

Ensemble Capriccio



John Tartaglia

Wave Functions for string trio (1994) (22:05)
(Four vignettes about the new [quantum] physics)

1. I. The Dancing Wu-Li (5:44)
2. II. Bell's Theorem (5:54)
3. III. Schrödinger's Cat (6:27)
4. IV. Surely..., Mr. Feynman (4:00)

Randall Davidson

- Around Columbia* (1989) (21:43)
5. I. Centralia (9:04)
 6. II. Mexico-Bolivar Tango (4:45)
 7. III. Around Columbia (7:54)

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski

- String Trio* (1991) (21:52)
8. I. Misterioso (6:32)
 9. II. Adagietto (5:07)
 10. III. Scherzando (3:04)
 11. IV. Adagio amoroso (4:06)
 12. V. Furioso (3:03)

Ensemble Capriccio: Chouhei Min, violin;
Korey Konkol, viola; Mina Fisher, cello

Total playing time: 65:40

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Notes

Tartaglia

Wave Functions for string trio (1994)

(Four vignettes about the new [quantum] physics)

John Tartaglia's string trio, *Wave Functions*, is a wonderful contemporary example of the connection that has long existed between the weird science of quantum mechanics and the harmonious field of music. The sound waves that make music possible are subject to many of the same mathematical rules as the quantum wave functions that describe the activity of electrons and photons. But John Tartaglia's trio goes far beyond formal similarities to demonstrate that absolute music provides a genuinely appropriate language for expressing the abstract ideas of modern physics.

In the trio's first movement, "The Dancing Wu-Li," a dark, ominous opening warns us of the strange unfamiliar world we are entering, where atoms lurk in a nowhere realm of mere possibility until provoked into physical existence by the act of an observer. "Wu-Li" comes from the Chinese word for physics, and means patterns of organic change, something nonsensical, or enlightenment (apt descriptions indeed for the chaotic micro world of quantum particles). The movement continues with a kind of dialogue between the void and potentiality, suggesting the unstable circumstances in which particles merge from nowhere, collide, and then vanish. A waltz appears in which an ordered phrase of notes seems to stop in its tracks, hesitate, and retrace its steps, as if reversing itself in time like an anti-electron dancing into the past, far from its electron partner. We can only accept the dance and join in.

The title of the second movement, "Bell's Theorem," refers to the shocking proof by physicist John Bell that physical reality must be non-local. In other words, two electrons or photons

can instantly communicate with and affect each other over great distances without ever exchanging physical signals. Bell's theorem was the death knell for Einstein's long-standing rejection of quantum theory on the grounds that it violates the "local-forces" law of cause and effect. In Tartaglia's somber opening phrases and throughout the movement, we hear the tolling of a bell that is both a musical pun on Bell's name and the mournful proclamation of the death of causality. A later rhythmic, syncopated passage evokes a kind of coordinated ballet, in which all the dancers hypnotically follow the same steps like synchronized marionettes (the perfect musical embodiment of non-local quantum entanglement).

"Schrödinger's Cat" is the playful name given to a diabolical thought experiment, devised by Erwin Schrödinger, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, who eventually came to doubt his own theory. Schrödinger wanted to dramatize the ambiguity of certain quantum descriptions, in which a particle apparently can exist in two mutually contradictory states. A photon may be polarized in an upward and a downward direction at the same time, or a hypothetical colored particle can be both black and white. Schrödinger imagines a cat trapped inside a box containing a poison gas apparatus that is triggered by a radioactive mechanism with a 50/50 chance of firing in one hour. At the end of the hour, according to the laws of quantum mechanics, the state of the cat is "half dead and half alive." In the third movement, "Schrodinger's Cat," Tartaglia treats us to a cat-and-mouse game with the Grim Reaper himself. On sliding strings, we hear the cat meowing in protest, and later even scratching on the box through a ponticello effect. There are frequent references to Chopin's death march. And in the end, we are caught suspended

simultaneously between major and minor keys in imitation of the perplexing quantum combination of life and death.

The title of the fourth vignette, “Surely..., Mr. Feynman” (In Memoriam), is taken from an autobiographical account of Richard Feynman, one of the illustrious twentieth-century physicists who extended quantum mechanics to the complex realm of electromagnetic phenomena, for which he won the Nobel Prize in 1965. Feynman was an authentic iconoclast and eccentric, beloved by colleagues and students alike for his brilliant physical insights, his down-to-earth style of teaching, and his simple and unassuming ways. In the final movement, Tartaglia has chosen to depart from the strange world of quantum mechanics, and instead to pay tribute in memoriam to one of its greatest proponents, practitioners, and teachers. In this touching passage, we hear the solemn tones of the liturgical Hebrew prayer “Kol Nidre,” traditionally associated with the memorial for the dead. Feynman had little use for religion and rejected his own Judaism. And yet perhaps it is fitting to acknowledge the irony of a spiritual culture that helped to nurture such a secular view of the world. Or is it that humanity truly occupies a combined state of spirit and matter?

—Roger S. Jones

John Tartaglia (b 1932), violist with the Minnesota Orchestra from 1968–1999, studied at Rome’s Conservatory of Santa Cecilia and earned a degree in humanities from the University of Florida. Prior to his appointment to the Minnesota Orchestra, he performed with orchestras in Tampa and Syracuse, and with the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra. Since 1971 he has been an affiliated faculty member at the University of Minnesota, and on a leave of absence from the orchestra in 1981–82 he was associate professor of viola at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. He has written several works of chamber music. Larger works include *Improvisations for Double Bass and Chamber Orchestra*, *Fanfare Beethoveniana*, and most recently, *Le Chat Noir: Divertimento for Three Bassoons and Orchestra*, all three of which have been premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra.

Davidson

Around Columbia (1989)

One of the first works commissioned by Ensemble Capriccio, *Around Columbia* belongs to a growing number of works that Davidson has written on America. His fascination with this continent exceeds national boundaries and cultural histories.

The three movements of this work draw their inspiration from towns in central Missouri. “Centralia” takes its name from the self-proclaimed capitol of “Little Dixie,” an area that still mourns the death of the Confederacy. To many of the natives of this town, its name perfectly describes their attitude toward their community and themselves. You will recognize three types of music in this movement: the music that takes power by attacking (atonal), the music that takes power by parading its patriotism (“Star-Spangled Banner” and “Dixie”), and the music that takes power by surviving.

The “Mexico-Bolivar Tango” is a celebration of polite but colliding societies. Bolivar is a hick town where live music only takes place in the VFW on weekends. Mexico is a high-class town where people play the piano in the parlor on Sunday afternoons. These two cities don’t often mix, but in this movement they seem to get along.

Easley is an incorporated township in Boone County on the banks of the Missouri River. Davidson used to go there in the early evenings of summer to listen to the frogs and crickets and the low, quiet rumble of a great river.

Around Columbia is finally a meditation on America, since the word “Columbia” is the poetic name for America and is derived from the European word “Columbus.” So much of the United States culture is a reflection of European perceptions and so little is a celebration of our own experiences.

Randall Davidson (b 1953) has lived and worked in the Twin Cities since 1975, after graduating from Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Humor and passion are the hallmarks of Randall Davidson’s catalogue. His many successful collaborations are testament to the appeal of his music and the regard other artists have for him. He and Garrison Keillor have produced two successful large-scale works: *The Young Lutheran’s Guide to the Orchestra* and a humorous oratorio, *The History of Evil: Bible Families*. He has established close relations with such arts organizations as Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota, Meet The Composer, American Composers Forum, Actor’s Theatre of St. Paul, and the Center for Puppetry Arts. Critics have described his work “as lovely as anything being written today.” He has for years advocated for other composers through his work at the Minnesota (now American) Composers Forum, American Music Center, Meet the Composer, and ASCAP. For more information, visit his website at <http://www.boysartmusic.com>.

Skrowaczewski

String Trio (1991)

Ensemble Capriccio commissioned Stanisław Skrowaczewski to write String Trio in 1991. In this work Skrowaczewski follows traditional, classical principles to horizontally and soloistically expose each instrument. At the same time, he sought to bind the three parts by vertical chords and harmonies, and with sharp rhythmic patterns that demand perfect synchronization. Harmonically, each movement has one or more melodic groups or themes. Patterns of certain intervals reflect Skrowaczewski’s obsession with the interplay of augmented fourths with perfect fourths, diminished ninths and sevenths, etc. These patterns are repeated in all five movements. The titles describe the musical character of each movement.

Stanisław Skrowaczewski (b 1923) enjoys an international reputation as both a composer and a conductor. He directed the Minnesota Orchestra for nineteen years, prior to becoming principal conductor of the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester in 1984. He has toured throughout England, the United States, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Spain. Skrowaczewski has conducted most of the world’s major symphony orchestras, including the Cleveland, New York Philharmonic, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras and the Vienna State and New York Metropolitan Operas. His musical contributions have been acknowledged on both sides of the Atlantic as being daring, imaginative, and expertly crafted.

Ensemble Capriccio, established in 1982, offers a regular concert series in the Twin Cities each season, as well as many regional, national, and international performances. The Ensemble is acclaimed for its excellent programming, fine guest artists, and commissions from regional, national, and international composers.

The trio members are full-time professional musicians. Min and Fisher are members of the Minnesota Orchestra, while Konkol is professor of viola at the University of Minnesota and a frequent performer with the Minnesota Orchestra. All are devoted to both the large setting of symphonic music and the intimacy of chamber music. Ensemble Capriccio’s repertoire represents both historical and contemporary string trio literature.

Ensemble Capriccio, acclaimed for its “emotive, yet polished performances,” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*) has worked from its inception to strengthen the viability of the string trio by enlarging and publicizing its repertoire. Central to this goal was the 1996 unveiling of *String Trios*, the first compact disc (on Titanic T:231) in a planned series of recordings featuring virtually unknown works and newly created repertoire for the trio. The disc showcases Stephen Paulus’s *Seven Miniatures*, commissioned by the Ensemble as well as String Trio by Heitor Villa-Lobos and Trio in G major, No. 53, by Franz Joseph Haydn (transcribed from a piano sonata).

Ensemble Capriccio is frequently featured on Minnesota Public Radio, and presents an annual series at venues including the Weisman Museum and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Guest artists have included cellist Yo-Yo Ma in the Schubert C Major Quintet, soprano Benita Valente in Schoenberg’s String Quartet No. 2, guitarist Sharon Isbin premiering Paul Schoenfield’s Fantasy, and pianist Lydia Artymiw in the Romantic literature.

In 1997, Ensemble Capriccio was honored to be the first recipient of the McKnight Artist Fellowship for Performing Musicians. As part of this Fellowship, they worked with composition and performance students at MacPhail Center for the Arts (Minneapolis) during March and May of 1998. During the 1999–2000 season, the Ensemble was a participant in Chamber Music America’s “A Musical Celebration of the Millennium” program and premiered its newest commissioned work, a trio by Judith Zaimont, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. In addition, Ensemble Capriccio members have performed and taught as leading festival artists in France, Korea, and Central and South America.

Ensemble Capriccio has also commissioned other works by

Paul Schoenfield, Stanisław Skrowaczewski, Laura Karpman, Janika Vandervelde, Russell Platt, Mary Ellen Childs, Alex Lubet, and Monalyn Reese.

Chouhei Min, violin, concertized extensively as a child prodigy in the Far East before coming to the United States. Min studied under Broadus Earle at Yale University and at the Hartt College of Music. A winner of the prestigious Coleman Chamber Music Award, she has performed under conductors Edo de Waart, Neville Marriner, and Stanisław Skrowaczewski. Min was formerly associate concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony, and held the same position with the Minnesota Orchestra from 1973–1990.

Korey Konkol, viola, professor of music at the University of Minnesota, is rapidly gaining a reputation for his dynamic teaching and performing style. Having studied with Roland and Almita Vamos at Western Illinois University and under Walter Trampler at the New England Conservatory, Konkol maintains a busy schedule of solo, chamber music, and orchestral performances which have taken him throughout the United States, Europe, as well as South and Latin America. Formerly a professor at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, he joined the Ensemble in 1992.

Mina Fisher, cello, came to the Minnesota Orchestra in 1979 after performing in principal cello positions in New Orleans and Costa Rica. Winner of the Bryan Young Artists Award and the Friends of the Music Award, Fisher studied at Indiana University under Janos Starker and Fritz Magg. Pursuing further studies abroad she worked with André Navarra in Vienna and Aldo Parisot in Brazil. Fisher’s strong commitment to chamber music has resulted in more than a dozen commissions for the string trio repertoire, all of which were developed with Ensemble Capriccio.

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