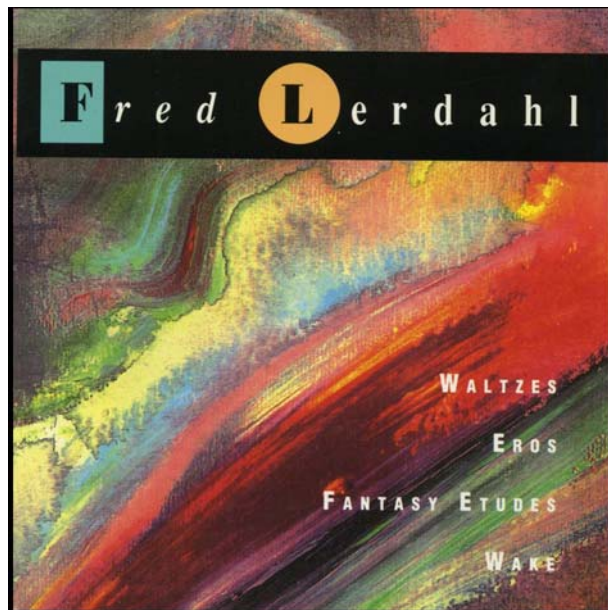


NWCR580

Fred Lerdahl

Waltzes—Eros—Fantasy Etudes—Wake



1. *Waltzes* (1981) (21:02)
Rolf Schulte, violin; Scott Nickrenz, viola; Fred Sherry, cello; Donald Palme, bass
2. *Eros* (1975) (22:28)
Variations for Mezzo-Soprano and Chamber Ensemble; Beverly Morgan, mezzo-soprano; Collage, Fred Lerdahl, conductor
3. *Fantasy Etudes* (1985) (14:09)
Musical Elements (Keith Underwood, flute; David Krakauer, clarinet; Syoko Aki, violin; Karl Pavens, cello; William Moersch, percussion; Elizabeth DiFelice, piano); Robert Beaser, conductor
4. *Wake* (1967-68) (15:46)
Bethany Beardslee, soprano; members of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players (Joseph Silverstein, violin; Burton Fine, viola; Jules Eskin, cello; Everett Firth, percussion; with associates Ann Hobson, harp; Arthur Press, percussion; Charles Smith, percussion); David Epstein, conductor

Total playing time: 73:32

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Notes

Waltzes (1981), a cycle of twelve virtuoso waltzes for violin, viola, cello, and bass, was commissioned by the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, where it received its premiere in 1981. The work is dedicated to Scott Nickrenz. The recording session, which took place in 1989, was funded by a composer award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

The character of *Waltzes* arose from three impulses: first, to compose a work that was suitable for summer-festival listening; second, to provide a challenge for brilliant string players accustomed to the nineteenth-century repertory; and third, to simplify the intricacies of my contemporaneous string quartets (1978 and 1982) without sacrificing integrity or personality. Written in high spirits, the piece includes occasional references to past composers, but never in violation of my own syntax and style. The instrumentation, for 'low' string quartet is reminiscent of Vienna; the lack of a second violin often forced high writing for the viola and cello. The part-writing and motivic treatment, which are quite classical in spirit, are woven out of a harmonic and voice-leading system of my own invention, one that I have used in one form or another in a number of pieces, including *Fantasy Etudes* on this disc. The system is 'tonal' in an extended sense, and allows for an orderly progression across the extremes of consonance and dissonance. *Waltzes* is a feast of the old and the new.

The individual movements, all in some variant of ABA form, break down as follows:

1. *Gracioso*: A congenial wind-up waltz.
2. *Con brio*: Two Chopin waltzes gone mad.
3. *Cantabile*: A cello melody reminiscent of a tune in *Swan Lake*.
4. *Leggiero*: String harmonics gives a special twist to a passage in Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*.
5. *Valse triste*: No Sibelius here, just soulful phrases slowly tossed between the violin, viola, and cello.
6. *Misterioso*: Five against two within $\frac{3}{4}$ time, in the ghostly guise of a presto minuet.
7. *Amoroso*: Another nod to Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, with passionate intent.
8. *Humoresque*: A wild fantasy, with pizzicato and legato effects, climaxing in a quote from my Second String Quartet, accompanied by glissando harmonics.
9. *Vivace*: A cross-accentual whirlwind.
10. *Lento*: The double bass speaks from the depths.
11. *Delicato*: An intimate duet for viola and cello, converting a 2/4 turn from Schumann's *Carnival* into a waltz rhythm.
12. *Waltz-fugue*: a veritable "grande valse brillante," alternating with two fugal sections that culminate in quadruple inversionsal counterpoint.

The text for *Eros* (1975) is a poem by Ezra Pound, entitled “Coitus,” from the volume *Lustra* (1915):

The gilded phaloi of the crocuses
are thrusting at the spring air.
Here is there naught of dead gods
But a procession of festival,
Fit for your spirit to dwell in.
Dione, your nights are upon us.
The dew is upon the leaf.
The night about us is restless.

from *Ezra Pound Personae*, © 1926 the Estate of Ezra Pound
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Dione is the mother of Venus, the goddess of love. Presumably the poet is contemplating a fresco by the Renaissance painter Giulio Romano. In the musical setting, for which the poem is merely a point of departure, the mezzo-soprano sings as if Giulio were her lover.

The piece is a set of twenty-one continuous variations, each twenty measures long. In the first variation the singer sets forth the entire poem; thereafter the poem is varied along with the music. The variation technique depends on close adherence to an underlying harmonic and rhythmic structure, always clothed in fresh ways. From Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* came the idea of making every third variation some kind of canon. The larger form falls into three increasingly climactic cycles of seven variations each. The instruments accompanying the mezzo-soprano are alto flute, viola, electric guitar, electric bass, harp, piano, and percussion (two players). The voice and acoustic instruments are amplified discreetly to form a degree of blend with the electric guitars; this unconventional instrumentation permitted the incorporation of elements of North Indian raga, and, marginally, even of rock music, all within the framework of the strict form.

Eros was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and was composed with the support of a Guggenheim Fellowship. In its clear tonality, and in its use of variation form, the work represented a significant step in my stylistic development. It was first performed in 1977 by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, with Beverly Morgan as soloist and Gerard Schwarz conducting; performances with Collage under my baton followed. This recording, made in 1979, was funded by a Naumburg Recording Award.

Fantasy Etudes (1985) was commissioned with the support of an NEA consortium commissioning grant by Musical Elements, Alea III, the Arch Ensemble, and the Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago. It was premiered by Musical Elements, Robert Beaser conducting, in 1985 in New York City, and was recorded in 1987. The piece is in one movement, and is scored for a *Pierrot*-like ensemble that has become standard for contemporary music: flute, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion (one player), and piano. I had previously avoided this instrumentation because of its prosaic heterogeneity, and indeed I had to exercise considerable ingenuity to give it timbral and poetic resonance. The larger form of *Fantasy Etudes* evolves from twelve interlocking ‘études.’ Each étude has its own characteristic idea and color so that the overall effect is one of ‘fantasy.’ Against this surface variety, however, there exists an underlying similarity of procedure. Each étude is cast in the form of ‘expanding variations,’ starting with a simple event and progressively elaborating into complexity (a rather

different procedure from the classical variation technique of *Eros*; its source lies instead in my First String Quartet). Each time, as the material of an étude begins to collapse under the weight of its elaborations, a new étude enters. These overlaps produce moments of dramatic tension—changes, if you like, from one fantasy to another. Toward the end the real études overlap more and more, rising to a broad climax, after which a coda quotes snippets from each étude in turn. The formal process is intricate yet quite audible.

Composing in such a form is an open-ended adventure. The way an expanding variation develops within an étude is constrained yet open; a compositional choice made in one variation can lead to unexpected consequences in the next. And since the connections across études exit outside the variational technique, in the larger picture almost anything can happen. The moments of overlap require contrapuntal finesse of a particular kind, because two kinds of music, each with its own logic are going on at once. These multiple moments can force the music into surprising channels. The combination of rigor and freedom demands a trust in the process itself.

During the summer of 1967 and 1968, while still a graduate student, I had the good fortune to be composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Music Festival. Bethany Beardslee, the already legendary diva of contemporary music, also spent those summers there. I wrote *Wake* for her. Accompanying the soprano here are violin, viola, cello, harp, and percussion (three players). Beardslee premiered the work under my direction at Marlboro in 1968. This recording, originally released on the AR-DGG series, dates from 1971.

Wake is the best fruit of my first period, which might be described as “post-Schoenbergian atonal/romantic.” (I have never been a serial composer.) Everything in the piece revolves around the soprano narration. The text is from passages in chapter eight of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, cut up and rearranged so as to reflect themes of the book as a whole. The form divides into three ‘cycles,’ flanked by an introduction, two transitions, and a coda. Washerwomen are gossiping at the ford. Cycle I concerns hearsay about Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Cycle II about his wife Anna Livia Plurabell. Cycle III depicts the gradual dissolution of the scene into night, with associated intimations of metamorphosis. A generous use of percussion lends atmosphere to the dream-like proceedings.

—Fred Lerdahl

Fred Lerdahl (b 1943) grew up in Wisconsin and studied at Lawrence, Princeton, and Tanglewood. He currently lives in Ann Arbor and teaches at the University of Michigan. He has received numerous honors, including the Koussevitzky Composition Prize, two composer awards from the Fromm Foundation, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Spoleto Festival USA, the Naumburg Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and others. Among the organizations that have performed his works are the New York Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Collage, Musical Elements, the Juilliard String Quartet, and the Pro Arte Quartet. He has been in residence at the Marlboro Music Festival, IRCAM in Paris, the Wellesley Composers Conference, and the American Academy in Rome. He is the author (with Ray Jackendoff) of *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*. Also available on CRI are Lerdahl’s First String Quartet (CD 551) and his String Trio and Piano Fantasy (SD 319).

Performer Biographies

For *Waltzes*:

Rolf Schulte was born in Germany and has performed with the Berlin and Munich Philharmonics, the radio orchestras of Berlin (RSO), Cologne (WDR) and Stuttgart, and the Seattle, Vermont, and New Hampshire Symphonies, among many others. Mr. Schulte performed Berg's *Kammerkonzert* at the 1985 Alban Berg Conference in Chicago and the complete Stravinsky violin works at the 92nd Street Y in 1976. Recent premieres include Tobias Picker's Violin Concerto with the American Composers Orchestra (CRI SD 474) and new works by Milton Babbitt, György Kurtág, and Mario Davidovsky.

In addition to his performances as soloist and chamber musician, violist **Scott Nickrenz** maintains an active schedule as a concert presenter. He is director of music at Boston's Gardener Museum, advisor to the president of the New England Conservatory, and chamber music advisor to the New World Symphony in Miami. Since 1978, Mr. Nickrenz has directed the popular noontime concerts at the Spoleto Festivals in Charleston, South Carolina; Spoleto, Italy; and Melbourne, Australia.

Over the past forty years cellist **Fred Sherry** has worked closely with many contemporary composers, including Luciano Berio, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss, Tōru Takemitsu as well as jazz pianist/composer Chick Corea. In 1988, he premiered Charles Wuorinen's *Five*, which was written specifically for him by the composer. In 1989, Mr. Sherry became the artistic director of the Chamber Music Society.

Donald Palme, a graduate of the Juilliard School, is double bassist for Speculum Musicae, Parnassus, and the Composer's Conference. He has performed on dozens of recordings and was formerly a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Today he is principal double bass with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra, and the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

For *Eros*:

New Hampshire-born mezzo-soprano **Beverly Morgan** holds both B.M. and M.M. degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music. She has appeared as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops Orchestra, Speculum Musicae, the Boston Musica Viva, and Bel Canto Opera, and has sung operatic roles across the U.S. and Europe for such companies as the Santa Fe and San Francisco Operas.

Collage is a contemporary music ensemble made up primarily of members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Playing on this recording are Paul Fried, alto flute; Ronald Knudson, viola; Henry Gwiazda, electric guitar; John Damian, bass electric guitar; Ann Hobson, harp; Christopher Keyes, piano; Frank Epstein and Thomas Gauger, percussion.

For *Fantasy Etudes*:

Established in 1977, **Musical Elements** is a contemporary chamber ensemble presenting annual concert series in New York City. Through the commissioning of many new works and participation in the NEA Consortium Commissioning Program, as well as through the presentation of twenty-four world premieres, thirty-nine New York premieres and eleven American premieres, Musical Elements has established itself as one of the most important new music ensembles in the New York area.

Robert Beaser, co-music director and conductor of Musical Elements, is also a composer. He earned a doctor of musical arts degree from the Yale School of Music and studied conducting with Otto-Werner Mueller, William Steinberg, and Arthur Weinberg. As a composer, his work *Mountain Songs* was recorded on the Musicmasters label and received a 1986 Grammy nomination.

For *Wake*:

Bethany Beardslee was the original singer who could make "difficult" contemporary art music sound as effortless as popular song. She has made numerous recordings for CRI, including Robert Helps's *Gossamer Noons* (SD 384), Milton Babbitt's *Vision and Prayer* (SD 268) and Ralph Shapey's *Incantations* (SD 232).

David Epstein was a composition student of Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt and conducting fellow with the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell, undertaking further studies with Max Rudolf and Izler Solomon. He conducts across the U.S. and Europe and has served as professor of music at M.I.T. and musical director of the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra. In addition to conducting the Boston Symphony Chamber Players for CRI, Mr. Epstein conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in George Perle's *Three Movements for Orchestra*, also on CRI (SD 331).

Production Notes

Waltzes

Recorded by Judith Sherman at SUNY, Purchase, New York, 1989.

Eros

Recorded by Carter Harman

Recorded by David Griesinger

Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 1978.

Fantasy Etudes

Recorded by Craig Droy at Kaufman Concert Hall of
the 92nd Street Y, New York City, November 1986.

Wake

Recorded by Marc J. Aubort at Boston Symphony Hall,

Boston, Massachusetts, January 31, 1970.

Engineered by Elite Recordings, New York City and edited by Joanna Nickrenz.

Originally released by the AR-DGG label.

Digital mastering by Sony Classical Productions, Inc., New York City.

All works published by Boelke-Bomart, Inc. (ASCAP)

The original recording of *Eros* was made possible by a recording award from the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation. Additional support was provided by a gift from Paul Fromm. The original recording of *Fantasy Etudes* was made possible by public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional funding was provided by the Oliver M. Ditson Fund of the University of Michigan and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

This recording project was made possible with the support of a composer award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a publication grant from the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan, a grant from the Oliver M. Ditson Fund of the University of Michigan School of Music, and a creative artists grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts.