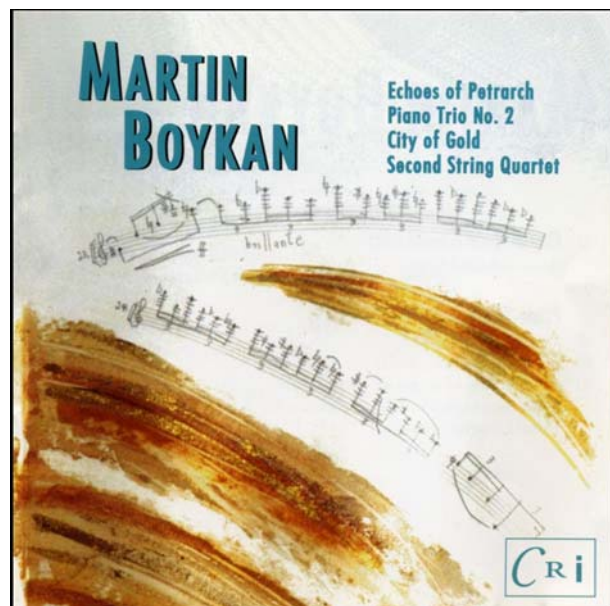


Martin Boykan



1. *City of Gold* (1996) (3:26)
Fenwick Smith, flute
- Piano Trio No. 2* (1997) (18:11)
2. I. Allegro (5:13)
3. II. Lento espressivo (8:02)

4. III. Grazioso ed un po' scherzoso (4:56)
Cyrus Stevens, violin; Michael Curry, cello;
Donald Berman, piano.
- Echoes of Petrarch* (1992) (13:10)
5. I. Canzone. "Chiare, fresche
e dolci acque" (4:55)
6. II. Sonetto. "Pace non trovo
e non ho da far guerra" (3:43)
7. III. Madrigale. "Non al suo
amante più Diane piaque" (4:32)
David Horne, piano. The Auros Group for
New Music: Susan Hampton Gall, flute,
William Kirkley, clarinet.
- String Quartet No. 2* (1973) (18:17)
8. I. Allegro (4:34)
9. II. Grave (2:23)
10. III. Vivo espressivo (4:09)
11. IV. Lento (7:11)
Pro Arte Quartet: Norman Paulu, Martha
Francis, violins; Richard Blum, viola; Parry
Karp, cello.

Total playing time 55:23

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Notes

Martin Boykan, more than any other living composer, is able to craft large-scale works with tremendous economy of means—works in which every note and gesture are essential. While he eschews overstatement and pyrotechnics, his work is emotionally available. Gratefully written for the instruments, it's elegant, subtle and delicate, yet viscerally powerful when it needs to be. In this day and age where it can no longer be assumed that professional composers have even a cursory acquaintance with the past, it has become commonplace to speak of at least *some* recent music as being informed by "the tradition." In Boykan's case, the music of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and particularly Beethoven, not to mention that of the Second Viennese school, has been most thoroughly absorbed and their compositional lessons applied in a unique and quintessentially American language, one belonging to the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the music of the distant and not so distant past is truly alive for him, offering boundless sustenance.

These recordings present four chamber works covering a period of twenty years, from the slight and blithely lyrical *City of Gold* (1996) for solo flute, to the large, intensely expressed, even thorny *Second String Quartet* (1973). In between are sandwiched *Trio No. 2* (1997) for violin, cello and piano, and *Echoes of Petrarch* (1992) for flute, clarinet/bass clarinet, and piano. Both trios are fine examples of Boykan's mature mode of expression. Thus, the recording chronicle not only a reversed progression in time, but also a

continual reduction of means, the most recent work being the most unabashedly lyrical and simplest of surface.

City of Gold was composed in collaboration with Boykan's wife, Susan Schwalb, who "had a commission to create an artist's book commemorating the 3000th anniversary of Jerusalem." The composition was designed so that a tape of it could be played continuously at the site of the exhibit. *City of Gold* begins and ends with sustained B's (above middle C) that are meant to connect to each other in an endless loop. On this recording it is a gently persuasive introduction to the music to follow.

Trio No. 2 is a substantial three-movement work for an instrumentation not seen very often in contemporary music: violin, cello and piano. The composer says it is "among the more classical works I have written. I am bold enough to admit that I often thought of Mozart while writing it." Throughout the piece, a sense of dialogue among three equals, difficult to achieve in an original way, is continually present. This is particularly manifest in the first movement, where balanced four-measure phrases are made to sound fresh, never mechanically symmetrical. It is a characteristic of Boykan's to set up compositional challenges for himself; the adoption of phrases of equal length which are made to sound open-ended is a good example. The second movement, described by the composer as "the dramatic center of the trio," begins with a highly expressive unaccompanied cello solo. The sense of lyricism, somewhat restrained, even lofty, in the first movement, becomes most heartfelt and unrestrained here. The

violin's concluding paraphrase of the cello solo brings the movement to a satisfying close, and is absolutely right and unpredictable at the same time. Movement three, marked *grazioso ed un po' scherzoso*, comes as a playful contrast, injecting into the dialogue an element of humor that at times turns sardonic.

As might be expected from the literary association, *Echoes of Petrarch* is primarily a pastoral work. The composer writes, "I would be gratified to have captured something of Petrarch's sensibility, but although his poetry was highly suggestive to me, I allowed the music to take its own course." Written for an Italian tour of the New York New Music Ensemble, it opens with a Canzone that captures the valedictory longing of the aging poet wishing to be buried alongside the "clear, fresh, and sweet waters, where she who alone to me seems woman rested her lovely limbs." The second movement (Sonnet), marked *Agitato*, reflects the poet's extremities of feeling—"I fear and hope, I burn and freeze; I touch nothing, and embrace the whole world; I see without eyes and scream without a tongue; I wish to die and beg for help; I feed on sorrow, and laugh with tears; To such a state, my Lady, you have brought me." It provides a wild and biting contrast to the placid surrounding movements. For Boykan, the third movement, Madrigal, describes "a moment of rapt contemplation." Just as the text, an evocation of Diana washing her veil, provides subtle echoes of the extremes of the sonnet ("...in the midst of icy waters; such that she made me tremble with an amorous chill, now when the heavens burn."), so the music at times recalls the agitation of the Sonnet within its prevailing tone of reflection.

With the *String Quartet* (dedicated to the late composer Seymour Shifrin, a friend, colleague, and kindred spirit), we journey backwards to a more turbulent time, reflected in both the surface and structure of the work. The first three movements are meant to be heard as open-ended in various ways leading inexorably to the finale—an extensive *Lento*. In essence, these three movements form a giant upbeat (anacrusis) to the fourth. Unlike the slow movements of the preceding works, this *Lento* has an element of unresolved tension, perhaps even *Angst*, made all the more compelling by the extremely unsettled context provided by what preceded them.

As Boykan states in his notes to the premiere recording, "the first movement begins with a rapid-fire succession of ideas leading to an unusually early climax. A short slow movement follows—too short, in fact, to be complete. It is to be continued at the end of the quartet. The third movement is a fast scherzo which leads into the last movement without any pause (indeed, with a phrase overlap)." I would add that the climaxes of both the first and third movements highlight unison writing for the quartet. In keeping with the preparatory nature of the first three movements, these unisons turn out to be foreshadowings of the prominent octaves that appear (for the first time) in movement four. The composer speaks of these as "expressive moments," attempting "to invest this interval, avoided in much contemporary music, with the significance of a 'diabolus in musica'." The almost Weberian ending of the first movement is a transition to the starkly expressive *Grave*. Here, the texture is very spare, leaving room for the fullness to come in movement four. This small utterance has an austere, otherworldly beauty, a beauty shattered by the slashing intensity of the scherzo, which follows without pause. After all this instability, the finale takes on the added weight of an arrival following a long and eventful journey. Characteristically, however, Boykan simul-

taneously creates and undermines this stability: "The concluding *Lento* is divided into four equal sections, marked by rhyming cadences. But against this even background, the music is unevenly paced, so that the sections seem unequal in length." As the quartet ends, we are left with a hard-won yet equivocal resolution.

As you'll hear, Martin Boykan is a composer incapable of easy solutions. He has enough regard for his audience to assume they'll join him as he aspires to "the precision and emotional breadth of the great tradition." Aspirations are well and good, but achievements, such as this music, are even better! I invite you to celebrate the achievements of this most rewarding American composer.

— Ross Bauer

Martin Boykan (b 1931) studied composition with Walter Piston, Aaron Copland and Paul Hindemith, and piano with Eduard Steuermann. He received a B.A. from Harvard University, 1951, and an M.M. from Yale University, 1953. In 1953–55 he was in Vienna on a Fulbright Fellowship, and upon his return founded the Brandeis Chamber Ensemble whose other members included Robert Koff (Juilliard Quartet), Nancy Cirillo (Wellesley), Eugene Lehner (Kolisch Quartet), and Madeline Foley (Marlborough Festival). This ensemble performed widely with a repertory divided equally between contemporary music and the tradition. At the same time Boykan appeared regularly as a pianist with soloists such as Joseph Silverstein and Jan DeGaetani. In 1964–65, he was the pianist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Boykan has written for a wide variety of instrumental combinations including four string quartets, a large concerto for large ensemble, many trios, duos and solo works, song cycles for voice and piano as well as voice and other instruments and choral music. The Salt Lake City Symphony premiered his symphony for orchestra and baritone solo in 1993. His work is widely performed and has been presented by almost all of the current new music ensembles including the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, The New York New Music Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the League-ISCM, Earplay, Musica Viva, and Collage New Music.

He received the Jeunesse Musicales award for his String Quartet No. 1 in 1967, and the League-ISCM award for *Elegy* in 1982. Other awards include a Rockefeller grant, NEA award, Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Fulbright, as well as a recording award and the Walter Hinrichsen Publication Award from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1994 he was awarded a Senior Fulbright Fellowship to Israel. He has received numerous commissions from chamber ensembles as well as commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, and the Fromm Foundation.

At present Boykan is the Irving G. Fine Professor of Music at Brandeis University. He has been composer-in-residence at the Composer's Conference in Wellesley, and Visiting Professor at Columbia University, New York University, and Bar-Ilan University in Israel. He has served on many panels, including the Rome Prize, the Fromm Commission, the New York Council for the Arts (CAPS), and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Over the years, he has taught many hundreds of students including such well-known composers as Steve Mackey, Peter Lieberon, Ross Bauer, and Marjorie Merryman. In 2001,

Perspectives of New Music is planning a special issue in honor of his 70th birthday.

Production Notes

Recording mastered by Jen Wyler, engineer, at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

Piano Trio No. 2, *City of Gold*, and *Echoes of Petrarch* produced and engineered by Joel Gordon and Martin Boykan.

City of Gold recorded in Roslindale, Massachusetts.

Piano Trio No. 2 and *Echoes of Petrarch* were recorded at Regis College in February, 1999.

String Quartet No. 2 was originally released on CRI SD 401.

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock, April 1978.

This recording was made possible by grants from the Tyrrel Fund, the Alice M. Ditson Fund for Music and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund.

Publishing:

String Quartet No. 2, Mobart.

All other works: C.F. Peters. (BMI)

CRI Production Manager: Allison Wolf

This compact disc has been made possible through the generous support of a Mazer Grant from Brandeis University.