

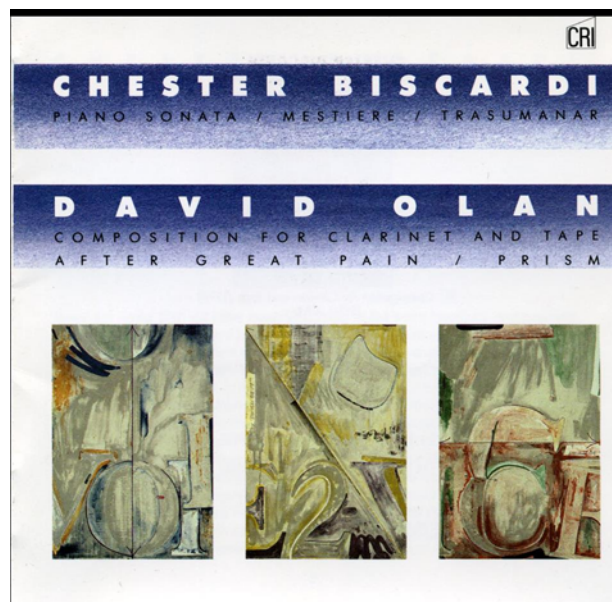
NWCR565

Chester Biscardi

Piano Sonata / *Mestiere* / *Trasumanar*

David Olan

Composition for Clarinet and Tape / *After Great Pain* / *Prism*



Chester Biscardi

1. Piano Sonata (1986; revised 1987) (10:00)
2. *Mestiere* for piano (1979) (5:29)
Anthony de Mare, piano
3. *Trasumanar* for twelve percussionists
and piano (1980) (13:32)
The New Jersey Percussion Ensemble;
Gary Van Dyke, conductor.

David Olan

4. Composition for Clarinet and Tape (1976) (5:24)
Laura Flax, clarinet
5. *After Great Pain* for soprano and
electronic sounds (1982) (9:43)
Judith Bettina, soprano
6. *Prism* for six percussionists and tape (1978) (8:42)
The New Jersey Percussion Ensemble;
Peter Jarvis, conductor.

Total playing time: 53:40

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Notes

Since the early 1970s, I have been interested in the ways literature and painting influence musical ideas and form—how literary images or use of color can inspire everything from the smallest melodic shape to a work’s overall structure. The first three pieces on this disc are the result of this exploration.

The structure of Piano Sonata (1986; rev. 1987) is based upon Jasper Johns’s *Voice 2*. *Voice 2* has gone through three transformations: originally an oil and collage triptych (1971), later a three-panel lithograph (1982), and in a final version, a nine-panel interchangeable series made of the 1982 lithograph. Johns borrows material from earlier works and utilizes overlapping, extension, and repetition as the main ingredients of form. Piano Sonata is divided into three sections which reflect three musical textures: angular and pulsating, fast runs and chords, and lyrical. As with Johns’s series, the three sections of Piano Sonata evolve into nine interactive sections and a coda.

Piano Sonata was written for Anthony de Mare and premiered on his New York debut recital in 1986.

Mestiere (1979) is a celebration of the contrasting sonorities—incisive and lyrical—which are natural to the piano. The Italian title is translated as “craft, business, occupation, whatever is necessary to one’s profession or art.” “Mestiere” is what one is and does, what is integral to one’s life and work. Here, the word is used as it is in the title of Cesare Pavese’s collected journals, *Il mestiere di vivere* (*The Business of Living*).

Mestiere was commissioned by Tulane University for the 1979 Festival of Piano Music and is dedicated to Robert Weirich who first recorded it on CRI in 1981.

Trasumanar, for twelve percussionists and piano (1980), is scored for thirty-two different instruments and specifies a spatial arrangement which creates a sense of acoustic motion among the diverse instrumental groupings: drums dominate the back of the stage, woods—stage right, metals—stage left, and the pitched instruments—in front.

The piano, which introduces the basic motivic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas, functions less as a solo instrument than as a means to unify and give motion to a music which varies between being static and highly dynamic. The relationship of the piano to the percussion ensemble was suggested by works for piano and electronic sounds: the percussion functions as an electronic tape—extending, amplifying, and interacting with the sounds of the piano.

“Trasumanar” is a word coined by Dante to describe the experience of rising above the human state. At the beginning of the *Paradiso*, Dante’s human nature is transmuted to a higher level. He is left bewildered by the sensual pull of being human and the spiritual aspiration to transcend human experience. The dramatic tension created by this struggle provides the structural framework of *Trasumanar*.

Trasumanar was written for The New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and its director, Raymond DesRoches, with invaluable assistance from percussionist Joseph Passaro.

—Chester Biscardi

Chester Biscardi's (*b* 1948) works have been performed by the American Composers Orchestra, the Houston Symphony, the BBC London, the RAI Orchestra-Rome, and Music Today-Japan, among others. Biscardi is the recipient of the Prix de Rome, an Ives Scholarship from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Born in 1948 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, he holds an M.A. in Italian Literature, an M.M. in musical composition from the University of Wisconsin, and a DMA from Yale. He is currently chairman of the music department at Sarah Lawrence College. Other works by Chester Biscardi on CRI include *Tenzone* (SD 400), *Mestiere* (SD 459), and *At The Still Point* (SD 474).

These three pieces combine live performers with pre-recorded magnetic tape. In each piece the performer has cues for the tape part in his score and is expected to coordinate his performance with the tape.

For my first piece in this genre, I chose to write for clarinet. As a clarinetist I felt closest to that instrument and its sound. *Composition for Clarinet and Tape* was completed in 1976 and first performed by me in May of that year.

Musically, my goal was to incorporate and extend the unique characteristics of the acoustic instrument into the electronic medium. I wanted to draw on the expressivity and fluidity of the clarinet (and clarinetist) and at the same time exploit the extremes of speed, register, dynamics, and percussiveness which can be achieved with tape. About two-thirds of the way through the piece, these two worlds are sharply juxtaposed; but in the piece as a whole, the sharpness of the contrast is felt within a process of accommodation between the two worlds, with each medium having the opportunity to reinforce and support the other. In this piece, and the others, the tape part was constructed from electronically generated sounds at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.

After Great Pain departs in intent, through not in method, from *Composition for Clarinet and Tape*. Here the starting point was less the desire to exploit relationships between the live an electronic media than to evoke the profound but austere concentrated emotion of the text. The piece was written for Judith Bettina, who gave its premiere in November 1982. Her distinctive sound and musicality strongly influenced the electronic sounds I chose to use.

The range of relationships between voice and tape is a response to the varying intensities of the text. The emotional foci of the work are in the second and fourth poems where Dickinson projects an almost incandescent absorption in the experience of loneliness and pain. There the tape tends to be

most concentrated and integrated with the voice. The other three poems are more outward-looking, offering some promise of release; their settings encompass a wider range of tape gestures and greater independence between voice and tape.

Prism was written for The New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and first performed by them in March 1979 under the direction of Joseph Passaro. My approach to the work was similar to that in *Composition for Clarinet and Tape*, except the roles of performers and tape were somewhat reversed. The idea was to exploit the percussiveness of the ensemble—and the brilliant virtuosity and precision of this ensemble—and to explore the potential of the tape for sustained lines and fluid gestures.

The piece is in one continuous movement with an introduction, a series of developmental episodes, and a brief conclusion. The introduction serves to juxtapose elements of the performing forces: families of instruments (metal/drum/wood), tuned versus un-tuned instruments, and live versus electronic sound. These juxtapositions are heightened in the central sections.

The multitude of textures available within the percussion battery is matched by a greater range of relationships between the performers and tape than is heard in either of my other two pieces on the recording. The evolving nature of the relationships between instrumental and electronic sound is vital to shaping this piece: the tape at times sounds “instrumental” (imitating, extending, and modulating the instrumental sound) and at times sounds inherently “electronic” (offsetting the percussion sounds or drawing them into its own world).

—David Olan

David Olan (*b* 1948) has composed six pieces for live performers and electronic sounds. His works also include orchestral, chamber, and solo compositions which have been commissioned and performed by such organizations as the American Composers Orchestra, Parnassus, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and the New Music Consort. Among his awards are Guggenheim, NEA, and CAPS Fellowships, and commissions from the Jerome Foundation and the Serge Koussevitsky Foundation in the Library of Congress. Born in 1948 in Worcester, Massachusetts, Olan holds degrees from Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin. He is on the faculty of Baruch College, where he has been chairman since 1984, and of the Graduate School of the City University of New York. David Olan's *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1974) appears on CRI SD 419

After Great Pain

Five Poems by Emily Dickinson

I

I cautious, scanned my little life—
I winnowed what would fade
From what would last till Heads like mine
Should be a-dreaming laid.
I put the latter in a Barn—
The former, blew away.
I went one winter morning
And lo—my priceless Hay
Was not upon the “Scaffold”—
Was not upon the “Beam”—
And from a thriving Farmer—
A Cynic, I became.
Whether a thief did it—
Whether it was in the wind—
Whether Deity’s guiltless—
My business is, to find!
So I begin to ransack!
How is it Hearts, with Thee?
Art thou within the little Barn
Love provided Thee?

II

It might be lonelier
Without the Loneliness—
I’m so accustomed to my Fate—
Perhaps the Other-Peace—
Would interrupt the Dark—
And crowd the little Room—
Too scant—by Cubits—to contain
The Sacrament—of Him—
I am not used to Hope—
It might intrude upon—
Its sweet parade—blaspheme the place—
Ordained to Suffering—
It might be easier
To fail—with Land in Sight—
Than gain—My Blue Peninsula—
To perish—of Delight—

III

The Love a Life can show Below
Is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face of Noon—
And smites the Tinder in the Sun—
And Hinders Gabriel’s Wing—

‘Tis this—in Music—hints and sways—
And for abroad on Summer days—
Distils uncertain pain—
‘Tis this enamors in the East—
And tints the Transit in the West
With harrowing Iodine—
‘Tis this—invites—appalls—endows
Flits—glimmers—proves—dissolves—
Returns—suggests—convicts—enchants—
Then—flings in Paradise—

IV

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs—
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday or Centuries before?
The Feet, mechanical, go round—
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone—
This is the Hour of Lead
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—
First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—

V

It was a quiet way—
He asked if I was his—
I made no answer of the Tongue
But answer of the Eyes—
And then He bore me on
Before this mortal noise
With swiftness, as of Chariots
And distance, as of Wheels.
This World did drop away
As acres from the feet
Of one that leaneth from Balloon
Upon an Ether street.
The Gulf behind was not,
The Continents were new—
Eternity it was before
Eternity was due.
No seasons were to us—
It was not Night nor Morn
But Sunrise stopped upon the place
And fastened it in Dawn.

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Judith Bettina is one of America's leading proponents of contemporary vocal music. She has appeared with leading ensembles across the United States from the Group for Contemporary Music and Speculum Musicae to the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the San Francisco Symphony. A native of New York City, Ms. Bettina presently teaches at Stanford University and divides her time between New York and California. This recording marks her debut on CRI.

Anthony de Mare won the 1986 Young Concert Artists International Auditions which led to his New York debut recital at the 92nd Street Y. Noted for his performances of twentieth-century American repertoire, Mr. de Mare has appeared with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and the San Francisco Symphony, among others. Since 1985 he has performed with Meredith Monk and the House. This marks his recording debut.

Laura Flax is one of New York's most versatile clarinetists. Ms. Flax is assistant principal clarinetist with the New York City Opera Orchestra, a member of the Da Capo Chamber Music Players, the Music Today Ensemble, and performs frequently with Orpheus and the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble.

The New Jersey Percussion Ensemble, Raymond DesRoches, director, is renowned for its definitive performances of twentieth-century percussion music. Through first performances of over 100 works, the group has virtually created a new repertoire for percussion ensemble. Mr. DesRoches formed the ensemble in 1968 with students from William Paterson College, Rutgers University, and Jersey City State College, and since 1972 the ensemble has been in residence at William Paterson College. The Ensemble can be heard on the CRI, New World, and Nonesuch labels.

Peter Jarvis studied percussion with Raymond DesRoches at William Paterson College. He is active as a conductor and/or player with the Amara Ensemble, the New Jersey New Music Ensemble, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and Terra Australis Incognita.

Gary Van Dyke is active as performer and conductor with the Abacus Percussion Quartet, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Colonial Symphony, the New Jersey New Music Ensemble, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble, and the Stony Brook Percussion Ensemble. He received degrees from William Paterson College and SUNY Stony Brook.

Performers in *Trasumanar*: Glen Fittin (glockenspiel, crotales, 6 cowbells, suspended cymbal, hi-hat), Michael Frasche (glockenspiel, 6 almglocken, 6 brake drums, Chinese cymbal, medium tam-tam, suspended cymbal, bell-tree, hi-hat), John Tighe (5 temple blocks, slapstick, maracas, claves, castanets, medium triangle, suspended cymbal, hi-hat), Carl Lindh (5 temple blocks, 4 wood blocks, maracas, claves, medium tam-tam, suspended cymbal, hi-hat), Peter Newell (marimba, 4 wood blocks, maracas, claves, castanets, finger cymbals, low triangle, suspended cymbal, hi-hat), John Ferrari (vibraphone, chimes, sizzle cymbal), Kenneth Piascik (marimba, maracas, claves, castanets, small tam-tam, suspended cymbal, hi-hat), Gary Beumeé (vibraphone, finger cymbals, high triangle, sizzle cymbal), Gary Fink (4 timpani, 2 timbales, 4 bongos, tambourine, finger cymbals, small tam-tam, hi-hat), Albert Natoli (2 tam-tams, military drum, 2 timbales, piccolo snare drum, string drum, tambourine, medium tam-tam, hi-hat), David Philip (4 timpani, tambourine, large tam-tam, hi-hat), Michael Toal (2 bass drums, 4 tam-tams, tambourine, finger cymbals, large tam-tam, hi-hat), and Linda Guarino-Udeako (piano).

Performers in *Prism*: Gary Beumeé (glockenspiel, xylophone, crotales, timbales, bongos, temple blocks, wood blocks), John Ferrari (timpani, chimes, tam-tams, triangles), Ted Sturm (marimba, vibraphone, bass drums, suspended cymbals), Kenneth Piascik (glockenspiel, vibraphone, bass drums, suspended cymbals), Andy DeLucca (timpani, crotales, tam-tams, triangles), and Gary Van Dyke (marimba, vibraphone, timbales, bongos, suspended cymbals).

Production Notes

Chester Biscardi
Piano Sonata/C.F. Peters Co. (BMI)

Mestiere/Merion Music, Inc./Theodore Presser Co. (BMI)
Steinway Piano CD-90
Recorded September 25, 1987 at Rutgers Church, New York City

Trasumanar/American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI)
Recorded May 18, 1987 at the John Harms Center for the Arts,
Englewood, New Jersey

David Olan
Composition for Clarinet and Tape/C.F. Peters Co. (BMI)

Recorded June 1979 at Church of the Holy Trinity New
York City

After Great Pain/American Composers Edition (BMI)
Recorded September 24, 1987 at Rutgers Church, New
York City

Prism/American Composers Edition (BMI)
Recorded May 18, 1987 at the John Harms Center for the
Arts, Englewood, New Jersey
(Original recording of *Composition for Clarinet and Tape* was
recorded and edited by David Hancock, engineer; Carter
Harmon, producer.)

Digitally recorded and edited by Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz, Elite Recordings, New York City.
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