

NWCR898

Curtis Macomber

Casting Ecstatic – Solo Works for Violin



Allen Anderson	
1. <i>Casting Ecstatic</i> (1994)	(9:35)
Nicholas Maw	
Sonata (1997)	(29:17)
2. I. Scena	(9:31)
3. II. March-Burlesque	(4:21)
4. III. Tombeau	(9:13)
5. IV. Flight	(5:57)
Martin Boykan	
Sonata for Solo Violin (1998)	(21:28)
6. I. Praeludium	(6:22)
7. II. Allegro	(5:13)
8. III. Arioso	(4:05)
9. IV. Fuga	(4:06)
10. V. Chorale	(1:40)
Arthur Kreiger	
11. <i>Keeping Company</i> (1998)	(7:24)
Total playing time:	68:05
© & © 2002 Composers Recordings, Inc.	
© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.	

Notes

As *Casting Ecstatic* unfolds, one pictures Curtis Macomber standing center stage like a Shakespearean actor alone in the spotlight, delivering solo violin lines like soliloquies. From plaintive angst to crazed passion, each performance feels like a glimpse into a guarded internal world.

This album—Macomber’s third dedicated to exploring repertoire for violin alone or with tape—confirms his reputation for superior performances of these soul-baring unaccompanied works. Previous CDs have included pieces by composers such as Elliott Carter, Mario Davidovsky, John Harbison, Shulamit Ran, and Roger Sessions. Macomber’s interest in this type of challenging repertoire has been something of a career-long passion. “Every composer has a solo piece,” he explains, “but they have different ways of approaching the violin expressively and technically. It’s fascinating to delve into that.”

And delve he has, developing a sophisticated approach to this type of repertoire. Here once again, what is remarkable in each of his performances is an obvious sensitivity to each composer’s language and a noticeable lack of pretension in his delivery. Works scored with as much technical flash as these could have quickly resulted in an album of showpieces of little depth, but while the listener may revel in Macomber’s technical skill, his interpretations lead one to explore the emotional and intellectual depth of each piece.

Allen Anderson’s *Casting Ecstatic* (1994), which lends its title to the disc, foreshadows the range of musical expression represented on this recording. Composed originally as a concert etude for Daniel Stepner, the work is “the line flung out, arching, holding its shape and origin, while ever expanding,” Anderson writes. “String technique, in particular the four-string sweep, refingered pitch repetition and the harmonic tremolo, are incorporated into an ongoing, three-part form (fast, with pockets of moderato, slow, fast), rather than explored in isolation.” In just under ten minutes, Anderson

works the instrument’s range of pitch and dynamic contrast and plays with the alternation between solid and harmonic sound in tandem and to fantastic effect. The swirling and rhapsodic music and the constant give and take of the line also call to mind a kind of stream-of-consciousness prose. Perhaps it narrates the kind of late internal argument that prevents sleep as one’s mind comes back again and again to the topic (or in this case theme) at hand from every direction in an alternation between calm and agitation.

With Nicholas Maw’s Sonata (1997), the disc takes a turn to the slightly more traditional with a four-movement sonata, in line with Roger Sessions’s weighty Sonata, which Macomber has recorded previously. He characterizes the Maw as “somewhat conservative but very compelling, with more structured and contrapuntal lines mixed with considerable virtuoso writing.” The first movement, “Scena,” tiptoes in on artificial harmonics, but gives way to an angular and hard-edged exploration of the sonata’s themes. This is a real workout for Macomber, including double-stop and octave passages that seem to grind out every bit of passion the instrument has to offer. The “March-Burlesque” that follows climbs, slides and tumbles around, taunting the listener, but that puckish recreation soon gives way to a reflective muted dreamscape in the “Tombeau.” Here Maw’s writing finally allows Macomber an opportunity to really let the instrument open up and speak with contemplative depth. A series of crystalline runs and long tones offer a moment of meditative space, an eye in the storm that fades away into the violent opening moments of the last movement. “Flight” hardly needs such a programmatic title. This is no idyllic soaring through the sky, but a hard-at-heels chase straight through the final moments of the work.

The tone shifts again with Martin Boykan’s Sonata for Solo Violin (1998), perhaps the most intense work on the disc. “There’s something spiritual about the Boykan that attracted

me,” explains Macomber. It’s a piece that “uses old forms in a new guise.” Indeed, there is a brooding and private quality to Boykan’s language that is complex and emotionally mature. The *Praeludium* allows the listener to wade carefully into this sound world, but the voice then shifts moodily back and forth between pensive thoughts and frantic flare-ups. The *Allegro* is a carefully crafted series of emphatic statements, as memorable for what is heard as for what is not, the silences amplifying and punctuating each utterance. Reaching the muted strains of the *Arioso*, the violin becomes a sort of distraught Ophelia by the water’s edge, contemplative and morose. With the opening of the *Fuga*, Boykan once again allows the more aggressive side to blaze, but this time with more restraint, bits of pizzicato releasing steam and slowing the train by the movement’s closing bars. The *Chorale* returns to dwell briefly in the work’s opening theme, returning the listener to point of departure.

Arthur Kreiger’s *Keeping Company* (1998) concludes the disc in sparkling fashion. Full of surprises, the work is its own labyrinth, seeming at turns both sinister and playful. This is the only piece on the disc for which Macomber must share the stage. The tape part features a number of *musique concrète* techniques as well as a clever use of household items (a lasagna pan is metamorphosed into a gong from an exotic folk culture; a metal ashtray becomes a strange bell that alters its identity during the course of a lengthy decay; a shovel’s blade appears once as a piercing anvil and later as a triangle of unusual girth). Macomber says he is continually attracted to the challenge of performing with tape and trying to interact with something that doesn’t interact. Kreiger himself writes of this delicate interaction: “They speak with distinct voices reflecting highly individual personalities, yet their conversation is informed by common interest and mutual acquaintance. At times the discourse is argumentative with each participant doggedly asserting its own musical gesture. In other areas of the composition the mood turns agreeable, even amorous. Here the lines often meld seamlessly or the players intuitively begin to complete each other’s thoughts.” That’s impossible because one of the “players” is a tape, but the piece works because Macomber is successful in creating the illusion that the two are equal partners in its spontaneous creation.

—Molly Sheridan

Molly Sheridan is associate editor of *NewMusicBox*, the website covering new American music from the American Music Center. She is a graduate of Ohio University, where she earned a B.S. in journalism with a specialization in performance.

Curtis Macomber is recognized as one of the most versatile soloists and chamber musicians before the public today, equally at home and committed to works from Bach to Babbitt, and with a discography ranging from complete Brahms string quartets to the Roger Sessions *Solo Sonata* (“One of the best recordings of twentieth-century solo violin music ever made”—*American Record Guide*). *Fanfare* has called his playing “remarkable for its depth of feeling as well as for technical excellence.” A featured lecture/recitalist in the first American Violin Congress in 1987, Macomber was also Second Prize winner in the 1980 Rockefeller Foundation International Competition for the Performance of Twentieth Century American Violin Music. He has appeared in recital at Carnegie Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Miller Theatre, and the Kennedy Center, and has been soloist with the *Musica Aeterna* Orchestra, the Juilliard Orchestra, Vermont Symphony, and at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy.

As first violinist of the award-winning New World String Quartet for eleven years (1982-1993), Macomber performed standard repertoire as well as contemporary works in perform-

ances in major halls throughout the United States and Europe, and, with the Quartet, he was appointed artist-in-residence at Harvard University from 1982-1990. He also recorded fourteen discs and performed numerous times on public radio and television in this country, and the BBC in Great Britain.

A founding member of the Apollo Piano Trio and the Bridge Horn Trio, and a member of the twentieth-century music ensemble *Speculum Musicae* since 1991, Macomber has also appeared with the Sea Cliff Chamber Players, New York Chamber Soloists, New York New Music Ensemble, Group for Contemporary Music, and in chamber music series across the country and in Europe. He has recorded for Arabesque, Nonesuch, Koch International, Vanguard, Pickwick, and Musical Heritage. The *New York Observer* cited Macomber’s previous CRI disc, *Songs of Solitude*, as one of 1996’s best instrumental solo discs.

Macomber is a member of the chamber music faculty of the Juilliard School and the violin faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, and has also taught at the Taos School of Music and Yellow Barn Music School. He holds his B.M., M.M., and D.M.A. degrees from the Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student of Joseph Fuchs and winner of the Morris Loeb and Walter Naumburg Prizes.

Allen Anderson was born in Palo Alto, California, in 1951 and grew up in Los Altos. He has composed works for the Empyrean Ensemble, *Speculum Musicae*, the UNC Chamber Singers, Aleck Karis, and Daniel Stepner, among others. Anderson’s work has been acknowledged with awards or commissions from the Guggenheim, Fromm, and Koussevitzky foundations, Chamber Music America, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia-Alpha Ro, BMI, and League of Composers/ISCM (both the national and Boston chapters).

Anderson has taught at Columbia University, Wellesley College, and Brandeis University, and since 1996 he has taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He received a bachelor’s of music degree from the University of California at Berkeley, a master’s of arts and doctor of philosophy in theory and composition from Brandeis University, where he studied with Martin Boykan and Seymour Shifrin. Anderson’s music is published by C.F. Peters, Margun Music, and APNM, and he can be heard on other recordings from CRI (CD 727—*Solfeggietti*, String Quartet, *Drawn From Life*; CD 617—*Charrette*).

Martin Boykan has written for a wide variety of chamber ensembles, including four string quartets, many trios, and solo works; he also has written extensively for voice and for chorus, including four song cycles with piano, and several with other instrumental combinations. He has received numerous commissions from chamber ensembles as well as commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress and the Fromm Music Foundation. In 1994 Boykan was awarded a Senior Fulbright to Israel. He received the League ISCM award for *Elegy* in 1982 and the Jeunesse Musicales award for his String Quartet No. 1 in 1967. Other awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, and NEA award and a Rockefeller grant, as well as a recording award and the Walter Hinrichsen Publication Award from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Boykan currently is the Irving G. Fine Professor at Brandeis University and has been composer-in-residence at the Composer’s Conference at Wellesley College, visiting professor at Columbia University, and composer-in-residence at New York University and Bar Ilan University, Israel. He has lectured at the Juilliard School, Harvard University, Princeton University, and the University of California. Boykan studied composition with Walter Piston, Aaron Copland, and Paul Hindemith, and piano with Eduard Steuermann. Boykan received a bachelor’s of art degree from Harvard University,

1951, and a master's degree in music from Yale University, 1953. His music is published by C.F. Peters and Mobart Music Press.

Arthur Kreiger has written works for orchestra, chorus, mixed chamber ensembles, solo instruments, and the electronic medium. His professional honors include the Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award. A solo CD of Kreiger's music featuring the New York New Music Ensemble is currently in production with CRI. Other compositions appear on *Odyssey*, *Spectrum*, *Finnadar*, *Neuma*, *Context*, and *New World Records*. Kreiger's most recent project, a Fromm Commission written for Michael Lipsey, is a work for hand percussion (darbouka, djembe, bodhran, cymbals, and tam-tam) and electronic sounds. He is presently a visiting associate professor in music at Connecticut College in New London. Kreiger holds degrees from the University of Connecticut and from Columbia University.

Nicholas Maw's extensive catalogue includes orchestral works, chamber music, vocal and choral music, two comic operas, solo instrumental works, and music for children. Born in 1935 in Lincolnshire, England, Maw divides his time between Europe and the United States, where his music has been played by a number of orchestra including those of Philadelphia, Minnesota, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. He has been the featured composer at many British festivals and has

received commissions from many of the major musical organizations in the U.K. such as the BBC, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the Philharmonia Orchestra, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Royal Opera House, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London Sinfonietta. Maw has won the 1993 Stoecker Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the 1991 Sudler International Wind Band Competition for American Games, the 1980 Midsummer Prize of the City of London, and the 1959 Lili Boulanger Prize.

The EMI recording of his ninety-six minute *Odyssey* (1987) for orchestra by Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1992 and cited by *Classic CD* (June 2000) as the best recording out of 100 recommended releases in the decade. The 1993 recording of his Violin Concerto by Joshua Bell for Sony Classical was nominated for the 2000 Mercury Prize. Other recordings of his music can be heard on EMI Classics, Klavier, ASV, and Numbus.

Maw studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London, with Paul Steinitz and Lennox Berkeley; and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Schoenberg's pupil, Max Deutsch. His career as a teacher has included positions at Trinity College Cambridge, Exeter University, and Yale University. Maw is currently professor of composition at Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore.

Production Notes

Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman.

Editing assistants: Jeanne Velonis and Hsi-Ling Chang

Casting Ecstatic was recorded June 14, 1997. *Sonata*, *Sonata for Solo Violin* and *Keeping Company* were recorded February 12 and 14, 2000.

All works recorded at the Recital Hall of the Conservatory of Music, Purchase College, SUNY Purchase, NY.

Keeping Company was commissioned by Curtis Macomber and the North Carolina School of the Arts. The electronic tape was realized at the Electronic Music Center at the NCSA and at the composer's home in Connecticut.

Publishing credits:

Casting Ecstatic (Anderson) – C.F. Peters; *Sonata* (Maw) – Faber Music; *Sonata for Solo Violin* (Boykan) – C.F. Peters; *Keeping Company* (Kreiger) – American Composers Edition.

This release was made possible with the generous support from University Research Council at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, L.C. Fisher, the Mazer Fund at Brandeis University, an anonymous donor, and the Ditson Fund for New Music.