

CRI SD 415

William Mayer: *Dream's End* (19:45)

Extremes

Mostly Clarinet

Buzzings

20th Century Guest at an 18th Century Musicale Interlude of Air

Appalachian Echoes

Burlesca (funicula ridicula)

Mostly Piano

Dream's End

Romuald Teco, violin; Priscilla Rybka, French horn;

Peter Howard, cello; Richard E. Killmer, oboe;

Timothy J. Paradise, clarinet; Layton James, piano;

William McGlaughlin, conductor

Eric Stokes

On The Badlands—Parables (12:25)

through quiet's gulch small riven winds pursued, persist . . .

until the birds/its swinging air/shall acrobat no more

The Anvil of Emptiness

St. Paul Chamber Orchestra;

Dennis Russell Davies, conductor

Eldey Island (7:35)

Cynthia Stokes, flute and piccolo

William Mayer (b New York, 1925) has received degrees from Yale University and the Mannes College of Music. Since his composition studies with Roger Sessions, Felix Salzer, and Otto Luening, he has received awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship; grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Council on the Arts, and the Michigan Council of the Arts; and Ford Foundation recording grants, one of which made possible the recording of his Brass Quintet (CRI 291).

Mayer's works have been performed by many leading orchestras, including the Philadelphia, Minnesota, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Buffalo, and the London Philharmonic; by such artists as Stokowski, Skrowaczewski, Max Rudolf, Gerard Schwarz, Eleanor Steber, and William Masselos. His chamber works have been presented by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the American Brass Quintet, the Dorian Woodwind Quintet, and others. His composition for children, *Hello, World!*, was chosen by the Philadelphia Orchestra to represent the International Year of the Child (1979).

In addition to composing, Mayer has written articles on contemporary music for the U.S. Information Agency and *The New York Times Magazine*. He presently (1980) serves as treasurer for the MacDowell Colony and chairman of the board of CRI. Among his recent compositions is an opera based on James Agee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *A Death in the Family*.

The composer writes:

“When asked by the American Artists Series to write a chamber piece using any group of instruments I wanted, I felt as if I had been given carte blanche in a pastry shop. My original plan was to use the violin, cello, and French horn as ‘dream’ instruments contrasting with the here-and-now sounds of an oboe and clarinet. The sixth instrument, a piano, was to be a kind of bridge. Such a plan may sound impressive in the program notes, but when I got down to writing the piece, these classifications soon went by the board. Following one's instincts, it seems, can leave the best laid plans in shreds.

“The fact is that each instrument is a world within itself. While the *lontano* sounds of the French horn in the movements entitled *Extremes* and *Appalachian Echoes* could be called dreamlike, the brassy eruptions of the same instrument in the movement entitled *Funicula Ridicula* are anything but dreamlike. In fact, the latter sounds closer to the alarm clock shattering our dreams. And, of course, an instrument’s timbre does not exist in a vacuum apart from the musical use to which it is put.

“In *Dream’s End*, the music often comments on itself or cuts itself off with guillotine-like dispatch—as if a critic had entered the scene. These interruptions are generally goodnatured, for if the composer’s right hand is slapping his left, the blow is apt not to be too heavy. This playful schizophrenia reaches its apex in the movement entitled *20th Century Guest at an 18th Century Musicale*.

“For the most part the instruments speak in this piece as individuals rather than as part of a bloc. Beyond the conversational sallies and rejoinders, there is an overall pattern of a poignant motif (built on a descending second and third) which recurs throughout the work in different guises.

“The commission for this piece happened to fall at a sad time for my family, coming soon after the sudden death of a young and vibrant family member, which prompted the title *Dream’s End*. Having designated the work as a memorial for a young person, I have sometimes wondered whether its mirth might not be out of place—but as I write these notes I recall the observation that humor is one way to deal with the tragedy of existence, so perhaps these juxtapositions of jest and poignance are not contradictory after all.

“A word about the titles of some of the movements seems to be in order. *Extremes* (first movement) refers to the wide range of register, dynamics, texture, and dissonant content of the movement. *Buzzings* (third movement) represents two flies hopping about and annoying each other. *Funicula Ridicula* (sixth movement) came into being when, as I was writing this burlesca, the old song ‘Funiculi, Funicula’ poked its head out of the musical fabric. The tune seemed at odds with a ‘serious contemporary piece,’ and I heard myself saying, ‘This is ridiculous.’ But after shelving it, I longed for its return. Hence the title *Funicula Ridicula*.”

Eric Stokes (b 1930, Haddon Heights, NJ) studied at Lawrence College with James Ming, the New England Conservatory with Carl McKinley, and the University of Minnesota with Paul Fetler. He has lived in Minneapolis since 1959, studying and teaching at the University of Minnesota, where he established the electronic music studio in 1970 and the New Music Ensemble in 1972.

Stokes writes:

“To me any sound is potentially interesting and useful in a composition. As such, sounds are inherently innocent and free. However, their freedom and innocence are restricted and compromised by that with which we associate them and by the ‘musical’ qualities or lack thereof we attribute to them. My aim as composer, then, is to hold open that freedom and innocence as widely as possible so that any sound may contribute fresh associations and sonic combinations not heard before.

“In composing *On the Badlands—Parables*, I gave electronically generated sound a place much like a fifth choir of the traditional orchestra. The title and those of the three movements constitute a primary, indispensable compositional decision—a kind of ignition link without which the piece could never have gotten properly started.

“I was commissioned to compose the work by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in 1972. The first performance was conducted by Sydney Hodkinson on June 3rd of that year in Minneapolis.

“*Eldey Island* was composed in response to a call for a solo piece for recorder (Blockflöte) from Hans Maria Kneih. The title refers to the extinction of the legendary sea-bird, the great auk, or ‘Geirfugl’; the penguin of the North.

“In 1830, a volcano erupted under the sea near Iceland, causing a seaquake that changed the contours of the coastline. Geirfugl Island, the last home of the great auk, disappeared beneath the waves. Museum directors around the world awoke to the fact that a species that had once numbered in the millions was virtually extinct. What worried them was that there were hardly any specimens of the great auk—skeletons, stuffed birds, eggs— in their collections.

“It turned out that a few of the animals had taken refuge on nearby Eldey Island. On June 3, 1844, fourteen men set out from Iceland for Eldey Island. They spotted two auks that, as the men approached, ran along under the high cliff, their heads erect, their little wings somewhat extended. The men cornered them before they could reach the safety of the sea, strangled them, and threw them into the boat. The men sold the two carcasses for nine pounds. The great auk was extinct.

“The piece may be played by any solo wind player using instruments of a single family: recorders, saxophones, oboes, etc. This version is played on flute alternating with piccolo. The soloist records his own playing on the tape to which a simple ring-modulated episode is added at the end. The performer plays live in concert with this self-prepared tape.”

Dennis Russell Davies has led the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra since 1972. He is music director of the Cabrillo Music Festival in California and serves as music advisor to the American Composers Orchestra. In 1980 he will relinquish his St. Paul post to be general music director of the Stuttgart Opera. **William McGlaughlin** is the associate conductor of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Cynthia Stokes studied flute with James Pappoutsakis of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, She performs frequently in orchestral and chamber music concerts, and with the Minnesota Opera Company. She is on the faculty of St. Olaf’s College in Northfield, Minnesota.

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Produced by Carter Harman

Dream’s End:

Recorded by Dennis Rooney in St. Paul Minnesota

On the Badlands—Parables, Eldey Island:

Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City

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(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)