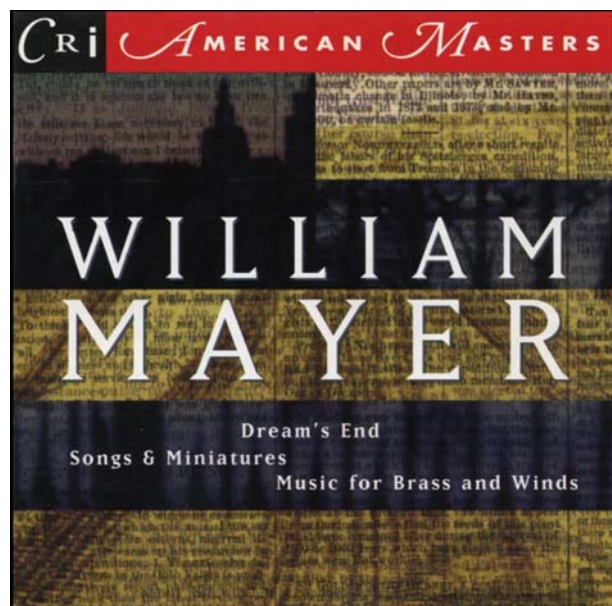


## William Mayer



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. <i>Country Fair</i> (1957) ..... (1:59)<br/>Robert Nagel Brass Trio: Robert Nagel and Robert Heinrich, trumpets; John Swallow, trombone</p> <p><i>Dream's End</i> (1976) ..... (19:49)</p> <p>2. <i>Extremes</i> ..... (1:52)</p> <p>3. <i>Mostly Clarinet</i> ..... (1:53)</p> <p>4. <i>Buzzings</i> ..... (1:56)</p> <p>5. <i>A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Guest at an 18<sup>th</sup> Century</i><br/><i>Musicale, Interlude of Air</i> ..... (3:01)</p> <p>6. <i>Appalachian Echoes</i> ..... (3:33)</p> <p>7. <i>Burlesca (Funicula riducula)</i> ..... (3:53)</p> <p>8. <i>Mostly Piano</i> ..... (2:11)</p> <p>9. <i>Dream's End</i> ..... (1:30)<br/>Members of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra:<br/>Romuald Teco, violin; Priscilla Rybka,<br/>French horn; Peter Howard, cello; Richard E.<br/>Killmer, oboe; Timothy J. Paradise, clarinet;<br/>Layton James, piano; William McGlaughlin,<br/>conductor</p> <p>10. <i>Khartoum</i> for Soprano (1968) ..... (2:04)<br/>Catherine Rowe, soprano; Ensemble conducted<br/>by Arthur Weisberg</p> <p>Brass Quintet (1965 rev. 1970) ..... (14:54)</p> <p>11. I – <i>Poco Presto</i> ..... (4:31)</p> <p>12. II – <i>Elegy: Very slowly</i> ..... (3:15)</p> <p>13. III – <i>Con moto e pesante</i> ..... (3:46)</p> | <p>14. IV – <i>Dance: Poco presto</i> ..... (3:22)<br/>Iowa Brass Quintet: John Beer, Robert Levy,<br/>trumpets; Paul Anderson, French horn; John<br/>Hill, trombone; Robert Yeats, tuba</p> <p><i>Miniatures</i> for Soprano and Seven Players (1968) .... (6:12)</p> <p>15. I – <i>Deeply Down</i> (Elizabeth Aleinkoff) . (1:03)</p> <p>16. II – <i>Land of Dead Dreams</i> (Alfred Noyes)<br/>(1:11)</p> <p>17. III – <i>Fireworks</i> ..... (1:14)</p> <p>18. IV – <i>Prophetic Soul</i> (Dorothy Parker) ..... (1:08)</p> <p>19. V – <i>Isn't There Some Mistake?</i><br/>(William Mayer) ..... (00:52)</p> <p>20. VI – <i>"...For No Man"</i> (William Mayer) ... (00:44)<br/>Catherine Rowe, soprano</p> <p><i>Two News Items</i> (1968) ..... (3:55)</p> <p>21. <i>"Hastily Formed Contemporary Music..."</i><br/>(William Mayer) ..... (2:10)</p> <p>22. <i>"Distraught Soprano Undergoes Unfortunate<br/>Transformation"</i><br/>(William Mayer) ..... (1:45)<br/>Catherine Rowe, soprano; Ensemble conducted by<br/>Arthur Weisberg</p> <p><i>Essay for Brass and Winds</i> (1954) ..... (10:22)</p> <p>23. I – <i>Un poco Lento; Moderato;</i><br/><i>Allegro moderato</i> ..... (6:25)</p> <p>24. II – <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i> ..... (3:57)<br/>New York Brass and Woodwind Ensemble:<br/>Henry Schuman, oboe; Lois Schaefer, flute;<br/>Charles Russo, clarinet; Raymond Alonge<br/>and Ralph Froelich, French horns; Morris<br/>Newman, bassoon; Robert Nagel and Robert<br/>Heinrich, trumpets; John Swallow,<br/>trombone; Harvey Philips, tuba; Charles<br/>Birch, percussion; Emanuel Balaban,<br/>conductor</p> <p>25. <i>Eve of St. Agnes</i> (John Keats) (1969) ..... (13:43)<br/>For Soloists, Mixed Chorus and Orchestra; Albert<br/>De Ruiter, narrator: Patricia Price, soprano;<br/>Rosalind Rees, soprano; David Hudson, tenor;<br/>The Peabody Conservatory Chorus and Orchestra;<br/>Gregg Smith, conductor</p> <p>Total playing time: 72:58</p> <p>© 1980, 1997 © 1997 Composers Recordings, Inc.<br/>© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.</p> |
|--|--|

## Notes

*Country Fair*

*Country Fair* was composed in 1957 for two trumpets and trombone. It starts off with a rather important sounding flourish that immediately leads into a more gentle episode whose main characteristic is its "off-balance" quality generated by changing meters. There follows a *misterioso*

section, which is succeeded once again by the original material.

*Dream's End*

When asked by the American Artists Series to write a chamber piece using any group of instruments I wanted, I felt

as if I had been given *carte blanche* in a pastry shop. My original plan was to use the violin, cello, and French horn as “dream” instruments contrasting with the here-and-now sounds of an oboe and clarinet. The sixth instrument, a piano, was to be a kind of bridge. Such a plan may sound impressive in program notes, but when I got down to writing the piece, the classifications soon went by the board. Following one’s instincts, it seems, can leave the best laid plans in shreds.

The fact is that each instrument is a world within itself. While the *lontano* sounds of the French horn in the movements entitled “Extremes” and “Appalachian Echoes” could be called dreamlike, the brassy eruptions of the same instrument in the movement entitled “Funicula Ridicula” are anything but dreamlike. In fact, the latter sounds closer to the alarm clock shattering our dreams. And, of course, an instrument’s timbre does not exist in a vacuum apart from the musical use to which it is put.

In *Dream’s End*, the music often comments on itself or cuts itself off with guillotine-like dispatch—as if a critic had entered the scene. These interruptions are generally good-natured, for if the composer’s right hand is slapping his left, the blow is apt not to be too heavy. This playful schizophrenia reaches its apex in the movement entitled “20<sup>th</sup> Century Guest at an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Musicale.”

For the most part the instruments speak in this piece as individuals rather than as part of a bloc. Beyond the conversational sallies and rejoinders, there is an overall pattern of a poignant motif (built on a descending second and third), which recurs throughout the work in different guises.

The commission for this piece happened to fall at a sad time for my family, coming soon after the sad death of a young and vibrant family member, which prompted the title *Dream’s End*. Having designated the work as a memorial for a young person, I have sometimes wondered whether its mirth might not be out of place—but as I write these notes I recall the observation that humor is one way to deal with the tragedy of existence; so perhaps these juxtapositions of jest and poignancy are not contradictory after all.

A word about the titles of some of the movements seems to be in order. “Extremes” (first movement), refers to the wide range of register, dynamics, texture, and dissonant content of the movement. “Buzzings” (third movement) represents two flies hopping about and annoying each other. “Funicula Ridicula” (sixth movement) came into being when, as I was writing this burlesque, the old song “Funiculi, Funicula” poked its head out of the musical fabric. The tune seemed at odds with a “serious contemporary piece,” and I heard myself saying, “This is ridiculous.” But after shelving it, I longed for its return. Hence the title “Funiculi, Ridicula.”

#### *Khartoum & Two News Items*

*Khartoum* expresses the longing for someone who has disappeared—has he gone to Spain? To Khartoum? Who can say? The word Khartoum is a beautiful one to set: exotic in spelling and in sound, it evokes the rare combination of remoteness and warmth. The soft rise and fall of chords at the end of the song suggest, for me, great reaches of distance—both in space and in the heart.

*Two News Items* were best described to me by an amused member of the audience. “They are totally unhinged,” she reported. The first item, “Hastily Formed Contemporary Music Ensemble Reveals Origins,” has the soprano desperately trying to stay seriously “avant-garde” though she and the ensemble often slip back into their true métier i.e. old pop tuned, jazz Salvation Army hymns, etc. The second item, “Distraught Soprano Undergoes Unfortunate Transformation”

has a soprano becoming more and more distraught from stage fright. Sedatives and massage fail to relax her, especially when she learns a critic is in the audience. The final straw is her sudden remembrance that she forgot to turn the gas oven off and her cat is in the kitchen.

Hysteria drives her over the brink; she is struck dumb and can only make clucking sounds. Sadly, she has turned into a hen. Incidentally, the accompanying trumpet is played by Gerard Schwarz before he embarked on his conducting career.

#### Brass Quintet

My Brass Quintet was commissioned by the noted New York Brass Quintet at the suggestion of first trumpeter Robert Nagel. Other founding members included John Swallow (trombone) and Harvey Philips (tuba). A more recent group, The Manhattan Brass Quintet, describes the work as a “rambunctious fete.” At times exhilarating, it can also turn wry—and rude. In some spots a player turns critic and sasses what he has just heard. Yet in the midst of all the crackling motion a serious and tragic figure wells up, generally without warning. In the second movement (an elegy) the quiet melody is formed by an individual instrument emitting one long single note followed by the next instrument enunciating *its* single note. These notes are often held throughout the phrase, thereby creating chords that soften the starkness of the isolated notes. The elegy is in memory of a college student who was killed on his way back to winter term in Oberlin when his car skidded out of control. Of elegiac movements I have written, this is my favorite. The quintet ends with a joyful fourth movement. The trombone solos over asymmetrically placed fifths. The focus then shifts to the horn, which exhibits a spit personality between raucous and gentle utterances. High dolce figures on the trumpet conclude the work.

#### Six Miniatures

I see the *Miniatures* as concentrated essences. *Deeply Down*, the first miniature, luxuriates in the depths of dark green sea water. *Land of Dead Dreams* observes the loneliness that can afflict us when surrounded by strangers. Low piano notes (partially strangled by stopping the piano strings with a rubber eraser) and a distant trumpet contribute to the lonely effect as does a speaking voice over the instruments. *Fireworks* is a celebration of sounds and syllables, generally divorced from any meaning beyond the physical sounds themselves. Timbres change from note to note. *Prophetic Soul* is a rather soulful rendering of a typically wry observation by poet Dorothy Parker. *Isn’t There Some Mistake?*, expresses our disbelief at each new sign of aging. For *No Man* also confronts the passage of time, but this time with finality.

*Miniatures* were first heard at the Guggenheim Museum in 1968. “Mr. Mayer’s songs chattered along with an elfin, askew wit that led only back to itself, as good music ideally should,” wrote Donal Henahan of the *New York Times*.

#### *Essay For Brass and Winds*

The *Essay* for brass and winds dates from 1954 and was written at the request of trumpeter Robert Nagel, whose New York Brass Quintet occasionally gave joint concerts with the New York Woodwind Quintet.

The concert literature for double quintet is sparse (the *Essay* also uses a percussion player in the second of its two movements). Despite the combining of two quintets in the scoring, the music gives no impression of a choir of woodwinds being pitted against a choir of brass. Instead, the instruments are treated individually.

The first movement could safely be called a passacaglia, save for an interlude and the ending in which the theme is inverted for the first time. The theme itself is built on an alternation between whole and semi-tones and between a minor and a major seventh. While the first movement exploits the sostenuto-lyrical qualities of the instruments, the second exploits their *secco* and satiric possibilities. One programmatic touch involves a raucous trombone heard near the beginning of the second movement. It reminded me of that overly loud and drunken voice so often heard over the din of a cocktail party in its later stages.

#### *The Eve of St. Agnes*

*The Eve of St. Agnes* might best be described as a highly romantic drama for chorus. A lot happens in a short amount of time (the piece takes less than fifteen minutes).

The action takes place on a bitter cold night in a medieval castle. A young would-be lover, Porphyro, sneaks into the bedroom of Madeline, the girl of his desires. She has gone to bed early and is asleep, for as legend has it, a maiden will dream about her future lover if she fasts and retires early on the magical Eve of St. Agnes. For the young man to sneak into her bedroom, however, is a highly dangerous operation: Madeline's family is feuding with Porphyro's family, much as Capulets and Montagues feuded in *Romeo and Juliet*. If discovered, Porphyro will almost certainly be killed.

As he steals into her room, a drunken party is in progress on a lower floor of the castle. The raucous sounds of the partygoers contrast mightily to the quiet mystical chant of Ave Marias that float into the castle from the frosty night outside. A further contrast to both the above is the romantic passion of the lovers. These opposing atmospheres are rapidly juxtaposed so that the listener senses that they are all happening at the same time.

The dramatic action swiftly unfolds in four compact scenes: 1) Porphyro gains entrance to Madeline's chamber 2) He woos her with food and song 3) She awakes and feels fully as much passion for him as he does for her 4) the clear moonlit night turns into a howling storm, permitting them to escape undiscovered as they elope into the night.

Finally there is one pervasive contrast throughout the work: the bitter cold of that frosty night that is unable to penetrate the lovers' island of warmth.

—William Mayer

Born in New York City (November 18, 1925), **William Mayer** entered Yale University with the notion of being a writer and graduated (1949) with equal affinities for music and language. A tilt toward music became evident as Mayer continued his training at Juilliard and the Mannes College of Music, studying with Roger Sessions and Felix Salzer, and later with Otto Luening and Izler Solomon.

His many awards and honors include two National Endowment for the Arts grants; a citation from the National Institute of Music Theater for contributing to "the advancement of American Musical theater" and one from the Center for Contemporary Opera for lifetime achievement in composition. In addition, Mayer received Guggenheim and MacDowell Fellowships, as well as grants from the Ford

Foundation and The New York and Michigan State Arts Councils.

The breadth of Mayer's musical and human perceptions has been one of his distinguishing characteristics. Thus, John Vinton, in his *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, cites Mayer's principal influences as Bartók, Stravinsky, Barber, and show music, especially the songs of Jerome Kern, an attribution echoed in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* which adds that "his style is characterized by a contrasting of transparent textures with humorous, highly rhythmic and densely scored passages." In his *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, Joseph Machlis writes: "His is a lyrical music that follows the middle of the road, favored with an unusual flow of fancy and wit, and marked by what he calls 'a free use of compositional techniques and disparate material with the aim of synthesizing so-called opposites into a coherent whole'."

On the occasion of the composer's sixtieth Birthday, critic John Rockwell noted that "William Mayer's music sings out with real beauty." Sometimes it is choral voices that "sing out" as in his *Spring Came on Forever*, written for the New York City Choral Society, or this *The Eve of St. Agnes* (John Keats), which closes this CD. Other times Mayer's lyrical voice is heard in full-scale dramatic works such as his operas *A Death in The Family* and *One Christmas Long Ago* and his ballet *The Snow Queen*. And more often than not, humor and propulsive rhythms are found side by side with poignant passages. The sudden juxtaposition of contrasting moods is a key element in major works such as *Octagon* (1971) for piano and orchestra premiered by Leopold Stokowski and pianist William Masselos (available on CRI CD 584); *Inner and Outer Strings*, (1982) recorded by conductor Gerard Schwarz; and *Of Rivers and Trains* (1988), an orchestral evocation of the Erie Canal and the early Hudson River stream trains.

Mayer is also known for his children's works, especially *Hello, World!* (1956), a musical trip around the globe that has been presented by innumerable orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra and recorded on the RCA label with Eleanor Roosevelt as narrator. A more recent setting work for both children and adults is an orchestral setting of A.A. Milnes's *Good King Wenceslas*, commissioned by radio personality Robert Sherman.

No Mayer work, however, has had more impact than *A Death in the Family*, premiered by the Minnesota Opera in 1983 and given a new production in 1986 by the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, a work about which the late Robert Jacobson wrote in *Opera News*: "William Mayer's three-act *A Death in the Family* should immediately become a candidate for regular airings around the country, so beautiful and meaningful is it, not only in its James Agee story but in the setting the composer-librettist has provided for it." Listeners around the country were able to hear the St. Louis performance with Dawn Upshaw and Jake Gardener under the auspices of National Public Radio.

Mayer lives in New York with his wife, the artist Meredith Nevins Mayer. Their three children, concert pianist Steven and two journalist daughters Jane and Cynthia, have earned recognition and esteem in their respective professions.

---

## Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

From CRI SD 185

*Essay* for Brass and Winds and Country Fair: Recorded May 1961 at Fine Studios, NYC.

From CRI SD 415

*Dream's End*: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by Dennis Rooney in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1978.

From CRI SD 291

Brass Quintet: Recorded March 1971 at Rutgers Presbyterian Church, NJ

*Miniatures*: Recorded December 1969 in Judson Hall, NYC.

From *Eight Miniatures* (Presser Co.) of which six are recorded.

*Khartoum* and *Two News Items*: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. Original funding provided by the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund and the Ford Foundation.

All works published by Theodore Presser Co. except *Essay* for brass and Winds, published by Boosey & Hawkes.

CRI *American Masters*

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton