashwander’s compositions and was greatly influenced by his musicianship and penchant for lively and diverse storytelling. Some of her earliest studio recordings were under the direction of Ashwander while collaborating on the 1981 album *Particular People*. Ms. Moore began her own musical journey in her teens in San Antonio, Texas, and would continue to compose and perform music throughout her career in San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Nashville, and now on the Gulf Coast of Alabama. She has been a sought-after vocalist for festivals, club performances and recording sessions. Ms. Moore’s recording *A Moment More* (2000) featured two Ashwander compositions, “Chili Billy” and “Daybreak in Alabama,” included herein. *A Moment More* was nominated for the 2001 Nashville Music Awards for Best Jazz Album of the Year.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

For Your Delight: New American Art Songs. Includes “Daybreak in Alabama” and “Possums.” Tom Bogdan, vocals; Harry Huff, piano. New World Records/CRI NWCR 901.

Particular People: Songs of Donald Ashwander. Sharon Moore, vocals; Donald Ashwander, piano. Upstairs Records UPST-3. (LP)

Ragtime: A New View. Donald Ashwander, piano. Jazzology JCE-71. (LP)

Ragtime Here and Now. Nurit Tilles, piano. Includes “Time Rag,” “Evanescence,” and “Grand Central.” Jazzology JCE-87. (LP)

They All Play Ragtime. Various composers and pianists. Includes “Friday Night” and “Business in Town.” Jazzology JCE-52. (LP)

Traditional Patterns: The Music of Donald Ashwander. Sharon Moore, vocals; Tom Bogdan, vocals; Harry Huff, piano; Donald Ashwander, piano. Premier Recordings PRCD-1038.

Turnips: Pieces by Donald Ashwander. Donald Ashwander, electric harpsichord, chordiana, rhythm box and piano. Upstairs Records UPST-1. (LP)

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She Laughed at Him; Betty, The Belle of Baytown; Thelma; Peggy, The Pearl of Pensacola; Chili Billy; and *Bar* are settings of poems by Donald Ashwander. *The Sinatra Line* is a setting of a poem by David Evanier. *Pedro at Baseball* is a setting of a poem by Jane Mayhall. *The Locust* is a setting of a poem by Eugene Walter. *Daybreak in Alabama* is a setting of a poem by Langston Hughes.

Producers: Nurit Tilles and Judy Ashwander Moore

Engineers: Jeff Zaraya (Disc One, tracks 1–16); Carl Seltzer (Disc One, tracks 17–26; Disc Two, tracks 1–16); Michael Webb and Danny Bailey (Disc Two, track 17)

Tracks 1–16 on Disc One were recorded at Vanguard Studios, NYC, in 1979. Tracks 17–26 were recorded at Seltzer Sound, NYC, in 1981. All tracks on Disc Two (except track 17) were recorded at Seltzer Sound, NYC in 1989 (1–14) and 1993 (15 & 16). Track 17 was recorded at The Tracking Station in Nashville, Tennessee in 1999.

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

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Tracks 1–16 on Disc One were previously issued on the LP *Sunshine and Shadow* (Upstairs Records UPST-2). Tracks 17–26 were previously issued on the LP *Particular People* (Upstairs Records UPST-3). *Daybreak in Alabama* was previously issued on the CD *Sharon Moore: A Moment More* (Mindful Music SM001).

All compositions published by the composer (ASCAP).

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Tel (212) 290-1680 Fax (646) 224-9638

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