

THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FORUM

JOSEPH SCHWANTNER

Music of Amber

Conducted by William Wright

JEAN EICHELBERGER IVEY

Solstice

Joseph Schwantner (b.1943, Chicago, IL) is currently Professor of Composition at the Eastman School of Music. He received his musical and academic training at the Chicago Conservatory and at Northwestern University, from which he received a doctorate in 1968.

From 1982 to 1985, Schwantner served as Composer-in-Residence with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra as part of the Meet the Composer/Orchestra Residencies Program. He has been the subject of a television documentary, *Soundings*, produced by WGBH in Boston, and his work *Magabunda, "Four Poems of Agueda Pizaro"* was nominated for a Grammy in the "Best New Classical Composition" category.

His commissions include works for the International Festival of the Arts at Lincoln Center, the Fromm Foundation, The Naumburg Foundation, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Schwantner received the Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for his orchestral work *Aftertones of Infinity*, and the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award in 1981 for *Music of Amber*.

Other works of Joseph Schwantner on CRI include *Modus Caelestis* (SD 340), *Wind Willow, Whisper . . .* (SD 441) and *Wild Angels of the Open Hills* (SD 497).

Music of Amber, written for the New York New Music Ensemble and completed in February, 1981, is scored for flute, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion.

A brief original poem accompanies each of the work's two movements or parts. While the work is not programmatic in the traditional sense, the poems did provide a landscape of extra-musical images and ideas which enhanced and stimulated the compositional process. This procedure of responding and reacting musically to poetic stimuli is found in several of my recent works, including *Aftertones of Infinity* (1978) and *Distant Runes and Incantations* (1984).

The first movement, subtitled *Wind Willow, Whisper . . .*, originally commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation, was one of six short works by six composers written to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Da Capo Chamber Players [These six works are available on CRI SD 441], and was first performed by them in March, 1980. Because of the movement's relative brevity, I later felt that a second movement should be added. This new version also included the addition of an extensive percussion part in Movement I.

The second movement, subtitled *Sanctuary*, provided formal balance to the work's overall design and allowed for further opportunities to investigate and explore the musical materials presented in the first movement. It was with this expanded formal scenario in mind that I attempted to create a larger mosaic of musical relations.

Jean Eichelberger Ivey (b. 1923, Washington, D.C., now living in New York City) is on the composition faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music. She was coordinator of the composition department from 1982 to 1986, and is the founder and director of Peabody's Electronic Music Studio. She is a graduate of Trinity College, Peabody Conservatory, the Eastman School of Music and the University of Toronto, from which she received a doctorate in composition.

Dr. Ivey has been awarded two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Guggenheim Fellowship and residencies at the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo. She is the subject of a television documentary, *A Woman Is . . . a Composer*, produced by WRC-TV in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Ivey has composed works in virtually every medium, but is particularly fond of writing for the voice. Her vocal works include the monodrama *Testament of Eve*, for mezzo soprano, orchestra and tape, an opera, *The Birthmark*, and much vocal chamber music. For many of these, including ***Solstice***, she has also written her own texts. Jean Eichelberger Ivey's *Hera*, *Hung from the Sky* can be heard on CRI SD 325.

Solstice (1977), commissioned by the music fraternity Sigma Alpha Iota for its national convention, is one of a number of works inspired by my interest in astronomy.

The text deals with the winter solstice, when the sun reaches its southernmost point and appears to stand still before proceeding on its journey.

The music is atmospheric, with emphasis on color and drama. Soft strokes by finger cymbals, taken up by chime-like chords on the piano, set up the "sense of awe and mystery" called for at the beginning of the score, and create a motive which recurs from time to time. Flute and voice enter in hushed contrapuntal dialogue. Suddenly the mood becomes much more excited as the singer, against swirling figurations in the piano, flute and glockenspiel, envisions the earth flung out like a vow from the sun.

Part II opens with a serene solo by unaccompanied piccolo. The singer recounts how ancient sages established festivals at the winter solstice: that of the Egyptian sun god, the boisterous Saturnalia of the Romans and the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ all of them feasts of light, placed at the "longest night in the year."

Part III depicts the approach of the solstice, with "each dawn more laggardly and every dusk too soon." A three-beat ostinato begun by a stroke of the claves opens this section, occurring later and later until the whole pattern starts over. Suddenly, the music brightens into coloratura figures for voice and instruments, as it describes yet another festival – the Scandinavian feast of St. Lucy, "when the eldest virgin daughter, crowned with candles, . . . comes carolling a blessing." A coda follows, recalling the dialogue of voice and flute near the beginning of the piece, forming a brief summation of the whole work.

-Jean Eichelberger Ivey

The **Contemporary Music Forum** was founded in 1973 in Washington, D. C. as a group of professional performers and composers committed to presenting concerts of works by living composers. The Forum has premiered over 150 new works and has represented over 200 composers, equally divided among Washington-area composers, other American composers and composers of other countries.

In addition to its regular chamber music series at the Frances and Armand Hammer Auditorium of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Forum has performed at the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap, the Organization of American States and at various museums and universities throughout the eastern United States. Its performances have been broadcast on public radio stations and by the Voice of America. This disc marks the Contemporary Music Forum's recording debut.

The Contemporary Music Forum

for **Music of Amber**

Katherine Hay: flute
Ronald Aufmann: clarinet, bass clarinet
Helmut Braunlich: violin
Lori Barnet: violoncello

Randall Eyles: percussion
Barbro Dahlman: piano
William Wright: conductor

for **Solstice**

Pamela Jordan: soprano
Katherine Hay: flute

Randall Eyles: percussion
Barbro Dahlman: piano

(Original liner notes from CRI Lp jacket)

MUSIC OF AMBER

Part I

Wind Willow, Whisper . . .
a gentle breeze
early morning mist,
dew on languid leaves,
sweet birds sing
in exultation,
a celebration . . .

Part II

Sanctuary . . .
deep forests
a play of shadows,
most ancient murmurings
from a dark millennium
the trembling fragrance
of the music of amber . . .

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SOLSTICE

I
At half-past night
and half-past winter,
the sun stands still
out in the Milky Way.
The year turns on its axis.
We huddle blind
in earth's bulky body's black shadow.
Flung like a yoyo out to the end of its string,
our planet strains its orbit.
Sun! will you slip the leash this time,
and let us hurtle heedless toward Hercules,
out of your track forever?
Ah, we have known you will not,
since Egypt and Chaldea.
We have known you will not.

II

There in the desert night, astronomers,
Magi of the East,
measured the motions on the cloudless sky,
learned to foretell the rise and fall of planets,
the courses of the moon,
your waning and your waxing great, O Sun!
Then said the wise men of Egypt:

Now is the sun reborn.
This is the birth of the sun-god,
at half-past night,
the longest night in the year.

And just here was ancient Rome's great revel
to chronicle the god of time: Cronus-Saturn, father of the gods,
with feasting, gifts to friends, pardon to foes,
torches, rockets, and all festive flames: –
Saturnalia! Saturnalia!

Then said the holy Church Fathers:

Let this date be hallowed;
let this rite be consecrate.
Now is the birth of the Son of God,
at half-past night,
the longest night in the year.

III

We have marked every day
each dawn more laggardly
and every dusk too soon.
Now in nothern countries
night is a slowly, slowly spreading stain.
December's day is sickly, bleak, uncertain.
But just here is the Lucy-date, feast of lights!
when the eldest virgin daughter, crowned
with candles, bringing pine,
and pastries scented with coriander,
comes carolling a blessing.
Carolling, she wakes the sleepers,
elucidates the dark.

At half-past night
and half-past winter,
the sun stands still out in the Milky Way.
The year turns on its axis.
Now is the sun reborn!
It is the longest night of the year.

Jean Eichelberger Ivey

