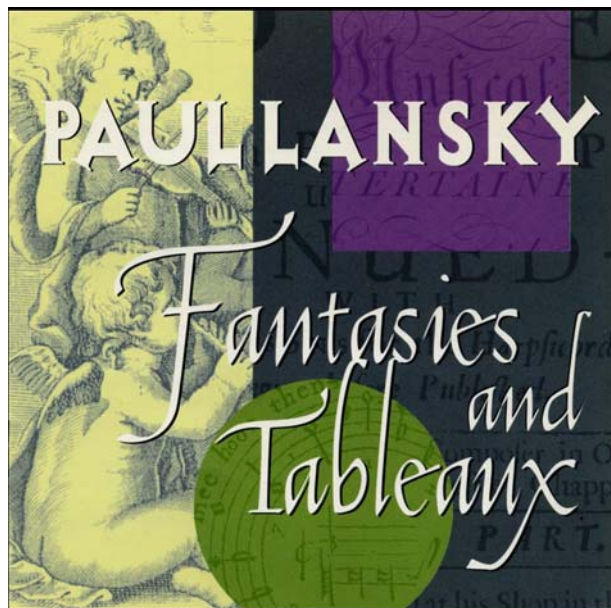


NWCR683

Paul Lansky

Fantasies and Tableaux



Electronic Music of Paul Lansky

Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion (22:24)

1. *her voice* (2:52)
2. *her presence* (3:45)
3. *her reflection* (4:04)
4. *her song* (3:10)
5. *her ritual* (6:02)
6. *her self* (2:31)

reader: Hannah MacKay

Still Time (25:16)

7. first tableau: *panorama* (7:08)
8. second tableau: *street scene* (4:36)
9. third tableau: *from above* (7:56)
10. fourth tableau: *turning inward* (5:31)

Total playing time: 47:33

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Notes

Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion

Speech and song are commonly considered as different and distinct as apples and oranges. It is my feeling, however, that they are more usefully thought of as occupying opposite ends of a spectrum that encompasses a wealth of musical potential. This fact has certainly not been lost on musicians: *sprechstimme*, melodrama, recitative, rap, blues, etc., are all evidence that this is a lively domain. *Six Fantasies* is my exploratory journey through this terrain. Each of the fantasies attempts to musically transform a single reading by Hannah MacKay of a well-known poem by Thomas Campion, and to highlight some aspect of her speech—contour, vowels, resonance, articulation, consonants, etc.—in order to explicate the implicit music within. The final fantasy largely reproduces the original reading, and it is my hope that by the time it rolls by, her speech will sound like music.

Thomas Campion (1567–1620) was, of course, both poet and composer, and particularly sensitive to the musical spectrum spanned by speech and song. His poem “Rose cheekt Lawra” was published in 1602 as part of a treatise entitled *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*. In this essay, Campion, in a tradition of the time, attempts to construct a quantitative model for English verse in which, as in ancient Latin and Greek, meter is determined by vowel quantity rather than by accentual rhythm. The poem is a wonderful, freewheeling spin about the vowel box. It is almost as if he is playing vowels the way one would play a musical instrument, jumping here and there, dancing around with dazzling invention and brilliance, carefully balancing repetition and variation. The poem itself is about Petrarch’s beloved Laura, whose beauty expresses an implicit and heavenly music, in contrast to the imperfect, all too explicit earthly music we

must resign ourselves to make. This seemed to be an appropriate metaphor for the piece.

Still Time

Cinema has had a substantial effect on the ways we think about music. Used best, music in film becomes an organic, often psychological part of the experience, uniquely casting our perceptions, transforming our senses of time and place, and telling us things we would have no other way of knowing. It is particularly interesting to see the way in which music has learned to become the “inner voice” of a film image. While music’s urge to evoke is ancient, its psychological role in opera venerable, and its contemporary use as environmental color all too prevalent, and heavily abused, there still seems to be something new about the ways in which we have learned to understand it in relation to scene. Undoubtedly, the portability that technology has brought to music and theater has a lot to do with this, but the fact remains that a new itch is being scratched.

Still Time was conceived as a kind of film music without images, perhaps reminiscent of the idea of a “song without words.” Each of the piece’s four overlapping tableaux rests on an initial real-world sound: wind in the garden, traffic, and groups of people for the last two. (The use of real-world sound here differs substantially from that in much of my other work, where I often attempt to transform the sounds into music—in this piece, the sounds remain relatively free from digital intervention and retain their original identity.) Turning the tables a bit on film, however, the recorded sounds are used here to color the music that evolves: now the “images” become the inner voice of the music. But the piece is not “about” anything in particular: it is, ultimately, abstract. Instead, I hope that the real-world sounds will influence our

perceptions of the music, coloring or skewing them by the way they position us. Also, further drawing on the experience of film, the pacing and evolution of the piece was conceived in terms of a kind of “landscape” cinematography: my musical camera pans slowly, and musical shapes build gradually, as we accumulate details of the panorama.

—Paul Lansky

Technical Notes

Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion was written in 1978–79 using IBM 360/91 and 3033 mainframe computers. It uses a technique known as Linear Predictive Coding, in addition to a variety of filtering and processing techniques. *Still Time* was written in 1993–94 using a NeXT computer. It uses a variety of reverberation and mixing techniques, and a physical model of a slide flute developed by Perry Cook. *Six Fantasies*, which was originally issued on LP in 1982 (CRI SD 456), has been resampled at 44.1 kHz from the original digital tapes, and both pieces were digitally transferred from the computer for mastering, so that every copy of this CD contains the original digital masters of these pieces.

Paul Lansky (b New York City, 18 June 1944) composes works for computer that tend to be focused not on the invention of “new sounds,” but on the ways in which this technology can be used to expand and deepen our sense of the sounds of the world around us. To this end, his pieces have involved the sounds of speech, of people going about their business, of machines and musical instruments—with the computer serving as an “aural camera” that transforms and repositions our perceptions of these sounds. It is his contention that the meaning of a sound lies not only in its

musical context, but also in the ways in which we understand its physical origin. Lansky teaches at Princeton University.

Other CDs by Paul Lansky:

“Small Talk,” New Albion Records, NA030CD: *Smalltalk, Guy’s Harp, Late August, Not So Heavy Metal*.

“Homebrew,” Bridge Records, CD 9035: *Table’s Clear, Night Traffic, Now and Then, Quakerbridge, The Sound of Two Hands*.

“More Than Idle Chatter,” Bridge Records, CD 9050: *Idle Chatter, Word Color, just_more_idle_chatter, The Lesson, Notjustmoreidlechatter, Memory Pages*.

Pieces in collections:

as it grew dark, Hannah MacKay, reader; “Computer Music Currents 11,” Wergo CD2031-2.

Hop (marimba and violin); “Combo Platter,” Marimolin, BMG/Catalyst 62667-2.

As If (string trio and tape); “The Virtuoso in the Computer Age–I,” Trio Fervor, Centaur Records CRC 2110.

Stroll (chamber ensemble and tape); “The Composer in the Computer Age–III,” Centaur Records, CRC 2213.

Wasting (tape, with Brad Garton, Andy Milburn); “Inner Voices,” Centaur Records CRC 2076.

Hannah MacKay studied acting at the High School of Performing Arts, and with Lee Strasberg, and has worked in film, television, and radio. She also pursues an active interest in classical languages and literature. Wife of Paul Lansky, she is also the “voice” of many of his pieces.

Production Notes

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