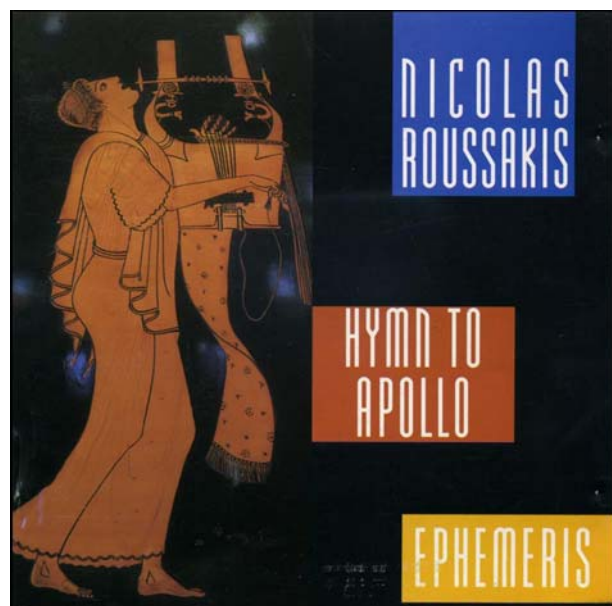


## Nicolas Roussakis



*Hymn To Apollo* (1989) ..... (15:51)

1. I. – Prestissimo ..... (8:13)
2. II. – Allegro moderato ..... (7:39)

The Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble: David Tessmer, flute; Linda George-Fountain, oboe; James Wilson, clarinet; Ivan Engel, bassoon; John Scandrett, horn; Wesley Ward, trumpet; Glenn Wayland, trombone; Beverly Nero, piano; Lucy Scandrett, harp; Jan Fung, percussion; Raymond Eichenmuller, violin; Kazuko Matsusaka, violin; Florence Ohlberg, viola; Martin Bernstein, cello; Jeffrey Mangone, bass; David Stock, conductor

*Ephemeris* (1979) ..... (37:33)

3. I. – Morning ..... (10:44)
4. II. – Afternoon ..... (8:22)
5. III. – Evening ..... (7:40)
6. IV. – Night ..... (10:48)

The Group for Contemporary Music String Quartet: Benjamin Hudson, violin; Carol Zeavin, violin; Janet Lyman Hill, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello

Total Playing Time: 53:30

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## Notes

The listener may wonder why this piece is called *Hymn to Apollo* (1989); a few words of explanation, therefore, are in order. In classical Greece, a hymn was a simple religious song containing a prayer and a poem in praise of a divinity; sung by a chorus, it was tranquil in tone and plain in style, devoid of musical complexities or excessive ornament. Apollo, as the patron god of music and poetry, was the leader of the muses who inspired creative artists. He was most widely venerated as Phoebus Apollo, the god of light, who stood for all that is serene, luminous, intelligible. The most common aphorism in ancient Greece, “midén ágan”—nothing to excess—is said to have been first spoken by Apollo himself and was always on his lips. Despite the title, this hymn is not for chorus; it consists of two rapid instrumental movements. The piece is a celebration of moderation, shaped by a sense of balance, proportion and form. The first movement is an attempt to find a working relationship between, on one hand, the harmonic series given by nature, the so-called “chord of nature” or overtone series, and, on the other hand, the purely artificial, man-made system of tuning called equal temperament. The second movement is a fugue. The objective was to take this time-honored procedure, which is based solidly on tonality, and to push it in the direction of twelve-tone music without losing its coherence and intelligibility.

The first movement, Prestissimo, explores the various regions of the “chord of nature” on six different fundamental tones. As used in this piece, the harmonic series does not sound in its pure form; rather, each of its tones is taken to the nearest pitch in the equally tempered chromatic scale, so that it can be easily played on traditional instruments. The series is used up to the eighteenth partial. The movement is in six sections, each with its own tonic and meter: C in 6/8 time, B in 4/4, D-

flat in 9/8, B-flat in 3/4, D in 12/8 and A in 2/4 time. The music often sounds modal, because the seventh partial, which approximates the flatted seventh degree, and the eleventh partial, which comes close to the raised fourth degree, are used consistently throughout. Tension is created by the melodic curves against the meter in which they are notated, since the curves are mostly not of the same length as the meter. The tempo is very fast, alternating from section to section between 132 and 198 on the metronome for one beat.

In ancient Greece, it was believed that Apollo fled during the winter months to live among the “Hyperboreans”, a mythical people of the North, literally “people beyond the North wind”. The word for flight in Greek is “fighí”, which also means fugue; the same is true in Italian, in which the word “fuga” means both musical fugue and flight or escape. In the spring, invocations were made to the god Apollo, urging him to return to his sacred island of Delos. The first movement of this composition is a hymn of praise to Apollo; the second concerns his flight; the piece thus conforms to the two basic types of hymn in classical Greece: praise of the god, and a plea for his return.

The tempo of the second movement is somewhat slower than the first and is marked Allegro moderato. The fugue has a pithy subject whose duration is a mere 2 and 2/3 seconds; it outlines an E-major triad with a major seventh above the tonic: E, G-sharp, B, D-sharp. The raised fourth degree, A-sharp, used as a passing tone, gives this melody a Lydian touch, and links it musically to the first movement. After an exposition with four entries, this procedure continues with this subject in the inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion, the four basic transformations of the twelve-tone music. The rudimentary musical material is then subjected to

a series of gradually more intense developments, through which the simple diatonic tune stated at the beginning becomes increasingly complex, until it unfolds into a twelve-tone aggregate in the third section of the movement. This is accomplished in the following fashion: two intervals contained in the subject (the major third and the perfect fifth) are combined with a mirror image of themselves to yield a hexachord; then, with the tritone transposition of that hexachord, the music arrives at a statement of a complete twelve-tone row. Tonality and dodecaphony, two supposedly irreconcilable systems, move closer and closer together as the music progresses. The idea of pitch order and the serial technique of transformations is applied to diatonic material; the chromatic music of the third section is disposed in schemes of stacked thirds that give it a surface resemblance, at least, to tonal music.

This movement has four parts, each lasting a little over two minutes. The first of these is the quadruple exposition; the next two are developments with episodes, strettos, and a dominant pedal on B; the fourth is a recapitulation with a coda in E-major. The meter of each successive part contributes to the gradual increase in tension up through section three, and, after that, the relaxation at the end. The first meter is 4/4 (the same as 16/16) at a tempo of 90 on the metronome for a quarter note. One sixteenth note is then removed from that meter in order to obtain 15/16, the time signature of the second part, which is counted in five beats of dotted eighth notes at 120 on the metronome. The meter of the third section is again one sixteenth note shorter than the previous one, here 7/8 time (or 14/16), counted in seven at 180 on the metronome for each eighth note. The recapitulation returns to the more relaxed tempo in 4/4 time of the beginning of the movement. These changes in meter constitute a series of metrical modulations which retain an underlying value of 180 on the metronome for the eighth note, which remains constant from start to finish.

Each section of the first movement begins with a measured tremolo between two adjacent overtones, a kind of shaking or trembling, which then expands into runs up and down the harmonic series, melodic curves which come and go like waves. Therefore, before listening to the music, one might consider a few lines from the ancient *Hymn to Apollo* by Callimachos, written in the third century B.C.: "How the laurel branch of Apollo trembles! How trembles all the shrine! Away, away whosoever is sinful!...Apollo does not appear to everyone, but only to those who are good. Whoever has seen Apollo is great; whosoever has not seen him is worthless... Be hushed, you that hear the song of Apollo; hushed is even the sea when minstrels celebrate the lyre, or the bow, the instruments of Lycorean Phoebus Apollo."

*Hymn to Apollo* was composed in 1988–89 under a fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts for the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and the Hoboken Chamber Orchestra. Its first performance was given by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble under the direction of David Stock in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on April 2nd, 1990.

*Ephemeris* (1979), the Greek word for "journal, diary or astronomical calendar," refers to a thing which lasts only one day. The title is also an allusion to the transient nature of music and of our very own life. The piece is dedicated to the memory of Aristoxenos of Tarentum, a pupil of Aristotle, who flourished in the fourth century B.C. He opposed the Pythagoreans, who taught that numbers constitute the true nature of things; Aristoxenos proposed that in musical matters the ear should be the final judge. In his *Elements of Harmony*

he said, "Our method rests on two things, the faculty of hearing and the intellect."

*Ephemeris* consists of four tone poems which describe the times of the day: Morning, Afternoon, Evening and Night—specifically, a hot, late summer day in the Eastern Mediterranean. Both outer events and inner states of being are portrayed by the music.

*Morning*. The opening measures are a representation of Aurora, Homer's "rosy-fingered Dawn." After the sun has risen, the music proceeds to describe the vigorous activity of the early hours of the day; a strong beat characterizes this central portion. The climax of the movement is an intensely animated conversation among the four instruments, in which the regular pulse of the morning's work gives way to a more fluid, speech-like rhythm. At the end, drowsiness sets in and there is a return to the music of the very beginning.

*Afternoon*. The movement opens with one single tone which subtly changes in color as it passes from instrument to instrument. This sets the mood for the musical painting of a hot, lazy, and erotic afternoon. Rapid arpeggios of harmonics, tension-laden tremolos and squirming glissandos unfold over long-held tones. Despite the very active surface, the musical material develops very slowly. The whole can be perceived as one long phrase, in which the tone row takes the duration of the entire movement to appear and then to dissolve.

*Evening*. This is a portrayal of a village feast, in which three dances take place. During the opening Prelude, the imaginary musicians are tuning their instruments. Each of the dances is based on a rhythm consisting of beats of unequal length. This long-short subdivision is known to us through the classic poetic meters and can be traced back to the Greek language of the time of Homer. It has survived in the folk music of the region and its exact proportions (in the ratio of 3:2) were first given by Aristoxenos in his *Elements of Rhythmics*. The dances here do not correspond to any specific model, but are freely invented by the composer. The first is in 9/8 time (counted 2+2+2+3), an interlude separates it from the second which is in 8/8 (counted 3+3+2) and the third is in 12/8 time (counted 7+5 or 2+2+3+2+3); the movement ends with a brief Coda.

*Night*. The fourth movement begins with the slow and dark music of sleep. This is interrupted by a quick, brilliant tune—the theme from the first movement of Haydn's *Sinfonie No. 6*, "Le Matin," which appears as a dream, enveloped in shimmering clouds of harmonic glissandos. After a further descent into the regions of profound sleep, there is a quotation of the great Byzantine hymn "Psyche mou, psyche mou, anasta!" by Romanos (V-VI centuries) as transcribed by Egon Wellesz:

My soul, my soul, arise!  
Why are you sleeping?  
The end is coming  
and you will be much  
confused by the tumult.

At that point, the music breaks loose, frantically quoting fragments from earlier sections of the composition. This frenzied, chaotic music is gradually replaced by very placid chords, which become longer and longer. The tumult disappears. The serenity of the final harmonies brings "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" (*Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians IV, 7*).

*Ephemeris* is based on a network of all-interval sets, whose original statement in the first movement is D# A# G# B G F# - C Db F D E A. The harmonies of the composition are

constructed mainly from the superimposition of thirds and sixths. In that sense, the music is a fusion of serial ideas and the more traditional notion of the consonance and dissonance.

The piece was composed during 1977–79 for the Columbia Quartet, which gave it its first complete performance at the Grand Teton Music Festival in Wyoming on July 25, 1979.

—*Nicolas Roussakis*

**Nicolas Roussakis** (*b* Athens, 1934; *d* New York, 1994) was born in Athens, Greece and spent his early years in Estonia, Italy and Switzerland. He came to the United States at the age of fifteen and became an American citizen. He is a graduate of Columbia University and attended the Hochschule für Musik in Hamburg, Germany, and the Gerienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt under a Fulbright Grant. Mr. Roussakis was executive director of the Group for Contemporary Music from 1971 to 1985, president of the American Composers Alliance from 1975 to 1981 and was one of the co-founders of the American Composers Orchestra in 1976. His creative work has been recognized by an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, as well as fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. His symphonic poem *Fire and Earth and*

*Water and Air* was recently recorded by the American Composers Orchestra and released on CRI CD 552. Mr. Roussakis is presently on the music faculty at Rutgers University.

**The Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble**, a flexible group of fifteen musicians, is the Pittsburgh region's only organization dedicated exclusively to new music. It was founded in 1976 and is a resident ensemble of the Duquesne University School of Music.

**David Stock**, conductor, founded the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble in 1976; he was composer-in-residence of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra during 1987–88. His own compositions have been performed in the United States and in Europe, Mexico, Australia and Korea. He presently is an associate professor of music at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

**The Group for Contemporary Music String Quartet** has appeared on the regular series of concerts by the Group for Contemporary Music in New York City and in various residencies, including Princeton and Rutgers Universities and Montclair State College in New Jersey. The members individually are prominent performers in the New York metropolitan area.

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## Production Notes

*Hymn To Apollo*: Produced by Mark Yacovone. Recorded and edited by RST Recording with Riccardo Schulz & Raymond Chick, engineers, on August 19, 1990. Published by ACA (BMI).

*Ephemeris*: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC, June 10, 1981. Original recording was released on CRI SD 471 and was made possible by grants from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc., the Research Council of Rutgers University, and the State University of New Jersey. Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Charles Harbutt, engineer, at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC using the DCS 900 20-bit a/d converter. Published by ACA (BMI).

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