

NWCR764

The McLean Mix & The Golden Age of Electronic Music



Priscilla McLean

Invisible Chariots (1975-77) (21:49)

1. *Voices of the Invisible* (6:19)
2. *Archangels* (8:40)
3. *Chariots* (6:50)

Barton McLean

4. *Song of the Nahuatl* (1976) (17:08)

Priscilla McLean

5. *Dance of Dawn* (1974) (22:23)
6. *Night Images* (1973) (6:07)

Barton McLean

7. *Etunytude* (1982) (5:30)

Total playing time: 73:00

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Notes

Composer-performers **Barton and Priscilla McLean** have been creating unique sound worlds since their first album of electronic music in 1975 (CRI SD 335), and have toured as The McLean Mix since 1973. Since 1983 they have performed and composed full time, touring the U.S. yearly, along with tours to Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia, and South America, performing hundreds of multimedia concerts and interactive installations. A central focus of their often abstract electro-acoustic music has been sounds and images of nature and primal forces of creation.

“The Golden Age of Electronic Music” refers to the period during the seventies when analog synthesizers were at their most powerful, and many fascinating works were being created using these with multitrack reel-to-reel tape recorders, noise reducing equipment, analog processors, and large mixers. The McLeans worked from 1974–76 with the Synthi 100 and Arp 2600 Synthesizers, Scully tape recorders, spring reverbs, the ElectroComp 101 Synthesizer, and many small devices in the Indiana University at South Bend Electronic Music Center. The equipment, large and cumbersome, filled the four walls of the studio, and the composers would often run, back and forth between stations, spending as many as twenty-two hours at a time to develop one complex sound. The pleasure of creating one’s own sound universe, of sculpting audible art in real time and reveling in the results was enough reason to endure the inconveniences!

Invisible Chariots

by Priscilla McLean

The first two movements were created in the Electronic Music Center at Indiana University at South Bend in 1975-6, and the third at the McLeans’s home studio in Austin, Texas in 1977. Many *musique concrète* sounds (tennis balls bounced on piano strings, piano strings bowed with bass viol bow hair, a

steak knife bounced on violin strings, etc.) were used, blending with synthesized sounds in this very dramatic work. The first movement continually builds, underlined with a low pedal tone and sudden hysterical outbursts. Movement two begins with a surreal autoharp glissando, and continues this unearthly timeless character. The third movement, strident and dance-like, uses an esoteric “flute” melody which was buried in the first movement, along with thunderous multiple bass bounces and a myriad of other drum-like rhythms.

Invisible Chariots was a staple of the McLean Mix tours during the late seventies and early eighties, and is one of Priscilla McLean’s most widely heard works. The title reflects Carl Sandburg’s famous poem “Isle of Patmos” which begins:

The invisible chariots
of the tall sky
must hold archangels
themselves invisible,
I have seen these chariots.

from *Harvest Poems*,

(Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., NY 1960, p. 31)

Invisible Chariots was originally released on Folkways Records FTS 33450 and FPS 36050, here digitally remastered/revised.

Song of the Nahuatl

by Barton McLean

We have come to sleep,
We have come only to dream.
It is not true, it is not true
we have come to live on the earth
As at every spring the grass is renewed
so do we too acquire form.
Our heart puts out shoots, grows green;

our body begets a few flowers,
and then lies withered.

Daniel Brinton, "Sketches from the Ancient Nahuatl Literature."

Unpublished manuscript, University of Texas Archives, 1881. This excerpt comes from a pre-Columbian (Nahuatl) Aztec poem, and was a major influence in the *Song of the Nahuatl*, which originally was created as an 8-channel work questioning humankind's relationship with the natural world. The musical "figures," the foreground melodies, grow out of and are finally absorbed back into the all-pervading nature sounds, which continue forever. The central part of the work depicts our egocentricity, as the melodies organically grow and soar, but always the underlying "nature" forces are present in veiled choir-like or fluctuating chords or ostinati, which ultimately prevail.

Song of the Nahuatl was created in the McLean's home electronic studio, and completed at the University of Texas Electronic Music Center, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1976, and was performed by The McLean Mix on their concert tours for several years. Originally released on Folkways Records FTS 33450, here it is digitally remastered/revise

Dance of Dawn

by Priscilla McLean

Created in 1974 in the Indiana University at South Bend Electronic Studio, *Dance of Dawn* has become the best-known American electronic work using the British Synthi 100 wall-to-wall analog synthesizer and analog-to-digital sequencer, a very new innovation at the time. The piece is in three continuous movements, and has a loose "program" reflected in Priscilla McLean's brief poem:

thunderous sun roaring away the abyss
riotous life-noises scream the air /senseful
rougeyellow leers white light eyeprying
footfall din is lost in
the jeers of the catmoon

Priscilla developed the idea of a sound containing abstract as well as imageric material (imago-abstract), unique to the medium of electronic music, here heard in the beginning, middle, and ending loon-like calls, and in many other sounds throughout this complex, dramatic work. *Dance of Dawn* was a featured piece of the McLean Mix's very first concert in 1974 at St. Mary's College at Notre Dame, Indiana, was a staple of their tours until 1978, and subsequently has been an intrinsic piece in college electronic curricula for decades. Originally recorded on CRI SD 335, here digitally remastered/revise

Night Images

by Priscilla McLean

Composed in the McLeans's home electronic studio in 1973, *Night Images*, was McLean's first totally electronic work. It was created on two small analog synthesizers, the Arp 2600 and the Synthi AKS, recorded on two stereo Revox tape decks and one quadraphonic Sony deck, and mixed down to a final two channels. Three main ideas dominate the work: a life-pulse, a murmuring dreamy background sequence (created on the first real-time sequencer available, the Synthi AKS), and a trumpet-like melody that metamorphoses during the piece. A poem by Priscilla McLean accompanies this short evocative work:

what are in the images of the night's eye?
some drift by clearly: focused, lucid.
others are mere phantoms—vaporous ghosts
that wander in the half-sensed twilight
the night belies and jest with reality
a cosmos apart

Night Images was originally released on Folkways Records FTS 33450 and FPS 36050, here digitally remastered/revise

Etunytude

by Barton McLean

In 1982 Barton McLean was director of the University of Texas at Austin Electronic Music Center when he composed *Etunytude* on the Fairlight CMI, the first commercial instrument to have a digital music sampler and a light pen to draw waves on the screen. Fairlight was Australian-made, and UT-Austin was the first electronic music center in the U.S. to own one. In honor of the occasion, McLean created this work by drawing sine waves on a TV screen, often producing melodies or complex harmonies, sometimes resulting in a beautiful "turning in space" effect that is part harmony, part melody, but intertwined. When a single voice was combined with others, a curious kind of counterpoint emerged in which the single notes were blurred by the ever-shifting relationships of the changing harmonics and which were further enhanced by delay and a digital harmonizer. The title refers to the piece's tunefulness as well as its etude-like character.

Etunytude was one of a set of works from the album "Computer Music From the Outside In," which were commissioned and released by Folkways Records in 1983 (FSS 37465). The album was used as a staple teaching tool by colleges across the U.S. for many years. *Etunytude* was also selected as a landmark computer piece of the twentieth century in the widely used humanities text *The Humanist Tradition*, Vol. 6 by Gloria K. Fiero. It has been digitally remastered/revise

Other CDs available of the McLean Mix: "Music of Priscilla & Barton McLean: the Electric Performer," Capstone Records CPS-8622 CD, "Rainforest Images," Capstone Records, CPS-8617 CD. Information about these along with McLean Mix activities can be obtained by calling (518) 658-3595 or e-mailing mclmix@aol.com

Production Notes

Digitally remastered from the original analog masters by the composers.
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