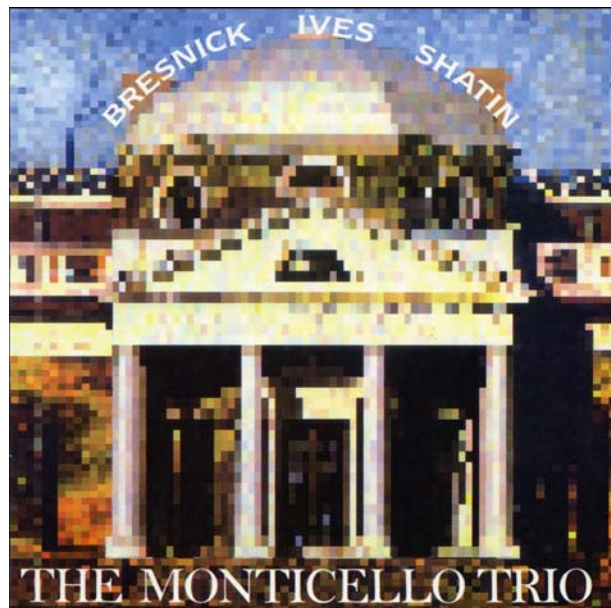


NWCR583

# Bresnick / Ives / Shatin

## The Monticello Trio



Charles Ives (1874–1954)

- Trio (1904–1911) ..... (25:27)
1. I.–Moderato ..... (5:12)
  2. II.–TSIAJ : Presto ..... (6:27)
  3. III.–Moderato con moto ..... (13:36)

Martin Bresnick (*b* 1946)

- Piano Trio (1987–88) ..... (21:08)
4. I.–Semplice, Inesorabile ..... (6:28)
  5. II.–Leggiermente, con accenti diversi  
    (“Cat’s Cradle”) ..... (4:18)
  6. III.–Parlando, Affettuoso ..... (6:29)
  7. IV.–Ardente, Sperduto ..... (3:43)

Judith Shatin (*b* 1949)

8. *Ignoto Numine* (1987) ..... (15:16)  
    The Monticello Trio: Tannis Gibson, piano;  
    Mark Rush, violin; Mathis Wexler, cello

Total playing time: 62:13

© & © 1990 Composers Recording, Inc.

© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.

## Notes

Like Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello and other early American architectural landmarks, the three works on this disc are examples of Americans revisiting and reinterpreting classical forms of the past. The violin-cello-piano instrumentation dates from the time of Bach as an outgrowth of the figured bass. It was employed extensively by Beethoven, primarily using the sonata form, and by most major Western composers thereafter. Here, such twentieth century sensibilities as asymmetry, quotation, and extended instrumental techniques are applied to the piano trio form in works that date from near the beginning and ending of our own century.

As with Beethoven, who also composed numerous works both for orchestral and chamber ensembles, the chamber music of **Charles Ives** displays the composer’s traits in sharp relief, and his trio is no exception. Though the dates of composition attributed to the trio vary, due in part to a controversial and continuing reevaluation of the composer’s catalogue and its dates, the work is attributed to Ives’s most prolific period, 1904 to 1911. It was during this time he composed several of his most famous scores including the orchestral pieces *Central Park in the Dark* and *The Unanswered Question*.

All of Ives’s characteristic methods and effects are utilized in the trio. The first movement opens with alternating duets between cello and piano and violin and piano, concluding with the layering of material from both. The very title of the second movement displays Ives’s humor: “TSIAJ” stands for “This scherzo is a joke.” Folk tunes, patriotic anthems and school songs are quoted here “in ludicrous profusion” (to use H. Wiley Hitchcock’s words). The third movement is a kind of rondo with a lyrical melody which is shared by the strings and alternates with more syncopated sections. The movement concludes with a quotation of the hymn tune “Rock of Ages.”

Though less blatantly than does the Ives, **Martin Bresnick**’s piano trio also refers to vernacular musical styles. Yet if Ives, at the opening of the century, was concerned with breaking from classical forms—or at least poking some fun at them—then perhaps with Bresnick’s greater distance in years from the Classical era, he can return unencumbered to the ideals of balance and form.

“It’s about symmetry and handedness,” Bresnick remarks. “Everything in the Piano Trio is symmetrical: rhythm, pitch, melody, everything. As to its handedness, it’s like a human form—one arm is always a little longer, one breast a little smaller. Two halves of the same face form an uneven symmetry.”

Bresnick, a former student of György Ligeti, John Chowning, and Gottfried von Einem, is a professor of composition at the Yale School of Music. Unlike the majority of his compositions, which include works for both traditional ensembles and computers, the Piano Trio lacks a programmatic title or theme, be it literary, social, or political. The composer describes it as highly abstract and personal.

The first movement begins “at music degree zero” with long, hushed tones. It has an initial musical symmetry around the note D which is slowly replaced by A-flat. The movement’s decisive ending reveals both notes as “twin stars,” setting up a two-note symmetry that is explored throughout the rest of the piece. The second movement is subtitled “Cat’s Cradle” referring to the children’s string game of forming symmetrical patterns. Like a traditional scherzo, the movement contains a kind of trio section with slower more lyrical material, which is followed by references to rock and minimalism before an abrupt ending.

Bresnick likens the third movement *Parlando, Affettuoso* (spoken tenderly) to a passacaglia. “This movement is one of the most passionate, almost erotic things I’ve ever written. It’s a kind of love duet between the violin and cello—two instruments gently sharing and transferring the subject back and forth. They rise to an almost old-fashioned climax, redolent of Brahms or Chopin. That may seem surprising, but the piece does honor its ancestors. The piano sums up the movement in an ecstatic cadenza.”

The final movement, *Ardente, Sperduto* (ardently, lost) follows without pause. “The title of the movement is a terrible paradox,” the composer remarks, “since we’ve gone from the third movement’s music of love and passion to music which is even more ardent but lost, confused, without comfort, spinning out into the void.”

Of the three works on this disc, **Judith Shatin’s** *Ignoto Numine* takes the freest approach to compositional form and instrumental technique. “The work suggests certain aspects of traditional sonata and concerto form—but only to annihilate them,” the composer remarks. “The title might be translated as ‘unknown spirit.’ It refers to the mystery of musical ideas and the element of shaped surprise that informs the compositional process as I conceive of it.”

Written in one continuous movement, *Ignoto Numine* is organized in two parts which, according to Shatin, “feature harmonic and thematic transformations that refer to sonata form, as well as virtuosic cadenzas associated with the concerto form. *Ignoto Numine* repeatedly violates these forms both timbrally and structurally.” The changes in instrumental color are at their extreme in the piano, the strings of which are variously struck with percussion mallets and sticks and plucked with the fingernail. The violinist and cellist also have special timbral techniques.

The mood of the piece also varies radically; tempo indications range from delicate, gentle and tender to excited, intense and agitated. “The use of special timbral techniques helped shape the extreme range of tones of voice,” Shatin explains, “from

the tender quality of the secondary thematic region to the fiercely wild cadenzas and ending.” The work ends “with utter abandon” as the musicians’ voices rise into loud shouts for an appropriately dramatic and modern conclusion.

Judith Shatin is associate professor of music at the University of Virginia, where the Monticello Trio, for whom *Ignoto Numine* was written, also is in residence. In addition to writing for traditional instruments, Shatin works at the forefront of computer music and is the founder of the Computer Music Laboratory at the University of Virginia. She is a graduate of the Juilliard School and of Princeton University, where her teachers included Milton Babbitt and J.K. Randall. She also studied with Jacob Druckman and Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood. Shatin is the president of American Women Composers, Inc., a national organization based in Washington D.C.

—Joseph R. Dalton

### **The Monticello Trio**

Since its founding just five years ago, the Monticello Trio has won distinction throughout the U.S. and Canada. Recently praised by the *Washington Post* for “an intense and thoroughly captivating performance” and by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for its “ardor and passion,” the Monticello Trio continues to expand its ever-widening audience. The Trio’s diverse repertoire has become its trademark, ranging across the historical spectrum to combine contrasting periods and styles into innovative programs.

The Monticello Trio has commissioned numerous new works for piano trio. They have received grants from the Serge Koussevitzky Foundation at the Library of Congress, Meet the Composer/Readers Digest Commissioning Grant, and from the Virginia Commission for the Arts. The Monticello Trio is in residence at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville where they also serve as artistic directors for the Albemarle Chamber Music Festival. This is the ensemble’s premiere recording.

---

## Production Notes

### Producers:

Martin Bresnick

Michael Friedman (Ives and Bresnick)

Judith Shatin (*Ignoto Numine*)

Recorded in Sprague Hall at Yale University December 1989 and May 1990.

Recording Engineer: Gene Kimble.

Post-production Engineer: Erica Brenner.

Ives: Published by Peer International Corp. (BMI).

Bresnick: CommonMuse Music Publishers (ASCAP).

Shatin: ACA (BMI).

Special thanks to Susan Frost.

This recording was funded by a generous grant from the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Virginia with additional assistance from Yale University and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

The Bresnick Trio was made possible in part by a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

CRI’s operations are supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and private foundation and individuals.