

CRI SD 296

John Eaton

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1. *Mass* (20:00)

Michiko Hirayama, soprano,

with ensemble of clarinet, electronic music synthesizers, and tape

John Reeves White, conductor

2. *Blind Man's Cry* (10:45)

Michiko Hirayama, soprano,

with ensemble of electronic music synthesizers

3. *Concert Music for Solo Clarinet*. (7:30)

William O. Smith, clarinet

John Eaton (born in 1935) has created a special place for himself among the ranks of electronic composers through his quest for the humanization of the medium. His method has been both to combine electronic instruments with live performers and to make sensitive use of special qualities of certain electronic music synthesizers. His fascination with new instrumental colors also is heard in the clarinet piece on this recording. During and after his college studies at Princeton, he was a jazz pianist. Eaton's opera *Myshkin* is scheduled to be shown shortly on PBS and his *Heracles* has been performed both in this country and Italy. He has won three American "Prix de Rome," two Guggenheim grants, and other awards. Eaton is on the faculty of Indiana University where his non-electronic epic opera, *Heracles*, was performed in 1972 as the dedicatory work of the University's Musical Arts Center.

The *Mass* was composed in 1970 in response to a commission by the Koussevitzky Foundation. The work, along with *Blind Man's Cry*, was one of his series written for the remarkable voice of the Japanese soprano Michiko Hirayama, combined with electronic instruments played in real time, that is, "live" rather than pre-recorded on tape. The work also features a solo clarinet which makes use of unconventional resources such as "double stops."

The *Mass* uses three small synthesizers called Synkets. The special capabilities of these instruments as used here depend on their keyboards, which are touch-sensitive both to pressure and sideways movement; each movement can have a different effect on the quality, timbre, loudness, and even pitch of the tone. Performers on the Synkets are Mr. Eaton, Eugene O'Brien, and Judith Martin.

The *Mass* also uses the Moog Synthesizer. This version of the instrument contains "sequencers," which are automatic devices that repeat and modify pre-set series of sound patterns. In this case the sound patterns are manipulable while in sequence. The performer on the Moog uses two pedals which control the volume, filtering, pitch levels and speed of sequencers, as well as a keyboard. It is played by Jay Williams.

The third electronic sound generating instrument used on this work is the Syn-Mill, which is a small patternmaker. It is played by Andrew Jarema.

Both the voice and the clarinet make use of a special electronic device that makes and plays tape loops in real time—the loops being used to create something akin to the familiar “reverb” which is used here upon command to generate an acoustical sense of space.

When the *Mass* is performed as a service, the congregation reads the text, and the sound of its voices is recorded and re-recorded with time delays and played back through loudspeakers. In the recorded version, the text is read by Kalvert Nelson. The real-time tape recording and stereo effects are done by Wilson Allen,

Blind Man's Cry was written in 1968 for a similar but smaller combination of voice and synthesizers. It underlines the characteristic “personal” capabilities of the Synket, played by John Eaton, and the “automated” sequencers of the Moog, performed by Jay Williams. *Blind Man's Cry* must be played at a very high level.

The voice enters the electronic texture as another discrete element, hysterically declaiming the text. By use of on-stage recording manipulated by Wilson Allen, her phrase, “Deus misericors” is turned into a canon, each time at the interval of a quarter-step. (As in the *Mass*, there is no pre-recording.)

Eaton describes his use of the Synket here as, in effect, the internal, agonized, existential cry that the blind man himself can no longer utter in the face of the brutal, inhuman poundings of fate in the form of the Moog sequencers. The work was premiered the same year (1968) at the Venice Festival of Contemporary Music.

Concert Music for Solo Clarinet was written in 1961, one of the earliest compositions to explore multiphonics and other new coloristic possibilities of the clarinet. It was written for Mr. Smith, who recorded it in 1971.

Michiko Hirayama is a Japanese-born resident of Italy who specializes in the singing of microtones and has performed in festivals of contemporary music throughout Europe. She has a wide pitch and tonal range and is capable of exquisite shadings. She has appeared in all of Eaton's music for voice and real-time electronics.

William O. Smith, a resident of Seattle and teacher at the University of Washington, has done perhaps more than any other performer to expand the capabilities of the clarinet. His ability to create strange harmonic effects and wild glissandos is unmatched outside electronic devices. A forthcoming record of his own music will appear on CRI.

This recording was made possible by a grant from the National Institute-American Academy of Arts and Letters, which gave one of its 1972 composition awards to John Eaton; and a grant from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

Mass was recorded after its New York performance in 1970 by Marc Aubort. *Blind Man's Cry* was recorded at the Gilfoy Studios in Bloomington, Ind., in the same year.

This is a composer-supervised recording

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)