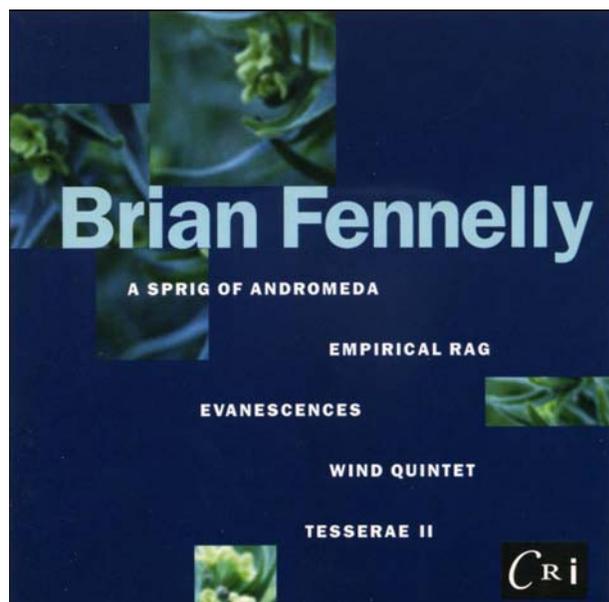


# Music of Brian Fennelly



1. *A Sprig of Andromeda* (1991-92) ..... (15:02)  
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra; Joel Eric Suben, conductor
2. *Tesserae II* (Fantasy for Cello) (1972) ..... (10:32)  
Fred Sherry, cello
- Evanescences* for instruments and electronic tape (1969) ..... (25:35)
  3. Part I. .... (1:11)
  4. Part II. .... (7:41)
  5. Part III. .... (7:43)  
Da Capo Chamber Players: Joel Lester, violin; Patricia Spencer, alto flute; Allen Blustine, clarinet; Helen Harbison, cello; Edward Murray, conductor; Tape part realized at the Electronic MusicStudio, School of the Arts, New York University.
6. *Wind Quintet* (1967) ..... (18:28)  
Dorian Woodwind Quintet: Karl Kraber, flute; Charles Kuskin, oboe; Jerry Kirkbride, clarinet; Jane Taylor, bassoon; Barry Benjamin, horn
7. *Empirical Rag* (1980) ..... (6:09)  
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra; Joel Eric Suben, conductor

Total playing time: 75:46

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## Notes

Reflecting on the nature of this compilation of five disparate works composed over an almost twenty-year span, an immediate thought concerns how each of these pieces is in some respect singular or the beginning of a new path. *Wind Quintet*, for example, couples demands for expressivity and virtuosity in ways that have maintained a strong appeal throughout my work. The quintet came about when, as a finishing doctoral student at Yale, I approached Gunther Schuller for a letter of recommendation. He asked to see some recent work of mine; my response was to set to work exploring the possibilities of the wind medium. The work was composed in an intensive two-week period in June 1967 and the pencil score was immediately sent to Gunther at Tanglewood. To my surprise and delight, he had *Wind Quintet* in rehearsal within two weeks and conducted the premiere on August 14 (a unique birthday present!).

The history and development of electronic music had been of particular interest to me at Yale. This led naturally to my music theory Ph.D. dissertation, "A Descriptive Notation for Electronic Music," an early version of which appeared in *Perspectives of New Music*, Fall-Winter 1967. In my first year of teaching at New York University, I was eager to explore the possibilities of the equipment there in the School of the Arts; the result was *Evanescences*, my first completed work to use tape. Composed for the Aeolian Chamber Players in the first three months of 1969, the Aeolians premiered it in May of that year at their Bowdoin College Festival of Contemporary Music in Maine. The severe equipment limitations that later arose at NYU led to my subsequent electronic works being realized at the more elaborate studio at SUNY Albany.

To pick up a thread at Yale again, I had studied cello briefly with Aldo Parisot at the time he was to premiere Donald Martino's *Parisonatina*. His playing was so captivating that I yearned to write a solo cello piece myself, yet I hesitated because of my own involvement with *Parisonatina*; I had written a short article on the piece (*Perspectives of New Music*, Fall-Winter 1969) and I wished to avoid obvious comparisons and parallels. By 1972 I felt distanced enough to take the plunge; *Tesserae II* became the second in a series of nine works of that title for different virtuoso solo performers, each of which sought to expand instrumental possibilities. *Tesserae II* was premiered in April 1973 by cellist David Moore, which marked the beginning of an association which later produced *Scintilla Prisca* for cello and piano. (Our recording of that work can be heard on Capstone CD CPS-8631.)

The two orchestral pieces on this CD represent very different preoccupations, although both illustrate my love of the orchestra as a wonderful timbral resource. The earlier piece, *Empirical Rag*, was written as a lark, originally for brass quintet (the Empire Brass, thus the title). My only foray into ragtime, it created a demand for ten subsequent transformations/arrangements for various instrumental combinations.

*A Sprig of Andromeda* from 1992 is one of five works for full orchestra that relate to the New England naturalist/philosopher Henry David Thoreau. While an independent piece, it is also the first-composed part of the three-movement *A Thoreau Symphony*. (Another movement, *On Civil Disobedience*, appears on New World CD 80448-2.) This symphony represents the culmination of my orchestral

writing; the “technical” concerns of composition are fully in service of expressive goals. “Sprig” was awarded Second Prize in the 1993 Goffredo Petrassi Competition in Italy, where it was premiered in Parma by the Orchestra Sinfonia dell’Emilia-Romagna, directed by Günter Neuhold (September 1993).

As of this writing, the final movement of the symphony, *Chrysalis* (1997) is now completed. Future projects include an extended solo piano piece and the completion of a second string quartet. While composition remains an adventure into some unknown, my present work emphasizes expressivity over exploration, within the range of compositional techniques common to my music over the past dozen years.

*A Sprig of Andromeda* (1991-92)

The title comes from a letter of May 11, 1892 by Louisa May Alcott describing the last days and funeral of Henry David Thoreau. A wreath of andromeda, his favorite plant, was placed on his coffin, and a “sprig of andromeda” was enclosed in the letter.

Except for a trombone solo representing the oration delivered by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the music is not intended to be programmatic, but rather to evoke the essence of that day and the essence of Thoreau himself. In Louisa May Alcott’s words:

It was a lovely day clear, & calm, & spring like, & as we all walked after Henry’s coffin with its pall of flowers, carried by six of his townsmen who had grown up with him, it seemed as if Nature wore her most benignant aspect to welcome her dutiful & loving son to his long sleep in her arms. As we entered the churchyard birds were singing their softest lullaby, & there between his father & brother we left him, feeling that though his life seemed too short, it would blossom & bear fruit for us long after he was gone, & that perhaps we should know a closer friendship now than even while he lived.

*Tesserae II* (Fantasy for Cello) (1972)

The mosaic patterning to which the title of this work refers applies to the permeation of motivic substance as well as sectional interrelationships and aspects of twelve-tone structure. The form may be described as a series of “strophes” separated by “episodes”; the former are musically and expressively intense units of complex and expansive structure; the latter are expressively more relaxed and structurally less elaborate. Levels of momentum suggest the division of the work into three groups of these units: The first group includes the rhapsodic first strophe, the following scherzo-like episode, and strophe II (*Polifonia*). The second group is slow and songful, beginning *con sordino* and expanding lyrically. The strophe within has its own contrasting subsection, which introduces playful pizzicato figures. The third group returns to faster pacing in episode 3 (*giocososo*), which leads into the dramatic multiple-stops of strophe IV. The work closes quietly with a summarizing coda.

*Evanescences* (1969)

The pitch structure of this work is the result of intuitive processes, with the gestures dictating details within a web of motivic relationships. The tape part uses solely electronically generated sounds, realized with an extensive Buchla modular system in place at that time in the NYU School of the Arts. The relation of the tape to the instrumental music is essentially different for each of the three movements; tape and instruments play together in parts I and II, with generally different materials in I, and similar materials in II. Instrumental sections frame this interplay in each of these movements.

In Part III the tape and instrumental forces alternate, joining together at the very end. At various points within the work the electronic music imitates instrumental sounds and materials, and also, conversely, the instruments occasionally imitate the electronic sounds and materials. When not used soloistically, the instruments often present melodic gestures whose timbral identities are continually shifting. Except for obviously dramatic moments, the music is generally reflective in character and often “evanescent” on several levels, especially at those moments when the sense of development in time is purposely suspended.

*Wind Quintet* (1967)

*Wind Quintet* demands virtuosity of both the ensemble (for example in relating different speeds and coordinating rapidly changing speeds) and the individual (for example the extended bassoon cadenza, where the player must project two different speeds simultaneously). While the twelve-tone pitch structure is consistently controlled, aspects of temporal structure range from the strictly specified through varying degrees of flexibility as to execution and correlation of parts. The musical gestures incorporate configurations associated with past music, injecting occasional moments of reminiscence, as well as those that project the complex energies of today. Most often, linear, timbral, or dynamic considerations predominate over the projection of harmonic elements, which are frequently static where they are to the fore. The Quintet is in one large movement, with the various sections either overlapping or separated by measured pauses.

*Empirical Rag* (version for orchestra, 1980)

The black sheep of the family, *Empirical Rag* brings a specifically motivic-contrapuntal approach to the ragtime idiom, within a tonal language that is essentially late-Romantic. (Imagine Mahler as a ragtime composer writing slightly under the influence of Roger Sessions—there is even a reference to the “Resurrection” Symphony in the mid-section!) This work is not an instance of the “rebirth of tonality” or any of the current fads; it is merely an application of my primary compositional concerns to a different tonal and stylistic idiom, written for sheer enjoyment.

**Brian Fennelly** (b Kingston, N.Y., August 14, 1937) studied at Yale with Mel Powell, Donald Martino, Allen Forte, Gunther Schuller, and George Perle (M.Mus 1965, Ph.D. 1968). In 1968 he joined the Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University, from which he retired as professor of music in January 1997. In addition to a Guggenheim fellowship, his awards include three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, commissions from the Koussevitsky Foundation and Meet the Composer/Reader’s Digest, as well as from the Hudson Valley Philharmonic and Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra, and a 1997 composer award for lifetime achievement from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

His music has been awarded prizes in many competitions, which include the Louisville Orchestra New Music Competition (First Prize, 1986), International Trumpet Guild Competition (First Prize, 1990), Goffredo Petrassi Competition (1993), Shreveport Symphony Competition (1981), and Premio Città di Trieste (1981). More than a dozen of his works have been recorded, with CD releases of Fantasy Variations (Louisville Orchestra) and five works on the New World label, including *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* and *On Civil Disobedience*, both Thoreau-inspired works for orchestra.

Brian Fennelly’s music has been performed by orchestras such as the Rochester Philharmonic, American Composers

Orchestra, and the Louisville Orchestra, as well as by the Concord and Audubon String Quartets. His choral music has been performed by groups such as the Gregg Smith Singers and New York Virtuoso Singers. International performances include two at the Warsaw Autumn (Poland) and four at the ISCM World Music Days (Iceland, Israel, Belgium, and Canada), with recordings by the Polish Chamber Orchestra, Prague Radio Orchestra, and the Polish National Symphony. Fennelly's music is published by Margun Music (Boston), Pro Nova (Munich), Ricordi (Milan), and American Composers

Edition (New York). In addition to composing and teaching, he has been active as an officer and board member in a number of music organizations, and co-directs the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, which he founded in 1976.

Fennelly resides in Kingston, N.Y. with his wife, Jacqueline, who played French horn with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic for many years. Liam Fennelly, a son from a previous marriage, is a gamba player now living in Europe.

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## Production Notes

*A Sprig of Andromeda* and *Empirical Rag* recorded September, 1995, Bratislava, Slovakia. Produced and recorded by František Poul.

Originally released on CRI SD 556:

*Tesserae II*: Produced and Recorded by Paul Alan Levi, 1986. Original release sponsored by the ACA Recording Award.

Originally released on CRI SD 322:

*Evanescences*: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. This original recording was made possible by a grant from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music.

Originally released on CRI SD 318:

Wind Quintet: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. This original recording was made possible by grants for the American Composers Alliance, New York University, and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.