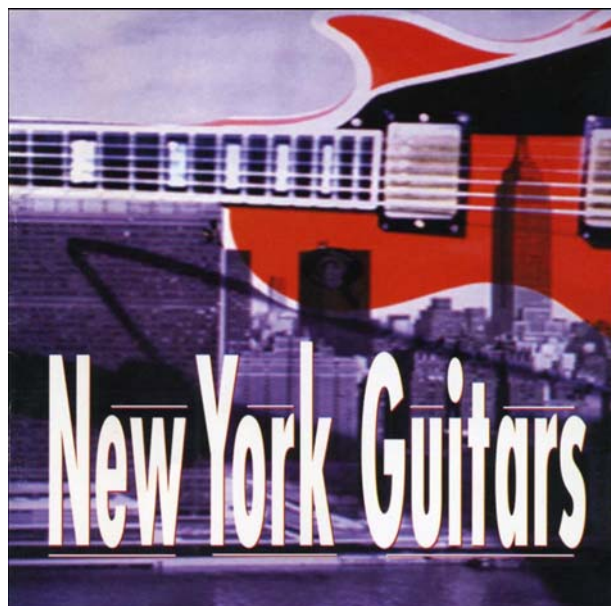


NWCR698

New York Guitars



1. John King: *White Buffalo Calf Woman Blues* (4:09)
2. Carolyn Master: *En Masse* (7:21)
3. Mark Howell: *The Quakening* (8:56)
4. Nick Didkovsky: *Flykiller* (1:49)
5. David First: *Jade Perches for Silvia* (8:41)
6. Brandon Ross: *O, People* (5:12)
7. Judy Dunaway: *Fifty 210* (8:53)
8. Loren Mazzacane Connors: *Departure* (2:56)
9. Ken Valitsky: *Meaning-Less* (5:44)
10. Phil Kline: *A Fantasy on One Note* (7:33)

Total playing time: 61:50

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Notes

The electric guitar was born into a hostile climate...

When the first amplified guitars were put on the market in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the first significant public campaigns against ever-increasing city noise were also taking place. Among the anti-cacophony mottos: “The silence of each assures rest for us all.” Thus, from its inception, the electric guitar was a symbol of noise, imprecision and rebellion. Its weapon: amplification, the enemy of restful sleep. Though the New York composers and improvisers on this record coax everything from dissonance and drones to blues and jazz out of their guitars, they all have one thing in common: they are by nature defiant, undermining so-called serious music by making it on an electric guitar.

Playing avant-garde music on an electric guitar is nothing new. The tradition in New York goes back at least to minimalist composer La Monte Young writing *For Guitar* in 1958 (which was later transposed to electric guitar) and Sonny Sharrock making a name for himself as a Free-Jazz guitarist in the 1960s. What sets the composers here apart is that they grew up in an era of rock and roll. Some of them were even playing in rock bands before finding other outlets for their musical experimentation. With all the baggage of rock history now attached to the electric guitar, separating it from the tradition of rock (or blues or jazz) has become not an act of appropriation but subversion. So when Mark Howell flips through sixty-five years of guitar styles and techniques in nine minutes and Judy Dunaway composes with the noise inherent in the technology of amplification, they are not celebrating the history of guitar music and technology but exploring its limits.

Is there a “New York Guitar” school of style? Some would like to think so. After all, New York became a melting pot of

influential experimental guitarists in the late 1970s, with guitar symphonists Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham, noise makers Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo of the acclaimed underground rock band Sonic Youth, mathematically-based composer and improviser Elliot Sharp, and no-wave cacophonists Arto Lindsay and Pat Place, all circulating in the same scene. But here, you’ll find no discernible line linking John Kings’s blues, David First’s microtonal play and Loren Mazzacane Connor’s abstractions.

If there is anything these New York composer/guitarists have in common it is the environment they live in, not the musical terrain they’re mapping. The noise of the city—which continues unhindered despite the noise-pollution fighters of the 1920s and 1930s—has a significant effect on the psyche of musicians. It raises their threshold for extreme sounds while exacerbating their need to avoid them. The result is that composers either incorporate the cacophony of the city into their pieces or try to escape from it altogether. Examples of the former are Ken Valitsky merging guitar, typewriter, ringing phones, sirens, and other computer-modified sounds in *Meaning-Less*, Phil Kline evoking the Doppler effect created by passing car horns in *A Fantasy on One Note*, and Nick Didkovsky building a distorted, pointillist collage in *Flykiller*. Examples of the latter are Carolyn Master retreating into the colors of the inner world that is *En Masse* and Brandon Ross meditating on the purity of the jazz saxophone in *O, People*. As the lyrics to one anonymous blues tune go:

*You can take the guitar outside,
You can take the guitar inside
Jes don’t take it no place, young man,
Where there ain’t no ear open wide.*

—Neil Strauss

1. John King: *White Buffalo Calf Woman Blues*

White Buffalo Calf Woman Blues was performed at the Kitchen as part of the 1993 Bang on a Can Festival. Electric guitar, plugged in straight, no effects, no big volume. Just showing where my music comes from: blues, playing around with my “White Buffalo Calf Woman” tune, coming out of a Dakota Native American legend.

Composer and guitarist John King has performed throughout Europe, the U.S. and Japan as a soloist and with his trio Electric World. He has composed numerous commissioned dance scores including two for Merce Cunningham (*Blues 22* for the dance CRWDSPCER and *Glass is Sighs for Native Green*), as well as for Robert Kovich, Ellen Cornfield, Dennis O’Conner and Randy Warshaw. Accordionist Guy Kluczevick recorded his “All Together Now” on CRI.

2. Carolyn Master: *En Masse*

En Masse, my first solo guitar piece, was written expressly for a performance at the 1993 Bang On A Can Festival. The composition has four sections of improvisations based on varying emotions. *En Masse* is dedicated to my father, Edward Julius Horyn (1920–1993), who died during the creative process of the work. It was recorded in concert May 29, 1993, at The Kitchen in New York City by Bob Bielecki, sound designer for The Bang on a Can Festival.

Composer, guitarist, and keyboardist Carolyn Master has been a member of The Glenn Branca Ensemble since 1987, performing on several U.S. and European tours and recording the Branca CDs. As a founding member of The Band of Cabbages and Kings, Master co-wrote, performed and produced numerous CDs and toured the U.S. extensively from 1988 to 1995

3. Mark Howell: *The Quakening*

The Quakening explores the characteristic nuances of the electric guitar (hammer-ons, tremolo picking, string bends, muting, overtones, fourth and fifth dyads, etc.) and draws on some of the literature of the electric guitar, the blues, and improvisational noise. No multi-tracking or overdubbing is used in this composition. This recording was made at Excello Studios in Brooklyn, NY, in January 1995, Bruce Hathaway, engineer.

Mark Howell was composer-in-residence at the 1994 American Dance Festival. His collaboration with choreographer Lynn Shapiro was performed at the festival in North Carolina and at Lincoln Center in New York. He is a composing member of the internationally known Fred Frith Guitar Quartet.

4. Nick Didkovsky: *Flykiller*

I started playing guitar when I was ten years old, on a Stella with rusty strings about a mile from the neck. Sixteen years later I started my band Doctor Nerve. Somewhere between then and now, I composed and recorded *Flykiller* interactively on my Scully four-track tape recorder. The result is three tracks of prepared guitar and one track of voice sung through a phone that I ripped out of a taxi-stand while still a student at Dartmouth College. Recorded at Punos Music (New York City).

Nick Didkovsky is a guitarist, composer, teacher and computer music programmer. In 1983 he founded the avant-garde rock octet Doctor Nerve. He is a composing member of the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet. His chamber work *Amalia’s Secret* was premiered by the Bang on a Can All-Stars in 1994 at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall. Nick is also chairman of computer sciences at a New York City high school.

5. David First: *Jade Perches for Silvia*

Jade Perches for Silvia is an adaptation of a large-scale (35-minute; 13 players) work entitled *Jade Screen Test Dreams of Renting Wings*. In this version, a guitarist is asked to modulate drones tuned in just intonation, playing “resolution games” through the implantation of an E-bow (a hand-held device that causes a guitar string to sustain indefinitely). Developed for guitarist Silvia Ocougne, it was premiered by her in July, 1993 at the USArts Festival in Berlin and was recorded at Studio P.A.A.A. in New York City, Alex Noyes, engineer.

David First has performed with and composed for numerous configurations, including his own ensembles Joy Buzzers and The World Casio Quartet. His opera, *The Manhattan Book of the Dead*, received its world premiere at La Mama, E.T.C. in New York in April 1995. He has been the recipient of an Opera/Music Theater Grant from the National Endowment of the Arts, the BACA Downtown New Territory Award for Music Composition, residency grants from Harvestworks, Real Art Ways, and the Yamaha Communications Center and an equipment grant from Casio, Inc. He has written commissioned works for baritone Thomas Buckner, pianist Phillip Bush, New York’s Essential Music and Choreographer Gloria McLean, among others.

6. Brandon Ross: *O, People*

O, People was composed in tribute to Ornette Coleman and Oliver Lake — both alto saxophonists, improvisers and composers. The piece is designed as a contemplation of their respective influences on my perceptual organization of sound and song as multidimensional gesturing. Recorded at Sear Sound, New York on January 26, 1995; producer: Craig Street; engineer: Danny Kopelson; assisted by Frederic Kevorkian.

Guitarist and composer Brandon Ross is drawn to “formless forms” of art. He tours and records with many luminaries of the jazz and new music fields, including Henry Threadgill, Butch Morris, Leroy Jenkins, and Oliver Lake. Since 1993 he has been musical director for vocalist Cassandra Wilson. He lives in Brooklyn and is currently developing the next big thing.

7. Judy Dunaway: *Fifty 210*

Unlike an acoustic guitar, an electric guitar cannot be heard without the use of an amplifier, and this dependency is the basis of my composition *Fifty 210*. The Yamaha Fifty 210 amplifier which resides in my rehearsal studio in Manhattan’s Lower East Side has been used by an endless stream of musicians over the past ten or so years. Along with the normal level of transistor hiss that is found in a Fifty 210, there is additional noise in this particular amp caused by age and usage. The indigenous electronic noise, as well as the special built-in tremolo, reverb and distortion features of the Fifty 210 amp, are necessary elements in my composition. The guitar used for this piece is a Gibson Chet Atkins solid-body nylon-stringed electric, tuned standard but with the strings sometimes prepared with metal and plastic objects. The score is instructional with room for improvisational interpretation. Recorded by Geoff Dugan; digital transfer by Elliott Sharp.

Judy Dunaway’s musical works attempt to push the boundaries of socially acceptable instrumentation and form. Her numerous compositions for balloons have been performed in the U.S. and Europe: her *Duo for Tow Radio Stations* for WWFMU (New Jersey) and WKCR (New York City) was simulcast in 1992 and her score for Diane Torr’s performance art piece, *Crossing the River Styx*, was the “high

decibel music” that instigated the closing of the legendary Franklin Furnace performance space in 1990.

8. **Loren MazzaCane Connors:** *Departure*

My notion of composition is to move as a train down a track: one can always confront it at any given point, yet will also have tangible evidence of the path, like the shades of a feeling. *Departure* is an abstraction from Irish airs and the blues tradition. It was composed directly onto a two-track recorder.

Loren MazzaCane Connors has produced a series of mostly solo electric guitar recordings released on independent labels since the late 1970s. He has been featured in numerous jazz and guitar magazines. *Wire* named him “the Eric Satie of blues guitar,” *Fanfare* called his miniatures “Webernesque,” and *Guitar Player* cited his “Microtonal Blues/Raga inflections that wash over the listener like a confluence of the Mississippi and the Ganges.”

9. **Ken Valitsky:** *Meaning-Less*

My music is a mélange of all the musical influences I’ve had throughout my life. Growing up playing guitar in garage bands in Detroit, it’s natural that the Beatles and Led Zeppelin are as important to me as Cage and Coltrane. I learned early that no particular style of music has a monopoly on quality.

What interests me about the electric guitar is its potential as a truly “electric” instrument and not only as an “amplified” instrument. It is a very special instrument capable of a multitude of effects. During the past forty years the electric guitar has become the instrument of American music. *Meaning-Less* explores the capabilities of the instrument and the genres of music which are associated with it such as funk, metal, blues and rockabilly. I’m glad to have finally written a piece combining the two instruments I play: electric guitar

and computer. Recorded at Pilot Studio, New York; Jerome Fox, engineer.

Ken Valitsky studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen as a Fulbright Scholar in Germany. He has worked with a diversity of collaborators including performance artist Lydia Lunch, soprano Dora Ohrenstein, choreographer Doug Elkins, and the Soldier String Quartet. He leads an ensemble that includes Thomas Chapin on saxophone and Regina Carter on violin. His music combines traditional formal techniques with contemporary genres such as bop, funk, industrial, thrash, rap and grunge.

10. **Phil Kline:** *A Fantasy on One Note*

It all began with the appropriation of Purcell’s title and a desire to be in the key of G. Then, over time, I added too many notes until finally the title reasserted itself and the superfluous notes were removed. The *Fantasy* is a celebration of right-hand technique and big amplifiers — five of which are strung across the soundstage with an assortment of delay and volume pedals. Recorded at Acme Studios, New York; Rory Young, engineer.

Phil Kline received his earliest musical education listening to records and playing in garage bands in Akron, Ohio. Later studies at Columbia University and Mannes College convinced him to buy more records. He has written five film scores as well as music for television and theatre productions. As a guitarist in the Glenn Branca Ensemble, he has recorded and toured extensively throughout Europe. For the past several years he has performed with an orchestra of boom box tape decks. His *Bachman’s Warbler* for 12 boom boxes and harmonica is on CRI disc “Bang on a Can Vol. 2.” He currently lives in Lower Manhattan with his wife, painter Robin Bruch.

Production Notes

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Mastered by Joseph Dalton and Robert Woolf, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC.

Compact disc was made possible through the generous support of the Greenwall Foundation, and the Virgil Thomson Foundation.