

NWCR889

Kitty Brazelton

Chamber Music for the Inner Ear



- Come Spring!* (1996) (24:25)
1. I Dogwood Petals and Hormones (6:41)
 2. II Miles Through the Upstairs Window (5:45)
 3. III Harmonic fable (6:08)
 4. IV First Second Seder at the Knitting Factory (3:51)
- Manhattan Brass Quintet: Wayne duMaine, trumpet; Kevin Cobb, trumpet; Gregory Evans, horn; Michael Seltzer, trombone; Stephen Foreman, tuba
5. *R* (1989-1998) (6:13)
Lyris Hung, five-string violin; Jay Kauffman, guitar; Kitty Brazelton, voice; Mat Fields, double bass; Danny Tunick, bongos
 6. *Sonar Como Una Tromba Larga* (1998) (10:34)
Chris Washburne, trombone; soundtrack created by Kitty Brazelton at Columbia University Computer Music Studio in 1998.
 7. *Called Out Ol' Texas* (1994) (7:32)
Danny Weiss, alto saxophone; Dan Barrett, cello
- Sonata for the Inner Ear* (1999) (23:18)
8. I Exposition (4:36)
 9. II Development (11:18)
 10. III Recapitulation (5:54)
- California E.A.R. Unit: Dorothy Stone, flute; Marty Walker, bass clarinet; Robin Lorentz, violin; Erika Duke, cello; Vicki Ray, piano, organ, sampler (EAR Unit out-takes); Amy Knoles, extended drum kit; John Magnussen, marimba
- Total playing time: 53:59
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Notes

Entering the Twenty-first Century with Kitty Brazelton

In the quest to discover the music of the twenty-first century, a great place to start is this recording of five works by Kitty Brazelton, even though all of them were composed in the final years of the twentieth century. But just as historians frequently state that the twentieth century really only began in earnest with the onslaught of the First World War, it also ended earlier than expected with the fizzling out of the Cold War, and the subsequent emergence of a world where nothing seems certain any more. If the music of the twentieth century reflected the geopolitics of the twentieth century, with its competing “isms” attempting to overthrow previous notions of how order could be established, then music at the dawn of the twenty-first century is a borderless powder-keg.

Unlike any other new music in the past, this new music of the twenty-first century is being composed as much by women as by men. A deeper plunge into its origins reveals that the seeds for this music were planted during the Women’s Rights movement in the late 1960s, and subsequent emergence of a generation of women composers not beholden to any of the dogmatic principles of twentieth century music, all of which were created by men. Growing up during this empowering time, Kitty Brazelton started jamming, leading bands (as

vocalist and songwriter), and writing chamber music, in the early ’70s.

Brazelton’s subsequent three decades of music-creation demonstrate her ability to bypass the “isms”: her ’70s group Musica Orbis wove medieval plainchant into free jazz, folk song, “George Crumb classical”, and acid rock, while her ’80s band Hide The Babies plumbed arena-rock and heavy-metal for inspiration. Her ’90s nine-piece “rockestra” DADADAH fused charted song-structures with improvisation, while Hildegurlls, her late ’90s re-casting (with fellow women-composer-performers Eve Beglarian, Lisa Bielawa, and Elaine Kaplinsky) of a Hildegard von Bingen morality-play, became a Lincoln Center sensation. Brazelton’s current project, the “digital-chamber-punk band” What Is It Like To Be A Bat?, employs fixed-and real-time computer-generated materials in live performance.

“Music is a living language, spoken between listeners and music-makers,” Brazelton says. “Like any language, despite the solidifying effect of notation and recordings, music evolves. We don’t segregate our increasingly multilingual music-listening, and we can’t primly parse-out our music-making, either. We can’t say what needs to be said in languages that no longer reflect the way we live.”

For Kitty Brazelton and other composers of her generation and beyond, there is no longer an uptown or a downtown, no hermetically-sealed classical music and must-be-shied-away-from pop music; and there's no longer a clear dividing line between the irrefutable will of a composer, and the dutiful obeisance of a performer. Brazelton, like many of these new composers, is a composer-performer, and equally at home writing a string quartet or playing in a punk rock band.

Kyle Gann describes the music of these composers as "totalist", since it embraces the totality of music-making possibilities. Another appellation, "twenty-first century schizoid music", implies the unpredictability and volatility of this multiple-personality music. In true schizoid fashion, this music can appear in many guises, as it does in the five works on this disc, which range from an experimental duo for the unlikely combination of cello and alto sax, to a multi-movement suite for a standard classical brass quintet, that is ultimately unlike anything else in the brass quintet literature.

Brazelton composed *Come Spring!* for the Manhattan Brass Quintet in 1996, after MBQ-hornist Greg Evans, while subbing in Brazelton's DADADAH, asked her what her "serious" music was like. In response she created a work that somehow blends ingredients from Morton Feldman, James Brown, Howard Hanson, Miles Davis, Janis Joplin, and even Elliott Carter, into a sound world entirely her own.

In Brazelton's description of the "riff-centric" first movement, "Dogwood Petals & Hormones," she ponders, "why doesn't the rock world recognize a wall of brass is as hormonal as a Marshall stack?" "Dogwood Petals & Hormones" is an exuberant answer to that question, featuring the brass instruments in contours that run the gamut from psychedelic-trip-out harmonic ambiguity, to heavy-metal unison blaring.

The "groove-centric" tripartite second movement, "Miles Through an Open Window," begins with an intense extended-technique French horn solo called *what you think you might be hearing*, which Brazelton, in characteristic polyglot fashion, describes as a "funk haiku" in the score. It leads directly into *when you were sure it WAS what you heard*, in which short polyrhythmic bursts, from the other four brass players, come across as a West-African tuned-drum ensemble, against the wailing of the horn, which Brazelton in the score requests to sound like a snare drum. In the concluding sections, *hearing it again later in your mind*, the horn and tuba are literally transformed into percussion instruments: the players are instructed to quietly tap their nails on the resonant part of their instruments' bells.

The "voice-centric" third movement "Harmonic Fable," which is also tri-partite, merges a bebop-like riff with a majestic contrapuntal setting of the Gregorian hymn *Pange Lingua*. Lest we be misled by this sudden incursion of medieval spirituality, Brazelton, a self-described "twenty-first century infidel," labels the three inner sections *animism*, *the rise of the church* and *we shoot the moon and return to our keen animal state*.

Brazelton describes the "party-centric" final movement, "First Second Seder at the Knitting Factory," as "a rave-up in the truly punky attitude of New York City". The title is a reference to the Manhattan alternative-music club, originally located on Houston Street, between SoHo and the East Village. In 1994-96, club owner Michael Dorf threw annual Second Seder feasts for the musician-community, who helped tear down the walls that divided various genres of music throughout the twentieth century. The movement combines jazz-like improvisation with strictly-notated polyrhythms, culminating in a euphoric group scream (MBQ's idea).

R, completed in its current incarnation in 1998, has gone through multiple compositional transformations. The original idea dates back to a 1987 MIDI computer improvisation sounding like "stream-of-consciousness run-on sentences." When Brazelton played it for the lead guitarist of her then-band Hide The Babies, he was mystified, since it was unlike any of the tightly-scripted ABABCBBB rock-songs she had been writing. Seven years later, Brazelton morphed the piece into a Serenade for viola, guitar and bongos, premiered by Jay Kaufmann, at Roulette, with Gregor Kitzis and Steven Swartz, in 1994. After the premiere, still unsatisfied, Brazelton doubled some of the voicings in the score, adding a double-bass to deepen the guitar, and a textless vocal line, which she sings on the present recording, making the viola-melody (played here by Lyris Hung on a five-string violin) more haunting and mysterious. The result comes across as a bizarre, half-dreamed, lullaby, half-way between the magic realism of Claude Vivier and the surreal exotica of Yma Sumac.

Sonar Como Una Tromba Larga (To Sound Like a Great Water-tornado), for trombone and tape, was created in 1998 expressly for a founding member of Brazelton's DADADAH, the multifaceted Chris Washburne, whose musical passions include Latin jazz and complex, microtonal, contemporary scores. As a result, this musical answer to what would happen if a Vulcan mind-meld were performed on Mario Davidovsky and Willie Colón, is filled with quarter-tones, angular phrases, glissandos, squeals, and salsa-like rhythms. The tape part was created at Columbia University Computer Music Center, from the sounds of Chris playing the trombone, as well as his in-between-playing commentary, and even the sound of his breathing (which is electronically transformed into an extraordinarily beautiful chordal sequence at the very beginning of the piece). The result is a four-dimensional sonic-portrait of Washburne, one of today's most vital musicians.

Called Out Ol' Texas (1994) is an anagram of "alto sax cello duet". Created for another DADADAHan, saxophonist Danny Weiss, to prove that "these two instruments and their performance practices could coexist in the New World," *Called Out Ol' Texas* is the most conceptually-oriented piece on this disc. Based on four core interactive visual models—a circle pierced by a ray; a figure in a square ground; interlocking angles; and homogenous and heterogeneous lines—the score uses George Crumb-like experimental notation, arranged on the page visually rather than traditionally, to encourage an intuitive approach that actually conveys these four visual images. The resulting "comprov" (a term Brazelton borrowed from composer and friend Butch Morris, whose music blurs the line between composition and improvisation) is an exciting interplay of contrasting ideas, enhanced by the unusual timbral combination of cello and saxophone.

Figures: 1. circle pierced by ray

2. figure in a square ground

3. interlocking angles

4. homogenous and heterogeneous lines

Each interaction is dual: the circle and the ray, the figure and the square, the upper and lower angles, and the two different lines. Sax and cello take turns playing each of the roles, trading during interlocking angles, where the roles are symmetric and interchangeable.

Sonata for the Inner Ear, a three-movement octet composed in 1999 for the Los Angeles-based, totalist, music ensemble California E.A.R. Unit, and premiered by them at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, is a deconstructive homage to classical sonata form. Brazelton describes the work, scored for flute, bass clarinet, violin, cello, marimba, expanded

drum set, and two keyboardists performing on piano, electric organ, and sampler, as a “triptych offering a trilateral view of a large oceanic instrumental group, as it makes its way through the musical plankton, or micro-nutrients, of two musical motives.” The three movements—Exposition, Development, and Recapitulation—can be played in sequence, with or without pauses, or separately as stand-alone pieces.

“Exposition” begins with a Bartókian theme, initially played by the flute that grows into ensemble-polyrhythms. A frenetic chain of sextuplets dissolves into a concertino-like piano passage, evocatively described in the score as “rabbit ragtime”, which eventually ushers in a quadruple-forte metrically-shifting *organum*, the bridge and energy center of the entire movement. A quiet jazz-like bass clarinet emerges from the entire ensemble at full blast, drawing the movement to a riveting conclusion.

“Development” incorporates semi-improvised solos by each of the players, in various instrumental combinations. Opening with an unaccompanied drum-set improvisation, the movement’s tension then shifts, for a violin improvisation, with a fully-notated accompaniment from the drum-set and the keyboards, followed by an accompanied bass clarinet improvisation, introducing the cello and marimba. An electric-organ improv, reminiscent of Procol Harum, and other late ’60s proto-prog rock bands, dissolves into a “rabbit ragtime” piano-cadenza—homage to the late jazz pianist Don Pullen. Two short fugues surround an intense unison run, between the marimba and drum set that ought to move fans of the Mahavishnu Orchestra to the edge of their seats. A mostly-notated cello solo, filled with agitated multi-stops, is ultimately succeeded by a peaceful flute solo embellished with improvised whistle-tones.

“Recapitulation” opens with an improvised solo for sampler, featuring samples drawn from the California E.A.R. Unit’s out-takes, which creates a historical portrait of the group. The remainder of the movement, following true sonata form, reintroduces the themes established in “Exposition,” but slightly altered. Comments in the score, such as “Mislead your audience: cross the wrong bridge—or is it?”, reveal the fun Kitty Brazelton must have had composing this.

Philip Glass has said that, while in the past you’d always know what to expect from a so-called “new music” concert, nowadays anything is possible. In the new “new music,” the infectious pulses of minimalism are reconciled with the angularities of serialism, the rigors of old-fashioned counterpoint co-exist with the spontaneity of improvisation and indeterminacy, and the catchy tunes and grooves of rock are woven into a musical language that is too unsettling to be dismissed as crossover. This is the music of “post-post-modernism”, where elements from different sources are no longer pitted against each other to create new contexts, but rather where elements from different sources are absorbed as equally valid parameters within a new, larger, musical thesaurus. Kitty Brazelton’s music is essential to defining our twenty-first century lexicon.

—Frank J. Oteri

Frank J. Oteri is a New York-based composer, and the editor of *NewMusicBox*, the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award-winning web-magazine from the American Music Center (www.newmusicbox.com)

Kitty Brazelton rejoices in the keener expression she gets by infusing vernacular American dialects into deep, complex structures. She leads exploded rock bands (her second CD with the nonet DADADAH, *Love Not Love Lust Not Lust*, was hailed by Rolling Stone as an “album of impressive nerve”),

and she composes dynamic orchestral works (*Sleeping Out Of Doors* [1998], her piano concerto commissioned and premiered by conductor Kristjan Järvi’s Absolute Ensemble, featured electric bass and amplified classical guitar). Her full-length opera, *Fireworks*, commissioned by American Opera Projects, concerns an extraterrestrial discovering the Fourth of July, and incorporates Caribbean rhythmic motifs, R&B, and classic recitative. Brazelton’s chamber music ranges from the NYSCA-commissioned cyber-punk fantasia *5 dreams, marriage* (premiered by her unique quartet What Is It Like To Be A Bat?, at Sound Symposium 2000, in Newfoundland), to innovative works such as *The Day Goes By... (requiem for 9/11)* (2001), for the Philadelphia octet Relache.

Brazelton’s current professorship at Bennington College, as well as her prior teaching tenures as BMI composer-in-residence at LaGuardia High School of Music and Arts in New York City, and as Lincoln Center Institute visiting-artist and faculty member at New York and Columbia Universities, supports her totalist philosophy by empowering students to find their own voices. Brazelton’s own teachers include Jack Beeson, Robert Fripp, Harrison Birtwistle, Steve Mackey, George Edwards, Jonathan Kramer, Brad Garton, and Susan Blaustein. She holds a doctorate in music from Columbia University (1994).

Brazelton grew up in Cambridge, MA, near Harvard, where she studied Mayan dialect at the age of fourteen. At seventeen, she decided to be a sculptor, but at Swarthmore College became a musician instead. She studied modernism and medieval plainchant by day, free jazz and acid rock by night, and combined them all in her first band Musica Orbis, whose LP *To The Listeners* (Longdivity-Rounder Records, 1977) won an avid East Coast cult-following, and national critical acclaim.

Ever since, in her bands such as Hide The Babies, DADADAH, Hildegurlls, and What Is It Like To Be A Bat?; in electronic compositions prepared at the Columbia Computer Music Center; and in special projects, such as those for pianist Kathleen Supové, for duos twisted tutu and Double Edge, and for ensembles Kitchen House Blend, Manhattan Brass Quintet, and California E.A.R. Unit, Kitty Brazelton has championed the universal nature of music.

Dan Barrett (cello) is active in New York City as cellist, composer, and conductor. He performs with the STX Ensemble, has appeared as soloist at the Radio France and Gulbenkian festivals, and has conducted the New York Bach Ensemble, the Composers Concordance, the Ethos Ensemble, and—on Broadway—James Joyce’s *The Dead*.

Kevin Cobb (trumpet, Manhattan Brass Quintet) joined the American Brass Quintet in 1998. He is an active freelancer as well as teacher, and plays with such ensembles as the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Speculum Musicae, and the Metropolitan Opera.

Erica Duke (cello, California E.A.R. Unit) is an active soloist, chamber musician, and specialist in contemporary music. She has had works written for her by composers Mel Powell, Alvin Lucier, Elliott Carter, and Morton Subotnick, with whom she has toured and recorded since 1981. Duke is a founding member of the California E.A.R. Unit, and is solo cellist of the Santa Fe Pro Musica.

Wayne J. duMaine (trumpet, Manhattan Brass Quintet) currently performs with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Brooklyn and Long Island philharmonics, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Manhattan Brass Quintet, and American Composers Orchestra, as well as with contemporary music ensembles including the STX-Xenakis, Sospeso, and Speculum Musicae. He is a member of the New York Big Brass, Connecticut Symphony, and Springfield (MA) Symphony.

Greg Evans (French horn, Manhattan Brass Quintet) is a member of the New Mexico Winds, and the New Mexico Bass Quintet. He has toured with the Manhattan Brass Quintet, and Absolute Ensemble, and has performed with STX-Xenakis, Vanguard Chamber Players, and the Crosstown Ensemble. He can be heard on several movie soundtracks, and has been the horn player for The US Open, Tour de France, and Classic Sports Network.

Mathew Fieldes (double bass), a native New Zealander now living in New York, has played regularly with the Auckland Philharmonia, and New Zealand Symphony orchestras. He is currently principal bass with Absolute Ensemble, and plays with the Westchester Symphony Orchestra, the José Limón Dance Company, Continuum, and the New England Symphonic Ensemble. The Matt Fieldes Jazz Quartet has performed in venues throughout New York.

Stephen Foreman (tuba, Manhattan Brass Quintet) performs regularly with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Radio City Music Hall Orchestra, New York Big Brass, and the Manhattan Brass Quintet. He has performed with the New York Philharmonic, American Symphony Orchestra, Solid Brass, Absolute Ensemble, and the S.E.M. Ensemble. Foreman has recorded for television and film, and spends each summer in Boulder, CO, as part of the Colorado Music Festival orchestra.

Lyris Hung (electric 5-string violin) has played with a wide array of artists including Bono, Bryan Adams, Ornette Coleman, and Suzanne Vega. She can currently be heard with the Mila Drumke Band, Quasilulu, Dan Zanes, and her newest project, *Slanty Eye Mama*, with Kate Rigg. Hung is producer of the Manhattan Brass Quartet's first recording, released in 2002.

Jay Kauffman (classical guitar) has performed throughout North America, China, Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, and India. He has been awarded numerous fellowships, and has won top prizes in several national and international competitions, including ASTA, MTNA, and the Arts America auditions. Kauffman's compositions have been featured on the nationally-syndicated radio program *Classical Guitar Alive*, and have been premiered at Carnegie Hall.

Amy Knoles (drums, California E.A.R. Unit) is a founding member and executive director of the E.A.R. Unit. She tours regularly with the Paul Drescher Ensemble, Rachel Rosenthal, and Basso Bongo, and maintains an active solo career performing computer-assisted live electronic music. Knoles is a recipient of the UNESCO international prize for the performing arts 2000, and received the 1999-2000 individual artist fellowship ward from the City of Los Angeles.

Robin Lorentz (violin, California E.A.R. Unit) has been an E.A.R. Unit member since 1984. Her solo violin-playing has been featured in motion pictures, and the television series *Northern Exposure*. Lorentz is a featured performer on tour with composers Terry Riley, and John Luther Adams. She recently gave the world premiere of John Adams's *Road Movies*, at the Kennedy Center.

John Magnussen (marimba, California E.A.R. Unit) has appeared as soloist with American Winds, at the Hollywood Bowl, and with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, at the Ojai Festival. Although he is a specialist in mallet-percussion, he can also be heard and seen playing anything from timpani, xylophone, or bass drum, to drum-set, dumbek, Latin percussion, or electronics.

Vicki Ray (many, many keyboards, California E.A.R. Unit) is a member of the E.A.R. Unit, Xtet, and the Southwest Chamber Music Society. She has been featured on the Los Angeles Philharmonic's *Green Umbrella* series, and has performed with the LA Chamber Orchestra, the German ensemble Compania, and the Blue Rider ensemble of Toronto. Ray is a founding artist of *PianoSpheres*, a concert series devoted to less familiar repertory for piano solo.

Michael Seltzer (trombone, Manhattan Brass Quintet) has performed with many of the New York region's finest orchestras and ensembles, including the Metropolitan Opera, American Symphony Orchestra, and Eos Orchestra. Seltzer has recorded for television and film, and regularly performs and records contemporary music with groups including the Absolute Ensemble, Bang on a Can marathon, and the STX-Xenakis ensemble.

Dorothy Stone (flute, California E.A.R. Unit), founding member of the California E.A.R. Unit, and the Southwest Chamber Music Society, has been active in the vanguard of the international contemporary music scene, for over twenty years, and has been consistently hailed for her virtuosic and persuasive interpretation of the latest literature. She has performed as soloist throughout the United States and Europe, as well as for National Public Radio, and WGBH's *Art of the States* Program.

Danny Tunick (bongos) is a New York City-based percussionist-conductor, who joined What Is It Like To Be A Bat? after performing with Brazelton, in composer Randy Woolf's band Camp. He has premiered works by Eleanor Hovda, Julia Wolfe, Herbert Brun, Tania León, Evan Ziporyn, Zhou Long, and James Boros. Tunick performs regularly with the Princeton Composer's Ensemble, the Common Sense Composers, and Bang on a Can's SPIT Orchestra.

Marty Walker (bass clarinet, California E.A.R. Unit) has premiered over eighty pieces written especially for him, many of which highlight his bass clarinet playing. He has been a featured soloist in numerous venues throughout the United States and Mexico, and has broadcast live performances for Pacifica and National Public Radio. Walker performs frequently in Los Angeles, and currently performs and records regularly with Some Over History, Ghost Duo, and Gong Farmers.

Chris Washburne (trombone) plays trombone, bass trombone, tuba, didgeridoo, and percussion, with classical, jazz, rock, and Latin groups in New York City. He has concertized throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Washburne has commissioned and premiered over twenty compositions for trombone, and is a regular performing member with the Boston Art Quartet, Manhattan Chamber Orchestra, SEM Ensemble, Walter Thompson Big Band, Marie McAuliffe's Ark Sextet, DADADAH, and leader of SYOTOS, a Latin-jazz group that features his original compositions.

Danny Weiss (alto saxophone) leads his own jazz quintet, the Danny Weiss Group, and has worked in pit orchestras both on and off Broadway. He has toured and recorded with experimental rock group DADADAH, and the brass jazz ensemble NoNoNonet, and has collaborated with New York choreographers and performance artists. Weiss has been a member of Latin and Caribbean bands, performing merengue, cumbia, and ska, and has performed with Yid Vicious, a Jewish folk music group.

Production Notes

Produced by Kitty Brazelton; mastered by Hugo Dwyer. *Come Spring!* was recorded at Sorcerer Sound, NYC, June 1998, by Silas Brown; edited and composited by Silas Brown with the help of the quintet; produced by Lyris Hung. *R* was recorded at Master Sound, Astoria, April 1998, by David Merrill and Hugo Dwyer; mixed by Kitty Brazelton and David Merrill; edited and composited by Hugo Dwyer. *Sono Como Una Tromba Larga* was recorded at Joe Music, NYC, August 2001 by Hugo Dwyer; mixed and edited by Hugo Dwyer. *Called Out Ol' Texas* was recorded live in concert at Roulette Intermedium, NYC, December 1994, by Hugo Dwyer; edited by Hugo Dwyer. *Sonata for the Inner Ear* was recorded by Scott Fraser at his studio in Glendale, CA, July 2001; mixed, edited, and composited by Kitty Brazelton and Scott Frasier. All pieces published by Sincim Vinahel (ASCAP).

Executive Director for CRI: John G. Schultz

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