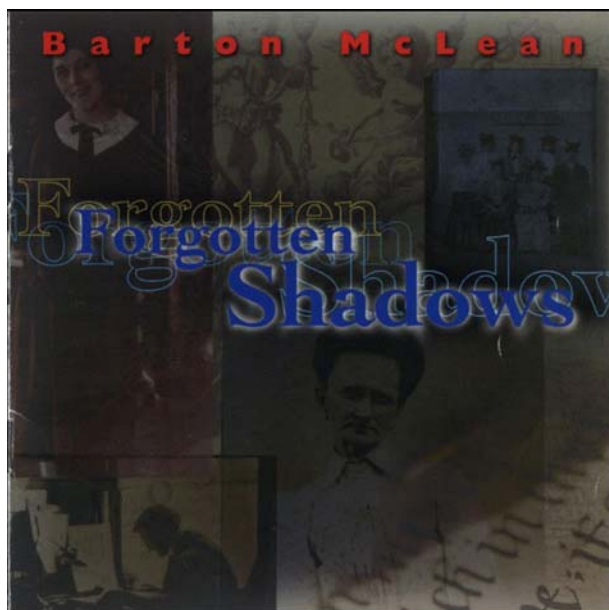


NWCR846

Forgotten Shadows

Three compositions by Barton McLean



1. *Ritual of the Dawn* (1982–4, rev. 1998) (15:30)
Linda Greene, flutes; E. Michael Richards, clarinet; Barbara DeChario, harp;
Barton McLean, piano; Keith Notrab, percussion.
 2. *Forgotten Shadows* (1995-98) (39:10)
Historian/musical advisors: Peter Schaaphok and Hilda Allen.
Interviewees (long-time residents): Charles Bentley, Victoria Green, Hilda Allen.
Musicians and musical groups: Priscilla McLean, soprano; Earl Hewitt, musical saw; Thomas Elkin, ragtime piano; Richard Blair, music boxes; “Big Mike” Eaton, fiddle; Cincinnatus, New York, Congregational Church Choir and Congregation, Marjorie Wilbur, conductor; Cincinnatus, New York, 4th of July Marching Band, Alton Wilbur, conductor; Children of Petersburg and Cincinnatus recorded in play; Elisha and Daniel Pantileo, individual children.
 3. *Happy Days* (1997) (11:12)
The McLean Mix Duo: Barton McLean: keyboards, party horns, siren, flexatone. Priscilla McLean: music boxes, slide whistle, siren, party horns, clapper, woodblock, flexatone, Happy Apple.
- Total playing time 1:06:13
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Notes

Each work on this disc relates to some aspect of celebration, ritual, or ceremony that brings people together. All my life I have been struck by how the qualities of the human spirit can manifest themselves in music, and have learned that rituals and ceremonies are the vehicles through which the human spirit (manifest through joy, humor, poignancy, reflection, triumph, sadness) is most closely bound to art.

In writing *Ritual of the Dawn*, I was influenced by the philosophies of H.G. Wells and especially his novel *The Time Machine*. I was struck by his ideas with regard to the transience of our existence on this earth. Despite all our most “civilized” efforts, the earth will eventually return, eons from now, to its natural state of equilibrium. This was the same philosophy put forth in ancient Nahuatl poetry (Pre-Columbian thirteenth-fifteenth century), from which I composed a huge ceremonial tableaux called *Mysteries of the Ancient Nahuatl*, for choruses and instrumentalists in 1975. *Ritual of the Dawn*, depicting a Nahuatl ceremony, was the only portion of this to ever be performed.

The sultry yet pulsative nature of the *Ritual of the Dawn* is produced through the technique of groups of performers playing different rhythmic cells simultaneously without coordinating their beats, as if several tape recorders were playing at the same time but not in sync. The score gives strict time frames (usually 5 to 10 seconds in length) for the various musical events and at certain junctures the conductor/pianist provides hand cues to coordinate the ensemble.

Ritual of the Dawn was revised in 1996 and premiered in its current version by the Syracuse Society of New Music in 1998. This recording was made subsequent to the premiere with several of the Society members.

Forgotten Shadows was inspired by an old tintype photo I found between the floorboards of my 1790’s farmhouse where we were living in 1993. It consists of some proper ladies all dressed up for an outing (c. 1890). These ladies and others from the past are the “forgotten shadows.”

The basic materials of the piece began as part of an audio/media installation, sponsored by the small historic village of Petersburg, New York (where we now reside), in December 1994. The exhibit seemed to evoke in the visitors a feeling of communal timelessness, yet it also brought to mind the mortality of one’s own brief existence. Later, I extracted the best from the installation material, fusing it into a coherent, quasi-symphonic electroacoustic tape work.

Used as a constant thread in the thirty-nine minute musical tapestry are tunes that were sung and played during the period of 1900 to 1925 for the rituals and traditions of the era. There is music for parades, church choirs, fiddle and ragtime piano dance halls, concerts, children’s playground games, etc.

To unite the many elements of such a large work and to give it a structure, I used the technique of flashback, and placed narrators near the beginning and the end of the piece. One phrase in particular, uttered by Petersburg resident Victoria Green, is central to the literary idea of the work and appears at the beginning and the end: “That is all gone now... you can’t

hardly see where it is.” Children’s voices are used to transition from the present to the past and back. There are two main climaxes, and many thematic interrelations throughout the work, along with a number of juxtapositions such as the mad, distorted canon with “Good Night Ladies” toward the end.

Just as in the music of Charles Ives (who was a model and mentor for this work), one may at times be fooled into relating only to the strings of existing “tunes,” and lose sight of the overall interweaving and structure. On repeated hearings, I hope that the deeper relationships (motivic and otherwise) and the more elegant macrostructure will become apparent.

All of the spoken and sung voices, as well as instrumental performers, marching band, etc., are my own recordings of actual residents of my present home, Petersburg, NY, and my boyhood home of Cincinnatus, N.Y. The work was composed in our electronic music studio of The McLean Mix from 1995 to 1998. As in many of my works, the interest lies not especially in the equipment used, which includes a variety of synthesizers, samplers, processors, software, but rather in the uniqueness of the concept and in the extensive recordings made of performers and groups in their natural settings throughout the state over a long period of time.

Throughout my life there has been the continuing presence of my first music teachers, Alton and Marjorie Wilbur. My study with the Wilburs began in 1951, at age thirteen, and has led to a rich collaborative relationship to this day, as can be heard by the choirs in *Forgotten Shadows*, comprising a recording I made of Mrs. Wilbur’s church choir and congregation made in my boyhood village of Cincinnatus, NY. The Wilburs have been an inspiration to me throughout my composing career, and in recognition of that, this album is dedicated to them.

Happy Days (1997) is a lighthearted work that forms the opening of the McLean Mix duo’s current concert, “Inside the Time Machine.” Its immediate appeal stems from the juxtaposition of traditional New Year’s Eve celebratory instruments (buzzers, horns, whistles, etc.) over a fabric of haunting and sprightly music boxes, enhanced by keyboard FM synthesizers. As such, it depicts the fun and wonder of the New Year’s ritual celebration. During the live performance, some theatrical and humorous elements surface as well, such as the way Priscilla McLean, who is trying to control five music boxes on stage by winding them up and starting and stopping them in the right places, finally assumes the guise of

a music box herself and “winds down,” only to be rescued by her “charming prince” (Barton McLean) — this can be heard in the winding sequence towards the end, followed by a frenetic burst of activity.

—Barton McLean

Barton McLean (b 1938) pioneered the first large-scale commercially-available digital sequencer and sampler in the USA as director of the electronic/computer music studios at the University of Texas-Austin and Indiana University-South Bend. With his wife, the composer Priscilla McLean, he has produced fourteen LP recordings and six compact discs, some of which have become staples in electronic music courses. In 1983 he and Priscilla left academia to develop their electro-acoustic duo, The McLean Mix. His major interests have been the integration of nature sounds into the web of traditional and non-traditional structures, the use of technology to articulate ideas based on environmental and cultural concerns, and the development of new instruments such as the recent sound/light project the “Sparkling Light Console.”

McLean’s output contains numerous orchestral, chamber, and solo works, including perhaps his most characteristic *Dimensions* series (as in *Dimensions II for Piano and Tape*, recorded on Capstone CPS 8637). Along with his contributions as officer of composers organizations, McLean has authored many articles on esthetics, electroacoustic music/media, audience development, and independent composer issues.

The McLean Mix electro-acoustic music/media duo has performed extensively throughout the U.S. (in forty-one states) and in many European, Pacific Rim, and South Asian festivals and residencies. Collectively they have been the recipients of numerous grants and awards. Residencies of the McLean Mix have included the Zagreb Biennale, MacDowell Colony, Banff Centre for the Arts, Relâche Ensemble at Yellow Springs, Artspace in Auckland, Chautauqua Institution, Buffalo North American Music Festival, University of Malaysia in Sarawak, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), Tunugan ‘97 (Asian Composers’ League) festival in the Philippines, as well as many universities in the U.S. Since 1983, composer/performers Barton and Priscilla McLean have toured as a full-time career, and collaborate closely on each new work. The McLeans reside and compose in an 1830 vintage restored home in Petersburg, New York.

Production Notes

CD produced and engineered by Barton McLean in The McLean Mix Studio in Petersburg, NY.

Ritual of the Dawn recorded at SUNY-Genesco, fall 1998

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