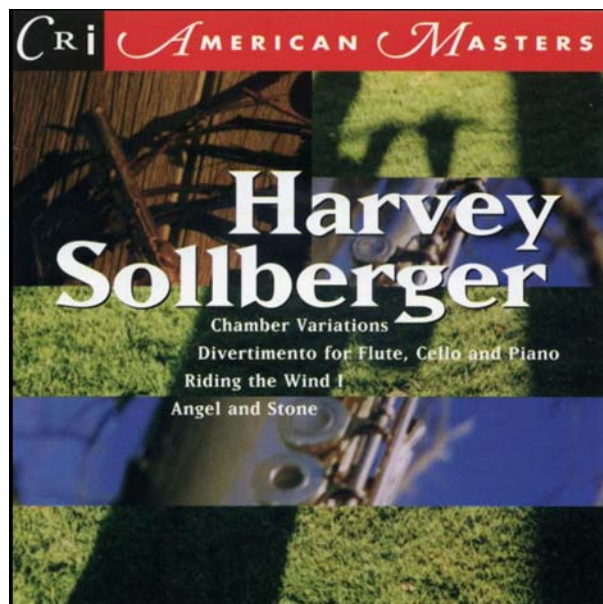


CRI 743

Harvey Sollberger

“A New York Retrospective”



1. *Chamber Variations* (1964) (17:41)
For twelve players and conductor
The Group for Contemporary Music: Gerardo Levy, flute; Sophie Sollberger, alto flute and piccolo; Josef Marx, oboe; Efrain Guigui, clarinet and bass clarinet; Donald MacCourt, bassoon;

Jeanne Ingraham, violin; Scott Nickrenz, viola; Peter Rosenfeld, cello; Kenneth Fricker, contrabass; Charles Wuorinen, piano; Raymond DesRoches, Richard Fitz, percussion; Gunther Schuller, conductor

2. I (2:25)
3. II (1:16)
4. III (2:03)
5. IV (0:38)
6. V (2:22)
7. VI (2:12)
8. VII (1:41)
Harvey Sollberger, flute; Fred Sherry, cello, Charles Wuorinen, piano
9. *Riding the Wind I* (1973) (18:33)
Patricia Spencer, flute; Da Capo Chamber Players: Joan Tower, piano; Joel Lester, violin; Helen Harbison, cello; Allen Blustine, clarinet; Harvey Sollberger, conductor
10. *Angel and Stone* (1981) (19:53)
Harvey Sollberger, flute; Aleck Karis, piano

Total Playing Time: 68:56

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Notes

It pleases me to introduce this compilation of works of mine composed in New York City during the eighteen-year period from 1964 to 1982. I arrived in New York in 1960 as a twenty-two-year old student and left it twenty-two years later, much transformed by years of work amidst the rich associations and dazzling intensity of the city's musical and artistic life. These were years first of study (with Jack Beeson and Otto Luening), then of dedication to high ideals of performance as embodied, especially, in the Group for Contemporary Music which Joel Krosnick, Charles Wuorinen, and I founded in 1962 and which Charles, Nicolas Roussakis, and I led continuously until the late 1980s at which point it morphed into a "virtual ensemble," one which doesn't anymore give concerts but exists electronically in the form of ongoing recording projects under Howard Stokar's direction.

Musical activity for me at this time centered around composing, playing the flute, conducting, running the Group, teaching, and work with various composers service organizations. Certainly, the direction(s) my composing took were closely-linked to the emergence during these years of the "new virtuosity" represented first by the Group and Arthur Weisberg's Contemporary Chamber Ensemble and subsequently by such ensembles as the Da Capo Chamber Players and Speculum Musicae. The work leading off this disc, *Chamber Variations*, seems to me, listening back, to be a riotous celebration of this newly-created world of expanded

and exhilarating performance possibilities. It was commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation for Tanglewood where Gunther Schuller led the premiere in August, 1964 (one upshot of which was the headline: "Tanglewood: A Sollberger K.O." in the *New York Herald Tribune*). In *Chamber Variations* I now hear resonances evoking three composers whose living presence loomed large in my world of those days: first, Edgard Varèse who supported the Group in its first years, seeing in us, he said, a continuation of his concert-giving activities with Carlos Salzedo in New York during the 1920s; then, Ralph Shapey, who urged me to go for the "long line"—*Chamber Variations* is a direct response to talk with Ralph; and finally, Stefan Wolpe whose antic imagination and protean fertility combined with an utter helplessness in the face of "practical" matters continue to beguile me.

The other works on this disc involve me as executant in contexts that were as typical as they were crucial for me during these years. The *Divertimento* was written for the flute, cello, and piano combo—initially the nucleus for the Group—of Fred Sherry, Charles Wuorinen, and myself. It began life as eleven short movements, several of which became conjoined to issue forth as the seven-movement work presented here.

Riding the Wind I was the outgrowth of a period of extensive research into the cataloguing and application of that whole

new range of sound resources for the flute that came to be known as extended techniques. The title is derived from the writings of an ancient Chinese philosopher, Lieh Tzu, who in the end, ecstasy attained, cannot tell whether he is riding on the wind or the wind is riding on him. Thus, the work's opening, with its preponderance of extended techniques, strikes me as kind of "music of nature"—what the ear lying at the foot of an abandoned pasture in upstate New York in early autumn might hear; its center—with its greater emphasis on conventional playing techniques—is more "human" music, more the work of human artifice; and the conclusion, working back to extended techniques, finally comes to rest on that most vulnerable of human sounds, that of breathing, of the sleeper trustingly at rest.

Angel and Stone is what I call one of my "white elephant" pieces: hard, cumbersome, and long—and yet dear to my heart like a strangely "off" but lovable and profound child. Seen from the present, the piece represents something of a breakthrough for me into a kaleidoscopic new world of stylistic diversity and genre bending (a flute and piano piece in which the players declaim poetry) and in this sense cognate to my *Life Study* (just released on CRI CD 738) composed the following year. *Angel and Stone* is dedicated to the memory of pianist Robert Miller with whom I performed parts of it.

The more extensive liner notes that follow were written at the time these pieces were initially recorded, and in their concerns and terminology offer testimony and a certain historical perspective as to where my head was at the time the music was being written and first performed. I find it interesting, for instance, to compare my quite "formalist" notes for *Chamber Variations* to the (to me) highly expressive and volatile music that issues from the loudspeakers. *Autre temps, autre moeurs*.

Finally, thanks are due once more to the truly exceptional performers on this disc, many of them old friends, without whose efforts these scores would remain mute and inglorious. For me to go forward I needed them, and they were there. My appreciation of their efforts has deepened with the years.

— Harvey Sollberger
— November 1996

From 1966:

The variations alluded to in the title of my composition *Chamber Variations* should not be thought of as a group of set pieces derived from and following in the wake of a 'theme.' The variation idea here is more one of continuous cyclic expansion based on the simultaneous and successive confrontations of originally 'fixed' musical occurrences that become subject gradually to various transformation procedures. In the course of its motion away from initially fixed norms of continuation—these norms involving among other things tempo, metric structure, instrumental function, patterns of repetition—activity often occurs in the form of layered or multi-level structures which simultaneously juxtapose different phases of the total development. Such construction is facilitated by the division of the ensemble—exclusive of the piano—into two groups comprised of (A) flute, clarinet—bass clarinet, violin, cello, percussion I and (B) piccolo-alto flute, oboe, bassoon, viola, contrabass, percussion II; partitioning is further extended to include the formation of a short-lived trio consisting of the first group's flute and cello combined with the piano. As the work progresses its complexion changes from the original soloistic orientation to an increasingly abstracted ensemble texture of interrelated pitch, attack, timbre, and intensity patterns. Associated with this is, in turn, a gradual transition from conventional rhythmic notation to a form of spatial notation

having none of the former's limitations with regard to the indication of subdivided beat.

If, to this point, the function of the instruments has been heard to be changing, changes, too, have been seen in the case of the primary visual component of the performance, the conductor. From conventional 'time-beating' at the outset of the piece the conductor's initiative (still kept, though, within the traditional custodial limits of his craft) is gradually extended to include—beyond the increasing frequency of tempo and meter changes—responsibility for the direct regulation of each event as it occurs. Thus, at the end of the work, time is not 'beat' by the conductor; it is, rather, measured as the duration between individual and composite events which occur upon his direct cue. Through all of this there continue to exist certain invariable elements, e.g. the piano's gravity-defying cascades which begin halfway through the piece, and the alto flute melody which I afterwards learned I had borrowed from *Tosca* ("Vissi d'arte"), and against which, perhaps, the process of change embodied in the work can better be perceived.

A word remains to be said about the performance of this piece. From a purely technical point of view, a performance such as the one on this recording would not have been possible as little as five years ago. By that time the demands of much new music so far exceeded the capabilities and understanding of those in the "public" concert world whose traditional role it had been to perform and present new works that composers resolved to take direct action themselves. One response to this problem was the formation in 1962 of the Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University—and subsequently of other university-based ensembles patterned after it—which provided a setting under university sponsorship for the cooperative endeavor of composers and performers dedicated to the pursuit of a new degree of excellence in the performance of contemporary music.

From 1974:

My *Divertimento* for flute, cello and piano was composed during the summer of 1970 for the Trio of the Group for Contemporary Music. It was first performed on Sept. 21, 1970 by that ensemble in Nicosia, Cyprus. The work is in seven movements, each quite different from the others as regards such factors as length, texture and continuity, though recurrent motives do surface occasionally.

In composing the *Divertimento*, I tried to create movements—some almost no more than moments—that could be heard as complete in themselves while yet functioning as integral components in the ensemble of movements which is the whole piece.

As to its overall spirit or mood, I think that the epigraph by Wallace Stevens on the title page—"that lucid souvenir of the past, the *divertimento*"—is a sufficient clue to my own attitude.

From 1976:

Riding the Wind I heads a series of works that I composed for flute during 1973 and 1974. More than any of my earlier flute music, it sets out to explore in a thorough and systematic way that whole new area of sound production and articulation known as extended techniques (key and tongue clicks, buzz tones, multiphonics, various inhaled and exhaled sounds, etc.). In the flute part the goal, locally, is to fashion a unique and convincing note-to-note melodic continuity from the integration of this new world of sound and color with traditional playing techniques. Globally, the application of extended techniques relative to the conventional mode of playing produces an overall form-defining curve or arch for

the work: extended techniques dominate the beginning and end; 'normal' playing prevails in the middle; mixed or transitional sections occur in-between these points. Thus, it is as if the flute's music emerges from the 'chaos' of a world of sounds and noises, working by the piece's middle to the fixed and 'defined' world of the flute we are familiar with, and, to the end, retraces its steps. Throughout, the instruments in various combinations accompany, comment upon, and respond to this progress; at times, too, they fall silent. Their material is, in fact, a reworked version of the solo part. *Riding the Wind II, III and IV* together form what is, in effect, the unaccompanied flute version of the same piece.

Riding the Wind I was commissioned jointly by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts. It was composed for the Da Capo Chamber Players—particularly for their excellent flutist, Patricia Spencer—and first performed by them in Alice Tully Hall, New York City, on April 25, 1974.

From 1982:

Angel and Stone is a composite work formed out of the merger and juxtaposition of two other pieces for flute and piano written in 1981, *Six Quartets* and *Short* (but vivid) *Fantasy*. *Six Quartets* is a twelve-tone work shaped throughout by trichordal partitioning procedures projected by means of dynamics, register, and timbre. *Short Fantasy*, by contrast, is a compositional 'improvisation,' much disposed to grand and passionate gestures. It was written to work both as an independent continuous piece and as music to be interpolated between the movements of *Six Quartets*. The resultant *Angel and Stone*—continuous and in one movement—adds up to something more than its parts, differing (to my ears) from its parent pieces in the ways it moves and articulates time. The overall form, in the many directions it takes, might be termed polyvalent. The title is taken from the poem of the same name by Howard Nemerov, part of which is quoted during the course of the work. *Angel and Stone* was commissioned by Bowling Green State University; it is dedicated to flutist Judith Bentley, who premiered it with pianist Marilyn Shrude.

—Harvey Sollberger

Harvey Sollberger was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1938 and holds degrees from the University of Iowa and Columbia University. He has been active as a composer, conductor, flutist, teacher, and organizer of concerts. His work in composition has been recognized by an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, two Guggenheim Fellowships and by commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation/Tanglewood, the San Francisco Symphony, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, Music from

Japan, and the New York State Council on the Arts. Mr. Sollberger's music has been performed here and abroad by such ensembles as the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella Series, and Pierre Boulez's Domaine Musical concerts.

As a flutist and conductor, he has toured and recorded extensively and has premiered works by Babbitt, Carter, Davidovsky, Felder, Martino, Reynolds, and Wuorinen. His orchestral credits include appearances and recordings with the San Francisco Symphony, the San Diego Symphony, the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and the American Composers Orchestra. A founder of the Group for Contemporary Music, he has been (with Charles Wuorinen) artistic director of that ensemble since 1962. In 1981 Sollberger received a special performer's grant from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University in recognition of "distinguished service in the cause of contemporary music." He has been featured artist at the Interlink Festival in Tokyo (1986) and during 1989-90 was resident composer at the American Academy in Rome and composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

In October 1995, his *In Terra Aliena* for soloists and orchestra received its premiere in Rome. His most recent composition, *Grandis Templum Machinae*, was commissioned by Amherst College and premiered in Amherst in November, 1996. Harvey Sollberger is currently professor of music and director of the SONOR Ensemble at the University of California, San Diego.

Angel and Stone

(Excerpt from the poem)

Howard Nemerov

In the world are millions and millions of men, and each man,
With a few exceptions, believes himself to be at the center,
A small number of his more or less necessary planets
careering
Around him in an orderly manner, some morning stars singing
together,

More distant galaxies shining like dust in any stray sunbeam
Of his attention. Since this is true not of one man of two,
But of ever so many, it is hard to imagine what life must be
like

"Angel and Stone" from *The Collected Poems Of Howard Nemerov*.

The University of Chicago Press, 1977. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, New York.

From SD 204

Chamber Variations

Recorded May 1964 at Steinway Hall, NYC. Released 1966. Funding provided by the National Institute-American Academy of Arts and Letters. Published by McGinnis & Marx Publishers.

From SD 319

Divertimento for flute, cello, and piano

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. Released 1974. Funding provided by the American Composers Alliance, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc., and the National Institute-American Academy of Arts and Letters. Published by ACA (BMI).

From SD 352

Riding the Wind I

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by Jerry Bruck, October 1975. Released 1976. Funding provided by the American Composers Alliance. Published by ACA (BMI).

From SD 463

Angel and Stone

Produced by Carter Harman and Carolyn Sachs. Recorded by Glenn Lieberman, New York, January, 1982. Funding provided by the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and supporters of the Group for Contemporary Music. Published by ACA (BMI).

CRI production manager: Allison Wolf

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