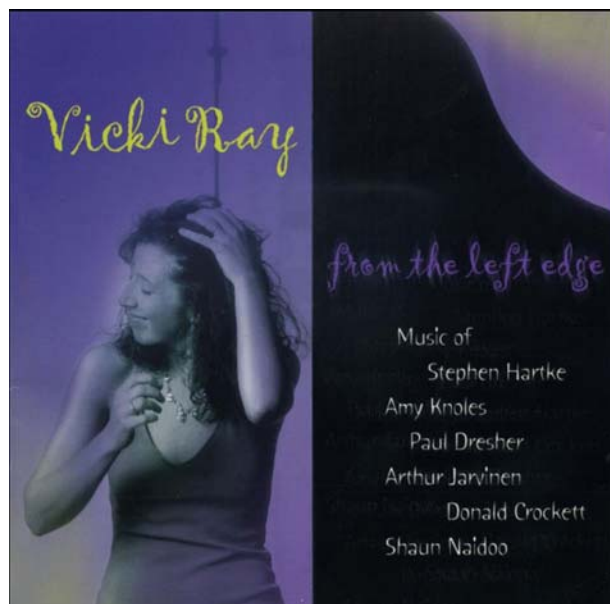


NWCR830

From the Left Edge

Vicky Ray, Piano

Music of Hartke, Knoles, Drescher,
Jarvinen, Crockett, Naidoo



Stephen Hartke: Sonata (1998)	(14:39)	
1. I Prelude	(3:20)	
2. II Scherzo: <i>Epicycles, Tap-Dancing, and a Soft Shoe</i>	(6:54)	
3. III Postlude	(4:25)	
4. Amy Knoles: <i>Belgo</i> (1997)	(10:54)	
5. Paul Drescher: <i>Blue Diamonds</i> (1995)	(17:46)	
6. Arthur Jarvinen: <i>The Meaning of the Treat</i> (1995)		(7:12)
7. Donald Crockett: <i>Pilgrimage</i> (1988)	(12:22)	
8. Shaun Naidoo: <i>Bad Times Coming</i> (1996)	(10:51)	
Vicky Ray, piano		

Total playing time: 73:46

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Notes

Spend some time concert-going in Southern California—a region once, but no longer, known as “the cultural desert”—and you’re bound to come across both the name and the good works of Vicki Ray. Take in one of the Los Angeles County Museum’s Monday Evening Concerts, a new-music series founded in 1939 and still aloft, and you’ll probably find Vicki as the pianist with the splendid chamber group called Xtet. Come another night, and you’ll find Vicki officiating at an off-the-wall concert by the intrepid pioneers known as the California E.A.R. Unit. In downtown Los Angeles, Vicki Ray turns up as a treasured participant in the L.A. Philharmonic’s own high-adventure *Green Umbrella* concerts. A handsome small church in Pasadena has become home to *Piano Spheres*, a handsome set of enterprising keyboard concerts, sponsored by a consortium of the area’s five best pianists, of which Vicki is one.

If Los Angeles has truly shucked off its “cultural desert” epithet, credit belongs most emphatically to the generation of superb creative musicians who absorbed splendid training—principally at the California Institute of the Arts, or at the University of California at San Diego—and then determined not to rush off in search of elusive East-Coast gold, but to dig in and build a musical culture amid the palms and the freeways. The evidence of their success rings forth on this disc: the works of six composers, West-Coast based, all composed for, and dedicated to, the phenomenal and fearless pianist who labors in their midst.

It doesn’t matter that Stephen Hartke was born in New Jersey, Shaun Naidoo in South Africa, or Vicki herself in Minnesota.

The result of the collaboration is a kind of panorama of Californian creativity and performance in its glowing variety. The fact of California’s Asia-facing geography, celebrated for generations in the music of Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell, and the not-nearly-well-enough-known Robert Erickson, becomes a principal color-resource in the works here by Arthur Jarvinen and Paul Drescher. Amy Knoles’s music seems to rejoice in the marvels of California scenery. The works of Donald Crockett and Stephen Hartke, splendid interminglings of structural concerns and expressive melodic invention, suggest that lingering East-Coast shadows still fall across the California landscape, while Shaun Naidoo samples the region’s sheer exuberance.

Stephen Hartke: Sonata

“My piano sonata,” writes Hartke, “was composed as a gift for Vicki Ray, a dear friend and ally. The piece is cast in three movements, the outer two being related both in thematic material and in their essentially somber mood. The central movement is considerably more playful and dance-like. The *epicycles* of the movement refer to two bits of material, one of which starts the movement, that are generated by the nesting of simple rhythmic wheels within wheels, thus producing syncopated melodic figures. Some of the resulting motives suggested tap-dancing to me, so I ran with it, going so far as to place a rather idiosyncratic soft-shoe as a trio to the tap-dancing’s minuet.”

Winner of the Elise Stoeger Award from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—a recent addition to a long list

that also includes Guggenheim and Friedheim awards, and a stint at the American Academy in Rome—Stephen Hartke moved to California in the 1980s, and currently teaches at the University of Southern California. His orchestral work *The Ascent of the Equestrian in a Balloon* was finalist in the 1998 Masterprize International Composing Competition, and was broadcast worldwide.

Amy Knoles: *Belgo*

“Commissioned and dedicated to Vicki Ray, a.k.a. *The Goddess of Piano*.” One of the founding blithe spirits of the California E.A.R. Unit, percussionist-extraordinaire Amy Knoles has also collaborated with performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, taught composition in a California State Prison, and...you-name it!

“Belgo,” Amy writes, is a Belgian restaurant in London, with waiters in monks’ outfits and strange words on the walls derived from Rabelais. I decided to sample the text, as well as a few tunes sung by my cockatiel “Crow.” The piano part at several points is a duet with the sampled text and bird calls. You’ll hear some fairly elaborate variations on some very simple melodies. And, since Vicki has such a good time, I’m convinced she was a drummer in a past life, so she gets to “kick it” in the end.”

Paul Drescher: *Blue Diamonds*

A student of Robert Erickson at U.C. San Diego, Paul Drescher has been a pioneer explorer in the possibilities of music produced electronically, with a vast legacy including theater pieces (among them the much-performed *Slow Fire*), solo works for synthesizer, and “normal” instrumental pieces. *Blue Diamonds* grew out of a keyboard solo in *Stretch*, a work composed for the California E.A.R. Unit, which Drescher later re-thought and expanded. “The piece,” Drescher writes, “is based on a commonly used scale derived from alternate half and whole steps, yielding an eight-tone or octatonic mode. Simple permutations of the scale yielded a sequence of eight variation modes which provide the harmonic material for the entire work... The reference to color is purely a response to the quality in the modes and to the role of intuition in the composition. I have no idea if there are such games in nature.”

Arthur Jarvinen: *The Meaning of the Treat*

“There is a wonderful story in which a naked woman walks around her neighborhood at night. She isn’t trying to be seen, but neither is she hiding. The possibility of giving some total stranger an unexpected surprise is always present. Vicki Ray offered me a commission to write a solo piece for her, but I was already committed to three other projects. Sadly, I told her ‘no.’ Shortly after that I sat down at the piano to mess around with some raw material for one of the other pieces. By the next day I had Vicki’s solo. So Vicki got her piece, an unexpected treat. The piece itself is like a musical short story, and solo playing is a lot like being naked on stage.”

Arthur Jarvinen, new-music performer, composer, physical poet, percussionist, another of the E.A.R. Unit’s founders, also member of the percussion trio *The Antenna Repairmen*, etc. etc.

Donald Crockett: *Pilgrimage*

Pasadena-born Donald Crockett is conductor of the Los Angeles-based new music ensemble, *Xtet*, and director of the Contemporary Music Ensemble at USC, where he is also professor of composition. Awards have come from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, BMI, the Aaron Copland Fund, the Kennedy Center and the National Endowment for the Arts.

“*Pilgrimage*,” the composer writes, “is a single 12-minute movement in five large sections. The material is generated by an opening refrain which contains 3/4 of the famous B-A-C-H motif (Bb-A-C), and which then launches on a “pilgrimage” toward the complete B-A-C-H, with a climactic moment in which fortissimo splats on the piano are juxtaposed with a clear perfect-fourth, the top note of which is the long-sought-after B-natural which completes the B-A-C-H motif.”

Shaun Naidoo: *Bad Times Coming*

Proclaimed by the *Johannesburg Citizen* (in 1990) as “one of the brightest lights in the South African musical firmament,” Shaun Naidoo is currently on the faculty of theory, composition and electronic music at U.S.C. “*Bad Times Coming*,” he writes, “uses the factory presets on a Roland JV1080 synthesizer module as the basis for the tape part. The mainly percussive sounds were selected for their referential quality, often evoking echoes of B-grade movie scores, cabaret, and rock music. These sounds, in combination with a frequently adversarial piano part, explore, in the first two sections, the juxtaposition of violence, and ironic humor. This humor disappears in the final section, and although the piano seems to win the game, the victory is quiet, dark, and enigmatic. *Bad Times Coming* was written for Vicki Ray.”

—Alan Rich

Vicki Ray, piano, performs widely as soloist and collaborative artist. A long-time champion of new music, her experience has ranged from premiering John Adams’s *Road Movies* at the Kennedy Center to serving as the *Chef du Chant* on Peter Sellars’s production of Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre* at the Salzburg Festival, and the Théâtre Chatelet, in Paris. As a founding member of *Piano Spheres*—an acclaimed solo series devoted to exploring the less familiar realms of the piano repertoire—her playing has been hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* for “displaying that kind of musical thoroughness and technical panache that puts a composer’s thought directly before the listener.” Vicki is a member of the award-winning California E.A.R. Unit and *Xtet*. She also is the head of the piano department at the California Institute of the Arts. Upcoming performances include the premiere of a new piece being written for Vicki by composer Kamran Ince.

Production Notes

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