

# Music of Ursula Mamlok



## *Constellations for Orchestra* (1993) ..... (12:57)

1. I. Brisk ..... (3:27)
2. II. Vivo; sprightly ..... (1:08)
3. III. Tranquil ..... (3:38)
4. IV. Sprightly and energetic ..... (4:44)

Seattle Symphony Orchestra; Gerard Schwarz, conductor.

## *Polarities for flute, violin, cello, and piano* (1995) ..... (8:25)

5. I. In High Spirits ..... (2:09)
6. II. Still ..... (2:55)

7. III. Playful ..... (3:21)  
Parnassus: Keith Underwood, flute; Cyrus Stevens, violin; Christopher Finckel, cello; Christopher Oldfather, piano; Anthony Korf, conductor.

## *Der Andreas Garten* (1987) ..... (15:22)

8. I. Dunkel... ..... (1:44)
9. II. Noch schläft... ..... (2:03)
10. III. Und Morgen's ..... (1:39)
11. IV. Kleiner Kolibri ..... (0:35)
12. V. Libelle ..... (1:41)
13. VI. Rote Scheibe ..... (2:28)
14. VII. Taubenflug ..... (0:31)
15. VIII. Andreas Garten ..... (2:13)
16. IX. Der Mond ..... (2:27)

The Jubal Trio: Christine Schadeberg, soprano; Sue Ann Kahn, flute; Susan Jolles, harp.

17. *Girasol* for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, and piano (1990) ..... (10:22)  
Parnassus: Keith Underwood, flute; Alan Kay, clarinet; Cyrus Stevens, violin; Christopher Finckel, cello; Christopher Oldfather, piano; Anthony Korf, conductor.

## *String Quartet No. 2* (1998) ..... (13:01)

18. I. With fluctuating tension ..... (3:51)
19. II. Larghetto ..... (5:04)
20. III. Joyful ..... (4:07)

Cassatt String Quartet: Muneko Otani, violin; Jennifer Leshnowar, violin; Mitchiko Oshima, viola; Kelley Mikkelsen, cello.

Total playing time: 62:21

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## Notes

The American composer **Ursula Mamlok** is a distinguished representative of the Central European Jewish intellectual culture that was transplanted to the United States as a result of the Holocaust. Mamlok was born in 1928 in Berlin and came to the U.S. in 1941. She studied with George Szell at the Mannes College of Music, and received her B.M. and M.M. from the Manhattan School of Music, where she was a pupil of Vittorio Giannini. Among her other teachers were Roger Sessions, Stefan Wolpe, and Ralph Shapey, who exercised a particularly strong influence on the development of her compositional technique. Mamlok is currently a member of the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music. She has also taught at New York University, the City University of New York, and Temple University. Her music is published by C. F. Peters, the American Composers Alliance, McGuinness and Marx, and Hildegard. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has been honored by BMI and the ISCM.

Mamlok is especially noted for her elegant and finely crafted chamber music. Her works are typically scored for small, mixed ensembles, and are cast in concise, multi-movement or multi-sectional forms. A serialist who “wants the compositional control” that the technique provides, Mamlok’s musical outlook and technique are fundamentally traditionalist in

orientation, a heritage of her diverse musical background and her thorough grounding in the classics of musical literature. According to the composer, it is essential that the technique of serialism be transmuted into a musical language comprehensible to the musically literate but non-specialist listener without depriving the resulting work of any compositional subtlety. In short, “the details should be left in the workshop.”

Mamlok’s musical credo is encapsulated in this recent statement: “My main concern is that the music should convey the various emotions in it with clarity and conviction. It interests me to accomplish this with a minimum of material, transforming it in such multiple ways so as to give the impression of ever-new ideas that are like the flowers of a plant, all related yet each one different.”

Mamlok’s music is a unique amalgam of many twentieth century stylistic trends. As her style evolved, she incorporated the neoclassic tendencies of her early music into her evolving use of serial technique, creating a music consistently transparent in texture and sensuous in sound. The stylistic diversities on the surface of her music serve structural functions within her works, providing formal contrasts and often playing a generative role within the development of a piece. Sectional contrast and repetition, palindromic and inversive symmetry, and the

use of arch forms are all typical formal strategies employed in Mamlok's music. The aural substance of her music is characterized by intricate textures and a preference for high, bright, delicate sounds, including those of the flute, clarinet, harp, violin, and piano. Mamlok likes to disguise the serial structure of her music within fluid, virtuosic lines that hover suggestively between tonality and atonality. In many of the works she has written since the '70s, she has divorced the techniques of serialism from the familiar gestural repertoire that accompanied the development of the method.

Mamlok completed all the works on this recording between 1987 and 1998. In contrast to the high drama of her works of the 60s and the intricate discourse of her works of the 70s and early 80s, her music of the last decade reflects her search for greater economy of means and directness of expression. In these works, she has created a fresh synthesis of the elements of her style and technique.

The orchestral work *Constellations* (1993) is a concise, sinfonietta-like work in four short movements without pulse. The first movement is built around a stentorian rising motto figure and a slow turn motif. The motto is treated in diminution and inversion, but returns in its original form at the end of the brief second movement scherzo, creating a dramatic contrast to the bright, contrapuntal textures that have preceded it. The lyrical slow movement that follows exhibits a palindromic formal design. The finale is related both stylistically and melodically to the final movement of the quartet. It opens with a cheerful looping, skipping melodic figure that serves as background to the "chorales" which dominate the movement. As it progresses, coruscating scale figures rush up and down the orchestra with increasing frequency, adding to the excitement. *Constellations* was commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony and premiered in February 1994, with Herbert Blomstedt conducting.

*Polarities* (1995) is emblematic of several of the most striking characteristics of Mamlok's style. The first movement employs delicate weaving, fluttering textures, which are contrasted with triple-*forte* piano chords and passages of rhythmic stasis. The brief second movement—originally composed as a memorial tribute to Samuel Starr, a friend of the Alaria Chamber Ensemble—dispenses with the piano entirely. With its stately, almost circular motion around a few musical gestures, it serves as a bridge between the frenetic activity of the first and last movements. The finale begins with neoclassically tinged motifs and textures that soon blossom into an intricate contrapuntal web. This wavelike buildup to complexity is the major device by which Mamlok creates structural contrast between the many short episodes within the overall arch structure of the movement. *Polarities* was commissioned and premiered by the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society.

*Der Andreas Garten* (1987) is a setting of a poem by Gerard Mamlok, husband of the composer. The text portrays the garden of the Mamloks' summer home in California, located

near the San Andreas fault. The poetry evokes both the beauty and the perils of nature. This is haunting and deeply atmospheric music: the brooding sound world created by the alto flute, low harp tones, and *Sprechstimme* at the opening and conclusion of the work contrasts with the brilliant, occasionally shrill, twittering of birds portrayed by flute, piccolo, and harp in the inner movements, producing an almost uncanny effect. The nine movements are arranged around numerous symmetries of pitch organization, tempo, and timbre. The eighth movement reproduces the second in inversion, with the rising and falling harp arpeggios that open and close the movements serving as important formal landmarks. An additional symmetry is created by the depiction of birds in flight in the fourth and seventh movements. *Der Andreas Garten* was commissioned by Franklin and Marshall College for The Jubal Trio.

*Girasol* (Sunflowers, 1990) inhabits a world of sound and gesture similar to that of *Polarities*. Commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation at the Library of Congress for the Griffin Ensemble, *Girasol* is a tour-de-force of variation technique. It presents an easily recognizable melody within a framework of constant rhythmic and textural change in a one-movement multi-sectional form. The first of the paired inner episodes of the piece is a passacaglia, distinguished from the preceding music by thin textures, a broadening of tempo, and the introduction of new thematic figures, created by the partitioning of the row. The final section both expands and transforms ideas presented at the beginning. A chirping triplet fifth motif marks structural turning points throughout *Girasol*. It frames the entire work, seemingly materializing from silence at the beginning and sounding almost inaudibly before the music sinks back into silence at the end.

Mamlok's new String Quartet No. 2, completed in 1998, is a compact three-movement work that contrasts strikingly with her first quartet, a product of her early maturity. While the earlier work displays the intense rhetoric so typical of her style in the 60s, the new quartet is fundamentally neoclassical in character. The first and third movements share a looping, skipping theme, presented in many guises in music that is by turns playful and lyrical. They share a formal resemblance as well: the first part of each movement is repeated in inversion. In the second movement, Larghetto, long legato lines of an almost Fauréan delicacy alternate with brief agitato interludes. The finale reintroduces material from the previous movements to create a tightly integrated overall structure. The quartet ends with a flourish, as the opening theme of the first movement returns in its original transposition, but in a new registral arrangement reminiscent of the opening of Berg's *Lyric Suite*. String Quartet No. 2 was commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation of Harvard University for the Cassatt Quartet. It is dedicated to the memory of cellist Anna Cholakian, one of the founding members of the Cassatt.

—Barry Wiener

*Der Andreas Garten*, poetry by Gerard Mamlok

*Dunkel, geheimnisvoll,  
verborgen,  
der Erde Wunde.  
In ihrer Kruste  
ungezähmt, im Schlummer:  
San Andreas.  
Es blüht ein Garten  
der Verwerfung nahe.*

Dark, mysterious,  
hidden,  
the earth's wound.  
In its crust  
untamed, in slumber:  
San Andreas.  
A garden blooms  
near the fault.

*Noch schläft der alte Baum;  
zwischen den Ästen  
der Spinne trügerisch Gewebe.  
Und durch das Filigran  
am schwarzen Firmament  
ein Stern,  
erstarrt zu Eis.*

The old tree sleeps on;  
between the branches  
the spider's deceptive web.  
And through the filigree  
on the black sky  
a frozen star.

*Und Morgen's sanfter Tau;  
schimmernde Perlen  
auf gelben Rosen.  
Im Nebel steht der Garten stumm;  
da von der Ferne ein Vogel ruft.*

And morning's soft dew;  
shimmering pearls  
on yellow roses.  
The garden silent in fog;  
a bird calls from far away.

*Kleiner Kolibri;  
schillernder Dunst  
durch blaues Licht,  
schwirrst  
vor und zurück,  
verweilend,  
berauschenden Nektar  
stiehlst.  
Langschnabel Du!  
Rückwärts  
fort!*

Little hummingbird;  
gleaming haze  
through blue light,  
whirring  
back and forth,  
lingering,  
stealing  
the heady nectar  
You Longbeak!  
Backward  
gone!

*Libelle,  
wie kamst Du in meinen Garten?  
Warum bleibst Du nicht dort,  
wo Du zu Hause—  
im grünen Schilf am See?  
Lockte der Duft der Rosen,  
das tiefe Blau an knorrigen Ästen?  
Oder hast Du mich,  
einst auch von fernen Ufern,  
nur einmal besuchen wollen?  
Dich trug bloss der Wind;  
mich brachte der Sturm.*

Dragon fly,  
how did you find my garden?  
Why didn't you stay  
where you belong  
in the lake's green reeds?  
Did the scent of the roses tempt you,  
the deep blue on gnarled branches?  
Or did you come  
just to visit me,  
who also came from distant shores?  
The wind carried you;  
the storm brought me.

*Rote Scheibe;  
Sonnenglut;  
Mittags. Und trocknes Gras  
versengt.  
Kein Vogel. Stille.  
Nur ein kleiner Ball,  
gelblich-rot,  
fällt zur Erde  
und zerplatzt.  
Ein Sperling naht,  
pickt an der Aprikose,  
die, beschattet,  
auf einer Fliese ruht.*

Red disk;  
glowing sun;  
noon. And dry grass  
singes.  
No bird. silence.  
A small,  
yellow-red ball  
falls to the ground  
and bursts.  
A sparrow comes close,  
pecks at the apricot,  
which rests in shadow  
on a flagstone.

*Taubenflug über den Garten;  
weisse Flügelschläge  
des Habicht's Auge unbekümmert.  
Taubenflug über San Andreas;  
flüchtige Schönheit  
gegen Wolken.*

Doveflight over the garden;  
white wingbeats;  
unconcerned with the hawk's eye.  
Doveflight over San Andreas;  
fleeting beauty  
against clouds.

*Andreas Garten,  
Garten meiner Seele!  
Du bist mir im Herzen;  
Dir bin ich nahe.  
Ich weiss von Deiner Wunde,  
aber auch sie bist Du.*

Andreas Garden,  
garden of my soul!  
You are in my heart  
as I stand here.  
I know of your wound;  
it is a part of you.

*Der Mond ist riesig gross heut' Nacht,  
geister-helles Scheinen;  
die furchtsame Akazie möchte sich  
verstecken.  
Tief in der Erde  
eine dumpfe Bewegung  
(fast lautlos, unmerklich).  
Die Wurzeln ahnen sie.*

The moon is huge tonight;  
its light is spectral.  
The fearful acacia wants  
to hide.  
Deep in the earth  
a hollow motion—  
(almost silent, imperceptible).  
The roots sense it.

This CD is dedicated to Dwight Mamlok.

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## Production Notes

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

*Constellations* recorded September 26, 1977 by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Produced by Adam Stern. Engineered by Al Swanson and edited by Dmitry Lipay at Seattle Music. *Polarities* and *Girasol* recorded May 1998 at the State University of New York, SUNY Purchase. Produced and engineered by Adam Abeshouse. *Der Andreas Garten* and *String Quartet No. 2* recorded January 1998 at the Recital Hall, Performing Arts Center, SUNY Purchase, New York. Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman.

CD mastered by Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, New York City.

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