

DAVID TAYLOR
Past Tells

New World Records 80436

This is not an album for the fainthearted, the straitlaced, or the stylistically correct. Bass trombonist David Taylor has drawn a multifaceted self-portrait from pieces he selected, inspired, or composed. In its range of styles and moods it's a portrait of the bass trombonist as a quick-change artist. Taylor's eclecticism takes us way beyond crossover or fusion, and demonstrates how meaningless the old stylistic boundaries are for a contemporary musician. Taylor does not just feel at home in many different styles, he *needs* the widest range of stylistic angles to present his musical identity. The works here are different masks, through which Taylor reveals his own obsessions and passions. In each piece he plays a role, and his dramatic range extends from Bachian piety to Yiddish irony, from the idealism of Charles Ives to the hipster nihilism of Lenny Bruce. The themes that emerge may appear contradictory: rage and nostalgia, religious faith and blasphemous humor.

Taylor's idols include, beside Ives, Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington and Gil Evans, Thad Jones and Mel Lewis, Miles Davis, Pablo Casals and Glenn Gould, Louis Armstrong, Edgard Varese, and Luciano Berio. The spirit of this album invokes the Sixties (when Taylor met Berio at Juilliard and performed music by Ives and Varese -- and when music, religion and politics mixed) as an antidote to the callousness of the Eighties and the cynicism of the Nineties. Taylor says that for him the Sixties represent the spirit of improvisation and risk as opposed to conservatory notions of "perfection." Playing the trombone, a "marginal" instrument, Taylor turns marginality into a virtue by transforming his instrument into a multiplicity of sounds and voices. Simply as a study of mutes, this album would be of interest: Listen to the counter-intuitive use of the Harmon mute in Ives's "Things Our Fathers Loved" or the buzzer mute (made out of kazoos) which gives a ghostly air to "The Indians." The surprising sounds Taylor produces are not merely colors, but voices. Significantly, most of the pieces on this album are songs without words, or they juxtapose and combine words and music. It's a one-man show (with a little help from some extremely talented friends) of a player/actor.

Suite: "Five (5) Songs avec benediction et divertissement aka Sidney Hall" (selected by David Taylor in 1983)

1. J. S. Bach recitative, "Ach, unser wille bleibt verkehrt" and aria, "Herr, so du willst" from Cantata #73, "Herr, wie du willst, so schick's mit mir." Arranged by David Taylor. David Taylor, bass trombone; Ted Rosenthal, piano; Emily Mitchell, harp; Gary Schneider, synthesizer.

The style of this transcription may alarm the authentic performance movement, but it has its own authenticity: this is pious nineteenth-century parlor Bach (with the synthesizer adding a contemporary shiver up the spine), a style that links it to other movements in the suite, particularly the Ives songs. The key to its dramatic function is the opening text: "Ah, how perverse our will remains." Awareness of rebellion leads to a nostalgia for faith. The penitent sinner accepts God's will, even in death: "Lord as thou wilt, then press ye pangs of dying, the sighings from my bosom...this form so deeply stained by sin." In the expressive purity of his tone Taylor here demonstrates the trombone equivalent of bel canto singing.

2. Charles Ives: "The Things Our Fathers Loved (and the Greatest of these was Liberty)." Arranged

by Nicholas Flagello and David Taylor. David Taylor, bass trombone; Ted Rosenthal, piano; Emily Mitchell, harp; Rolf Schulte and Jon Kass, violins; Louise Schulman, viola; Fred Sherry, cello.

Ives often arranged his songs as instrumental pieces (and vice versa). This song is an homage to his father, George Ives, who was the village bandmaster in Danbury, Connecticut; it packs a tremendous amount of musical evocation into its brief length. Ives hears the village organ, his Aunt Sarah humming gospels, and the village cornet band playing "The Battle Cry of Freedom." Scene-painting suddenly gives way to prophecy as the singer commands the listener to hear the songs, even though he cannot recall their words, for they speak directly to the soul. The transcendental blend of church hymns and marching tunes, sentimentality and energy, so characteristic of Ives, extends Taylor's themes of militancy and nostalgia with an American political subtext provided by the parenthetical title.

3. Charles Ives: "The Indians," poem by Charles Sprague. Arranged by Nicholas Flagello and David Taylor. David Taylor, bass trombone; Ted Rosenthal, harpsichord; Emily Mitchell, harp; Rolf Schulte and Jon Kass, violins; Louise Schulman, viola; Fred Sherry, cello.

An elegy for Native Americans driven from their lands. The white man ploughs their hunting grounds, chops down their forests, takes over their rivers, forcing their children west to die. The melodic line is like a haunting, distant religious chant. The accompaniment is an organum of dense seven-note chords, here played on a distant harp, which swells to a climax as the sound of the axe rings through the woods, then gradually fades away.

4. Maurice Ravel: "Chanson hebraique." Arrangement of "Meyerke main Suhn," a traditional Yiddish song. Adapted by David Taylor. David Taylor, bass trombone; Emily Mitchell, harp.

A dialogue between father and son. The father asks the son what he prays for. The son answers that he prays for children, long life and bread: children and long life in order to teach the Torah and praise God, bread to feed his father. The song captures the intense devotion and ironic realism of the *shtetl*.

5. (Divertissement) Andras Szollosy: "One Hundred Bars for Tom Everett." David Taylor, bass trombone; Gordon Gottlieb, three bongos.

The one purely instrumental movement of the Suite, "One Hundred Bars" is the first outburst of extravagant virtuosic special effects. The comic mood is interrupted however, by an Andante religioso in the form of a two-part chorale. The lower part is played while the upper is sung into the trombone so that the harmonics in between are also heard.

6. Duke Ellington: "Come Sunday," arranged by Michael Abene. David Taylor, bass trombone; Jon Kass, violin; Ted Rosenthal, piano.

Ellington's classic tune, a prayer to God to "see my people through," made its first appearance in Carnegie Hall on January 23, 1943 as part of *Black, Brown and Beige*, where it was played by Lawrence Brown on trombone, Ray Nance on violin, and Johnny Hodges on saxophone. Michael Abene's arrangement is a tribute not only to Ellington's song but to its first interpreters as well. It is a

distillation of the original down to its melodic essence, especially in the passage where the notes of the melody are split between the three instruments in a bell-like *klangfarbenmelodie*. Here Taylor's religious theme finds its purest expression.

7. Charles Ives: "Tolerance," text "from a quotation in Pres. Hadley's Lectures, "Some Influences in Modern Philosophic Thought." Arranged by Nicholas Flagello and David Taylor. David Taylor, bass trombone; Emily Mitchell, harp; Rolf Schulte and Jon Kass, violins; Louise Schulman, viola; Fred Sherry, cello.

An ironic return to the "perverse will" that opened the Suite, Ives's song justifies tolerance by pointing out the universal feelings of longing and desire. Knowledge of one's own struggles demands sympathy with the plight of others. This tiny song is, formally, simply a fierce crescendo. The Suite ends on a tone of militant defiance: as Charles Mingus said, you *can't* fight Sidney Hall. But Taylor means by this suite you can fight Sidney Hall.

David Schiff: "Shtik." David Taylor, solo bass trombone; Marty Ehrlich, tenor saxophone; Andy Laster, baritone saxophone; Herb Robertson, trumpet; Mark Helias, bass; Phil Haynes, drums. Commissioned by David Taylor. Written in 1992.

I wrote the following program note for the premiere of "Shtik" at the Manhattan School of Music:

The first time I heard David Taylor perform (it was a performance of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*) I knew he was not only a great trombonist but also a great actor--and I decided to write him a performance piece that would challenge both of these talents. Later, when I heard him perform with the Charles Mingus Big Band, I also saw that he was a great improviser, and I decided that the piece should allow him to display this talent as well. Soon the constellation of Taylor, Mingus, and Lenny Bruce formed in my mind--a connection confirmed for me from reading about Bruce and how he connected his wild comic monologues with jazz improvisation. In "Shtik," Taylor plays the role of Lenny Bruce. The music is based on the words and rhythms of one of Bruce's routines, "To is a Preposition," a defense of free speech against charges of obscenity. Bruce's "shtik" is written like a piece of music, repeating and developing a few verbal motives. Its mood changes rapidly from the serious to the comic to the tasteless to the terrifying to the sublime to the vulgar--it goes to the edge, and then over the edge. *My* "Shtik" (which aims to capture the mood of a Fifties lounge act) uses the rhythms and fluctuating moods of Bruce's monologue as the basis of an extended jazz composition inspired by the music of Charles Mingus. The trombone soloist is free to incorporate bits of the verbal monologue into the musical shtik, ad lib. The piece ends with three cadenzas which can be musical or verbal or both.

David Noon: "Tailor-Made" op. 112. David Taylor, bass trombone; Emily Mitchell, harp; Gordon Gottlieb, percussion; Lindsey Horner, double bass; and tape. Commissioned by David Taylor. Written in 1991. In three movements.

David Noon's three-movement suite superimposes taped material on live performance. The instrumental parts are meticulous, elegant, and cool, the recorded materials are provocatively incongruous. The listener has to put the parts together, a fascinating exercise. The composer offers

this guide:

"Self-reliant, sometimes naive, well-meaning, sometimes misguided, idealism has always played an important part in America's group and individual cultural history. Resonance of that idealism reverberate in the movements of "Tailor-Made." In the second movement, strains of African-American Scott Joplin, son of ex-slaves, playing his New Rag (1912) waft subtly alongside Woodrow Wilson's insightful, loving, yet paternalistic, speech (1915) to the American Indians, a speech given in brotherhood and solidarity with Native Americans who, at that time, were not yet official citizens of the United States. (That political right would come only in 1924.) Memories of our idealistic past also infuse the final movement of "Tailor-Made": a love song, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," sung by John McCormack in 1914, a song born of the horrors of the "War to End All Wars," is juxtaposed against the motoric, sometimes martially insistent music of live musicians 80 years later. The living past, the sonic reverberations of our history, form a part of the collage of the present for us all."

David Taylor: "Past Tells (or Orals)." David Taylor, bass trombone; Paul Smoker, trumpet and flugelhorn; Herb Robertson, trumpet and valve trombone; Marty Ehrlich, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Andy Laster, baritone saxophone and clarinet; Jay Branford, alto saxophone and baritone saxophone; Phil Haynes, drums and percussion; Mark Helias, bass; Gary Schneider, conductor. Written in 1993. In eight sections (without breaks): Beginning, Lamentations, Four Chord, Nokh A Mol, Processive Regalia, Duo, Spiritual-Out Chorus, and Epilogue.

A brooding and mysteriously intense piece, "Past Tells" combines atonal harmonies, Yemenite chant, a spiritual ("You Can Bury Me in the East"), and blues and aleatoric passages. Although the influences of Ives, Varese, Berio and Ornette Coleman may be discerned, the piece is held together by Taylor's idiomatic understanding of the textural and sonorous possibilities of his dark-timbred ensemble. The piece begins by opposing a double ostinato in the trumpets against slowly moving chords played by all the bass instruments. In Lamentations, the trumpets play a Yemenite chant taken from Idelsohn's Thesaurus of Hebrew-Oriental Melodies against a unison line in the saxophones and bass trombone. Four Chord is a nine-bar chorale for clarinet, trombone, trumpet, flugelhorn, alto, and tenor, moving the music into the middle register. Nokh A Mol (Yiddish for "once again") inverts the texture of lamentations with high instruments playing the unison line while the baritone sax improvises on rhythms from the Yemenite chant in the low register; trumpet and bass trombone add a unison bass line. Processive Regalia opposes a vamp for two clarinets to a chorale in the lower instruments. Duo is an improvised passage for bass and drums. In Spiritual-Out Chorus, a high ostinato in the reeds is set against a slow melody in the trumpets and trombone, leading into a statement of the spiritual "You Can Bury Me in the East," which picks up momentum as several layers of improvised materials gradually enter. In the Epilogue, the Chorale from Processive Regalia returns in the higher instruments, but now appears as counterpoint to a long expressive melody in the bass trombone.

—David Schiff

David Noon was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in 1946 and attended Pomona College. His composition teachers included Karl Kohn, Darius Milhaud, Charles Jones, Yehudi Wyner, Mario Davidovsky, and Wlodzimierz Kotonski. He received an M.A. in musicology from NYU, where he

studied medieval music with Gustave Reese, and holds M.M.A. and D.M.A. degrees from Yale in composition. He also studied at the Music Conservatory in Warsaw, Poland, on a Fulbright Fellowship. He is chairman of the music history department and the composition faculty of the Manhattan School of Music.

David Schiff was born in New York City in 1945. He studied English literature at Columbia University and Cambridge University, and composition at the Manhattan School of Music with John Corigliano and Ursula Mamlok, and at the Juilliard School with Elliott Carter. He is author of "The Music of Elliott Carter" and numerous articles for the New York Times, The New Republic, Tempo, and the Atlantic Monthly. His opera *Gimped the Fool*, to a libretto by I. B. Singer, has received productions in New York and Boston. His music has been performed by Chamber Music Northwest, the Oregon Symphony, Concordia, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Richmond Symphony, and at the Tanglewood and Aldeburgh festivals. He teaches at Reed College in Portland, Oregon.

Andras Szollosy was born in Szaszvaros, Transylvania in 1921. He studied with Zoltan Kodaly and Goffredo Petrassi. His Concerto #3 for sixteen strings won the title "Distinguished Composition of the Year" at UNESCO's International Rostrum of Composers in 1970. His works have been performed by the Chicago Symphony, the Hamburg Philharmonic, the King's Singers, the BBC Symphony, and at the St. Magnus Festival in Orkney, Scotland.

David Taylor was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1944. He studied trombone with Davis Shuman at the Juilliard School. He was a member of the American Symphony, conducted by Leopold Stokowski. Taylor has been a member of the bands of Gil Evans, Chuck Israels, George Gruntz, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis and Bob Mintzer. He has appeared as soloist with the St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Caramoor Festival, the New York Chamber Symphony, and the Group for Contemporary Music. He can be heard on records by Duke Ellington, Barbara Streisand, Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, The Rolling Stones, and Quincy Jones. He has performed premiers of compositions by Charles Wuorinen, Alan Hovhaness, Frederic Rzewski, Eric Ewazen, David Liebman, Lucia Dlugoszewski, and George Perle. He is a five-time winner of the Most Valuable Player Award of the New York chapter of the national Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Taylor currently (1993) is a member of the New York Chamber Symphony and Mostly Mozart, and teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and at the Mannes College of Music.

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On this recording, David Taylor's bass trombone is the Edwards by Getzen.

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DAVID TAYLOR

PAST TELLS

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Five (5) Songs Avec Benediction et Divertissement aka

Sidney Hall (Selected by David Taylor)

- 1 Recitative: Ach, unser wille bleibt verkehrt/Aria: Herr, so du wilt (J. S. Bach) (8:12)
- 2 The Things Our Fathers Loved (and the greatest of these was Liberty!) (Charles Ives) (publ. Peer International Corp.) (2:13)
- 3 The Indians (Charles Ives) (publ. Associated Music Publ., BMI) (2:11)
- 4 Chanson hebraique (Traditional, arr. by Maurice Ravel) (3:49)
- 5 One Hundred Bars for Tom Everett (Andras Szollosy) (publ. Edition Musica Budapest) (4:37)
- 6 Come Sunday (Duke Ellington) (publ. G. Schirmer) (5:38)
- 7 Tolerance (Charles Ives) (publ. Merion Music Inc., BMI) (0:37)
- 8 *Shtik* (David Schiff) (12:53)
(publ. David Schiff, ASCAP)
Tailor-Made op. 112 (David Noon)
(publ. David Noon, ASCAP)
- 9 Top Hat (3:51)
- 10 White Tie (5:25)
- 11 Tails (3:57)
Past Tells (or Orals) (David Taylor)
(publ. Triple Letter Brand Music, BMI)
- 12 Beginning (1:53)

- 13 Lamentations (3:27)
- 14 Four Chord (0:48)
- 15 Nokh A Mol (3:01)
- 16 Processive Regalia (3:46)
- 17 Duo (0:59)
- 18 Spiritual - Out Chorus (3:08)
- 19 Epilogue (1:54)

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