

Speculum Musicae

David Rakowski – *Imaginary Dances*; Susan Blaustein – *Commedia*
 Allen Anderson – *Charrette*; Sheree Clement – *Chamber Concerto*



Susan Blaustein

1. *Commedia* (1980) (13:43)

David Rakowski

Imaginary Dances

2. I (5:23)
 3. II. Liberamente (5:02)
 4. III. Tema con variazione (5:51)

Allen Anderson

5. *Charrette* (1984) (13:45)

Sheree Clement

6. *Chamber Concerto* (1982) (13:49)

Total playing time: 58:04

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Notes

Commedia was composed in 1980 for *Speculum Musicae* and is scored for a mixed ensemble of winds, strings, and percussion. The title alludes to those dramatic traditions wherein a play is specifically written for and recreated by a company of players, each of whom is well known to his audience as a particular masked character. *Commedia* was written for the players in the ensemble *Speculum Musicae*, which, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, seemed of sufficient vintage to enjoy such a rapport with its audience.

At the piece's opening, the ensemble is gathered in excited celebration as it readies materials for its ritual drama. Amidst the initial din and flurry, familiar individual voices emerge. While we are busy renewing our acquaintance with the handsome troupe, the drama among them has already begun to unfold. In the scenes that follow, each player has occasion to express his own brand of virtuosity with which he tries to engage and influence his cohorts. Through the projection of their individual rhetorical styles, the characters attempt to charm, cajole, outrage, delight, or inspire their fellows.

Not until the oboe's intimate singing carries the other "melodic" voices away with its lyrical sweep, can a more genuine expressive quality finally penetrate the masks. Even the repeated and energetic attempts of the characters to resume their revels (and to restore a sense of decorum better befitting a ritual drama) cannot altogether silence this lyric strain its voice once discovered.

—Susan Blaustein

Susan Blaustein (b 1953 in Palo Alto, Calif.) was most recently an assistant professor of music at Columbia University ('85-90). Prior to joining the Columbia faculty, she was a junior fellow for three years in the Harvard University Society of Fellows, before which, she taught at Yale, where she received her doctorate in composition. Ms. Blaustein has received commissions from *Speculum Musicae*, American Composers Orchestra, Group for Contemporary Music, the Jerome Foundation, Jubal Trio, Nonesuch Commissions Awards, the Fromm Foundation, Parnassus, Pomona College, and, most recently, from the International Musicological Society, and the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation at the Library of Congress. She also has received commissions from performers including pianist, Alan Feinberg; flutist, Jayn Rosenfeld; and cellist, Joel Krosnick.

The composer was a recipient of the 1987 Brandeis Creative Arts Award Citation and has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Composer/Librettist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, prizes in the League-ISCM National Composers Competition, and fellowships to the Composers' Conference, now at Wellesley College. Her music has been nationally broadcast on public radio and has been performed in Canada, Israel, the Soviet Union, and in Western Europe. She was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1988.

I wrote *Imaginary Dances* for *Speculum Musicae* in the summer and fall of 1986. It was premiered at Merkin Hall, New York City, on March 9, 1987. The opportunity to write for such accomplished performers, equally adept at solo playing and tight ensemble playing, suggested a

piece in which one instrument was always a soloist, and in which the soloist's relationship to the ensemble—of which it is necessarily a part when not a soloist—is constantly being explored and redefined. This premise reminded me of the functions of dancers in some modern ballet, hence the title, which came to me in a dream. The piece is divided into three movements, played without pause, and further divided into sections in which one instrument is soloist. The movements could be described as fast-slow-fast over which the timbre moves from bright to dark and back to bright.

The piece begins in turmoil as the instruments try to sort out their roles in the drama of the piece. The oboe is the soloist here, and after a wrenching climax, it manages to assert itself above the din and quiet the ensemble down in time for the violin solo section. The violin's music is lighter and a little more rhythmic but is punctuated by uncalled for outbursts from the ensemble. These outbursts finally multiply and the music becomes more tense for the percussion solo section. But this frantic music runs out of steam, at first starting and stopping, and then finally collapsing under its own weight, settling into the slow music of the second movement. The second movement is very slow with the lyrical viola solo giving way to the intricately woven bass clarinet solo. As this movement ends, in the quietest moment of the piece, the third movement, a theme with five variations, suddenly interrupts as if to bring back the opening. The music of this movement is less frantic and mercurial than that of the first. The movement gradually progresses toward music with longer and longer stretches in which a clear pulse can be perceived. The theme and first variation are led by the piano; the second and third variations are led by the cello; and the fourth and fifth variations are led by the flute. All during this movement, the oboe keeps trying to bring back the B which began its solo and its opening licks (it apparently doesn't understand the function of recapitulation), but by the end of the last variation, it settles on moving that B up a semitone to C. The climax at the end of the fifth variation segues to the coda of the entire piece, the only significant stretch of music with a clear pulse. In this coda, all the instruments get another brief moment in the sun as soloists before the piece ends with nineteen quickly hammered chords.

Imaginary Dances is dedicated to Speculum Musicae and to Donald Palma, who conducted its premiere and this recording.

—David Rakowski

David Rakowski was born in 1958 in St. Albans, Vermont. He is assistant professor of music at Columbia University, where he teaches composition and theory. He previously taught composition and theory at Stanford University, where he also directed the Ensemble for New Music. Rakowski's major teachers have included Babbitt, Berio, Ceely, Westergaard, Spies, Lansky, and Heiss. His awards and fellowships include a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, an NEA grant, a Bearn Prize, two BMI Awards, a Chadwick Medal from New England Conservatory, as well as fellowships to Tanglewood and the Wellesley Composers Conference; residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Djerassi Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center. He has received commissions from the Riverside Symphony, Speculum Musicae, Parnassus, Fromm Foundation, Alea II, Alea III, Dinosaur Annex, and Nueva Learning Center. Mr. Rakowski's music is published by C. F. Peters and he is affiliated with American Composers Alliance

and Broadcast Music Inc. He is a founder of the Griffin Music Ensemble of Boston.

Charrette was completed in May 1984, three days before its premiere. It was commissioned by Speculum Musicae through Chamber Music America with the support of the Jerome Foundation and The Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

When, in the all too frantic business of completing a score, one resorts to round-the-clock labor to meet a deadline, that is a *Charrette*. So it was with the writing of this piece: down to the wire, fraught with both anxiety and exhilaration. But more than characterizing the conditions of the piece's creation, the urgency and concentration of a *Charrette* epitomizes the central tone of the music itself. There is enough in the score, which is unsettled and in search of completion, that a colleague has dubbed the piece, "the apotheosis of the upbeat."

Each of the work's four main sections is shaped as a protracted upbeat to a decisive arrival, which serves to dispel accumulated tensions and to signal the section's close. Arrival is always identified with group effort. The cooperation among the instruments, which entails a transformation from shifting textures and dialoguing to a massed front, is a prerequisite for the success of the articulation. The violin eventually emerges as the guiding force in the first section directing the ensemble to the climax. In the second section, competing soloist and subensembles settle on an ordering of their music compatible with motion to the goal. In the third section, which begins after a brief interlude, a capriciousness is overwhelmed by music of a diabolical cast. The overlapping of voices again gives way to a group gesture, which, after the crucial arrival, disperses, reverting to fragmentary figures. The firm, chordal opening of the third section parodies, in its compression, the weighted sectional arrivals and contrasts with the equivocations of previous openings. After an allusion to an ethereal passage from the second section, the music resumes the upbeat track, but now, the uniformity of purpose and means among the participants is a lesson learned in all that's gone before.

—Allen Anderson

Allen Anderson (b 1951) was educated at the University of California at Berkeley and Brandeis University, where his teachers included Andrew Imbrie, Edwin Dugger, Michael Senturia, Martin Boykan, and Seymour Shifrin. He taught at Brandeis University from 1981 to 1991. He has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the New England ISCM (Leo Snyder Award for *Arcade*), the Washington Square Contemporary Music Players (for *Solfeggietti*), BMI, and the New Music Consort. His commissions include those from the Koussevitzky Foundation (String Quartet) and the American Music Center (*Measure of Terrain*), among others. He is a founding member of Boston's Griffin Music Ensemble.

Chamber Concerto was written in New York City and Lenox, Massachusetts in 1982. The piece is about reviewing and reliving previous events placed in new contexts. It initially unfolds through a series of variations. Later variations include parts of preceding ones. Occasionally, the resulting passage is reviewed again, in a third context. The riot of orchestrated colors possible by the soloists of a chamber orchestra goes a long way in creating the new contexts for familiar ideas. The work was previewed at the Composers' Conference and given its premiere at the Tanglewood Music Festival in 1985. Speculum Musicae gave the New York premiere the following fall.

—Sheree Clement

Sheree Clement was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1955 and studied at the University of Michigan and Columbia University. She has received awards from ASCAP, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Tanglewood Music festival, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. At present, she creates software applications for the New York City Public Schools and continues to compose music.

Speculum Musicae is ensemble-in-residence at Columbia University in New York City. It has been called “New York’s most important new-music group” by the critic for the *Boston Globe*. Speculum Musicae has been bringing new music to audiences for over twenty seasons. On the concert stage and through recordings, the ensemble seeks out the best chamber music the twentieth century has to offer from the “classics” of the early 1900s (Schoenberg, Ives) to newly commissioned works (Hyla, Sanford), and from the works of well-established composers (Boulez, Babbitt, Carter, Davidovsky, Seeger, Takemitsu, Wolpe) to those of composers at the

beginning of their careers (Viñao, Fuentes), or of those composers just gaining international recognition (Kurtág, Ruders, Jemitz). Speculum Musicae presents a varied and multi-cultural look at music.

In addition to an ongoing annual series at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City, the ensemble’s home base, and a preview series at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, the ensemble tours both in the United States and abroad. Recent seasons have included performances of the American Music series at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Library of Congress, New Music Los Angeles series, New York Philharmonic’s New Horizons series, and at Harvard University (for the Fromm Foundation). Overseas, the ensemble has toured Great Britain and Germany and was featured at Poland’s Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1986. In 1988, the group performed at the Bath International Festival, which featured a concert that was taped for television broadcast by the BBGC, and at the City of Geneva Festival.

Speculum Musicae Personnel

Commedia:

Susan Palma, flute & piccolo; Stephen Taylor, oboe; Allen Blustine, E-flat, B-flat, & bass clarinet; Benjamin Hudson, violin; John Graham, viola; Chris Finckel, cello; Donald Palma, bass; Charles Descarfino & Daniel Druckman, percussion. Robert Black, conductor

Imaginary Dances:

Susan Palma, flute & alto flute; Stephen Taylor, oboe & English horn; Allen Blustine, clarinet & bass clarinet; Charles Descarfino, percussion; Aleck Karis, piano; Benjamin Hudson, violin; Lois Martin, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello; Donald Palma, conductor

Charrette:

Susan Palma, flute; Stephen Taylor, oboe; Allen Blustine, bass clarinet; Daniel Druckman, percussion; Aleck Karis, piano; Benjamin Hudson, violin; John Graham, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello; Donald Palma, bass; William Purvis, conductor

Chamber Concerto:

Susan Palma, flute; Laura Conwesser, piccolo; Allen Blustine, B-flat clarinet; William Purvis, French Horn; Raymond Mase, trumpet; Jonathan Taylor, trombone; David Braynard, tuba; Daniel Druckman, percussion; Gwendolyn Mok, piano; Benjamin Hudson & Carol Zeavin, violins; Lois Martin, viola; Chris Finckel, cello; Marji Danilow, bass; Donald Palma, conductor.

Production Notes

Produced by Marc Aubort & Joanna Nickerenz.

Engineered by Elite Recordings, Inc., NYC.

All recorded at Rutgers Presbyterian Church, NYC.

Commedia

Recorded on October 23, 1987.

Published by the Association for the Promotion of New Music (BMI).

Imaginary Dances

Recorded on March 23, 1989.

Published by C. F. Peters, (BMI)

Charrette

Recorded on February 29, 1988.

Published by Margun Music (BMI).

Chamber Concerto

Recorded on March 18, 1986.

Published by Margun Music (ASCAP).