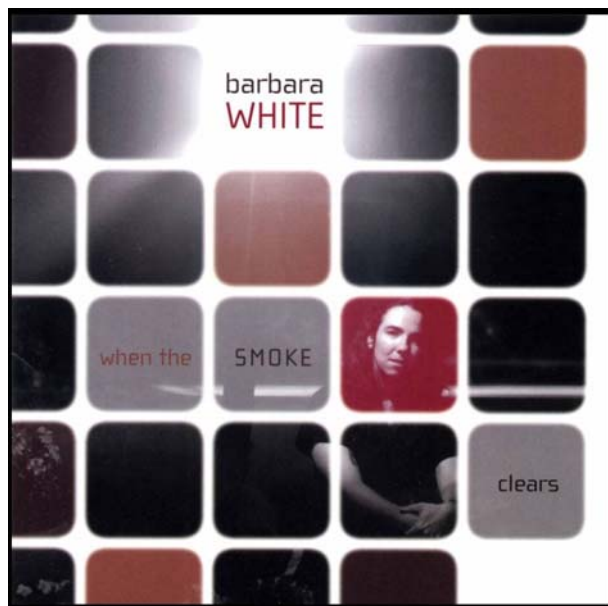


Barbara White

When The Smoke Clears

1. *the mind's fear, the heart's delight* (1998) (12:35)
New York New Music Ensemble: Jayn Rosenfeld, flute; Jean Kopperud, clarinet; Linda Quan, violin; Christopher Finckel, cello; Stephen Gosling, piano; James Baker, percussion; Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor
2. *When the Smoke Clears* (1995/98) (8:06)
Princeton Composers Ensemble: Michael Lowenstern, clarinet; Anna Lim, violin; Nancy Zeltsman, marimba
3. *Third Rule of Thumb* (2000) (12:08)
Talujon Percussion Quartet: Michael Lipsey, Dominic Donato, David Cossin, Tom Kolor, percussion
No-Man's Land (1999) (13:09)
4. *Pibroch* (4:16)
5. *Foolish Fire* (2:43)
6. *Don't Look Down* (4:40)
Barbara White, clarinet
Life In The Castle (1997) (18:17)
7. *In the Castle* (2:31)
8. *Mirror* (5:01)
9. *Meeting* (2:22)
10. *Apparition* (1:46)
11. *There is More to a Mirror* (1:31)
New York New Music Ensemble: Mary Nessinger, mezzo-soprano; Jayn Rosenfeld, flute; Jean Kopperud, clarinet; Linda Quan violin; John Whitfield, cello; Stephen Gosling, piano; James Baker, percussion; Michael Pratt, conductor
12. *When the Smoke Clears* (1995/98) (8:06)
Princeton Composers Ensemble: Michael Lowenstern, clarinet; Anna Lim, violin; Nancy Zeltsman, marimba

Total playing time: 61:39

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Notes

Contemporary debates over musical language often revolve around the supposed rupture between modernist and postmodernist approaches. But for composer Barbara White, polemical debates take a back seat to the shaping of musical ideas, which tend to be unruly and difficult to compartmentalize. "Although I am interested in the ways these categories might describe musical experience," says White, "I find that the distinctions between them dissolve as soon as I step into the studio."

In the chamber works by White heard on this recording, improvisatory-sounding gestures are placed in sophisticated formal designs, melodic lines are often singable but never predictable, and compositional techniques are equally informed by vernacular traditions and the gymnastics of today's finest new music virtuosi.

Underlying the formal rigor and syntactical games like the use of canons and palindromes lies a delight in the vitality of live music-making. As White, a clarinetist, says, "I appreciate the excitement, unpredictability, and even the imperfection that characterizes live performance." At times the composer challenges performers, including herself, to "misplay" their instruments, or to play unusual objects like tin cans and frying pans; at other times White calls for a more traditional blending of instrumental sounds. The overall result is a stream of sonic possibilities presented by acoustic instruments.

White ushers us into her sound world with a juxtaposition of

clashing themes, timbres, and colors in *the mind's fear, the heart's delight* (1998), composed specifically for the New York New Music Ensemble. The piece unfolds in five distinct sections: an eccentric dialogue that pits piano and percussion ("glued" together throughout the piece) against the rest of the ensemble; an enigmatic duet between flute and violin, underscored by a shimmering repeated phrase in the upper register of the piano; and a melancholy section that focuses on long, low notes in the cello. Next comes a long development in the bass clarinet and drums that eventually lands in an extremely high register, making the bass clarinet sound like a wailing tenor sax, followed by the final section, in which the other instruments re-emerge timidly through a beautiful, apprehensive passage. The quick, harsh refrain from the opening interrupts often, providing an impetus for sudden contrasts. White explains the sharp disparities between sections as inherently paradoxical: the title, a slightly altered line from the poem "Eruption: Pu'u O'o" by Garrett Hongo, evokes the fusing of anxiety and bliss. White treasures such contradictions, noting that "a single idea or experience can simultaneously inspire both terror and desire."

The oldest piece on the album, *When the Smoke Clears* (1995/1998), was written with Nancy Zeltsman and her five-octave marimba in mind. In this instance, White not only bestows a personality on each instrument, but she transforms their sounds by creating unusual relationships between them.

The clear textures and quirky rhythms emulate Stravinsky, and there is even a short quotation from his *Agon* in the opening bars. After a brief introduction, the marimba and the violin begin an extended duo, which is at times friendly and at other times fiercely competitive. Eventually the clarinet sneaks in and plays alongside the violin, and for awhile the identical rhythms and dynamics suggest an alchemical combination of the two timbres. Toward the end of a lilting middle section, the piece ascends to its climax, as the marimba becomes more prominent and eventually overtakes the others to play a short solo in its lowest register. As the climax recedes into what the composer calls “a kind of warped organum,” the quiet, understated homophony brings the sense of resolution evoked by the title. White’s mother, to whom the work is dedicated, died just as it was completed. The phrase “when the smoke clears...” is one she heard her father utter many times in the ensuing weeks.

The tranquility at the end of *When the Smoke Clears* is forsaken to continue the bold quest for adventurous new sounds in *Third Rule of Thumb* (2000), a piece written specifically for the Talujon Percussion Quartet with the support of the Fromm Music Foundation. Restricted to “so-called unpitched percussion,” this is a study in how timbre and relative pitch can create a percussion-specific syntax. Indebted to John Cage (the “Third” in the title is derived from Cage’s *Third Construction*) and Lou Harrison (particularly his *Concerto for Violin and Percussion*), White utilizes everything from woodblocks, Chinese opera gongs, and a large Brazilian caxixi to tom-toms played with a super ball, frying pans, and tin cans. The piece opens with the mystical sound of a bowed cymbal cut with a repeated rhythm on the woodblock. For the first several minutes, White focuses on the isolation of sounds, emphasizing the distinct colors produced by their opposition: wood versus metal, struck versus shaken, short versus sustained. As the piece continues, additive rhythms and interlocking patterns appear, often resulting in danceable “grooves.” These grooves gradually entice all the players into a metallic swirl, and all differences are erased as they join in an ecstatic unison at the end.

The solo clarinet piece *No-Man’s Land* (1999) is a homecoming. An active clarinetist, White explains that she arrived at the work’s unusual sound world though investigating her “not entirely contented” relationship with her primary instrument. The piece grew out of improvised accompaniments to dance performances begun after a long hiatus from performing due to an injury. Her physical discomfort encouraged her to experiment with new ways of approaching the instrument and led her toward an idiosyncratic performance strategy. She describes the process as a way of “claiming extraneous sounds, including conventionally undesirable ones, and forming them into a personal musical language.” Tablature notation indicates the “wrong” fingerings that access notes White describes as “falling between the cracks of the twelve-tone temperament.” Her technique—she dislikes the implied dualism of the term “extended technique”—also mines the sonic potential of breath, multiphonic “noise,” and high shrieking sounds. Each of the three movements evokes an idea made explicit by a matching epigraph:

I. Pibroch

The sea cries with its meaningless voice
Treating alike its dead and its living.

—Ted Hughes, “Pibroch”

[Also: *piobairèachd*, a form of highland bagpipe music]

II. Foolish Fire

“Finally I began to wonder whether I, like the spider that chased the shadow, had been deluded, and had seemed to hear a sound that was not a sound.”

—W.H. Hudson, *Green Mansions*

[Also: *ignis fatuus*, a flickering light seen over marshes, thought to issue from the souls of the damned]

III. Don't Look Down

“Don't look down.”

—Stan Swartz

“Pibroch,” the title of which refers to Ted Hughes’s poem, is an organic lament that alludes to the variation form common in Highland bagpipe music. “Foolish Fire” focuses on “phantom” sounds, including the reverberation of flickering microtonal tremolos and the percussive sounds of fingers drumming on the keys. The more vigorous “Don't Look Down” is a dance that buzzes frenetically, grounding the dialogue in repeated riffs and pedal notes as it inches ever upward. The movement’s title is an instruction from one of White’s T’ai Chi instructors—an instruction she is still learning to obey!

White’s study of T’ai Chi hints at her interest in movement-based art forms. In fact, she describes her own approach to music-making as visual and kinetic. She has been naturally drawn to dance projects, starting in her early twenties as a free-lancer playing for a weekly dance improvisation group. As a graduate student, she founded Momentum Interdisciplinary arts with Pittsburgh choreographer Joan Wagman. This relationship gave birth to *Life in the Castle* (1997), a dance/opera hybrid, dedicated to Wagman that links the movements of the dancer to the voice of the singer.

The libretto, constructed from a set of six poems, forms a narrative structure that, like most of White’s work, avoids linearity. Reflective imagery figures prominently as a structural and aesthetic theme, as many of the texts explicitly address mirrors and reflective shapes suspended in what White visualizes as a “cold, stark interior.” The choreography moves through reflective objects onstage, while the music focuses on distinct ideas filtered through various mirror-like procedures. For example, the last movement is a retrograde of the first one, and both movements are based on a single symmetrical chord. The second movement presents an isorhythmic canon at the unison, cycling three times through a thirty-note pitch cycle in homage to the Apollinaire *calligramme* that supplies the text. In each repetition, the voice, flute, and violin reposition themselves vis-à-vis one another, eventually coalescing into a blur, which suggests the infinity effect created when two mirrors face one another. Throughout the work, instrumental color underscores the text, as when the return to wooden sounds in the final movement evokes the mirror frame described in Margaret Atwood’s poem.

White’s music is, as she says, “informed by narrative, although the narrative tends to be unpredictable or enigmatic.” A listener may encounter any number of surprises, including “accidental” sounds, virtuosic displays, and off-kilter rhythms in her pieces, but the unexpected twists and turns are all part of a single, compelling sensibility.

—Amanda MacBlane with Barbara White

Amanda MacBlane is a New York-based musician and journalist, and the production coordinator for *NewMusicBox*, the ASCAP/ Deems Taylor Award-winning web magazine from the American Music Center (www.newmusicbox.org).

Life in the Castle texts

1. Life in the Castle
It is an ancestral castle
With no tables or fire
with no dust or rug
The perverse spell of this place
is wholly in its shiny mirrors
the only possible thing to do here
Is to look at oneself day and night.

From "Vie de Château" by Anne Hébert. Published in French in *The Tomb of the Kings* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1967). English translation by Alik Barnstone and Willis Barnstone, published in *A Book of Women Poets From Antiquity to Now*, ed. Barnstone and Barnstone (New York: Schocken, 1980). Used by permission.

2. Mirror
IN
TIONS THIS
FLEC MIR
RE ROR
LIKE I
ALL AM
AT EN
NOT Guillaume CLOSED
AND Apollinaire LI
GELS VING
AN AND
THE REAL
NE JUST
GI AS
MA YOU
I

From "Coeur, Couronne et Miroir" ("Heart, Crown and Mirror") by Guillaume Apollinaire, edited and translated by Anne Hyde Greet. Published in *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-16)*, ©1980. Used by permission of Univ. of California Press.

3. meeting
At the end
of the longest evening
in this moment, silent,
I wait for you.
I look out, then I see you.
You've been here before.
in the still
of night without end,
in the hush,
I see you,
alone.

by Katrinka Kraft. Unpublished, used by permission.

4. Apparition
Having attained her perfect size
the giant moves in shadows
And makes the room sway with her weight
Her grandeur stretches and sprawls
Against the wooden walls
Touches the ebony ceiling
Her deep eye shines
Like a well
in the darkness

From "Apparition" by Anne Hébert, published in French in *Day Has No Equal But Night*, with English translation by A. Poulin, Jr., ©1994. Used by permission of Boa Editions Limited.

5. The Invisible Woman
 Now that I have become invisible
 I can go anywhere
 Flow through crowds and cracks
 Slide past gateposts
 Insinuate myself through
 Chinks in the wall
 Pry into corners
 Look boldly into windows
 To watch how other people live
 Eavesdrop in full view
 Nothing can keep me out
 No one knows what I do

From "The Invisible Woman" from *The Lone Woman and Others*, by Constance Urdang, ©1980.
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6. There is More to a Mirror
 There is more to a mirror
 than you looking at
 your full-length body
 flawless but reversed,
 there is more than this dead blue
 oblong eye turned outwards to you.
 Think about the frame.
 The frame is carved, it is important,
 it exists, it does not reflect you,
 it does not recede and recede, it has limits
 and reflections of its own.

From "Tricks with Mirrors" by Margaret Atwood,
 from *You Are Happy* (Harper & Row, 1974).
 Used by permission of Margaret Atwood.

Composer **Barbara White** has a long-standing involvement in interdisciplinary collaboration, especially in composing for dance; she has also completed a number of residency projects, including a Continental Harmony Commission from the American Composer Forum for the community of Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Other recent commissions have come from the Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players, the New York New Music Ensemble, Boston Musica Viva and the Fromm Music Foundation. White has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the state arts councils of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. She spent the 2000-01 year as a Bunting Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

As a clarinetist, White has performed her works with Momentum Interdisciplinary arts, the Fromm Music Foundation Contemporary Music Series at Harvard and the Florida International Festival of New Music. Her scholarly writings approach diverse topics, including the dramatic mechanisms of unstaged opera, the vagaries of eclecticism, and the intersection of gender and music analysis. White holds degrees from Harvard/Radcliffe Colleges and the University of Pittsburgh, and she is a member of the faculty at Princeton University.

The New York New Music Ensemble is one of the world's premier twentieth-century chamber music groups. Its "extensively rehearsed and emotionally charged performances" (*New York Times*) reflect the group's conviction that

thoughtfully performed contemporary music can reach both specialist and uninitiated audience. Each member is a virtuosic solo performer, and the group has a long list of commissions and works dedicated to it. The Ensemble is also committed to the creation and presentation of theater music and interdisciplinary performances.

Described by the *New York Times* as an ensemble possessing an "edgy, unflagging energy," the **Talujon Percussion Quartet** has been mesmerizing audiences since 1990. Talujon performs regularly at New York's Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Hall, the Kitchen, and the Knitting Factory. Talujon's most recent CD, *...the speed of the passing time...* features the works of Xenakis, Harrison, Rzewski, Shapey, and Talujon.

Violinist **Sunghae Anna Lim** is a member of the Laurel Trio and the New Millennium Ensemble, which won the 1995 Naumburg Chamber Music Competition. She has appeared as soloist with the Honolulu Symphony, the Princeton Chamber Symphony, and the Harvard-Radcliffe Bach Society Orchestra. Lim has toured Japan as soloist with the Viennese chamber orchestra Ensemble Nine and has recorded for Koch International, CRI, and Newport Classics.

Michael Lowenstern is a clarinet soloist, bass clarinetist with the New Jersey Symphony, head jingle writer for Grey Advertising's eMarketing division, and a regular with the Klezmatics, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Jerome Kitzke's "The Mad Coyote." He has appeared on over

thirty CDs, including two solo CDs: the critically acclaimed *Spasm*, and his newest, *1985*.

Conductor/percussionist **Jeffrey Milarsky** is music director and conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra, as well as professor in music at Columbia University. He has led such groups as the American Composers Orchestra, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum Musicae, and the New York Philharmonic chamber music series. He has recorded for the Angel, Teldec, Telarc, New World, CRI, MusicMasters, EMI, Koch, and London labels.

Mezzo-soprano **Mary Nessinger** has sung at venues including New York's Alice Tully Hall and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Gardner Museum in Boston, and Wigmore Hall in London. She has appeared with the Baltimore, Grand Rapids, Jacksonville, and London Symphonies; the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra; and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Her recent recordings are on the Deutsche

Grammophon, CRI, Mode, and Koch International labels.

Conductor **Michael Pratt** joined the music faculty at Princeton in 1977 as conductor of the Princeton University Orchestra. He also serves at Princeton as the director of the certificate program in musical performance and co-directs both the Composers' Ensemble and Richardson Chamber Players. He has been music director of the Delaware Valley Philharmonic since 1990 and has appeared with leading ensembles and orchestras of the United States.

Nancy Zeltsman is a leading marimba performer, recording artist, commissioner of new works, teacher, and author. She recently joined the faculty of Temple University, has taught marimba at the Boston Conservatory and Berklee College of Music since 1993, and directed the first Princeton Marimba Festival in July 2001. Zeltsman has recorded two solo CDs, *Woodcuts* and *See Ya Thursday*. From 1985-1996 she performed with Marimolin.

Production Notes

Produced by Steven Mackey and Barbara White (*the mind's fear, the heart's delight* and *When the Smoke Clears*); Barbara White (*Third Rule of Thumb*); James Moses, Ted Coffey and Dan Cooper (*No-Man's Land*); and Paul Lansky and Barbara White (*Life in the Castle*).

Engineered by James Moses. Edited by Reuben de Lautour.

Final mixing of *No-Man's Land* by James Moses and Mary Lee Roberts.

All pieces published by the composer.

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