

**ROGER REYNOLDS**  
**Whispers Out of Time**  
**Transfigured Wind II**

**New World Records 80401**

**MEMBERS OF SONOR**  
**THE SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ENSEMBLE**

If composers born in the 1920s deconstructed the classical tradition and destroyed the foundations of "normal" musical practice, it was left to the '30s generation to build a new universe amid the rubble. No one has participated more assiduously in that venture than Roger Reynolds (b. 1934). With degrees in both engineering physics and music, he has infused into avant-garde music a perspective cognizant of the extra-musical world. His 1962 theater piece *The Emperor of Ice Cream* inaugurated a new genre, and became one of the most widely imitated works of its decade. His book *Mind Models* (which discussed musical implications of commercial technology, drug use, computers, and brain-wave study, among other things) was to the American Seventies avant-garde what Boulez's *On Music Today* was to European serialism: a bold outline of extended possibilities, a never-look-back plunge into unexplored territory. It seemed surprising, yet fitting, that in 1989, Reynolds nabbed the usually sedate Pulitzer Prize for music; he was the first experimentalist sufficiently recognized by the establishment to do so since Charles Ives in 1947.

*Whispers Out of Time* is the prize-winning work. The title is the last phrase of John Ashbery's long poem *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, and Reynolds uses a string orchestra to reflect the poem's changing images, as the poem itself reflects a sixteenth-century painting by Parmigianino. The subject is a natural choice, for Reynolds is one of the most literary of recent composers; he has based works on texts by, among others, Wallace Stevens (*Emperor*), Samuel Beckett (*Ping, A Merciful Coincidence* and a new work, *Between the Shingle and the Dune*), Jorge Luis Borges (*The Palace*), and Milan Kundera (*Sketchbook, The Vanity of Words*). Ashbery's *Self-Portrait* is divided into six sections, reflected here by six movements each titled with a line from the poem, and further divided phrase by phrase with parenthetical quotations.

The work is a departure for Reynolds in that there are underlying musical quotations as well, from Beethoven's *Les Adieux* and Mahler's Ninth Symphony. A long, skeletalized passage from the opening of *Les Adieux* runs through the violas and cellos, starting about one minute into the first movement. The first section of "The Surprise, the Tension Are in the Concept" contains a long quotation from that electric moment in the first movement of Mahler's Ninth where, the development over, the horns forcefully restate the opening motive. Reynolds analogizes his appropriation of Mahler to Ashbery's of Parmigianino; as Ashbery overlays his personal experiences over the artist's work, so Reynolds "shrouds" both quotations with material of his own in the violins and contrabass, and both are rhythmically altered to become "temporally convex," as in the mirror of Ashbery's title. (However, listen in the fourth movement for the Ninth's opening F# A B A motive, slowed down, in the basses.) The poem mentions that Berg described a phrase of Mahler's Ninth as "death itself," and Reynolds inscribes those words at the *fff* chord near the sixth movement's beginning.

*Whispers* is scored for a string orchestra of eight violins, six violas, five cellos, and four contrabasses, including a soloist on each instrument. The bass-heavy substitution of contrabass for second violin is only one of the ways in which Reynolds creates textures unusual for the genre. Great subtlety is

achieved by having the soloists at times depart only slightly from what the ensemble is playing (sometimes the same pitches with skewed rhythms), like an image out of focus; in addition, the leaders of each section sometimes play independently, and during part of the fifth movement every instrument has its own line. Various figures "tone-paint" the poem: the pizzicato ensemble against the soloists "sighing" glissandos at "Raindrops on the Pane," or the up-and-down swelling of 32nd notes at "Like a Wave Breaking on a Rock."

More often, though, Reynolds suggests only a quality of intellection, with the second movement's brief eight-voice tempo canon at ratios of 12:15:16:18:20 (Reynolds has written at length about tempo canon pioneer Conlon Nancarrow), the phasing of repeated figures, or the finale's emotive effect, having the soloists throb the pitches that are more calmly sustained by the ensemble. Algorithmic methods aided in the creation of such intense effects, yet through them the piece captures a kind of passionate abstraction, an austere, Ruggles-like atonal counterpoint informed by a wealth of new instrumental techniques.

*Transfigured Wind II* (1983) is an example of Reynolds's most quintessential style. It could be said that the central challenge of both his music and his writings has been the subjective response to new technology, how to absorb new sensibilities into music without allowing the technology to defeat or subvert artistic expression. *Transfigured Wind II* relies on techniques that Reynolds pioneered in *Archipelago*, a major work he produced in 1983 at IRCAM: He recorded the piece's four flute solos and used a computer to capture, analyze, and transform the nuances of pitch, tempo, and dynamics that the performer intuitively added to the notation. The transformations then appeared on tape, and also became the material for the orchestral writing. In a way, the entire piece is an amplified, colorized echo of flutist Harvey Sollberger's musically informed response to Reynolds's intricate notation.

The four sections each begins with flute solos, the last three starting, respectively, about 3, 8, and 17 minutes into the piece. The first focuses around a low C and C# with ghostly whistle tones; the second leads from a wide-ranging quarter-note melody to melodies spun around an F#; the third plays with tremolos, trills, and small glissandos; and the fourth runs through chromatic scales and buzzy, irregular multiphonic trills. All these gestures are echoed in the orchestra after each solo, and also in the taped background drawn from repeated phrases of the flute's material. The computer draws unexpected timbres from the flute; one whirring sound is actually the flute's opening *sforzando* drawn to 128 times its original length. Both tapes and orchestral variations are cumulative. The extensive tape passage (at about 27 minutes) combines six flutes at once (actually one line horizontally computer-divided into six "slices" and recombined), and the long orchestral finale refers back to the entire piece, not just the preceding solo. Reynolds has long been fascinated by memory, by the *Traces* (to cite an early title) notes leave behind.

Though computer-derived, the transformations are neither literal nor born from some complex system but rather, audible by surface impression; they invite the ear into the piece. The repeated-note gestures and mallet percussion flurries are Reynolds trademarks, as is the spacious, uncluttered sense of time, which seems to stem from Reynolds's early fascination with absurdist literary figures such as Beckett, from the "ocean of silence" created as metaphor for *Archipelago*, and from his extensive contact with Japanese culture (can one separate such influences?). Few composers can match Reynolds for technological sophistication. Of those who come close, no others have written such human, ear-conscious music.

—Kyle Gann

Kyle Gann, *composer and critic*, is the new-music columnist for *The Village Voice* and the author of *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow (Excelsior)*.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Ambages*. Harvey Sollberger, flute. Nonesuch HB 73028.

*Blind Men*. Peabody Concert Singers and Chamber Ensemble, Gregg Smith conducting. CRI S 241.

*Coconino ... A Shattered Landscape*. Arditti Quartet. Gramavision R2 79440.

*The Emperor of Ice Cream*. Gregg Smith Singers, Gregg Smith conducting. Turnabout 34759.

Fantasy for Pianist. Yuji Takahashi, piano. Mainstream 5000.

*From Behind the Unreasoning Mask*. Miles Anderson, trombone; Tom Raney, Roger Reynolds, percussion. New World 80237.

*Ping*. Reynolds, piano; Karen Reynolds, flute; Paul Chihara, harmonium and percussion; Alan Johnson, electronics. CRI SD 285.

*Quick Are the Mouths of Earth*. The Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Arthur Weisberg conducting. Nonesuch H-71219.

"...the serpent-snapping eye." Edwin Harkins, trumpet; Daryl Pratt, percussion; Cecil Lytle, piano; tape. CRI SD 495.

*Traces*. Yuji Takahashi, piano; Karen Reynolds, flute; Lin Barron, cello; Alan Johnson, electronics. CRI SD 285.

*The Vanity of Words*. Wergo 2024-50.

*Voicespace (Still, A Merciful Coincidence, Eclipse, The Palace)*. Philip Larson, Edwin Harkins, Carol Plantamura, Deborah Kavasch, Linda Vickerman, voices; the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble. Lovely Music VR 1801-2.

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Ashbery, John. *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. New York: Viking, 1975.

Reynolds, Roger. "Indeterminacy, Some Considerations," *Perspectives of New Music*, 4/1:136-40.

\_\_\_\_\_. "John Cage and Roger Reynolds: A Conversation." *The Musical Quarterly*, October, 1979: 573-594.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mind Models: New Forms of Musical Experience*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Searcher's Path: A Composer's Ways*. Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College, CUNY, 1988.

Sollberger, Harvey. "Roger Reynolds." In *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds. London and New York: Macmillan, 1986.

*The soloists on this recording are from the group SONOR:*

**John Fonville**, flutist-composer, received a DMA from the University of Illinois before joining the music faculty at the University of California, San Diego. He is active as a soloist and member of the Tone Road Ramblers (a performer/composer ensemble) and serves as co-music director of SONOR. He was a featured soloist at the International Festival for Contemporary Music held at Darmstadt in 1988.

**János Négyesy**, violinist, born in Budapest and educated in Europe, was concertmaster of the Radio Berlin Orchestra before living and working in Paris, Vienna, and New York. In 1979, he joined the

Music Department at the University of California, where he teaches, performs, and records. In the spring of 1990, he premiered the violin concerto, *Personae*, written for him by Roger Reynolds.

**Yun-Jie Liu**, principal viola for the San Diego Symphony and for the San Diego Symphony Ensemble, is a graduate of Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He is the winner of numerous awards, including the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition in 1988 and the Music Academy of the West Concerto Competition in 1988. He has also been principal viola for the Shanghai Conservatory Symphony.

**Peter Farrell**, cellist, taught at the University of Illinois and the Eastman School of Music prior to joining the faculty at the University of California, San Diego. He has served as principal cellist with the Columbus Philharmonic Orchestra, with the Sinfonia of San Diego, and with the San Diego Symphony. Currently serving as chair of the department of music, he is one of the original members of SONOR.

**Betram Turetzky**, contrabassist, is the author of *The Contemporary Contrabass* and co-editor of *The New Instrumentation*, a series published by the University of California Press. More than 300 new works have been written for and performed by him. He is also the most frequently recorded contrabass soloist in America. He is professor of music at the University of California, San Diego, and a charter member of SONOR.

**SONOR** was established in 1975 as the resident contemporary music ensemble of the University of California, San Diego. Members of SONOR appear throughout the world in major international festivals performing a repertoire which reflects a dedication to research, preparation, and performance of a wide spectrum of twentieth century music with a particular emphasis on recent works by American composers.

**The San Diego Symphony Ensemble** was established in 1989 by the San Diego Symphony to present a contemporary music series featuring the works of living composers. Utilizing the administrative umbrella of the San Diego Symphony Orchestra Association and drawing upon the symphony's full-time artistic ensemble, the San Diego Symphony Ensemble receives the majority of its funding from corporate and individual donations, grants, and government funding. Igor Gruppman serves as concertmaster for the ensemble.

**Harvey Sollberger** has been active as a composer, conductor, flutist, teacher, and organizer of concerts since the early 1960s. He was a founder of the Group for Contemporary Music and, with Charles Wuorinen, served as its co-director for 27 years. Recently, he has been the featured artist at the Interlink Festival in Tokyo, composer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome, and composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Sollberger is currently Professor of Music at Indiana University.

### **Roger Reynolds**

*Whispers Out of Time* (26:31)

- 1- I. The Soul Is a Captive (5:40)
- 2- II. A Magma of Interiors (2:53)
- 3- III. Like a Wave Breaking on a Rock (2:43)
- 4- IV. The Surprise, the Tension Are in the Concept (2:39)

5- V. A Chill, a Blight Moving Outward (2:59)

6- VI. The Portrait's Will to Endure (9:37)

Janos Negyesy, violin

Yun-Jie Liu, viola

Peter Farrell, cello

Bertram Turetzky, contrabass

The San Diego Symphony Ensemble

Harvey Sollberger, conductor

7- *Transfigured Wind II* (35:30)

John Fonville, flute

Flute source material for computer-generated tape supplied by Harvey Sollberger.

The San Diego Symphony Ensemble

Harvey Sollberger, conductor

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