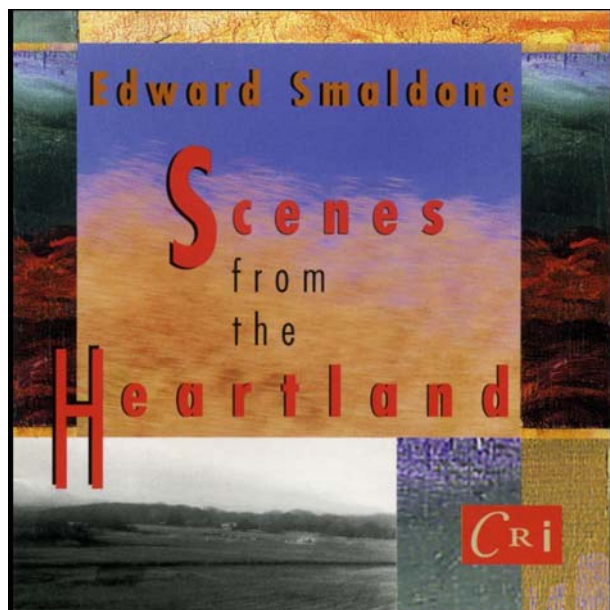


NWCR863

Edward Smaldone

Three Scenes from “The Heartland”



1. Rhapsody for piano and orchestra (1993) (16:32)
Munich Radio Orchestra; Michael Boriskin, piano;
Arthur Fagen, conductor

2. Trio: Dance and Nocturne (1984) (6:46)
Speculum Musicae: Curtis Macomber, violin;
Allen Blustine, clarinet; Andrè Emelianoff, cello

Three Scenes from “The Heartland” (1994) (12:11)

3. I. Introduction (maestoso, con rubato) . (4:18)
4. II. Scherzo (rambunctious) (2:13)
5. III. Nocturne (with quiet intensity) (5:40)
Donald Pirone, piano

Solo Sonata for Violin (1980) (9:19)

6. I. Dramatic (3:15)
7. II. Scherzo (2:59)
8. III. Dramatic (3:05)
Curtis Macomber, violin

9. *Two Sides of the Same Coin* (1990) (10:07)
Allen Blustine, clarinet; Michael Boriskin, piano

Total playing time: 55:17

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Notes

Although the five compositions on this recording cover a fifteen-year period, stretching from 1980 to 1994, they are linked by a consistent compositional approach and a common set of core musical values. Despite the fact that he composes in a modernist, free atonal idiom, **Edward Smaldone** (*b* Wantagh, NY, 1956) is a classicist. Every work here is deeply and rigorously motivic. Within each piece, the composer develops music of very different sensibilities—by turns energetic, doleful, lyrical, exuberant, or playful—from common motivic threads, imaginatively reconceived. There are no textures for their own sakes, that is, no sections that sacrifice thematic content to mere color or gesture, no passages of simple repetition, no minimalist “sameness” of idea. Rather, the Germanic values inherent in the challenge of “continuing variation”—challenging because of its demands on the imagination and connection-making processes of both composer and listener—is a guiding force in this music. Smaldone is also a classicist in the sense that his large-scale musical forms take their inspiration from eighteenth-century models. Exposition, development, and recapitulation—the components of the sonata form, that preeminent structure of all classical music—figure prominently in his work, as does the flavor of such prior musical forms as the scherzo. Even contrapuntal techniques associated with Baroque music surface from time to time, when they may convincingly further Smaldone’s musical intentions. Steeped as he is in the learned traditions of the past, the composer is equally concerned with transmitting the energies of the present. “My first experiences were with rock and popular music, and my aim as a composer has been to create the immediacy and excitement of those kinds of

music while eluding the pitfalls of either simple-minded populism or a too precious academicism.”

The decade-and-a-half-long development in the composer’s work documented in this recording reveals expanded musical means rather than a sea change in stylistic direction or any radical shift in approach. The earliest works recorded here, the Solo Sonata for Violin (1980) and Trio: Dance and Nocturne (1984), embrace, albeit in different ways, a Schoenbergian aesthetic: the first piece is serious, rigorous, and demanding, the second more playful and *gemütlich*. The three later pieces—*Two Sides of the Same Coin* (1990), Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra (1993), and *Three Scenes from “The Heartland”* (1994)—admit other musical influences and embrace a wider range of musical means, especially the syncopated rhythms, harmonies, and textures of jazz, and a broader gestural range that includes the harmonic and melodic sweep and dramatic intensity of Romanticism. One hears over the period covered in this recording a continuing enrichment of musical language within a *modus operandi* that remains firmly located in the values of rigorous traditional craftsmanship and a visceral delight in sound.

Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra was commissioned in 1993 by the Queens Symphony Orchestra in celebration of its fortieth anniversary, and was premiered in that year with Michael Boriskin as soloist and Arthur Fagen as conductor. Though the piece is written in a free atonal harmonic idiom, Smaldone’s affection for jazz-tinged harmonies is apparent in the Rhapsody, producing a tonal palette that the composer has characterized as “McCoy Tyner meets Arnold Schoenberg.”

The opening measures serve as a telling introduction to the composer's work. Ascending melodic couplets, marked *inciso con fuoco* ("incisive, with fire"), force their way upward by semitone intervals, establishing the motivic *ur*-material that serves not only as the basis for the opening theme but also in the creation of music of quite different character, including the playful passages interwoven throughout the work. Even accompanimental filigree, such as the piano's arpeggiated music, is developed from the same motivic tissue. The result is a piece in which diverse themes are informed by the same unifying source material. As with all of the compositions on this recording, a traditional approach to extensive thematic development on the local level is mirrored in the choice of formal structure: the rhapsody corresponds roughly to the sonata form in a later, freer incarnation. At its entry, the piano extends the opening theme and develops it in imaginative and unexpected directions, introducing elements by turns playful and romantic, and later juxtaposing both.

The developmental tendencies of the exposition leave the composer free to strike out in adventuresome new directions in the development proper (starting at the 5'16" mark). The tempo slows as the mood turns mysterious, but this section is more volatile than the first, as it features intense climaxes and sudden changes of thematic direction. Among its striking features are a colorful and ghostly re-presentation of the opening theme against piano trills, and a solo cadenza that further explores different approaches to the expository material.

The recapitulation (beginning at 13'57") juxtaposes themes more sharply and reduces gestures to their essences, a strategy that ratchets up the intensity and provides a compelling and dramatic gloss on the work's expository material.

Trio: Dance and Nocturne, for violin, clarinet, and cello, was composed in 1983, almost a decade before the piano rhapsody. In its motivic rigor, contrapuntal orientation, and even its pitch usage, the piece is unmistakably Schoenbergian. Nevertheless, guided by an unflinching light touch and sensitive ear, Smaldone is able to coax from an atonal palette the kind of graceful music that has eluded many composers working in a similar language. The trio is compact, excellently crafted, and "breathes" comfortably and naturally. In A-B-A' form, the work features breezy dance music in its A section, and a darker, slower "nocturne" in the B section (beginning at the 1'32" mark). Despite the sharp change in mood between these sections (attenuated by a skillful transition and retransition), the motivically consistent source material underlying both sections creates a unifying link, in the tradition of the best nineteenth- and twentieth-century German music. The abundance of intervals of the second and fourth—especially, in the case of fourths, close to the top of a melodic line—and the generally upward trajectory of the melodies create strong and consistent thematic profiles common to both sections. In addition, sections A and B both feature sinewy, contrapuntally independent lines, similar rhythmic values despite the difference of tempo, and the kind of attuned responsiveness, on the part of each instrument in relation to the others, that suggests musical "conversation."

The recapitulatory A' section (commencing at 4'24") demonstrates a well-schooled familiarity with the synthesizing tendencies of nineteenth-century music, as found, for example, in the short late piano works of Brahms. The A' section smoothly combines the music of A and B, subtly reintroducing A with a new version of the opening (invoking the Classical "false recapitulation") and altering and developing the music from the B section (starting at 4'45") as well. The return of a more recognizable version of the work's

opening music (at 5'29") creates a liberating momentum that is sustained through the trio's blithe conclusion.

Three Scenes from "The Heartland," for solo piano, was commissioned by and is dedicated to pianist Donald Pirone. Composed in 1994, and thus almost a decade removed from the composer's student days, the work turns from the more homogeneous and exclusive use of "high-art" models found in Smaldone's earlier period. With equal sureness and a mature and confident voice, Smaldone invokes, within an essentially free atonal language, the landscapes of jazz piano, quasi-fugue, and Chopinesque Romanticism. Well blended and richly flavored, the piece is a convincing amalgam of stylistic elements, rather than a jarring disjunction of mismatched musical bedfellows.

The musical elements redolent of America—namely, jazz rhythms, harmonies, and textures, and sweeping passages that evoke the spaciousness of the American frontier—dovetail smartly with the work's attempts to capture the atmosphere of Amy Clampitt's poem "The Heartland." Smaldone writes, "The land that the poet evokes, the wonder and space as well as the violence and volatility of the place we occupy, found their way into the sound poems that comprise the work."

The first movement, Introduction, derives its inspiration from lines that evoke the majesty and wildness of the uncharted prairie, where there are "no roads / no landmarks to tell where you are, / ... or whether you will ever find a place / to feel at home ... only waves of chlorophyll in motion." Marked *maestoso, con rubato*, the Introduction opens with a two-chord statement that is used in a Wagnerian manner as a building block and point of departure for subsequent statements, and as a strong identifying motif that resurfaces throughout the movement. The block chords eventually throw off melodic tendrils that gain independence and boldness, until the truncated recapitulation restores the wall of chordal sound and, with it, an aura of spaciousness.

The Introduction's commingling of Romantic phrase-building with jazz piano harmonies and "improvisatory" melodic figures gives way to the good-natured Scherzo, marked "rambunctious." Through this movement, the composer hoped to convey, in his words, "the freewheeling and confident nature of the American spirit, so blindly ambitious, confident, and optimistic" in its willingness to tackle what Clampitt describes as "the involuted tantrums of Spring and Summer[s] sacksful of ire," "wind and rain ... swigging up whole farmsteads," where "luck and cellar hole were all / a prairie dweller had to count on." Smaldone, who sees jazz as a metaphor for the buoyancy of the American spirit, evokes the brash confidence of Clampitt's pioneers through the music's propulsive motion and jagged, syncopated changes of meter. Embedded imitation is made explicit in a clever episodic two-part invention on the main subject (starting at 0'36") that brings to mind a musical meeting between Ellington and Bach.

The concluding Nocturne invokes the "pure astonishment" found in Clampitt's paean to the American heartland, realizing in musical form the sense of awe and understated passion suggested by the poetry. Sweeping arpeggios accompany lyrical lines, and passages that are the work's only flirtation with tonal harmony convey hushed majesty. Just prior to the final cadence, the atmosphere is shattered as the spirit of jazz imposes itself with irrepressible energy through a jagged, quicksilver melody stated in octaves. A faint echo of the opening motive returns in the highest register and then sweeps into silence, before octave C's in the bass bring the work to a close.

Written in 1980 and dedicated to the composer's wife, Karen, the Solo Sonata for Violin is the earliest composition on this recording, and is an ambitious essay in a challenging genre. Smaldone's concentration on musical materials firmly within an atonal modern aesthetic is especially perceptible when heard following the lushness and expanded stylistic palette of *Three Scenes from "The Heartland."* Nevertheless, the absence of eclectic stylistic means does not lead to an absence of gestural variety. This work demands a violinist with the skill to sharply differentiate contrasting gestures, negotiate the entire range of the violin, realize unusual meters and complex rhythmic figures, and play the copious pizzicati, arco with simultaneous pizzicato, and harmonics—all without diminishing the lyrical and expressive flow of the music. The piece is cast in three movements, the outer two of which mirror each other. As in all the other pieces on this recording that return to opening material, the "recapitulation" found here radically reconceives the music to which it refers. Nonetheless, the first and third movements share many elements in common. These include their pace and character (both are marked "dramatic"), the use as an opening figure of an ascending semitone (the Piano Rhapsody develops out of the same initial gesture), concluding sections featuring poignant high-register bowed notes set against left hand pizzicati in the lower register, similar angular melodies using the entire range of the instrument, and an alternation between what the composer calls "gentle phrases" and "chordal outbursts," between "lyrical statements and aggressive ones." Unlike later pieces by the composer, however, which distill expository essences into dramatically truncated recapitulations, this third movement is more a companion piece to the first than an intensification of it: it reconfigures all the elements of the first movement while still retaining the first movement's shape and character.

The inner movement, a scherzo, employs a traditional three-part (A-B-A) form; its playful outer sections frame a lyrical slow section (beginning at the 0'55" mark) of contrasting gestural and melodic character. The return of the scherzo is not a mere repeat of the opening material, but is a shortened version that still manages to incorporate the essence of the B section to create a summarizing synthesis of all that has come before.

Two Sides of the Same Coin, for clarinet and piano, was commissioned by Sounds from the Left Bank, and was premiered at P.S. 1 (Project Studios 1) in Long Island City, New York, in May 1990. Aptly named, this single-movement work in two sections develops music of radically different sensibilities from common motivic and harmonic material. The A section is energetic and propulsive, and begins with three distinct gestures in as many measures—syncopated chords, pointed staccato arpeggios, and a jazzy figure comprised of an eighth note and two sixteenths. After spinning out an exploration of these basic ideas, the A section winds down and gives way to a contrasting and dream-like B section that transmogrifies elements from its predecessor. Now the propulsive rhythms of the A section are translated into a steady stream of eighth-note quintuplets in the lower registers of the piano (against which the clarinet plays long, angular lines "as though in a haze"). This eventually slows to near stillness, until a short coda restores the energy and material of the A section.

Dedicated to his eldest daughter, Laura, the piece was intended to reflect life at home with an eighteen-month-old child. "Her boundless energy (when awake)," writes the composer, "and dreamy tranquility (when asleep) were two sides of what now seems like a blissfully simple experience of

parenting, especially compared with the current scenario of three children, ages twelve, nine, and six!"

As the five pieces on this recording demonstrate, Edward Smaldone has evolved a musical language that is as visceral as it is intelligent, an accomplishment prompting the American Academy of Arts and Letters to observe that the composer's "serious concern with the foundational aspects of musical coherence never conflicts—indeed, it becomes a means of achieving—a compositional language that is vital, expressive, and original."

—Perry Goldstein

(Composer Perry Goldstein is a member of the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.)

Pianist **Michael Boriskin** has performed throughout the United States and in over thirty countries, at venues such as Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, the BBC, Theatre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, and Vienna's Arnold Schoenberg Center. He has appeared as a soloist with the San Francisco, Seattle, and Utah symphonies, the Polish National Radio Orchestra, the Bavarian Symphony of Munich, the American Composers Orchestra, the New York Chamber Symphony, the UNAM Philharmonic of Mexico City, and many others. His innovative National Public Radio series, "Century View," was heard regularly for three seasons across America. Boriskin's numerous recordings range widely from Brahms and Tchaikovsky to contemporary composers and appear on a variety of labels. Boriskin is presently artistic director of the Copland Heritage Association.

Pianist **Donald Pirone** enjoys a distinguished career as soloist, chamber musician, and concerto performer. He has appeared throughout the country and in several major concert halls, including Carnegie Recital Hall. Pirone has premiered and commissioned several new works throughout his career, including Edward Smaldone's *Three Scenes from "The Heartland."* A resident of New York, he is a member of the performance faculty at the Aaron Copland School of Music, at Queens College, and heads the piano and chamber music departments at the Center for Preparatory Studies in Music at Queens College. Pirone has recorded for Koch International, Musical Heritage Society, Grenadilla Records, CRI, and Capstone.

Conductor **Arthur Fagen** has conducted more than sixty operas in prominent houses throughout the world, including the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Opera, the Vienna State Opera, and the Munich State Opera. Equally active on the concert podium, Fagen has conducted the Czech Philharmonic, the Tokyo Philharmonic, the Jerusalem Symphony, and the Prague Symphony Orchestra, among others. A native New Yorker, Fagen studied at Wesleyan University and the Curtis Institute. He served as first conductor of the Kassel Opera and Braunschweig Opera, as well as chief conductor of the Flanders Opera of Antwerp and Ghent (1983–1986). He has been the music director of the Queens Symphony Orchestra since 1989.

For almost thirty years, **Speculum Musicae** has been internationally recognized for its meticulously prepared and passionately rendered performances of the music of our time. *Speculum Musicae* clarinetist **Allen Blustine** is a longtime champion of new music and has performed dozens of premieres, including works by Milton Babbitt, Donald Martino, Elliott Carter, and Wayne Peterson. Blustine is executive director of *Speculum Musicae* and is on the faculty of Columbia University. **Curtis Macomber**, violinist with *Speculum Musicae*, has appeared in recital and as soloist at Carnegie Recital Hall, the Kennedy Center, and many other

venues here and abroad. Macomber was a member of the New World String Quartet for eleven years (1982–1993). He is on the faculties of the Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music. **André Emelianoff**, cellist with Speculum Musicae, is also a member of the Da Capo Chamber Players, principal cellist for the New York Chamber Symphony, and a member of the faculty of the Juilliard School. He has worked closely with many leading American composers, including Joan Tower, George Perle, and Elliott Carter.

The **Munich Radio Orchestra** was founded in 1952 with the expressed aim of creating an orchestra that could perform the

most challenging “serious music” as well as jazz and lighter popular fare. To that end the orchestra has an enormously varied repertoire that includes opera, operetta, musicals, popular compositions, rarely heard symphonic works, film music, and symphonic jazz. Over the course of a busy and varied concert and recording schedule, the orchestra has performed with such noted artists as Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, Lalo Shifrin, Grady Tate, and Bobby McFerrin and has appeared in both traditional concert settings such as the Salzburg Culture Festival at the Vienna Music Association and at the Lucienne and Zurich jazz festivals.

Production Notes

Publishing:

All music published by L. K. Music

Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra: produced and engineered by Peter Urban and Wolfgang Schreiner, for Bayerische Rundfunk, in Munich, March 1995.

All other titles were produced and recorded by Adam Abeshouse at LeFrak Concert Hall, Queens College, September 1997 and August 1998.

This compact disc was made possible through a grant from the City University of New York, PSC-CUNY Research Awards Program.