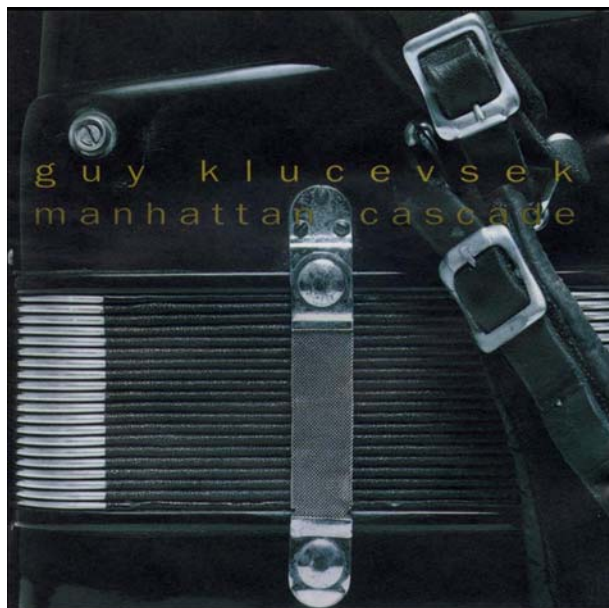


NWCR626

# Guy Klucevsek

## *Manhattan Cascade*



1. John Zorn: *Road Runner* (1986) ..... (5:23)
2. Anthony Coleman:  
*Below 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Above 125<sup>th</sup> Street* (1987) . (7:12)
3. Guy Klucevsek: *Samba D Hiccup* (1986) ..... (5:24)
4. Guy Klucevsek:  
*An Air of Gathering Pipers* (1988) ..... (7:02)
5. John King: *All Together Now* (1990) ..... (11:43)
6. Lois V. Vierk: *Manhattan Cascade* (1985) .... (20:00)

The next four pieces were written as part of *Polka From the Fringe*, a collection of over thirty polkas commissioned by Klucevsek.

7. Christian Marclay: *Ping Pong Polka* (1987) .. (2:53)
8. Mary Ellen Childs: *Oa Poa Polka* (1988) ..... (4:01)
9. Rolf Groesbeck: *Polka I* (1987) ..... (3:49)
10. Aaron Jay Kernis:  
*Phantom Polka* (a cinematic polka) (1988) .. (2:51)

Guy Klucevsek, Free Bass Accordion

Total playing time: 70:52

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## Notes

There aren't many recordings that refer to Mahler, Dvořák, "Salt Peanuts," polkas, spirituals, tangos, South African union songs, waltzes, sambas, and zydeco. This album touches upon all of these traditions with a solo instrument that abounds with tradition – the accordion.

Invented in the 1820s, the accordion is best known as a folk instrument. Accordionist **Guy Klucevsek**'s earliest musical experiences were part of the Slovenian folk tradition. As a child in a Slavic community in western Pennsylvania, he played in many polka bands.

But Klucevsek has evolved beyond an oom-pah mentality and has created a new accordion tradition. Since the mid 1980s, he has commissioned a body of works for accordion which, as the works on this disc display, draw upon multiculturalism and a variety of postmodern trends and experimental techniques.

In addition to Klucevsek's active role as a performer and commissioner of new works, he is also an accomplished composer, and this disc contains two of his works. In his *Samba D Hiccup* (1986), the accordion is inspired by the Brazilian *forró* style. There is a balance here between a lyrical quality and the rhythmic energy driving the piece. In an *Air of Gathering Pipers* (1988) one is transported to the British Isles with visions of bagpipe players in the hills. The tune is soulful and poignant.

The other eight pieces on this disc were written specifically for Klucevsek from 1985–1990 by young American composers. Four of these compositions were written as part of "Polka From the Fringe," a collection of over thirty new polkas commissioned by Klucevsek.

Representing the only solo works of the project (the others being for Klucevsek's "Ain't Nothing But A Polka Band"), these compositions explore different aesthetic concerns. "If I were pressed to name only one favorite instrument," Minneapolis-based composer **Mary Ellen Childs** says, "it would be the accordion. The instrument has such an incredible range—pitch, dynamic, number of notes playable at once, variety of tone colors, etc. I rarely write for solo instruments; I prefer the interplay of separate lines in an ensemble. However, there are many ensemble capabilities within this one instrument."

In *Oa Poa Polka* (1988), Childs uses the accordion in a traditional way, borrowing the oom-pah bass. Working with the right and left hand reeds she creates a bouncing effect between the same pitches. Her title reflects the structure of the piece which begins with a few scattered notes and gradually fills in the spaces: O A, PO A, POLKA.

**Christian Marclay** was lured to the accordion because of the instrument's visual appeal and its populist roots. "I always use cheesy and unfashionable music in my work and create something different—breathing new life into it."

Marclay is known primarily as a visual artist whose sculptures and installations have appeared in numerous museums and galleries in the U.S. and abroad including the 1991 Whitney Museum Biennial.

Musically, Marclay is interested in odd juxtapositions and jump-cuts. His trademark sound collages of live LP mixes allow him to easily jump from a polka to an aria. *Ping Pong Polka* (1987), first conceived as a performance piece, is a dialogue between a "live" accordion and "dead" recorded sounds. Thus, Marclay feels it's ironic that the music is

ending up on a recording. The title refers to an old stereo aesthetic, the ping-pong effect, as well as the exchange between the “live” and the pre-recorded material.

**Aaron Jay Kernis’s** *Phantom Polka* (1988), like many of his more classical pieces, is based on a series of visual images. “For a reason I can’t explain, soon after beginning this polka, I thought of a movie—*Abbott and Costello in the Haunted House!* The specific images brought to mind were those of a translucent ghost appearing on a stairway and the same essentially tame, yet scary apparition in a large ballroom dancing with hundreds of fellow phantoms. This vision appeared in 1930’s or 1940’s black and white and on a fuzzy 1960’s TV. The polka is formed as a little story and, as in many of my compositions, it is eclectic.”

Until Klucevsek asked him to write a polka, **Rolf Groesbeck** never thought about writing anything for accordion, though he is often influenced by ethnic music. While composing *Polka I* (1987), Groesbeck recalled his childhood in the Midwest, country fairs, families dancing, and rural settings. These images were alternated with thoughts as well as his experience of a new accordion music played in intimate loft spaces. The piece was composed in an intuitive flash; “I heard these sounds and wrote them down very quickly, juxtaposing two styles of music which stood for two very different performance contexts.” *Polka I* begins with long, atonal chords and then moves to a middle polka section. It returns to the eerie chords with a brief attempt, in a coda, to get back to the polka.

For **Anthony Coleman**, a veteran improviser as well as a composer, the image of the accordion was not an issue. “I don’t have an agenda about the instrument.” His concerns in *Below 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Above 125<sup>th</sup> Street* are exploring and transforming different dynamic and timbral effects. Although his palette for *Below 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Above 125<sup>th</sup> Street* encompasses references to Mahler’s 10th Symphony and Gillespie’s “Salt Peanuts,” Coleman is not particularly interested in literal quotes. “Generally, I edit out specific musical references. I like my music to have a feeling of an alternative language; it gestures somewhere, but you’re not sure where. The title refers to the two New York neighborhoods where I’ve lived for most of my life.”

Elements of improvisation are found in the pieces by John King and John Zorn. Zorn’s graphic score says: “quote tango,” “quote Beethoven,” and “quote waltz,” while King instructs: “improvise in zydeco style” or “add clusters.” Zorn says, “I try to conventionally notate, but I believe in improvisation and the edge it gives a performance.”

**John King’s** *All Together Now* (1990) is based on a South African trade union song from one of his favorite records. His treatment of the tune involves stylistic transformation. “I’m hoping to make connections between traditional South African music and traditional Southern music—blues, zydeco, gospel, spirituals—and show the music is from the same river.”

He feels comfortable with his music played at a bar or a concert hall. “My music often comes out of socio/political statements. I want there to be aggression, pain, joy, life, humor, and stylistic references that draw people in to the

music.” King was inspired by the vocal quality of the breath and bellows of the accordion. “The quality of its sound and texture conjures up a world of imagery. Like the slide guitar and harmonica which draw out sounds from my childhood, the accordion elicits a similar emotional response.”

*Road Runner* (1986) is **John Zorn’s** first piece in a series inspired by cartoons. “Time is used in a particular way in cartoons. A lot of my pieces also deal with blocks that change quickly.” Zorn uses jump-cutting, a technique more commonly associated with film than with music, in *Road Runner* to create a short, virtuosic solo piece. Influenced by Berio’s *Sequenza* series as well as Carl Stalling’s “Looney Tunes” music, Zorn tries to balance head and heart: “I’m concerned with challenging the perceptions of the performer and the audience. I try to make my music challenging and fun, but I like my music to annoy people. If it’s not challenging it might as well be wallpaper.”

Zorn’s *Road Runner* score includes cut-outs from comic books including images of the Road Runner, the Coyote, and “Twang” and “Womp!” balloons, which serve as inspiration, while directions such as “dense insanity for 3 seconds” or “go crazy for 2 seconds” convey very specific ideas to the performer.

While Zorn and King are working with quick transformations, **Lois V. Vierk** works with more gradual changes. Starting with timbral and textural concerns, *Manhattan Cascade* (1985) was developed with an exponential structure—a device Vierk has used over the last decade. This principle involves the rate of change of musical material by a mathematical factor which helps develop and transform a sound shape. But Vierk is also concerned with the emotional thrust: unlike strict minimalists, she abandons the mathematical principles when warranted.

Vierk’s *Manhattan Cascade* is written for four accordions and is one in a series of works for multiples of the same instrument. She has also written pieces for 8 cellos, 5 electric guitars, 6 trumpets, and 8 Japanese ryūteki (flutes). “I was brought up on Stockhausen and Berio, who pushed for instruments to do new things. I was trying to get to the extremes of what the accordion could do. When I heard its low sounds, I latched on to them; I knew my piece would end there. The title of the pieces refers to New York because I was living here and was filled with the energy of the city. When I listened to the piece in my head, it felt like water. I had the image of water cascading and trickling down.”

The composers on this disc have different stylistic and musical concerns. While Christian Marclay was the only composer to study the accordion—with a Polish musician he met in an East Village bar—all the composers have a special working relationship with Guy Klucevsek and his instrument. John King sums it up: “It’s hard for me to separate the accordion from Guy Klucevsek. He gives music a power a direction and an in-depth interpretation that is very satisfying.” Each composer also spent time with Klucevsek learning about the accordion’s capabilities. What has emerged is an experimental accordion disc that highlights the range of the instrument and Klucevsek’s contributions to its repertoire.

—*Iris Brooks*

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## Production Notes

Produced by Guy Klucevsek

Executive Producer : Joseph R. Dalton

Recorded and mixed January, April, 1991, at Baby Monster Studios, NY, by Bryce Goggin, engineer, except for: *Road Runner* recorded January 1986, Full House Productions, NY, Phil Lee, engineer. Produced and mixed by John Zorn. *Manhattan Cascade* recorded February 1986, India Navigation, NY. Steve Cellum, engineer. Mixed February 1991, Baby Monster Studios, NY, Bryce Goggin, engineer. Tape part to *Ping Pong Polka* recorded and mixed January 1987, by Bobby Previte. Digital mastering by Allan Tucker, Foothill Digital Productions, NY.

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