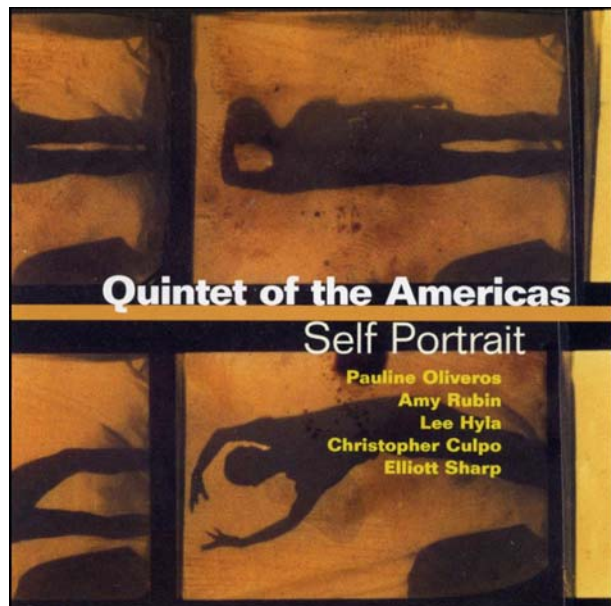


NWCR722

Quintet of the Americas

Self Portrait



Pauline Oliveros

1. *Portrait of the Quintet of the Americas* (1996) ... (7:26)

Amy Rubin

2. *La Loba* (1994; rev. 1995) (24:03)
3. I. Cantadora I (2:31)
4. II. La Loba (2:37)

5. III. Hambre del Alma (1:56)
6. IV. Llamar o Tocar (6:35)
7. V. Descansos/Wise Woman (6:03)
8. VI. Cantadora II/La Loba (4:21)

Lee Hyla

9. *Amnesia Breaks* (1996) (8:31)

Christopher Culpo

10. *Woodwind Quintet* (1996) (13:11)
11. I. Presto (3:07)
12. II. Adagio (2:00)
13. III. Interlude (1:01)
14. IV. March (2:46)
15. V. Fantasy (3:13)
16. VI. Interlude (00:53)
17. VII. Coda (00:11)

Elliott Sharp

18. *JAG* (1996) (9:30)

Marco Granados, flute; Peggy Pearson, oboe; Daniel Granados, clarinet; Thomas Novak, bassoon; Barbara Oldham, horn; with Michael Lowenstern, bass clarinet (in the Sharp); Amy Rubin, piano (in the Rubin)

Total Playing Time: 62:45

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Notes

We have long heard about the widening chasm between composers and performers, between new music and the public, between popular and contemporary “classical” music. Today, however, a new generation of engagé composers and performers are closing both of those gaps. This is not just a matter of composers writing in the vernacular or performers taking up the cudgels in defense of new music. These creative and interpretive musicians are themselves active collaborators in the act of bringing new work to life, crossing the lines that formerly divided schools, styles, categories, and even countries.

Take Quintet of the Americas. This is a classical wind quintet—flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn—that was founded in 1976 in Bogotá, Colombia, by the principals of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Colombia. In 1979, they relocated to New York City, committing themselves to new music from all parts of the hemisphere. They have worked closely with a wide range of composers, premiered more than fifty works (over half of them commissions), and made numerous arrangements of their own, adding folk music to the contemporary classical repertoire which they are helping to create.

The current album, which celebrates their fifteenth anniversary season in New York, consists of five new works, four of which were commissioned and premiered by the group. All of this music requires major input from the

performers, and two of the pieces, the Pauline Oliveros and the Elliott Sharp, have strong improvisational elements; they are, in effect, creative collaborations between the composers and their interpreters.

Pauline Oliveros (b 1932) is one of the most original and extraordinary presences in new music today. In the early 1960s, she became the first director of the Tape Music Center at Mills College in Oakland, California, and from 1966 to 1980 she worked at the active and innovative new-music center at the University of California, San Diego. In 1981, she moved to Kingston in New York’s Hudson Valley, where she established the Pauline Oliveros Foundation and the Deep Listening Band, with which she often performs on an accordion tuned in just intonation. She has been called the founder of meditational music and is the composer of a series of pieces known as *Sonic Meditations* and *Deep Listening Pieces*.

The original concept of her *Portraits* dates from 1987 and was realized by Ms. Oliveros in collaboration with computer programmer Peter Ward. The “score” of the work is a mandala of circles connected to each other by radiating spokes. The “Stillness/Listen” at the center of the mandala is surrounded by what she calls the “internal” attributes of “Sense,” “Feel,” “Intuit,” and “Think”; a larger ring consisting of circles marked “Dream,” “Birth,” “Signature,” “Quotation,” “Nature,” “Memory,” “Who am I?” and

“Theater”; and, finally, at the outside of the structure, the Externals: “Intermittent” and “Constant,” “Far” and “Near.” The composer has also given each musician a unique and personal set of pitches, a kind of musical mantra which she has created by casting each individual’s astrological chart from which she has derived the individualized musical material as a basis for improvisation.

In order to realize all of this, the players must not only read the notes and charts but also be actively involved in listening to each other and to the sounds of the space they are in as they perform. The piece begins at the center with “Stillness/Listen,” but the performers are then free to select other circles by following the connecting lines outward; in the end, however, they must return to the central stillness. The timing and the overall length are left open so that the outlines of this musical portraiture are determined by the performers themselves.

Amy Rubin studied at New York’s High School of Music and Art, at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, at Cornell, and the Yale School of Music. She has been a composer/pianist for Peter Brook’s Center for International Theater Research in France, at La Mama, the Acting Company at Juilliard, the New York Shakespeare Festival, and the Kennedy Center. She has written for theater, film, and television as well as for jazz, folk, electronic, and chamber ensembles. As a Senior Fulbright Scholar in 1992–93, she lived in Ghana, West Africa, where she taught at the National Academy of Music and the National Institute for Film and Television. While in Ghana, she produced live and televised concerts, founded and performed in a worldbeat ensemble, and conducted research. Since 1994 she has been artist-in-residence at Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey.

La Loba, for woodwind quintet and piano, was commissioned by Quintet of the Americas with a grant from New York State Council on the Arts, and had its premiere at the Americas Society’s Sal6n Sim6n Bol6var in New York City on May 26, 1994. The work was inspired by Clarissa Pinkola Est6s’s *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, a collection of myths and stories depicting women from around the world with the author’s psychological and literary analyses. “In reading the book,” says the composer, “I was most struck by the poetic phrases which describe both archetypal characters and concepts. These gave me the titles and helped shape and define the various movements of the piece.” The first, for solo flute, “Cantadora I,” carries the subtitle “Beginning the Story.” A *cantadora* might be described as a bard, a balladeer, or a storyteller; the music carries the instruction “hauntingly, legato & freely.” “La Loba,” the title of the entire work and also of the second movement, literally means “The Female Wolf,” but it also evokes the sense of “The Wild Woman.” Marked Presto, “La Loba” is a scherzo-like romp juxtaposing the solo piano against the five winds. “Hambre del Alma” or “Hunger of the Soul,” subtitled “a lament,” is a duet for English horn and French horn. The two winds are asked to play “plaintively, freely & expressively.” “Llamar o Tocar” is more difficult to translate; it might be rendered as “cry out or else make music” (llamar means “to call” or “cry out”; tocar is “to touch” but also “to play a musical instrument”; the composer calls it “a knock on the door of the unconscious”). Recurring ostinati provide a structure against which musical flights of fancy occur. “Descansos,” or “resting places,” provides a moment of contemplation for clarinet, bassoon, and piano; together with the rough-edged wisdom of “Wise Woman” (“In a folk style, as sung from the Sacred Harp, as sung from the mountains”), it forms a kind of minuet and trio.

“Cantadora II,” this time for four winds, is subtitled “Ending the Story” and the piece ends with a reprise of “La Loba.”

Lee Hyla was born in 1952 in Niagara Falls, New York, and grew up in Greencastle, Indiana. He studied at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and the New England Conservatory of Music, where he currently serves as co-chair of the composition department. He has a long list of commissions, grants, and awards which have resulted in a number of notable compositions, including a setting of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* for narrator and string quartet (commissioned for Ginsberg and the Kronos Quartet), a piano concerto commissioned by Speculum Musicae, and a series of “Amnesia” pieces beginning with a chamber orchestra work, performed by the London Sinfonietta in 1980 and continuing most recently with the wind quintet recorded here.

Amnesia Breaks, commissioned by Quintet of the Americas with the aid of a grant from New York State Council on the Arts, was written in early 1990 and had its premiere in New York on May 8 of the same year. The piece, in a single movement, is built on extreme contrasts, and the structure, emotional as well as musical, is reflected in the composer’s vivid directions to the performers. One part of this musical dialectic is loud and imposing, and the performing directions in the score asks the players to make the following kinds of sounds: “honking,” “emphatic,” “jagged,” “abrasive,” “with abandon,” “bluntly,” “exuberantly,” “relentlessly,” “frenzied,” “acerbic,” “aggressive,” “sputtering,” “pointed accents,” “brutal and sustained,” “shriek,” “ferocious,” “wild and emphatic,” “heavy, with grit.” These moods alternate with music of quite another humor that is varied in dynamic and tempo, most often soft and delicate, much freer and more expressive; the corresponding performance directions are “molto espressivo,” “veiled,” “calm,” “like a waltz,” “lighter, more relaxed,” “suspended, sustained,” “delicately,” “molto cantabile e sostenuto,” “calmly expressive,” “full and expressive,” and, at the very end, “whispered”; it is as if the remembrance of pain is dissolved by the soft passage of time.

Christopher Culp was born in 1960 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and studied at Boston University and the Juilliard School, where his principal teachers were Milton Babbitt, Bernard Rands, and Stephen Albert. He has composed not only concert works but also music for dance and theater. Since 1991, he has lived and worked in France.

His *Woodwind Quintet* was written in 1985 in New York. It has seven movements, entitled Presto, Adagio, Interlude, March, Fantasy, Interlude, and Coda, giving it the form (although not exactly the content) of a classical suite or divertimento. Although the sections are strongly contrasting in character, they are all closely related motivically and also in their harmonic character, alternating a kind of serial whole-tone system with free chromaticism. In one way, this work is about classical form, but the mood is very contemporary, with repeated and held notes alternating or interspersed with virtuoso passages for the individual players, quick changes of tempo, and elements of ensemble coordination and strict tempo that go in and out of focus.

With **Elliott Sharp** (b 1951), we are at the center of the contemporary New York City downtown performance scene. Beginning in the late 1960s, Sharp, a composer and multi-instrumentalist, founded and led a series of new-music ensembles—Carbon, Orchestra Carbon, ‘Dyners Club, Bootstrappers, Terraplane, and others—and created a long list of new works, performance pieces, and collaborations with these groups and other artists including various filmmakers, choreographers, and performance artists; the Soldier, Avanti,

and Kronos String quartets; the American Composers' Orchestra; the Dutch group Loos; the Japanese Butch groups Byakko-Sha and Tatoeba; the Korean komungo player Jin Hi Kim; Bachir Attar, leader of the master musicians of Jahjouka from Morocco; the Plastic People of the Universe/Pulnoc from the Czech Republic; the Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan; and, of course, Quintet of the Americas. Sharp's work, combining elements of "classical" contemporary music with jazz and rock, has taken the traditional arts of improvisational music and renewed them in late twentieth-century form.

JAG, written for the Quintet in 1989, is based on nothing more than a few written-out musical fragments for the various instruments (alto flute, oboe, bass clarinet, bassoon, and horn), repeated and varied ad lib as "loops" at different speeds and with what the composer calls "extended timbral effects"

including the bending or even "complete obliteration" of pitch. In effect, Sharp gives a few musical ideas and sets certain constraints and ground rules; the performers supply the rest. For this recorded version, however, the composer then took the recording and further manipulated it electronically, making this a true composer/performer collaboration.

—Eric Salzman

Since its founding in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1976, Quintet of the Americas has championed the music of North and South America in distinctive programs, presenting a wide range of repertoire. Recent honors and awards include a 1991 and 1994 Chamber Music America/ASCAP award for Adventurous Programming and a 1993 Koussevitzky Commission Award for Karel Husa.

Production Notes

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