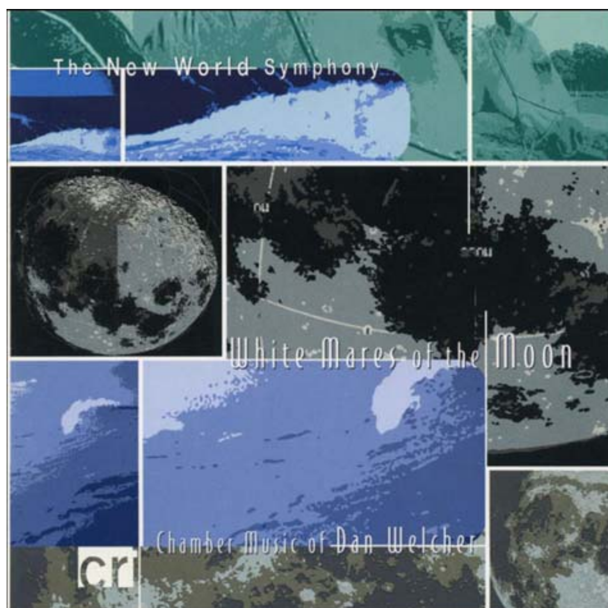
NWCR881

White Mares of the Moon

Chamber Music of Dan Welcher



1. *Tsunami* for cello, percussion and piano (1991) . (10:50)
   Erica Wise, cello; Marc Damoulakis, percussion; Mark Griffith, percussion; Michael Linville, piano

Phaedrus for clarinet, violin and piano (1995) ... (16:26)

2. Apollo's Lyre (Invocation & Hymn) .... (9:21)
3. Dionysus' Dream-Orgy (Ritual Dance) .... (7:05)
   Bharat Chandra, clarinet; Jason Horowitz, violin; Joshua Nemith, piano

Partita for horn, violin and piano (1979) .... (19:44)

4. Prologue .... (4:22)
5. Nocturne .... (3:39)
6. Intermezzo .... (4:18)
7. Aria .... (3:48)
8. Toccata .... (3:37)
   Kimberly Penrod, horn; Shalini Vijayan, violin; Michael Linville, piano

9. *Dante Dances* (Danzi d'Inferno) for clarinet and piano (1995) .... (13:31)
   - Introduction: The Gates of Hell
   - Tango (for Charon)
   - Charleston (for Cerberus)
   - Polka (for the Furies)
   - Gymnopédie (for Paolo & Francesca)
   - Schottische (for Ulysses)
   - Tarantella (for Gianni Schicchi)

   Bharat Chandra, clarinet; Michael Linville, piano

Sonatina for Solo Piano (1972) .... (10:02)

10. Vigoroso .... (:58)
11. Lento .... (4:44)
12. Presto .... (2:20)
    Joshua Nemith, piano

13. *White Mares of the Moon* for flute and Harp (1986) .... (8:41)
    Valerie Chermiset, flute; Deanne van Rooyen, harp

Total playing time: 79:14

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Notes

Critic Royal S. Brown, writing in *High Fidelity* in 1974, called Dan Welcher "one of the most promising American composers I have heard." Welcher has been steadily fulfilling that promise ever since. With over eighty works to his credit, more than half of which are published, Welcher has written in virtually every medium, including opera, oratorio, concerto, symphony, wind ensemble, vocal literature, piano solos and various kinds of chamber music. Also a highly respected conductor, Welcher has made guest appearances with a number of leading professional orchestras and ensembles in the United States and was for ten years assistant conductor of the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

Dan Welcher (*b* Rochester, NY, 2 March 1948) has won numerous awards and prizes from institutions such as the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Reader's Digest/Lila Wallace Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Meet The Composer, the MacDowell Colony, the Corporation at Yaddo, the American Music Center, and ASCAP. His orchestral music has been performed by more than fifty orchestras, including the Chicago, St. Louis, and Dallas symphonies. From 1990 to 1993, he was composer-in-residence with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. His list of works includes two wind ensemble pieces completed in 2000; an orchestral work commissioned by the Utah Symphony Orchestra entitled *Zion*, premiered in Salt Lake City in September 1999; an overture entitled *Spumante*, commissioned by the Boston Pops (and premiered by that orchestra under its music director, Keith Lockhart, in May 1998); an oboe concerto entitled *Venti di Mare* premiered in February 1999 by oboist John Snow with the Rochester Philharmonic under Peter Bay; and *JFK: The Voice of Peace*, an hour-long oratorio for narrator, solo cello, chorus and orchestra, premiered by the Handel & Haydn Society Orchestra and Chorus, with cellist Paul Tobias and narrator David McCullough, in March 1999. Dan Welcher holds the Lee Hage Jamail Regents Professorship in composition at The University of Texas at Austin.

Tsunami (1991)

The unusual combination of cello, percussion and piano seems more incongruous than it actually sounds. When I first heard the ensemble Aequalis, in a full evening program, I was astonished at the combination of lyricism, pulse and color . . . something about the mix causes the cello to sound marimba-like, the vibraphone to imitate the cello's harmonics and the piano to become a kind of proto-orchestra of colors and effects.

Tsunami was written for Aequalis in the summer and fall of 1991, with the assistance of a grant from Chamber Music America. The title, the Japanese word for "tidal wave" (which

is a misnomer–tsunamis have nothing to do with the tides), refers to the phenomenon of an undersea disturbance causing a huge wall of water to flood the first land in its path. The initial earthquake or volcanic eruption that sends a seismic shock through the water is invisible—it's only when that shock wave hits land, recoils and takes ocean swells back with it that the "wave" begins to form. In successive landings, recoilings and re-landings, this force finally spends itself, usually inundating anything in its path, sometimes to a depth of 100 feet or more.

My piece does not attempt to depict this natural cataclysm—how could it, with three instruments?—but the form of the first half of the work is based on it. The initial percussive "shock" that opens the piece creates a stir, in the form of a cello motive marked "swelling" and employing long *portamenti* pushing upwards. After a second shock, the cello motive begins an undersea journey—very slow and lyrical at first, accompanied by non-pitched percussion only. Eventually the piano joins, first with echoing bass notes, then with a rather mechanical motive high on the keyboard. This force grows, the cello line climbs higher and higher, until another double-shock is heard—perhaps the energy has hit land? Following this, the percussion becomes melodic (marimba), and we now have two lines in canon accompanied by a separate line in the piano. This, too, builds to a climax, and an even louder and more vigorous shock results. Now the texture is a three-way canon, with cello, vibraphone and piano chasing each other in ever-faster cycles of sound. The height of this is a triple cadenza, in which all three players spend their pent-up energy, one at a time.

The second part of the piece follows after a settling-down and is marked "Dancing." This is a rondo with a recurring theme, heard first in the marimba, and three contrasting sections heard between reiterations of the main tune (the form could be diagrammed A-A-B-A-C-A). The mood is one of joyous kinetic energy, with elements of Eastern or Balinese gamelan sounds and employing several pentatonic scales (as does the first half of the work). It ends in a vigorous, stomping dance.

Phaedrus (1995)

I became interested in the work of Plato through my friend and collaborator, the writer and philosopher Paul Woodruff. Paul's new translation, with Alexander Nehamas, of the *Symposium* gave me insights into ancient Greek ways of thinking about Love, Beauty and Wisdom—and managed to keep the earthy and often bawdy side of it all in full view. But their new translation of Plato's later dialogue *Phaedrus* went even further: the beauty of the speeches is breathtaking, and the discourse itself is enough to keep one awake at night.

Basically, the Great Speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* dialogue has to do with the place of Eros in the world and with the conflict in the soul between fleshly pleasure and philosophic discovery. I will not attempt to encapsulate this brilliant discourse in a program note: suffice to say that reading it gave rise to my two-sided work for clarinet, violin and piano, *Phaedrus*. The first movement represents the Philosophic life and is thus subtitled "Apollo's Lyre (Invocation and Hymn)." It begins with an unaccompanied melody for the clarinet that (after a pair of harp-like flourishes for the piano) expands into an accompanied canon. The voices in the dialogue (clarinet and violin) follow each other by a prescribed number of beats, but the music is totally devoid of any meter at all. The piano, representing the lyre, accompanies this lyric love-feast with repeated "strummed" chords. The canon has three large sections and ends with the violin echoing the unaccompanied clarinet invocation as the sound of the lyre fades.

The second movement, called "Dionysus' Dream-Orgy (Ritual Dance)," presents, after a brief introduction, another kind of unmetered music. Rather than long lyric flights of philosophic song, however, this time we hear a unison dance of unbridled energy and sensual transport. The piece soon takes a loose arch form, with contrasting metered dance sections divided by the unison unmetered "orgy" tune. Midway through the movement, Apollo's melody returns from the first movement, but it is a temporary reminiscence. The orgiastic dance returns, reaches a climax and ends with a stomping of feet.

While Plato asserts that a proper balance between lust and reason is necessary in all men, he (naturally) gives the nod to Philosophy as the better choice in which to live. Not so in my music: the two sides are meant to coexist and to complement each other. No sides are taken.

Phaedrus was commissioned for the Verdehr Trio by Michigan State University. It is dedicated to the Verdehr Trio with great affection and admiration.

Partita (1979)

My Partita for horn, violin and piano was commissioned by Michael and Lenore Hatfield, hornist and violinist respectively. This combination of instruments has been used by more than a few composers, most notably the ubiquitous Trio in E-flat by Brahms, but also by later composers like Lennox Berkeley. In terms of tone color, it offers a very strange combination of sounds—the sonorous depth of the modern grand piano, the (in contrast) more airy and more delicate violin, and the rich mellow tones of the horn. How was I to balance these three disparate voices and form a homogeneous ensemble character?

My answer was to capitalize on these dissimilarities and to add a dimension of group psychology. It is no accident that there are few permanently organized professional trios: psychology tells us that three is the worst number for human interactions. With two people, there is either agreement or disagreement. With four or more, various subgroups can co-exist. But with three, more often than not, two of the participants team up, forming a union against the third, who becomes the "odd man out." My Partita presents, in five movements, the various two-against-one or one-against-one combinations possible. The movements are organized in terms of tone color:

Disagreement:

I. Horn vs. Violin and Piano (Prelude)
II. Piano vs. Horn and Violin (Nocturne)
III. Violin vs. Piano (Intermezzo)

Agreement:

IV. Horn and Violin (Aria)
V. Horn, Violin and Piano (Toccata)

The musical language, too, reflects "differences of opinion." The horn's opening recitative, tonally oriented, contrasts sharply with the perky, atonal (in fact, strictly serial) music first presented by violin and piano. These two separate "musics" are the material on which all five movements are based.

In an extra-musical sense, the piece represents a coming-to-grips with the problem of threes. After the participants have tried pairing off in various ways, either eliminating the third party altogether or, at the very most, keeping him in his own musical corner, an argument begins (Toccata). The tonal and serial elements vie for supremacy in all three voices, until the rich E-flat melody of the Aria finds its way over the ostinato. All three players, for the first time, are in excited agreement. This being accomplished, the work ends exuberantly in a hard-won unison statement of the horn's opening motive.

Dante Dances (1995)

The clarinet is not the most diabolical of instruments: traditions dating from the Renaissance give that distinction to the trombone. But composers have known for a long time that the clarinet is the strongest solo instrument in the orchestral wind section, and perhaps for that reason there is a long history of serious virtuoso writing for it. Mozart loved the instrument and wrote two of his very best works for it (the Concerto and the Quintet). Rossini contributed a flashy set of variations, Weber wrote two concerti and several chamber works, and Brahms followed Mozart's example with a Quintet as well as two very late Sonatas. In the twentieth century, the number of clarinet sonatas, trios, quintets and concertos outweighs those for any other solo wind instrument by two to one—in terms of range (both pitch range and dynamic range), flexibility and color, the clarinet can't be equaled by any other wind instrument. And, like Paganini, a good clarinetist can seem somehow possessed by unearthly spirits.

So it made good sense when Bradley Wong approached me for a virtuoso piece for clarinet and piano to "go to the devil" for inspiration. I had already written a clarinet concerto, a clarinet quintet and a trio (with violin and piano)—all rather elegant pieces–so this new piece had to go in other directions. I had been reading Robert Pinsky's excellent new translation of Dante's *Inferno* when the commission came about, and my first thought was "poor Brad: Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here!"

Building on that, I crafted an introduction, theme and variations for clarinet and piano that became a suite of dances, with each dance named for a character found in Dante's journey through the underworld. Each dance uses the same twelve-tone pitch set, but I caution listeners away from note-counting. The music is tonally based and (as one can see from reading the dance forms) not intended to be High Art. The music begins with a cadenza, marked "The Gates Of Hell," and inscribed with the familiar warning against hope—directed, of course, to the soloist. The dances then proceed in the order of Dante's journey, through the concentric circles of Hell that are divided with particular punishments for special sins. First, there is a "Tango" (for Charon, the ferryman across the Styx), which leads directly to a "Charleston" (for Cerberus, the three-headed dog outside the Third Circle of Hell), and reaches a frenzied romp in the form of a Polka (for the Furies). The midpoint of the piece is a stately "Gymnopédie," the Greek ceremonial dance made famous (some say invented) by Erik Satie, named for the two ill-fated lovers Paolo and Francesca da Rimini. The last two dances revive the speed, and further inflame the spirit, as the Poet crosses ever deeper into Hell. First, there is a snappy "Schottische," named for Ulysses, and then a final "Tarantella" for Gianni Schicchi (of course!) in which the slow melody of the "Gymnopédie" returns as a countermelody over the rollicking 6/8 Italian dance.

The diabolical nature of the music began to take over its composer's consciousness: as I was writing the final notes of the "Tarantella," I realized that it was the thirteenth of the month. I decided to check the timing of the completed piece, and found that it lasts about thirteen minutes. There was, indeed, a supernatural power taking an interest in *Dante Dances*. And for those who wonder how nineteenth and twentieth century dance forms can be found in a fifteenth century version of Hell, I can only say that time is eternal. I'm sure that even characters from the fifteenth century who are living in Hell have been exposed, by now, to tangos and charlestons.

Dante Dances is dedicated, with affection and deep sympathy, to Bradley Wong.

Sonatina (1972)

This work was written in 1972 as a celebration piece. I had just completed my enlistment in the U.S. Army, serving as bassoonist and arranger for the U.S. Military Academy Band at West Point, and had also just completed my master of music degree at the Manhattan School of Music. The two "commencements" of civilian life and post-school freedom occurred within weeks of each other, and I experienced a heady rush of creative ideas.

One of my fellow bandsmen was pianist Bradford Gowen, who later won the first Kennedy Center/ Rockefeller Foundation prize and went on to a stellar career (he now teaches at the University of Maryland). He had suggested the idea of a piano piece to include on his concerts, and as we had spent more than a few hours between parades playing piano four-hands, I knew his brand of pianism quite well. The Sonatina was born of his musical initials, B-flat and G.

The first movement exploits the falling minor third in the first theme and the rising minor third in the second. Cast in the classical sonatina form of exposition (complete with repeat), very small development and recapitulation with coda, this movement is marked *vigoroso*. The second movement, which is twice the length of the first, is a passacaglia with five variations. The theme is twelve bars long, in which the first six bars are inverted to form the second six—a pattern that each of the variations also maintains. The theme itself is, again, born of the interval of the falling minor third, but in each successive variation the accompanying material exploits various intervallic and harmonic devices that disguise the theme, culminating in a wide-leaping fourth variation in which all the thirds have become sixths. The movement thins to the same texture as the opening—a kind of pealing of bells on the note F-sharp, ending in a pure major chord. The final movement, marked "presto," is a digital display-piece in rondo form. The ritornello is a rushing theme in sixteenth notes formed of expanding intervals, and all of the successive episodes are made from the same material with changes in rhythm and meter. A surprise "break" in the motion occurs early on, with an augmented motive from the theme that bears a striking resemblance to Sousa . . . perhaps the Army experience had yielded more benefits than I suspected! The movement proceeds through several episodes, Sousa has his last ruffle and flourish, and the Sonatina ends in a rush of double-octaves with B-flat/G having the last word.

White Mares of the Moon (1986)

The American imagist poet Amy Lowell (1874-1925) provided both the title and the substance for this brief descriptive work in her poem "Night Clouds." I had been commissioned by the flute/harp duo Chaski to write a piece that "had a different sound than most flute and harp pieces." The image of these elusive beasts cavorting through the night, before the appearance of the "tiger sun," seemed to me perfectly suited for flute and harp and would give me the chance to write a work for that combination that did NOT have overtones of nymphs and shepherds. I wanted to make much use of the harp's more violent sounds (beating the strings and the soundboard, for instance) as well as its unusual and idiomatic effects, such as pedal glissandi. For the flute, there are "jet-whistle" effects, extremes of register, pitch-bending and other decidedly non-pastoral gestures. The work was composed in 1986.

—Notes by *Dan Welcher*

New World Symphony

Established in 1987 under the artistic leadership of Michael Tilson Thomas, the **New World Symphony**, America's Orchestral Academy, is an intensive, multi-faceted three-year fellowship program that prepares highly gifted graduates of distinguished music programs for leadership positions in orchestras and ensembles throughout the world. Since its inception, more than 450 New World Symphony fellows have launched careers as musicians and educators in professional orchestras, ensembles and arts institutions in this country and abroad. The New World Symphony is an accredited member of the National Association of Schools of Music.

Michael Linville (Producer/Pianist)

Los Angeles native **Michael Linville** is currently director of admissions and coaching associate with the New World Symphony. He is also the artistic coordinator and conductor of the New World Percussion Consort, an ensemble dedicated to the performance of contemporary chamber music featuring percussion. He attended Pepperdine University in Malibu and the University of Southern California as a percussion major and now enjoys a career that also includes piano, harp, conducting and arranging. Linville has performed with the Honolulu Symphony, Pasadena Symphony, Florida Philharmonic and Florida West Coast Symphony.

As a soloist, Linville has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony, New World Symphony, Breckenridge Chamber Orchestra, National Repertory Orchestra and Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra. He has participated in Juin Musicale á Monte Carlo, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Keystone, Breckenridge, Hot Springs and Ojai Music Festivals, Sessione Senese per la Musica in Siena, Italy, and the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara. Linville is featured on the New World Symphony's most recent release for BMG Classics, *New World Jazz*, and is a soloist on Naxos's *A Night in the Tropics–The Music of Gottschalk.*

White Mares of the Moon represents Linville's first work as producer and recording supervisor.

Production Notes

Produced by Michael Linville

Recorded at Florida International University's Wertheim Concert Hall, September 29-30, 2000, in the presence of the composer.

Peter McGrath, recording engineer

Micah Hayes, assistant engineer and editor

All works published by Elkan-Vogel, Inc., a subsidiary of the Theodore Presser Company (ASCAP)