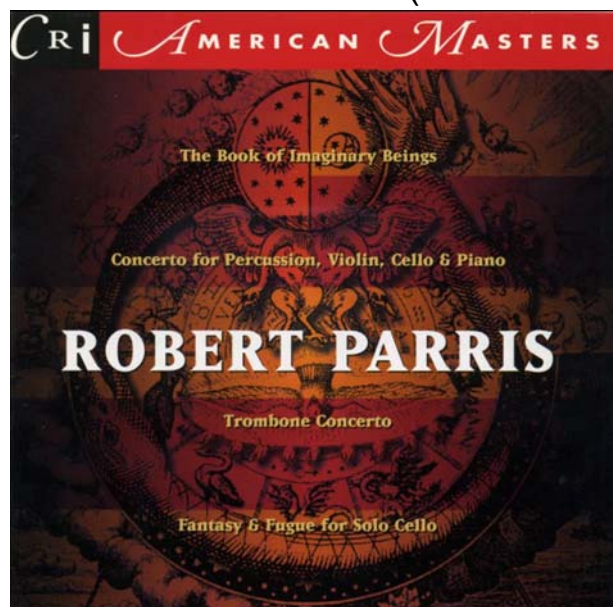


Robert Parris (1924–1999)



Concerto for Trombone (1964)	(16:42)
1. I – Nocturne	(8:46)
2. II – Perpetual Motion	(7:56)
Roman Siwek, trombone; Polish National Radio Orchestra; Ldzistan Szostak, conductor	
Concerto for Percussion, Violin, Cello & Piano (1967: 1977)	(18:05)
3. I – Grave	(8:26)

4. II – Allegro	(4:16)
5. III – Cantabile ed agitato	(5:22)
Joel Berman, violin; Evelyn Elsing, cello; Evelyn Garvey, piano, celesta; Ronald Barnett, percussion	

Fantasy & Fugue (1954)	(10:03)
6. I – Fantasy	(6:20)
7. II – Fugue	(3:43)
Lori Barnet, cello	

<i>The Book of Imaginary Beings</i> (1972)	(23:26)
8. I – Amphisbaena	(1:18)
9. II – The Rain Bird	(2:34)
10. III – A King of Fire and His Steed	(4:59)
11. IV – A Bao a Qu	(3:22)
12. V – The Satyrs	(3:53)
13. VI – The Double	(2:29)
14. VII – Sirens	(3:25)
15. VIII – Amphisbaena Retroversa	(1:21)
Dorothy Skidmore, flute; Joel Berman, viola, William Skidmore, cello; Evelyn Garvey, piano, celesta; Ronald Barnett, percussion; Thomas Jones, percussion	

Total playing time: 68:35

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Notes

Robert Parris's Concerto for Trombone was regarded with amazement by CRI's composer-directors, who would have thought it unplayable if they had not heard a tape of the premiere played by Robert Gutter. The present recording was made by still another remarkable instrumentalist, Roman Siwek, who was brought into the picture by the Polish orchestra when it became certain that Mr. Gutter would, through no fault of his own, be unable to make the session. Listening to Siwek's stunning, not to say apocalyptic performance, CRI's officials were still more amazed...

These remarks are excerpted from the liner notes for the original LP recording in 1968, which were written by Carter Harman, then the executive vice-president of CRI. Robert Gutter was the soloist in the premiere in September of 1964 at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. The orchestra was the (now defunct) Washington Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Ivan Romanenko.

When negotiations began in 1967 between the Polish National Radio Orchestra and CRI, it was assumed that Mr. Gutter would be the trombonist. Believing that everything had been settled, I was surprised and shaken by a telephone call from Mr. Harman. He had just received a call from Poland. It seemed that the orchestra was ready to record, (I got the impression that the string players had their bows poised) but Mr. Gutter was nowhere to be found. Under the circumstances CRI was instructed to ask me if I'd mind if the solo trombonist of the

Polish orchestra were to play the solo part. "If I'd mind?" Suppose Mr. Gutter were to turn up just as I put the phone down? Anyway, I had to make an immediate decision and, imagining that the tape was about to roll, I said sure. But I meant maybe. As it turned out, Mr. Siwek was a very model of virtuosity and musicality.

But what actually happened will probably never be known. I later learned, however—and there was surely some skullduggery here—that even while Mr. Gutter's attempts to secure a Polish visa were being frustrated, Mr. Siwek must surely have been practicing very hard indeed.

The composition of the concerto went very fast—the creative spark that fired its writing during the first six weeks of 1964 was, initially at least, neither its structure nor its content, but rather the allure of the medium itself: the almost limitless timbral possibilities that might be extracted from a full string section, a flutist (who would also play piccolo), an oboist, a clarinetist, a pianist, a percussionist, and a trombone player with the agility of a virtuoso cellist. (A soprano clarinet part was added later.) The resultant texture, while often symphonic, is more generally that of enriched—to say the least—chamber music.

Concerto for Percussion, Violin, Cello and Piano came about in 1967, when the players on this recording asked me for a piece for piano trio, my musical imagination, always stimulated by unusual instrumental combinations, simply refused to function, benumbed by the memories of sound—

patterns from the past. I found myself ready to write only after joining to the ensemble a percussionist with four busy limbs. (The percussion plays xylophone, bells, vibes, tam-tam, triangle, ratchet, and a drum-set consisting of side drum, tomtoms, pedal bass, hi-hat and cymbal. The pianist also plays celesta.) The addition of one player to the group not only disproportionately increased its coloristic and expressive resources, but effectively destroyed the limiting and discomfiting piano trio idea.

The piece was originally in two movements, and was played for the first time in the Hall of the Americas of the Pan American Union in Washington D.C. on October 5, 1967. In the summer of 1977, the second movement was considerably shortened and the last movement added.

I wrote Fantasy and Fugue when I was barely thirty and my style very much in process. Forty years later, after having passed through the hands of several cellists, the piece found its ideal interpreter in Lori Barnet. Its Baroque influence is obvious—I know of no more proximate ancestors; yet for its extreme demands on the player—from flamboyance to introspection, clearly I owe a debt to the nineteenth-century image of virtuoso-as-hero.

Just as imaginary beings are, almost by definition, symbols of inner reality, the eight pieces that constitute *The Book of Imaginary Beings* are expressions of elusive, vague, mysterious and occasionally mystical states of feeling evoked by associative imagery. Its literary source is the book of the same name by Jorge Luis Borges—a compendium, really, of the more illustrious creatures of the mind. Here are the supercriptions to the several movements (and occasional bracketed remarks by the composer) adapted from Borges's bestiary*:

I. Amphisbaena. "The amphisbaena is a serpent having two heads, the one in its proper place and the other in its tail; and it can bite with both... Amphisbaena, in Greek, means 'goes both ways'." [The ferocious amphisbaena's end is not really its beginning: its shape is a line, not a circle. But since this opening movement reappears in retrograde as No. 8, it is a musical palindrome as well as a bestial one, which is, after all, a very good reason for being an imaginary being.]

II. The Rain Bird. "When rain is needed, Chinese farmers have at their disposal...the bird called the 'shang yang'... The tradition runs that the bird drew water from the rivers with its beak and blew it out as rain on the thirsting field."

III. A King of Fire and His Steed. "This almost unimaginable fancy was attempted by William Morris in the tale 'The Ring Given to Venus'...

As a white flame his visage shown,
Sharp, clear-cut as a face of stone;
But flickering flame, not flesh it was;
And over it such looks did pass
Of wild desire, and pain, and fear,
As in his people's faces were,
But tenfold fiercer..."

IV. A Bao a Qu. "There has lived since the beginning of time a being sensitive to the many shades of the human soul. It lies dormant...until at the approach of a person some secret life is touched off in it, and deep within the creature an inner light begins to glow." [The poetical source for the almost constant drumbeat lies in the inanimate being brought to life—its heart made to pulsate. The more prosaic source was the beating in my clogged ears during a bad cold.]

V. The Satyrs. "Satyrs were thickly covered with hair and had short horns, pointed ears, active eyes, and hooked noses. They

were lascivious and fond of their wine. They set ambushes for nymphs...and their instrument was the flute."

VI. The Double. "The ancient Egyptians believed that the Double, the 'ka,' was a man's exact counterpart, having his same walk and his same dress. Not only men, but gods and beasts...had their 'ka.' In Yeats's poems the Double is...the one who complements us, the one we are not nor will ever become." [This piece is a gloss on a pretty piece by Saint-Saëns: his music represents the bird's superficial beauty; mine, its latent inner ferocity, both aspects in collage. The white swan and the black swan, as it were.]

VII. Sirens. "The Odyssey tells that the Sirens attract and shipwreck seamen, and that Ulysses, in order to hear their song and yet remain alive, plugged the ears of his oarsmen...and had himself lashed to the mast...In the sixth century, a Siren was caught and baptized in northern Wales..."

VIII. Amphisbaena Retroversa.

*Quoted from *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis Borges with Margarita Guerrero. Translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni in collaboration with the author. Copyright 1969 by Jorge Luis Borges and Norman Thomas di Giovanni. Published by E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., and used with their permission.

The Book of Imaginary Beings was written in 1971–72 for the players who are heard on this recording, and who gave the first performance on May 7, 1972 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. during the American Music Festival under the direction of Richard Bales.

My life as a composer began in my late teens—somewhere around 1943—the birth-date of my earliest songs. It intensified during my two years at Juilliard, where Peter Mennin prodded and poked at my weekly offerings, subtly inculcating the technique required to put together extended structures. I subsequently worked with Luening, Ibert, and Copland, but their influence on my music was minimal.

Of my seventy-odd pieces, most are for small ensembles: a colorist from the very beginning (I've written almost nothing for solo piano, although I am a pianist) many of these chamber pieces are for unusual instrumental combinations. Owing to my very early work with violinists and cellists—I continue to play publicly today in chamber recitals—I feel an affinity for strings, often, I'm afraid, pushing the technical requirements beyond some players' comfort thresholds. My solo Violin Sonata, for instance, tests the limits of the instrument, yet Curtis Macomber's performance (on CRI CD 706) is exemplary. Both Macomber and Lori Barnet on this recording have reconciled their instruments to the demands of the music.

Like most composers these days I find orchestra performances hard to come by, but I was fortunate in the eighties when Mstislav Rostropovich was director of the National Symphony Orchestra; in 1983 and 1985, respectively, he conducted my Kettledrum and Trombone Concertos. In 1986 Rostropovich and the NSO commissioned my Symphonic Variations; the first performances took place in January of 1988.

Since 1964 I have been teaching at the George Washington University in Washington D.C. and it is owing to the support of its department of music (and its chairman, Roy Guenther), and the University Facilitating Funds, that this recording is now available.

—Robert Parris

Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Curt Wittig.

Fantasy & Fugue for Cello recorded and engineered by Curt Wittig. Recorded May 12, 1998 at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD (new recording).

From Orion LP 78301:

Concerto for Percussion, Violin, Cello, & Piano recorded and engineered by Curt Wittig. Recorded October 3, 1977 at Tawes Recital hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

The Book of Imaginary Beings recorded by Roger Byrd, 1973 at Tawes Recital hall, College Park, MD.

From CRI SD 231:

Concerto for Trombone recorded by Polskie Nagrania. Original recording was made possible by a grant from The American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Publishing:

Fantasy and Fugue: C.F. Peters Corp., all other works published by ACA (BMI)