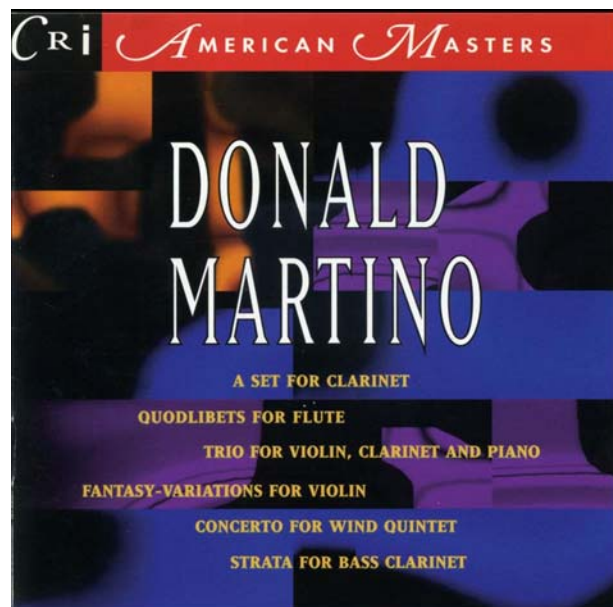


NWCR693

Donald Martino

A Set / Quodlibets / Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano

Fantasy-Variations for Violin / Concerto for Wind Quintet / Strata



A Set for Clarinet (1954)	(9:15)
1. Allegro	(3:25)
2. Adagio	(3:40)

3. Allegro	(2:10)
Michael Webster, clarinet	
<i>Quodlibets</i> for Flute (1954)	(7:58)
4. I	(4:10)
5. II	(1:39)
6. III	(2:09)
Samuel Baron, flute	
7. Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano (1959)	(11:59)
Paul Zukofsky, violin; Arthur Bloom, Clarinet; Gilbert Kalish, piano	
8. Fantasy-Variations for Violin (1962)	(13:20)
Paul Zukofsky, violin	
9. Concerto for Wind Quintet (1964)	(16:09)
Contemporary Chamber Ensemble of Rutgers University, Arthur Weisberg, conductor	
10. <i>Strata</i> for Bass Clarinet (1966)	(6:20)
Dennis Smylie, bass clarinet	

Total playing time: 65:36

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Notes

Donald Martino (b Plainfield, NJ, 16 May 1931; d 2005) is widely known as one of America's most consistently fascinating composers. He has received numerous honors and awards, including membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the 1974 Pulitzer Prize in music. He is the Walter Bigelow Rosen Professor of Music Emeritus at Harvard University.

The importance of this CD lies not only in the fact that it brings together, in digitally re-mastered form, excellent performances of six of Donald Martino's compositions, but also in the manner in which it documents an important transitional decade during which he arrived at, and subsequently began to develop and explore his own unique, personal method of twelve-tone composition. Thus, it is hoped that in addition to serving as a compendium that will stimulate interest in these and other of his early compositions, the recording will help to shed new light on the larger, more widely performed works that have, in recent years, unfortunately tended to eclipse those included here.

Many of the most distinctive characteristics of Martino's mature compositional style, particularly his incorporation of virtuosity "not just as a technical attribute but as an expressive component functioning as a metaphor for what might be called 'the life struggle,'" may be traced directly to experiences of his youth. Martino was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1931, and from an early age was deeply and completely immersed in musical activities of all sorts. Having

learned to play the clarinet, saxophone, and oboe, he came first to idolize Benny Goodman, then Charlie Parker, and his youthful exuberance and energy led him to compose pop tunes, short piano pieces, and dance band arrangements, and to perform on a daily basis in "orchestras, jazz combos, dance bands, feast bands, polka bands, whatever." An important teacher during these formative years was an Italian bandsman named Francesco Lieto, who, according to Martino, was "an incredible role model—a technician unsurpassed by any I have since heard. He would sit with me and, with him in the lead, we'd play in unison for hours. When I stumbled he would say, 'Don't worry about it, Donnie, just practice and it will get better.'" Lieto's infectious optimism, his apparently unshakable faith in the human capacity to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, had a tremendous, positive effect on Martino, and eventually served as the foundation for a fundamental compositional premise resting on the notion that "the degree of difficulty of the music, both technically and interpretively, is its drama."

In 1948 Martino graduated from high school and, with the hope of becoming a concert clarinetist, accepted a scholarship from Syracuse University. Here he met Ernst Bacon, his first composition teacher, who exposed him not only to Beethoven sonatas and Schubert songs, but also to the music of Bartók, in whose melodic and harmonic language Martino discerned a surprisingly close connection with that of be-boppers such as Parker and Gillespie. (For example, both Bartók's Fifth String Quartet and Parker's "Donna Lee" rely heavily on the "octatonic" or "diminished" scale, which consists of alternat-

ing half- and whole-steps.) Fittingly, Bartók came to exert a strong influence on Martino's early, relatively off-the-cuff concert works.

After leaving Syracuse, Martino received a fellowship from Princeton University, where, having made the decision to focus on composition, he studied with Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions. While working with Sessions, he composed what he describes as "a huge cello concerto, sort of a transposition down an octave and a fifth of Bartók's Violin Concerto." As Martino puts it: "After the Concerto, I was worn out, so I wrote two solo pieces, *A Set* for Clarinet and *Quodlibets*, both still very much under the influence of Bartók. They were written very quickly, a couple of days for each piece." Given these circumstances, and given Martino's youthful propensity for intuitive, minimally planned compositions, it's not at all surprising that both works turned out to be spontaneous-sounding romps.

The *Set*, a virtuosic show-piece that, despite its having caused somewhat of a stir early on, is now a staple of the modern clarinet repertoire, was composed over a period of three days in February of 1954, and is dedicated to Martino's "old pal and friendly rival clarinetist" Arthur Bloom, who premiered the work in Princeton in May of that year. The term "set" refers not to a twelve-tone set—indeed, Martino was at the time largely unfamiliar with the music and theories of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg—but rather to the dance band set, which always consisted of three pieces played without pause. Echoes of jazz and pop music pervade all three movements—the first of which (Allegro, an A-B-A form with introduction and coda) was originally titled "Conservatory Stomp," while the second (Adagio, A-B-A with coda) was called "Blues in Eb," and the third (Allegro, a medley with introduction and coda), "10th Avenue Shuffle." These influences notwithstanding, the work is, in essence, what Martino refers to as "an instance of classical virtuoso writing in the Italian tradition"; in fact, many of its technical challenges (such as the enormous wide-register leaps) derive directly from the études that the composer studied with Lieto.

Quodlibets, written in July of 1954, was, like *A Set*, composed very quickly. It shares many characteristics with its predecessor, ranging from a three-part formal layout—*Studio* (adagio-allegretto), *Arietta* (larghetto), *Burla* (allegro)—to the use of rapid scales, large, sudden registral shifts, and twisting octatonic/chromatic melodies. An additional connection with *A Set*, one which offers a small glimpse of Martino's wry sense of humor, is the fact that both works were originally intended to be part of a collection entitled *Solo Pieces to be Played in Public, Hint!*

Having completed his degree, Martino left Princeton later that year, and, thanks to the first two consecutive Fulbright grants, went off to Italy to study composition with Luigi Dallapiccola. While abroad, he began an intensive investigation into the working of the chromatic universe, and started composing what he describes as "primitive twelve-tone music."

"I don't think it was so much the influence of Dallapiccola as it was simply the natural evolution of my technique. I was writing a String Trio. During the course of it, the weavings in and out of the octatonic scale caused the music to become completely chromatic... Thereafter, everything seemed to be leading me in the direction of chromaticism."

Martino returned to the U.S. in 1956, and soon found a teaching job (for \$2 an hour!) at the Third Street Music School Settlement in Manhattan. During the next few years, his interest in public performance continued to wane, although he occasionally played in jazz combos with his childhood friend Bill Evans. At the same time, however, he

was hard at work on a series of compositions in which he gradually learned to allow his theoretical interests to reconcile themselves with his innate musicality. Those "painful, frustrating years" culminated in the brief Piano Fantasy of 1958; here, for the first time, Martino found a way to compositionally come to terms with his notion of the twelve-tone system as "a universe of interconnected tone roads," in which "each piece could be imagined as but a different journey, on familiar paths, throughout that universe."

In 1959 Martino accepted a teaching position at Yale, where, immersed in various compositional and theoretical endeavors, he would remain until 1969. His next work, the Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano, is in many ways an embodiment of the sort of precarious balance sought by the composer: "It is at once rigorous—but sensuous; fragmentary—but possessing long lines of fragments. It contains all the seeming contradictions which I have so avidly pursued for most of the years thereafter." Accordingly, an overriding concern throughout the Trio was "blending fundamentally disparate instrument colors. Toward this end I thought to deploy my notes in registers, at dynamic levels, and with attack and timbral characteristics that would minimize the difference between the instruments." The use of "long lines of fragments" is mirrored in the seven-part formal scheme, A-B-A', C, A'-B'-A', in essence a set of rondo-variations.

According to Martino:

"The A sections are permutations of each other, each section containing the same events reshuffled. Whereas the A sections are homophonic in texture, the B sections are contrapuntal and are related by retrogression, with B' completing the harmonic implications of B; C, also contrapuntal, is independent in design ... [and] also presents the Trio's slowest music. It is the symmetric center of a tempo scheme in which A sections are moderate to fast and other sections are slow."

As indicated by its title, *Fantasy-Variations* (1962) "combines variation technique ... with the freedom and unpredictable character of the fantasy." The former serving as "the process which directs the compositional technique," the latter as "the intrusive dictator of the expressive foreground." The large-scale form is typically paradoxical, and is seemingly the byproduct of the composer's intense struggle to achieve a tenuous, provisional resolution between these contradictory impulses. While the work consists of a single continuous movement divided into smaller sections defined by contrasting tempi and character, the boundaries between the sections are frequently blurred due to the presence of invasive passages that seem bent on disrupting the predominant mood. (These interruptive, discretionary tactics would eventually lead to the "chaotic swirl" of later works such as *Notturmo*, in which seemingly incompatible musics are juxtaposed and made to coexist.) Not surprisingly, extreme demands are placed on the performer, who, alone, is thrust into the challenging position of having somehow to contain and direct the work's clashing, volcanic energies.

The Concerto for Wind Quintet, commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and completed in 1964, derives its title from the composer's desire to lead the five instruments, here treated as five soloists, into virtuosic combat with one another. (In fact, the 13-part formal structure includes a "quintuple solo"!)

The composition of the work was preceded by a systematic investigation of the timbral characteristics of the instruments, heard alone and in all available combinations. Beginning with the simple but profound realization that, in terms of tone color, the wind quintet consists of two duos (flute/clarinet and oboe/bassoon) plus the horn, which is unique, Martino was then able to extend and multiply the various timbral groups in an enormous variety of directions. At the same time, his ever-

deepening understanding of the twelve-tone system's structural implications helped him to both compose longer passages and control the succession of instrumental subgroups in ways that were both illogical and musically interesting. (Martino even goes so far as to describe each note of the piece in terms of a sort of "eternal now:" "a multiplicity of functions is assigned to each note ... each note represents not only what is, but what has been and what is about to be.") These formal concerns, however, serve as rational underpinnings for flights of fancy, and neatly complement Martino's keen sense of drama and irrepressibly lyrical tendencies. The result is a work that, despite (or, more accurately, partly because of) its constructive wonders, is lively and elegant, and demands repeated hearings.

Unlike the Concerto, *Strata* for Bass Clarinet (1966) was composed very quickly (Martino refers to it as a "little improvisation"), a fact that is perhaps indicative of the degree to which the composer had succeeded, even so early on, in mastering the complexities of his twelve-tone universe. The title refers to the stratification of melodic fragments, a procedure that allowed Martino to fully exploit the timbral characteristics of the bass clarinet's various registers. Techniques such as key clicks, slap-tongue, flutter-tongue, quarter-tone inflections, lip glissandi, and throat tremolo are called for, and serve not as "special effects," but as both vehicles of expressive nuance and articulatory mechanisms that help to clarify structural relationships. *Strata's* quiet,

meditative conclusion was, according to the composer, a reaction to the passing of his "very dear buddy and canine confidante, Muffin," and serves as a lament and funeral march.

It is easy to view the solo and chamber works heard on this CD as springboards for Martino's far-reaching, expansive compositions of the mid- to late '60s and '70s, such as the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1965), *Mosaic* for Grand Orchestra (1967), *Pianissimo* for solo piano (1970), the Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1972), the Pulitzer Prize-winning chamber work *Notturmo* (1973), and Triple Concerto (1977). Many of the characteristics of Martino's mature music, such as the reliance upon virtuosity as an organic compositional determinant, and the coexistence of diverse emotional states in what the composer would later call a "counterpoint of sentiments," find their origins here. But in striving for such historical perspective, we must not overlook the innate value of these early works. One hopes that this collection will enable and encourage a deeper appreciation of both their architectural marvels and their sheer musical exuberance.

—James Boros

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Production Notes

Originally produced by Carter Harman

From CRI SD 212:

Quodlibets

From CRI SD 230:

Concerto for Wind Quintet

Funded by a 1967 award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters

From CRI SD 240:

Fantasy Variations and Trio

Engineered by Jerry Newman. Funded by a 1967 award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters

From CRI SD 374

A Set for Clarinet

Produced by Horace Grennell and Carter Harman.

Engineered by David Jones. Originally released on Desto Records. The CRI release was funded by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University

From CRI SD 499:

Strata

Engineered by David Hancock. Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, Princeton University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Jerome Foundation, the Ernst von Siemens Foundation, Time-Life, Inc., Mr. David Braynard, Mar. and Mrs. Jose M. Ferrer III, and Mr. Andrew Schneider.

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A Set for Clarinet and *Quodlibets* published by McGinniss & Marx Music Publishers (BMI)

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Executive Producer Joseph R. Dalton

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Ellen Fitton, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, NYC.

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