

## **Todd Brief**

***Cantares for soprano and large orchestra (1982)***

**Young Hee Kim, soprano**

**Dutch Radio Philharmonic Orchestra**

**Ed Spanjaard, conductor**

***Concert Etude for piano (1980)***

**Michael Dewart, piano**

***Moments for harp (1979)***

**Susan Jolles, harp**

***Canto for flute (1983)***

**Jos Zwaanenburg, flute**

*"I am fascinated by color and rhythm, although I consider myself foremost, a formalist. I draw my inspiration from all great music, and my compositions share many musical gestures with the so-called Romantic period. Yet as a composer today, writing virtuosic and highly colored works, I create a more modernist sound in terms of harmony, rhythm, and color, with the overall form based on the development of emotional and psychological drama."*

**Todd Brief's** self-description reveals a composer who has established himself confidently amid the vast spectrum of compositional styles available in these times. Early on he determined his compositional techniques, "a physical and learned intuitive process" stemming from vocal and keyboard improvisation. "After repeatedly playing my sketched materials, compositional decisions emerge which become engraved in my memory as the work itself," he explains. The music that results strikes the listener with its emotional impact and intensity.

Born in New York City in 1953, Brief played a variety of instruments at an early age, most seriously the piano, and began composing at the age of fifteen. He continued formal studies in composition with Ralph Shapey in Chicago, and earned degrees at the New England Conservatory of Music and Harvard University in Boston, where he worked with Donald Martino, William T. McKinley, Gunther Schuller, Earl Kim and Leon Kirchner. Further studies were undertaken through various fellowships to the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood and the Darmst 鵬 ter Ferienkurse fr Neue Musik, and with Isang Yun in West Berlin through the German Academic Exchange (D.A.A.D.).

His compositions, written for a large variety of vocal and instrumental ensembles, have received over thirty awards and prizes including a Guggenheim Fellowship, Prix de Rome, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Goddard Lieberman Award, "Young Generation in Europe" Prize from the City of Cologne, "Frderungspreis" from the City of Stuttgart, Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundation commissions, and both ASCAP and BMI awards. His works are performed throughout the United States and Europe, at major contemporary music festivals and by orchestras such as the I.S.C.M. World Music Days, Gaudeamus MusicWeek, Darmst 鵬 ter Ferienkurse fr Neue Musik, Fromm Festival, the Rome Radio Orchestra and the American Composers Orchestra.

This recording marks the debut of his work on CRI.

## *Notes on the Music*

The original sketches for *Cantares* were made in 1976, but most of the composition was done in 1982. Brief completed it shortly before its premiere at the Gaudeamus MusicWeek, the live recording of which is heard on this album. When he wrote *Cantares*, large, late-Romantic works were in Brief's thoughts. Perhaps from this influence, he has stretched the modern orchestra to its limits (the score calls for ninety-six performers and amplified soprano, although most performances have used fewer than the sixty strings required) in order to create this densely textured, powerful sounding work.

It was Brief's "romantic" outlook that led him to the poetry of Pablo Neruda, both in *Cantares*, and later, in *Slow Lament* (1984) for soprano and piano. "Neruda's images and the sound of the language itself provided a powerful combination for me. The poetry is vivid, emotional, and dramatic 用 articularly in the use of sharply contrasting images. In general, the visceral, earthy quality of Latin American poetry appeals to me, and the sounds of the Spanish language are conducive to very fluid vocal lines." For *Cantares*, the text "provides the emotional basis of the work's formal design, the concentrated ebb and flow of its dramatic character, and the virtuosity of its orchestral color."

Although the overall impression is of a fluid, improvisatory style, Brief has notated the vocal line meticulously. He has also added phonetic interludes, extracted from the Spanish text, which "serve as reflections of the poem's various moods and atmosphere. While the soprano enacts the text, the orchestra develops independently. It is the soprano and orchestra acting 預 s a duo 擁 n opposition to and in support of one another which creates the work's tension and release; the turmoil of inner 'sea' in which the narrator ultimately "survive(s) . . . alone . . . woundedly abandoned." In this music, attacks, connections, resonances, and releases create particularly strong impressions, echoing such phrases from the text as: "swells and blows . . . listens and breathes."

The three solo works on this album were borne out of Brief's fascination with virtuosity. In such solo recital works, he finds "an opportunity for concentrated dramatic development and exploration of instrumental technique." The sonic world created by each of the instruments 摇 arp, piano, and flute 妖 differs markedly. Yet the three share, along with *Cantares*, the traits of Brief's style: a density of musical events, intricate rhythms, extremes of range and dynamics, extensions of technique to create new colors, and a sense of the drama and psychology of the individual's survival in a complex and sometimes hostile world."

In *Moments* (1979), the most contemplative of these three pieces, the harp engages in ruminative studies of the opening musical events in each of a number of episodes. Whether the first arpeggiation, the pulsations of a chord, or the emergence of a single melodic line from a filigreed surrounding, these moments accumulate and grow gradually, but insistently, to a climax, before being released to calmer times and a conclusion that rustles, rather than fades away.

*Concert Etude* (1980) utilizes the piano's majestic power in similar, though more extended statements. The composer observes that the one-movement composition "moves forward in a kaleidoscopic manner, turns from one type of gesture or material, arrives at yet another, and gathers in one unified gesture." Registral contrast, motivic repetition and variation, and the huge spectrum of colors and emotions, all recall *Moments*, but the scale is grander. Brief's instructions to the performer, here as elsewhere, encompass dynamic level, tempo, mood, mode of attack, and even fingerings. But the effect is timeless and liberating.

The technical resources of the flute might seem constricting in such virtuosic music, but not for Brief. In *Canto* (1983) he utilizes multiphonics, harmonics, whistle tones, microtones, variations of lip openings and angle of the flute's head-joint, vibrato, and fingerings to achieve his ends. "Canto" is the Spanish word for song; the flutist is instructed to perform "in a vocal manner" and, like a vocalist, the flutist's

modulations of a single tone are particularly important. With the rise and fall of its shapes and character, the music grows seemingly to the bursting point; the sound remains idiomatic and colorfully imaginative. Again there is a settling, for *Canto* shares with the three other works here a quiet, calm ending.

—Susan Feder

♯ 1986 Susan Feder

Parts of these notes originally appeared as program notes for the American Composers Orchestra and in *Ear Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 3: "Todd Brief: Emotion within Form"; an interview with Perry Goldstein, and are reprinted by permission.

### *Notes on the Performers*

**Michael Dewart**, pianist, performs regularly throughout the United States both as soloist and as accompanist. With a particular interest in 20th century repertoire, Dewart has a long and impressive list of premiere performances to his credit, including Brief's *Fantasy* (1975) for violin and piano and *Concert Etude* which is dedicated to him. He has recorded for the Spectrum and Opus One labels.

**Susan Jolles**, harpist, has commissioned many works for her instrument. She has performed extensively as a member of the Jubal Trio, the American Composers Orchestra, the Y Chamber Symphony and the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, as well as in solo recitals. She has received awards from the Fromm and Naumburg Foundations, and has recorded for the Nonesuch, Vox and Bridge labels. With the Jubal Trio, she may be heard on CRI recordings SD 479 in Francis Thorne's *Nature Studies* and SD 497 in Joseph Schwantner's *Wild Angels of the Open Hills*.

**Young Hee Kim**, soprano, studied in Korea and later in Madrid with Lola Aragon, and with RKoster in the Netherlands. She has won many international competitions and awards. After her Rome Radio Orchestra (RAI) appearance in *Cantares*, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* proclaimed, "Not since the prime of Cathy Berberian has such a voice been heard: strong and flexible, with wide range and varied expression and of an astonishing transparency."

**Ed Spanjaard**, conductor, studied in Amsterdam and London, and has assisted such conductors as Haitink, von Karajan, Solti, and de Waart. He has since conducted major European orchestras, especially in the Netherlands, and made numerous recordings. He has given the premieres of many orchestral and chamber works, including those commissioned for Het Nieuwe Ensemble, which he has conducted regularly.

**Jos Zwaanenburg**, flutist, studied at the Sweelinck Conservatory, Amsterdam, with Joost Tromp. He has a considerable repertoire of contemporary works, many written expressly for him, and has won many awards including the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition. As soloist and as a member of ensembles such as the Tibia Quartet, he has performed throughout Europe.

## CANTARES

La parracial rosa devora  
y sube a la cima del santo:  
con espesas garras sujeta  
el tiempo at fatigado ser:  
hincha y sopla en las venas duras,  
ata el cordel pulmonar, entonces  
largamente escucha y respira.

Morir deseo, vivir quiero,  
herramienta, perro infinito,  
movimiento de océano espeso  
con vieja y negra superficie.

Para quien y a quien en la sombra  
mi gradual guitarra resuena  
naciendo en la sal de mi ser  
como el pez en la sal del mar?

Ay, que continuo país cerrado,  
neutral, en la zona del fuego,  
inmovil, en el giro terrible,  
seco, en la humedad de las cosas.

Enlonces, entre mis rodillas,  
bajo la raíz de mis ojos,  
prosigue cosiendo mi alma:  
su aterradora aguja trabaja.

Sobrevivo en medio del mar,  
solo y tan locamente herido,  
tan solamente persistiendo,  
heridamente abandonado.  
—Pablo Neruda

## SONGS

The parracial rose devours  
and climbs to the peak of the saint:  
with thick claws it fastens  
time to the wearied being:  
it swells and blows in the hard veins,  
it ties the pulmonary cord, then  
lengthily it listens and breathes.

I wish to die, I want to live,  
tool, infinite dog,  
thick ocean movement  
with an old and black surface.

For whom and to whom in the shadow  
does my gradual guitar resound,  
being born in the salt of my being  
like the fish in the salt of the sea?

Ah, what a continuous closed country,  
neutral, in the zone of fire,  
motionless, in the terrible spinning,  
dry, in the moistness of things.

Then, between my knees,  
beneath the root of my eyes,  
my soul pursues its sewing:  
its terrifying needle at work.

I survive in the midst of the sea,  
alone and so crazily wounded,  
so solely persisting,  
woundedly abandoned.  
—Translation by Donald D. Walsh

*(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*