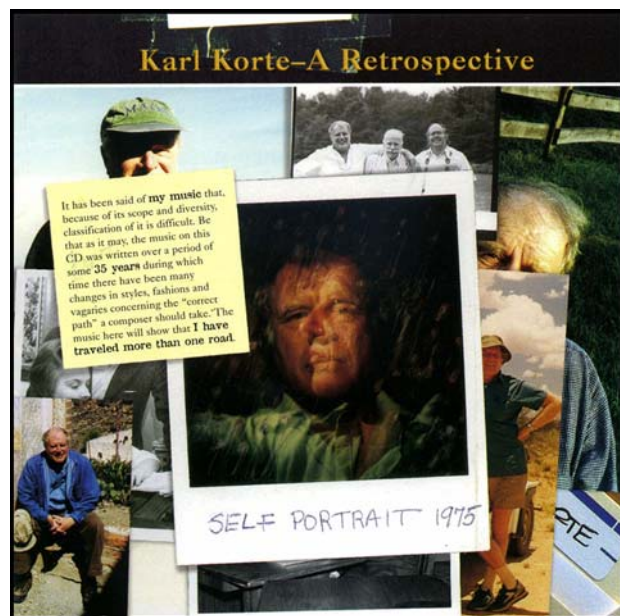


NWCR882

Karl Korte

A Retrospective



1. *Fantasy* for Violin and Piano (1959) (9:46)
Mark Peskanov, violin; Doris Stevenson, piano
2. *Matrix* for woodwind quintet, piano, saxophone and percussion (1968) (15:05)
New York Woodwind Quintet: Samuel Baron, flute; Ronald Roseman, oboe; David Glazer, clarinet; Arthur Weisberg, bassoon; Ralph Froelich, French

horn. With Albert Hamme, saxophone; Raymond DesRoches, percussion; Elizabeth Korte, piano

- Five New Zealand Songs* (1986) (16:22)
3. *Response* (4:00)
 4. *My Mother Spinning* (1:27)
 5. *Judas Iscariot* (2:41)
 6. *My Father Today* (5:19)
 7. *Girl, Boy, Flower, Bicycle* (2:55)
Christine Schadeberg, soprano; Christopher Oldfather, piano
 8. *Symmetrics* for solo saxophone and percussion (1973) (11:50)
Albert Regni, saxophone; University of Texas Percussion Ensemble: Bruce Radek, Mark Singer, Steven Harris, Joe Clark, percussion; George Frock, conductor
- Epigrams* for Solo Piano (1992-1993) (20:50)
9. *Tomorrow* (3:02)
 10. *Lullaby for Leah* (3:38)
 11. *In Memoriam* (4:06)
 12. *Vashti* (3:20)
 13. *Icicles* (3:15)
 14. *Fidgity Funk* (3:29)
Doris Stevenson, piano

Total playing time: 73:59

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Notes

The history of twentieth-century American concert music tends to concentrate on schools of composition and specific cultural centers. The former divides into experimentalists, minimalists, serialists and neo-romantics, to name a few. The latter tends to break down into the East and West Coasts, further refined into New York and California. As a result, a vast body of composers and their work, made by composers in the middle of the country, flies under the critical and historical radar. And that “middle” is more than just geographical. In the Midwest and West, composers (usually affiliated with conservatories or universities) have been deeply aware of currents percolating on both sides of the country, often more so than their counterparts on either coast. These musicians have often been far more open and less self-conscious in their blending of techniques and languages thought incompatible by “true believers.” Their attitude is tolerant and synthetic. Such a composer is Karl Korte.

Korte taught for almost thirty years at the University of Texas at Austin. While his career has been richly recognized on a national basis, above all it is the supportive environment of a core of brilliant student and faculty musician-colleagues that has given him a laboratory in which to pursue his vision. His music mirrors the changing concerns of American composition from mid-century to the present, yet it retains a core of personal expression which is distinct and recognizable.

The composer in his notes state that he has “traveled more than one road.” Of course it’s true. One hears full-blooded, lyrical American neoclassicism in the *Fantasy* for violin and piano, a far more angular and constructivist aesthetic in *Matrix* and *Symmetrics*, and a freer, more eclectic mix of materials in the *Five New Zealand Songs* and *Epigrams*. Yet at the same time, there are commonalities between these works that show the same artist at work, decade after decade. To take but a few examples:

The composer’s early experience in jazz and popular musics emerges in such diverse moments as the jazz licks which take over. *Matrix* near its nine-minute mark, the bluesy intonation of the saxophone in *Symmetrics*, and the gutbucket drag which concludes the “Fidgity Funk” of *Epigrams*.

A love of repeated notes and figures, and the dramatic tensions they create, manifests itself in instances as varied as the recurrent atonal yelps at the five minute mark in *Matrix*, and the repeated note figure which permeates “Tomorrow” from *Epigrams*.

A rich and inclusive harmonic practice can be seen throughout all the pieces on this collection. The romantic tonal harmony of the *Fantasy* sets a standard for beauty and expression that is pursued, no matter what the language. While more “systematic” in its nature, in *Matrix* and

Symmetries the tight motivic organization guarantees that one still hears phrases which have real direction, and an overall sounds which never seems random or coincidental. The *Five New Zealand Songs* are fearless in the way they mix materials; to take a single example, the first is strongly grounded with tonal progressions, but ornamented with a layer of atonal filigree, which is essential to interpreting the meaning of the text. And by the time we reach the *Epigrams*, the range has expanded yet again. "Tomorrow" is a sophisticated remembrance of the composer's initial neoclassical practice.

These pieces use modality freely, Spanish-tinged in "Lullaby for Leah" and Indonesian in "In Memoriam." "Vashti" and "Icicles" incorporate far more chromatic materials. And the aforementioned "Fidgety Funk" is down-and-dirty.

And so, over almost a half-century, Korte has carved out a personal, non-dogmatic body of work which both reflects the trends of the period and places his own personal stamp on them. His career, with its devotion to individual expression and a refusal to accede to any single "ism," is a reminder that those who look only to the traditional centers of musical activity do so at their peril, for they can miss art of genuine substance in the process.

—Robert Carl

It has been said of my music that, because of its scope and diversity, classification of it is difficult. Be that as it may, the music on this CD was written over a period of some thirty-five years during which time there have been many changes in styles, fashions and vagaries concerning the "correct path" a composer should take. The music here will show that I have traveled more than one road.

The *Fantasy* for violin and piano is one of my earliest compositions. I was flattered by its selection for performance at Tanglewood in 1960 and pleased by the generally favorable audience reaction it received at the time. Elsewhere, however, the climate was most definitely not favorable for works of this sort and after encountering rejection and downright hostility from some New York new music performance groups and "new music" record companies, it remained largely unplayed. (I remember a violinist writing to me in the '70s with the message that although he truly liked the piece and wanted to perform it, his application to perform it at a new music competition had been rejected because the jury found the work too "conservative.") If many programmed compositions I've recently heard young composers in any indication, the climate has changed.

After several years with the Ford Foundation Young Composer's Project (the Contemporary Music Project of CMP), during which I wrote much relatively simple music for use by schools and churches, I received an academic appointment at the State University of New York at Binghamton, then Harpur College. It was a remarkable period. At one point, "in-residence appointments" included Jean Casadesu, the Guarneri Quartet, and the New York Woodwind Quintet; *Matrix* for woodwind quintet, saxophone, piano and percussion dates from this period and was first recorded for CRI in 1968. This was a time in which I became interested in exploring serialized pitch relationships. However, I always did so in a rather free and personal manner. In the music from this period of my life, the juxtaposition of divergent or even opposing musical events plays an important role—as Samuel Baron put it, "you turn a corner and discover yourself in a totally unexpected world." The recording of *Matrix* received excellent notices with *Stereo Review* writing "*Matrix* is a

stunning piece," and the *American Record Review* calling it "the substance of real musical matter."

During the twenty-six years I spent as professor composition at the University of Texas at Austin, I wrote many compositions which took advantage of the outstanding faculty performers and high quality student performing groups available at the university. *Symmetries* for solo saxophone and percussion was composed in 1973 for faculty artist Albert Regni and the University of Texas Percussion Ensemble, under the direction of George Frock. It gets its title from a pitch organizational plan that is derived from symmetric hexachords. Since Al Regni is a performer equally home in both the world of classical music and jazz, it was perhaps inevitable that I should ask him to draw upon both worlds. (I have tried to never turn my back on the fact that my early musical experiences were largely in the areas of jazz and popular music.) Many of the derigueur compositional devices of the '70s are present including multiphonics, quarter-tones and "false" fingerings; the later device being used as a "quasi-quote" and tribute to jazz giant Lester Young. *Symmetries* was first recorded on an album entitled *Extended Saxophone*. It too received favorable comment with the *NACWPI Journal* calling it "a captivating experience from the subtle beginning to the fiery conclusion."

In 1985 I received a Fulbright Lectureship to New Zealand. I spent the good part of a year in this beautiful and fascinating country. The experience led to several compositions based upon indigenous sounds from the "land of the long white cloud." (Among them is *Birds of Aotearoa* which is based upon prerecorded bird song and available on the album *Extensions—A Retrospective of Electro-Acoustic Compositions* by Karl Korte on Centaur Records (CRC 2363). On the other hand, the *Five New Zealand Songs* were inspired by the work of five New Zealand poets whose work I came across, quite by accident, in an anthology. These poems touched me greatly. The subjects of love, death, joy, humor and sorrow know no geographic boundaries and the texts were chosen by the simple yet mysterious process familiar to most composers: reading them somehow triggered, perhaps demanded, a musical response. If the style of these songs seems markedly different from that of the previous two works, it is because since the late '70s, I have become less and less tempted by the seduction of "systems," with their promise of liberation from uncertainty, and found myself more and more willing to draw upon what, for want of a better word, can only be described as the intuitive.

My dictionary defines "environment" as "the circumstances of conditions that surround one." The six *Epigrams* for piano heard here are from a series of short works motivated by my surroundings, i.e. grandchildren, memories and a most beloved dog. "Tomorrow," "Lullaby" and "Fidgety Funk" were inspired by three of my grandchildren at various points in their lives; "In Memoriam" is dedicated to the memory of my first wife, Elizabeth, whose superb piano playing can be heard on *Matrix*; looking out my studio window on a cold February day explains "Icicles"; and "Vashti" is a twenty-pound American Eskimo who, at least when she was a puppy, looked and acted very much like a baby seal.

—Karl Korte

Karl Korte, (b Ossining, NY, 25 Aug 1928), spent most of his early years in Englewood, NJ. His first musical influences came from his father, a sculptor born and trained in Germany, who had a love of classical music. However, Korte's first activities as a musician were in the areas of jazz and popular music. After high school graduation he played with the First

Army Band and then attended the Juilliard School, where he studied with Peter Mennin, William Bergsma, and Vincent Persichetti. Later composition teachers include Otto Luening, Goffredo Petrassi, and Aaron Copland. Korte has been awarded a number of significant prizes and awards, including two Guggenheim Fellowships, Fulbright Fellowships to Italy and New Zealand, and a Gold Medal from the Belgian government in the Queen Elizabeth International Competition. His music has a scope and variety that makes classification of it difficult. Orchestral works range from symphonies to pieces for beginning string orchestra; choral works include oratorios and short works for school and the church use. In recent years he has worked on a number of compositions for various instrumental soloists with "extended" accompaniment created by computer. Korte taught at the University of Texas at Austin from 1971 to 1997 and holds the rank of emeritus professor from that institution. From 1997 to 2000 he was a visiting professor at Williams College. His home is now in Cambridge, New York.

Russian-born violinist **Mark Peskanov** has been a guest soloist with the Chicago Symphony; the New York, Los Angeles, and London philharmonics; and the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras, among others. He has appeared regularly at summer festivals in Aspen, Boulder, Grant Park, Tanglewood and the Hollywood Bowl. His most recent engagements include tours with the NHK Orchestra in Japan and with Leonard Slatkin and Wolfgang Sawallisch. Peskanov is music advisor to the Woodstock Mozart Festival in Illinois, where he performs and conducts.

Pianist **Doris Stevenson** has appeared as soloist with the Boston Pops and as collaborative partner with Gregor Piatigorsky, Ruggiero Ricci and other string players. A founding member of the Sitka Summer Music Festival in Alaska, she has played with the Marin MusicFest and Chamber Music Los Angeles. Stevenson served for ten years on the piano faculty of the University of Southern California and is currently artist-in-residence at Williams College in New York.

For over fifty seasons, the **New York Woodwind Quintet** has been a leader in the field of chamber music in the United States and abroad through commissioning new work and transcribing existing classical repertoire. Although none of the members of the Quintet who performed on this recording in 1969 are members today, the Quintet continues with new personnel and activities, including recent performances at the

Norfolk Festival, the Rockefeller Institute, and the Monterey Chamber Music Society. The Quintet has been ensemble-in-residence at the Juilliard School since 1989.

Soprano **Christine Schadeberg** has performed across the United States and Europe and has premiered over 120 works, many of which were written for her. After making her Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center debuts, she has continued her guest appearances with such groups as the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Boston Musica Viva, the Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players, the New York Music Ensemble, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and Speculum Musicae. Schadeberg appears on several CRI releases including Mario Davidovsky's *Romancero* with the ensemble Voices of Change and *Music of Ursula Mamlok*.

Since his recital debut in Carnegie Recital Hall in 1986, pianist **Christopher Oldfather** has appeared with new music groups in New York and abroad. He has been a member of Boston's Collage New Music since 1979 and is known for his performances with the Juilliard String Quartet. A founding member of the Andreas Piano Trio, Oldfather has also appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, the New World Symphony, and Ensemble Modern. His recording of Elliott Carter's *Duo* with violinist Robert Mann was nominated for two Grammy awards in 1990.

As principal saxophonist with the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera and New York City Ballet Orchestras, **Albert Regni** has toured and recorded throughout the world. He has performed with the orchestras of Leningrad, Odessa, St. Petersburg, Israel and Rotterdam, and with Leonard Bernstein, Pablo Casals, Pierre Boulez, and Leopold Stokowski. Regni is a professor of saxophone at the College of New Jersey and is founder of the American Saxophone Quartet. He is recipient of a Gold Record and Grammy recognition for his work on the TV series *Twin Peaks*.

The **University of Texas at Austin Percussion Ensemble** has traveled throughout the Southwest and has appeared in eight states in contemporary music festivals and on the programs of leading state and national music organizations. Its conductor **George Frock** is professor of percussion at the University and is a nationally recognized teacher, performer and composer and percussion repertoire. He has been solo timpanist for the Austin Symphony for more than twenty years and writes regularly for publications of the Percussive Arts Society.

Production Notes

Digital re-mastering and mastering compilation by Adrian Carr, engineer at Adrian Carr Music Designs, New York City, 2001.

Fantasy: Recorded at Town Hall, New York City on June 30, 2000.

Published by E. C. Schirmer Music Co. (ASCAP).

Matrix: originally released on CRI SD 249. Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded (analog) at SUNY Binghamton, NY by Marc Aubort on February 12, 1969.

Published by Knote Press (ASCAP).

Five New Zealand Songs: Recorded at Town Hall, New York City on June 29, 2000.

Published by Knote Press (ASCAP).

Symmetrics: Originally released on CRI SD 431. Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded (analog) in the Recital hall, University of Texas at Austin by Dorothy Ann Leser in 1980.

Published by Seesaw Music Corp. (ASCAP).

Epigrams: Recorded at Town Hall, New York City on June 30, 2000.

Published by Knote Press (ASCAP).