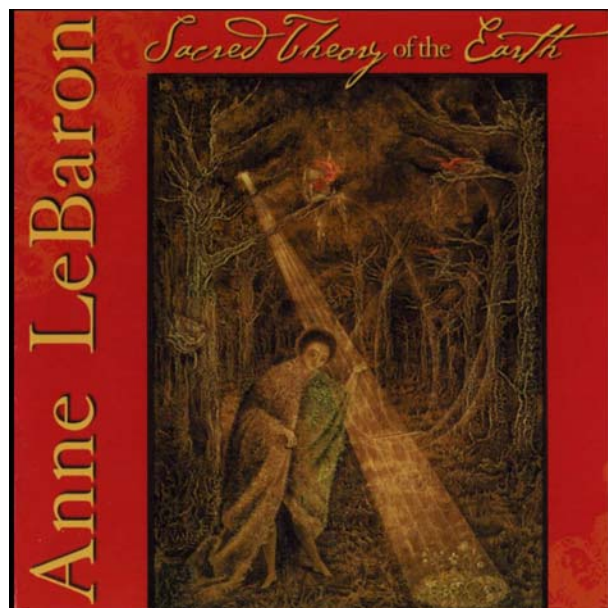


NWCR865

Anne LeBaron

Sacred Theory of the Earth



1. *Devil in the Belfry* for violin and piano (1993) ... (11:09)
Paula Peace, piano; Christopher Pulgram, violin
 2. *Solar Music* for flute and harp (1997) (7:22)
Amy Porter, bass flute, alto flute, flute, piccolo;
Anne LeBaron, harp
- Telluris Theoria Sacra* for flute, clarinet, violin, viola,
cello, piano, and percussion (1990) (29:26)
3. I. Sea Horse Tails: Introduction (7:46)
 4. II. Strange Attractors: Waltz (5:11)
 5. III. The Devil's Polymer: Arabesque (9:52)
 6. IV. Vortex Trains: Tarantella / Albedos:
Lauda / Gravothermal Collapse: Epilogue (6:37)
Atlanta Chamber Players: Paula Peace,
piano; Amy Porter, flute, piccolo; Ted
Gurch, clarinet, bass clarinet; Christopher
Pulgram, violin; Paul Murphy, viola; Brad
Ritchie, cello; Michael Cebulski, percussion;
John Lawless, percussion; David
Rosenboom, conductor
 7. *Sachamama* for alto flute and tape (1995) (12:46)
Amy Porter, flute

Total playing time: 53:59

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Notes

“We think him a better Artist that makes a Clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the Springs and Wheels which he puts in the work, than he that hath so made his Clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike.”

—*Reverend Thomas Burnet*, *Telluris Theoria Sacra*

In 1681, when time-keeping devices occupied the peak of Europe’s technological achievement, Thomas Burnet published his *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, which posits God as the great clockmaker. Burnet’s creator sets his planet on an automatic course that entails not only measured stasis but also natural catastrophe and eventual annihilation—all as stages of God’s “Order of Things.” When first published, this theory provoked considerable debate and was widely derided. But from a twentieth-century perspective, informed by evolution and chaos theory, Burnet now seems prescient.

Burnet’s *Theoria* appeared just when European musicians were reducing the ambiguities of earlier rhythmic practices to the neatly packaged meters that still largely prevail. The characteristics of the clock thus came to music and swept away the multi-leveled hierarchies around since the fourteenth century *Ars Nova*. Yet, if the steady pulsation of standard metric structures provides a degree of security, it also restricts our ways of experiencing time.

Burnet’s cosmology serves as inspiration for one of Anne LeBaron’s most complex compositions. But her *Telluris Theoria Sacra* also points to LeBaron’s more pervasive interest in music’s ability to shape our perception of time: all four chamber works on this CD immerse us in a sound world where time variously bends, stands still, dances, or conforms

to the mechanical measure of the clock. Although the pieces do not sound much like each other, they share a quality LeBaron characterizes as “surreal.” Throughout her music, fragments of everything from Peruvian folk tunes to medieval hymns, waltz rhythms, or Baroque masses appear suddenly in alien, rigorously constituted contexts, rather like Dali watches draped over branches in arid landscapes. Indeed, the figure of the ticking watch—that tyrannical synchronizer of daily life—returns repeatedly in her compositions, sometimes intact, sometimes melting precipitously down into more elastic modes of being, and sometimes thrown off course by snippets of referential whimsy.

Devil in the Belfry (1993) draws its conception from a droll story by Edgar Allen Poe. Poe’s narrator, a fussy budget scholar, takes us to Vondervotteimittiss, a Dutch borough where citizens fastidiously regulate all aspects of their lives in accordance with the town’s clock. One day, however, a “foreign-looking young man” arrives with a huge violin, climbs into the belfry, and causes the clock to strike thirteen. As the town falls into disarray, the devil celebrates with his fiddle, “at which he was scraping out of all time and tune, with both hands, making a great show, the nincompoop! of playing ‘Judy O’Flannagan and Paddy O’Raferty.’” Poe makes the fiddler the satanic element in the story, yet he depicts the lives of his villagers as so rigid that the chaos unleashed by the outsider qualifies as liberation. In so doing, Poe signals the dehumanizing effect of modernity’s fixation on time-keeping mechanisms—the real demon of his tale.

LeBaron echoes Poe’s tale by juxtaposing rigid clockwork figurations with other ways of structuring life. Just as Poe

introduces his violin-playing trickster into an orderly Dutch town, so LeBaron injects “time rebels”—snatches of Eastern European waltzes, Irish jigs, jazz, and tango—into the mix, thus unsettling deliciously the obsessive regimentation of the surroundings. Written for piano and violin, *Devil in the Belfry* weaves unpredictably between the hyper-efficiency of today’s technological habits and the periodic rhythms of human cultures and the earth itself.

Devil in the Belfry was commissioned by the McKim Fund of the Library of Congress and was premiered by the St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble at the National Academy of Sciences, on November 19, 1993.

Solar Music (1997) introduces us into an exquisitely lush soundscape, unencumbered by grids measuring either duration or pitch. The title refers to a painting by Remedios Varo (a female Mexican surrealist) that depicts a woman bowing the rays of the sun. To simulate this effect, LeBaron instructs the harpist and flutist (who plays four flutes of varying registers) to employ a range of extended techniques including bent pitches, key glides, and bowed strings. Time seems to hover like intense afternoon heat in this environment of delicate sonorities and sporadic rhythms. Recalling Japanese court music, Debussy, Cowell, Partch, and Crumb, *Solar Music* revels in the sensuous and in the capacity of music to make palpable new realms of pleasure.

Solar Music was commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and the premiere, performed by Camilla Hoitenga and Alice Giles, took place at the Berlin Philharmonic Kammermusiksaal in April 1997.

As mentioned above, the intricate structure of *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1990) was inspired by Thomas Burnet’s treatise, which traces Earth’s history through seven phases. LeBaron compresses these phases into a series of four movements for seven players (flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, percussion, piano); she generates from Burnet’s different modes of material and temporal existence her own interlocking set of pitch-class relationships and configurations of time. Written as her dissertation, *Telluris Theoria Sacra* is LeBaron’s most ambitiously formal composition, yet it speaks as clearly and dramatically as the shorter works on this album. Like them, it makes imaginative use of a continuum between eclectic reference and abstract organization (many of the movements receive their titles from higher mathematics and physics).

Movement I reflects the first two of Burnet’s phases. LeBaron’s free-form opening, titled *Sea Horse Tails*, joins the celebrated depictions by Haydn, Schoenberg, and Milhaud of the Chaos the preceded Creation. According to Burnet, chaos eventually resolves into what he describes as smooth, concentric layers. To reflect this stage, the second half of Movement I, *Opalescence*, unfolds as a seventh-century passacaglia, which subjects an ostinato pattern to multileveled variation. If the organizing principles of *Sea Horse Tails* remain purposely concealed, the dance rhythms of *Opalescence* make evident a gradual emergence into order.

Burnet’s third phase, a great flood, receives its own movement, *Strange Attractors*. Using material extrapolated from mathematical representations of feedback loops, LeBaron composes her flood as a waltz. She writes: “A flood results from a type of feedback activity: the evaporation of water from the earth’s surface which returns to the earth in the form of precipitation. In quite another sense, a waltz, a dance in which two people embrace, implies entirely different forms of feedback. The strong triple rhythm of a waltz also embodies a sense of roundness or circularity, an inherent

characteristic of the feedback principle.” Thus, instead of aligning the flood with destruction, LeBaron invites us to contemplate this phase as a moment of self-sufficient plenitude.

Burnet’s fourth phase, the creation of our own Earth, appears as Movement III, *The Devil’s Polymer* (a mathematical term designating “a delicate, web-like filigree [that binds] every floating molecule within the image to all the rest”). Whereas other phases of Burnet’s natural history operate according to a homogeneous principle (flood, fire), our globe, with its “cracked crust,” incorporates both water and continents of dry land. In this movement, LeBaron works with the free form of the arabesque, and her fantasia of earthly existence includes both intricate, abstract patterning and jazzy rhythms.

Movement IV brings us full circle from destruction by fire to a new stasis of smooth and concentric layers, and then to the conversion of the planet into a star. Most unusual in this movement is the emergence, after a fiery tarantella, of a *lauda*, a devotional song from medieval Italy, used here to symbolize relief from the destructive conflagration. The movement leads to an ecstatic apotheosis and a quick collapse back into chaos.

Telluris Theoria Sacra was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts for a consortium of performers—the Theater Chamber Players, the New Music Consort, and the Atlanta Chamber Players—and was premiered by the Theater Chamber Players at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., on March 31, 1990, with Joel Lazar conducting.

The title of the CD’s final selection, *Sachamama* (1995), refers to a serpent found in Peruvian mythology—a spirit that offers protection but also causes storms and devours those who intrude into its jungle. In this piece, LeBaron makes use of Harry Bertoia’s custom-built sound sculptures (which operate something like wind chimes) and also of Peruvian traditional song and even a fragment of a Gloria by the seventeenth-century Mexican composer Manuel de Stuyama. Over the course of *Sachamama*, an edited tape of Bertoia’s eerie sound sculptures coexists with the human sounds of folk melody and the long-forgotten strains of Baroque Catholicism. Underneath the traces of colonial rule and indigenous culture, the unknowable Sachamama patiently bides its time.

Sachamama was commissioned and premiered by Stefani Starin at Merkin Hall, NYC, on March 30th, 1995.

My epigraph quotes Burnet’s praise for a creator who “makes a Clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the Springs and Wheels which he puts in the work.” Burnet’s deity operates rather like a serialist composer—like someone who might write a piece called *Marteau sans maitre*. LeBaron’s music testifies to her skill with the clockwork aspects of twentieth-century composition, but its charm results from the incessant meddling with the works. If Burnet scorns “he that hath so made his Clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike,” Poe reminds us that life need not follow the dictates of science. And like the devil in the belfry, LeBaron exercises the right to disrupt the pure order of her proceedings, to interpolate quotations and instances of sheer beauty. Therein lies her artistry.

—Susan McClary, 2000

Anne LeBaron (b. Baton Rouge, LA, 30 May 1953), a composer and musician at the forefront of innovation, is recognized for her work in the electronic, instrumental, and performance realms. Her compositions address an extraordinary array of subjects, ranging from Greek and South

American myths, to environmental degradation and cultural obsolescence. Her latest dramatic musical work, *Croak (The Last Frog)*, tells the story of the last frog on earth. *Going Going Gone*, a work in progress for speaking string quartet, takes a humorous approach to once ubiquitous objects now fading from use, such as typewriters and carbon paper.

LeBaron studied with György Ligeti in Germany as a Fulbright Scholar in 1980–1981, then completed her doctorate in composition at Columbia University. Her works have been performed and broadcast throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia; recent performances have been presented in cities as diverse as Prague, Hong Kong, Sydney, Berlin, Havana, Kyoto, and Talloires. Her numerous awards and prizes include a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, a Fromm Foundation Commission, and the 1996 CalArts/Alpert Award in the Arts. The Pennsylvania State Council on the Arts awarded her a fellowship for the year 2000.

Prior to joining the faculty of the music department at the University of Pittsburgh in 1996, LeBaron was based in Washington, D.C. In 1993, she was one of six composers selected to inaugurate the New Residencies program sponsored by Meet the Composer. She currently is completing two major projects that will premiere in the fall of 2000. *Pope Joan*, a joint production commissioned by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and Dance Alloy, will be based on poems by Enid Shomer, depicting events in the papacy of Pope Joan, who disguised herself as a man and served as Pope (according to legend) from 853 to 855. *Continental Harmony*, a nationwide project supported by the American Composers Forum, has placed one composer in each state of the union to collaboratively write a new work for the state of Mississippi, involving a chamber orchestra, rap artists, two performance artists/poets, children from area schools, and the Tougaloo Concert College Choir. LeBaron's activities will be the subject of a PBS broadcast in the spring of 2001.

The range of LeBaron's compositional language can be heard on two Mode recordings featuring her music. A Tellus/Mode coproduction includes the first work written for the Lyon and Healy electric harp, as well as selections from her blues opera, a collaboration with Thulani Davis called *The E. & O. Line*. An earlier recording, *Rama, Ritual, and Revelations*, with the

New Music Consort and the Theater Chamber Players of Kennedy Center, highlights works from the 1980s. This recording received the highest rating given by *Down Beat*.

An accomplished harpist, LeBaron is recognized internationally for her pioneering work in developing extended techniques and electronic enhancements for the harp. She performed *Solar Music*, her work for flute and harp, in Prague at the 1999 World Harp Congress, where she also presented a lecture/demonstration describing notations for her original harp techniques. Leading innovators of jazz and other forms of improvised music, including Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, and Derek Bailey, have engaged her in performance and recording collaborations.

The **Atlanta Chamber Players**, now entering their second quarter century, continue their acknowledged track record of excellence and innovation in performance and presentation. The ensemble's core of piano, violin, and cello is regularly augmented by guest winds, strings, brass, and vocalists. Their repertoire ranges from the traditional masterpieces of Brahms and Beethoven to the contemporary classics of Crumb and Shostakovich. Commissions from them have resulted in world premieres of works by John Harbison, David Amram, Jonathan Kramer, Anne LeBaron, Bruce MacCombie, Edmund Trafford, and Thomas Ludwig. During the past twenty-five seasons, the Atlanta Chamber Players have given critically acclaimed national debut performances throughout the country, including at New York's Merkin Concert Hall, Boston's Charles River Concert Series, Charleston's Spoleto Festival, the Cincinnati Composers' Guild, and Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art and Phillips' Collection. In 1979 the Atlanta Chamber Players were one of the first ensembles to participate in Chamber Music America's three-year C. Michael Paul Residency Program. The group began a thirteen-part series of hour-long live radio programs that are being broadcast statewide on the fourteen stations of the Peach State Public Radio Network. The Atlanta Chamber Players have recordings available on the ACA Digital, Press Avant, and Leonardo labels. In addition to residency performances at Georgia State University since 1991, the group continues a multifaceted residency at Kennesaw State University, begun in 1996.

Production Notes

Executive producer: Anne LeBaron; coproducer: Paula Peace. Recording engineer: Robert S. Thompson; assistant recording engineers: Nicholas Demos, Scott McKee. Mastered by Jeremy Zuckerman, Digital Impulse Mastering, Los Angeles. *Devil in the Belfry* and *Solar Music* were recorded May 22, 1999, at Georgia State University Recital Hall, and edited by Ben Milstein. *Sachamama* was recorded May 21, 1999, at Georgia State Electronic Music Studios, and edited by Robert S. Thompson. *Telluris Theoria Sacra* was recorded May 2, 1998, at Georgia State University Recital Hall, and was mixed by Ben Milstein and edited by Joachim Gossman.

Publishing:

Devil in the Belfry, *Solar Music*, and *Sachamama*: Golden Croak Music (BMI).

Telluris Theoria Sacra: Norruth Music (BMI division of MMB Music).