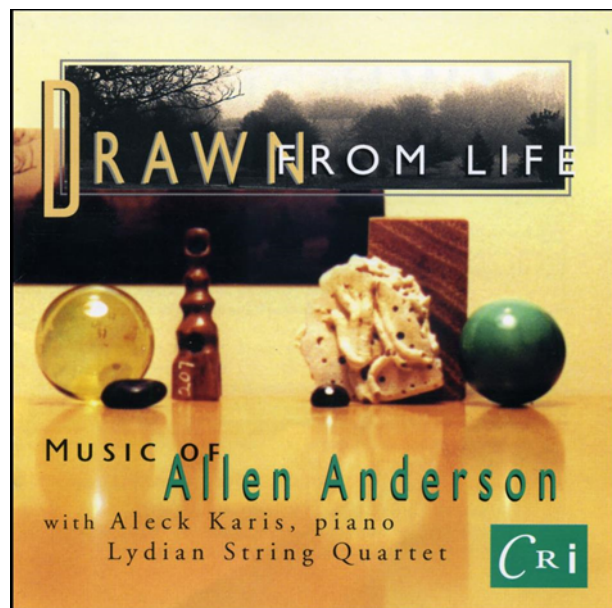


NWCR727

Music of Allen Anderson

Drawn from Life



<i>Solfeggiati</i> (1988)	(15:11)
1. I – Caprice	(3:58)
2. II – Chaconne	(7:59)
3. III – Scherzo	(3:14)
Aleck Karis, piano	
String Quartet (1990).....	(22:06)
4. I – Animato/Reservato	(9:11)
5. II – Variations on S.K. and R. L.	(5:40)
6. III – Fleet, athletic, wiry	(7:15)
The Lydian String Quartet: Daniel Stepner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello	
<i>Drawn from Life</i> (1992).....	(17:01)
7. I – Springer	(2:29)
8. II – Romance	(1:11)
9. III – Klava in Strada	(5:46)
10. IV – Rolling Stock	(1:44)
11. V – Fortune’s Telling	(5:51)
Aleck Karis, piano	

Total playing time: 54:28

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Notes

In the gentle pun of his title, *Drawn From Life*, Allen Anderson hints at expansive, ambitious themes: the mutuality of ordinary and extraordinary experience, the capacity to transform dailiness through imagination, and the complementary capability to recast and dramatize this process through art. *Drawn From Life*—The title begs big questions: is the compositional process one of “drawing out,” “extracting”; or is it “sketching,” “observing,” “displacement” Or is it both? The mix of explicitness and ambiguity, modesty, and expansiveness, in Anderson’s title seems entirely apt, for his artistic sensibilities are at once dramatic and reserved; they’re strongly affected by a self-aware appreciation that the art/life negotiation is delicate, that it can involve subtle interactions of observation and feeling, revelation, and convention.

To my mind, Anderson’s astute, impassioned, reflective musical transactions of life into art, bear a strong kinship to the poetic world of Wallace Stevens. In a small, late poem, “The World as Meditation,” Stevens revisits a mythic predicament—Penelope’s expectation of Ulysses’s returns—and takes it as an occasion for allegory. The poem begins with a moment of watchfulness and heightened awareness:

*Is it Ulysses that approaches from the east,
The interminable adventurer? The trees are ended.
That winter is washed away. Someone is moving.*

The movement that Penelope notices turns out to be the rising sun; and, in Stevens’s retelling, this most fundamental, quotidian condition incites an ecstatic, recurring vision of Ulysses’s return. The poetic narrator elaborates on this premise, associating the pulse of Penelope’s thought with that of her heart, and, even more, with the diurnal rhythm of day breaking. And with this figurative juxtaposition of the most

ordinary and extraordinary of life’s possibilities, the poem’s pulse itself seems to quicken, moving to a climactic irony:

*But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun
On her pillow? The thought kept beating in her like her heart.
The two kept beating together, It was only day.*

Stevens points to a way of understanding this ironic outcome—“only day,” at the edge of “The World As Meditation,” in the poem’s epigraph. A fragmentary quotation from an unlikely figure, the composer Georges Enesco, appears there, alluding to a latent theme—Penelope’s weaving and its allegorical correlative: the particular discipline of artistic labor and the capacity of this labor to transform daily life. The “exercice essentiel du compositeur,” Enesco declares, is “la meditation.”

This allegory of art emerging from daily life came to mind repeatedly as I reflected on the special pleasures and insights I’ve taken from the music of Allen Anderson. Each of the three works presented here draws deeply from the celebration and commemoration of daily life. In the title work, a five-movement, solo piano piece (which the composer calls a “garland of commemoratives”), some of the events recollected and transformed parallel aspects of Penelope’s story: “a homecoming, a wedding, time spent in a castaway corner of Italy, the influence of place and a friend’s birthday.” In all three works, weddings abound—three are celebrated here, in both the final piece of *Solfeggiati*, another suite for piano, and the second movement of the String Quartet, as well as the second piece of *Drawn From Life*. Sometimes the occasion commemorated is literally inscribed in the music: in both *Solfeggiati* and the String Quartet, Anderson assembles a musical alphabet to spell out the initials or names of dear friends.

At first blush, Anderson's response to so many weddings, birthdays, and homecomings may seem incongruous or even startling. Certainly, his dailiness is a far cry from the familiar evocations of daily life in American concert music—Ives's boisterous holidays or Copland's nostalgic landscapes. Anderson takes us far from the wide lawns of Barber's *Knoxville* to a less innocent place, where the transmutation of experience is more intense, and the conventions of representing daily life more subtle and ephemeral. Moreover, by contrast to Stevens's literary evocation of art drawn from life, Anderson requires neither allegorical description nor ironic juxtaposition; music has more astute and powerful modes of enactment. In Anderson's music, we repeatedly find ourselves teetering at a musical borderline between experiences found and experiences made—where the inchoate musical gesture mutates momentarily into a musical line, where expressive nuances fleetingly become structural motives, where feeling confronts form. And, although we often talk about music in terms of "form"/"content" interactions, Anderson's compositions explore an especially refined balance. They fight their own distinctive battles; they achieve their own distinctive poise.

Especially in the more intimate solo piano pieces, the surface flickers fitfully, almost imperceptibly, between eruptions of raw musical energy and more refined actions—the piecing together of intricate contrapuntal puzzles. So also for the larger scale and slower musical rhythms: formal articulations and the metabolic flow of feeling seem to emerge, one from the other without ever quite merging or becoming entirely distinct. A couple of examples: "Rolling Stock," the fourth of the five movements of *Drawn From Life*, echoes the rumbling and releases the energies of a freight train on the move; but it also embodies a place memory that's more formal than mimetic. In Anderson's words, it's "an attempt to capture in musical patterns something of the Renaissance architectural symmetry I saw all around me in Italy." Thus a poised unfolding of formal proportions counterbalances an ongoing rush of sonorous gestures. And a delicately delineated contrapuntal structure intermittently flickers to the surface in the minute details of "Rolling Stock," as well, rising out of, and returning into its ongoing rumbling figurations and arpeggiations. I hear this subtle movement between mimetic gesture and contrapuntal design as a boundary phenomenon, a playful exploration of the borderline where the apprehension of an abstract form emerges from a more primary, inchoate experience.

In other contexts, Anderson's music can evoke a similar sense of flickering, but at a different border, between more unstable structures and a more dramatic, struggling self-consciousness. In "Chaconne," the second movement of *Solfeggietti*, a lullaby tune and the oscillating figures of its accompaniment comprise a two-part texture and a dynamic premise for variations. Through the set that follows, the melodic element of the texture reappears fitfully, while the accompanimental premise progresses more gradually from measured to unmeasured repetitions or oscillations—drum-like reiterated notes, slow, metrical trilling motives, freely accelerating figures, and finally tremolos. The original opposition of melody and accompaniment thus comes to be linked to a more dramatic opposition: gradual process vs. erratic eruption; and, in the third variation, the gradualness of the accompaniment process yields abruptly to the suddenness of the melodic outburst, precipitating a registral thrust to the movement's climactic high point. The preceding sense of struggle between two elements gives the motion to the climax an especially animistic feel; and in that context, a long fermata at the climax and the momentary tentativeness of its immediate

aftermath seem a very interior, conscious response—a moment of psychological recovery, as if the music itself had been briefly startled, almost paralyzed. This moment of dramatic intensification is revelatory as well, a juncture point where "experience" and "form" meet: the potential for structural stasis latent in the opening oscillating figures of the "Chaconne" comes to fruition in this climax, when the music's "persona" becomes especially vivid, but vividly uncertain—when the music itself seems lost.

Whether or not the listener will hear such moments in the elaborately emblematic ways I've suggested, there are many such stunning passages of dramatic and formal richness along the way in *Drawn From Life*, *Solfeggietti*, and the String Quartet. Not surprisingly, the String Quartet involves the most extended treatment of musical forms; it draws from life in the longest, often broadest, lines: "Its first movement," the composer writes, is "marked *Animato/Reservato*, [and it] opposes two irreconcilable musics, one which is angry compressed and fitful, the other introspective, world-weary, even desolate. Beginning in turbulence and strife, the movement gives way to ever longer periods of the reserved music, eventually conceding to the vast and serene." Anderson has described the second movement of the Quartet as "a wedding present for two musician friends...the character of [whose] variations arise from an assortment of musical genres which have played a role in our relationship over the years. The five variations and finale proceed: like a viol consort, madrigal, scherzo I, scherzo II, popular song and finale." The final movement is a formal hybrid, partly through-composed, partly a rondo; in its last moments, the movement provides a modest moment of discovery, finding an opportunity for closure in a recollection of its opening.

By contrast to the Quartet, the five-movements of *Drawn From Life* each explores a more singular image and set of associations, if in equally-nuanced music. Progressing from the sprung rhythms and chorale prelude-like opening of "Springer," it moves on to the brief wedding piece, "Romance," which celebrates the "ecstasies of love," as Anderson has indicated, and "Klava in Strada," named after a painting by George Lawson (*Klava*) and the town in Italy where it was composed (Strada). After "Rolling Stock," the set ends with "Fortune's Telling," a birthday commemorative which "attempt[s] to speak honestly and directly, from one to another," and arrives at an especially refined and poignant process of closure.

In terms of the form/expression dialectic, *Solfeggietti* falls between the other two works. A formally taut set of character pieces, it is at once more intimate than the quartet and more thoroughly conditioned by conventional forms than *Drawn From Life*. "The material for each movement is derived from the conversion into pitches of the name or names of friends," Anderson writes, "and hence the composition's title. 'Caprice' is a fast-medium-fast movement spun from ribbons of tune. 'Chaconne', variations on a chord progression, begins and ends with a lullaby tune, and includes among its variations a reference to Liszt's 'La Chapelle de Guillaume Tell.' 'Scherzo' with trio, which concludes the set, jockeys between whimsy and a punchy, slightly jazzy turbulence."

For the composer, as for Stevens's mythic weaver, life is drawn from art as much as art from life. Allen Anderson has drawn his extraordinary music not only from friendships and travels, but from a messy profusion of musical influences, experiences, and aspirations. Like a large share of the composers in this country, Anderson was born neither to modernism nor the compositional vocation. He began his musical career as a teenage, rock guitarist—without the

characteristic benefit of childhood piano lessons, but with otherwise unexceptional, if extraordinarily intense, pop music enthusiasms: the Yardbirds, the Jefferson Airplane, the Byrds, for example. The tight song structures of the Beatles first demonstrated to him that musical construction, as well as improvisation, had its own special potentials. In high school, he began to stray off the beaten path, turning to sitar performance and North Indian music, to Ives, Stravinsky, and Milhaud, to John Cage's prose and George Crumb's sounds. Later, in college—and already composing “on the sly”—he began to experience the power of concentrated musical designs more intensely, encountering, among other inspiring antecedents, the late Stravinsky, *The Well-tempered Clavier*, and such European avant-gardists as Berio and Boulez. And as a graduate student, the music of Elliott Carter, Donald Martino, and his principal teacher, Seymour Shifrin became particularly significant.

And so it goes, on an on: for composers, performers, or listeners alike, there is no end to such catalogues of influences, musical and otherwise, and no end to the variety of ways such influences can be assimilated, combined, or transformed. But what can we take from the preceding list? It's eclectic, but it shouldn't be too surprising. Rather, it suggests an overarching progression: from a performer's elated confrontation with the power of music, to a growing appreciation of the unfamiliar, of how much may be revealed at the far edge of musical familiarity, and then to an awareness of how such revelation and power may be focused in musical forms. But beyond the particulars of their musical antecedents, the works for solo piano and string quartet on this disc celebrate the processes of influence themselves. They permit the conversation between art and life to unfold and develop, resourcefully, magnanimously, uninhibited.

—Martin Brody

Allen Anderson was born in Palo Alto, California in 1951. He studied at the University of California, Berkeley and Brandeis University, where his principal composition teachers were Seymour Shifrin and Martin Boykan. He has been commissioned by the Koussevitsky, Guggenheim, and Fromm foundations, as well as by Chamber Music America, and the American Music Center. He has taught at Brandeis University, Wellesley College, Columbia University, and is presently associate professor of music at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. *Charrette*, written for Speculum Musicae, has been recorded on CRI 617. His music is published by C.F. Peters, Margun, and APNM.

Aleck Karis is at home with both contemporary and classical works, and has recently appeared with New York's Y Chamber Symphony, St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, the Richmond Symphony, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He is the pianist with Speculum Musicae, the New York League-ISCAM Chamber Players, and SONOR, the contemporary music ensemble of the University of California, San Diego, where he currently is professor of music. Karis has recorded for Bridge, Nonesuch, New World, Neuma, Koch, and CRI. He can be heard on two new CRI discs, his *Music for Piano and Electronic Tape* (CRI 707) and as the soloist in Eric Moe's *Kicking and Screaming* with Speculum Musicae (CRI 705).

The **Lydian String Quartet** (Daniel Steptner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello), in residence at Brandeis University since 1980, has inspired acclaim worldwide by its special flair for contemporary music as well as interpretive mastery of standard repertoire. Essential to the spirit of the Quartet is the annual commissioning and recording of new works. The Lydian's are represented by recordings of Ives, Schuman, Harbison, and Schubert, with recently released discs featuring works by Ornstein, Fauré, and Hyla.

Production Notes

Produced by Allen Anderson.

Recorded by John Newton and Brad Michel, engineers of Sound Mirror. Edited by Brad Michel of Clarion Productions.

String Quartet recorded on August 28, 1992 at the Campion Center, Weston, Massachusetts. *Solfeggietti* and *Drawn From Life* recorded on October 7, 1993 in Slosberg Recital Hall, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

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