

Music of Brian Fennelly
New World 80448-2

The music on this recording is drawn from a range of solo, chamber, and orchestral works composed by Brian Fennelly over a period of two decades. In his thirty-year career, Fennelly (born in 1937) has contributed more than sixty works to the repertoire of twentieth-century music. He brought the discipline garnered by studies in mechanical engineering at Union College in Schenectady, New York to graduate studies in music at Yale University, from which he received the Master of Music and Ph.D. degrees. His most significant teachers were Mel Powell, Donald Martino, Gunther Schuller, George Perle, and Allen Forte. Since 1968, he has served on the faculty of New York University, where he now holds the rank of professor of music. Active in national and local new-music organizations, Fennelly was the founder and is currently co-director of the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, and he has served as an officer of the American Composers Alliance and the U.S. League of Composers-- International Society of Contemporary Music. Recognition of his compositional achievement has come in the form of numerous performances worldwide and over two dozen awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Koussevitsky Foundation Commission, several National Endowment for the Arts awards and Martha Baird Rockefeller grants, and First Prize in the 1986 Louisville Orchestra Competition.

The works presented here make use of a variety of harmonic systems: the complex and sophisticated serialism of *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*, *Sonata Seria*, and *String Quartet in Two Movements*; the tonal orientation of *Empirical Rag*; and the more freely atonal and harmonically consonant language of his later works, represented by *On Civil Disobedience*. Despite this diversity of harmonic approaches, all of the music on this recording shares certain central characteristics. Fennelly often combines the most advanced techniques of twentieth-century composition with traditional forms and gestures. He utilizes the sonata or rondo, or aspects of the scherzo, aria, or dance when they serve his creative purposes. His music is inclusive, borrowing judiciously from the past rather than rejecting it—and he is brilliantly economical, with the ability to generate disparate material from a single source. At the same time, however, a spirit of spontaneity and fancy pervades his work. Above all, his music tends to be densely motivic and often contrapuntally rigorous; Fennelly's motivic concerns generate the sonic textures.

On Civil Disobedience (1993) is a movement from *A Thoreau Symphony*, and is named after an essay by Henry David Thoreau. Although the piece is not intended to be programmatic, it is, in its rigor and whimsy, a fitting tribute to the iconoclastic American transcendental philosopher. The piece contains two different kinds of music, both of which have their motivic origins in the initial beat. At the outset, quick, even-note attacks of alternating pitches send a nervous ripple through the orchestra. Fennelly then develops an elaborate jigsaw puzzle from the expansion of the opening figures; an overlapping of rhythmically interconnected parts cascades through the orchestra. The result is an initial section of pointed attacks, sudden bursts of rhythmic energy, and a smattering of breezy lines. The ensuing section serves as a point of contrast: the nervous opening two-note alternation of tones slows down dramatically to reveal music of undulating sensuality,

first heard in the piano. Long, sustained lines appear above this gently rocking accompaniment. The entire piece is built around extensions and juxtapositions of these two kinds of music. The nervous, sometimes witty, but mostly propulsive energy of the opening section is combined with the lyricism of its counterpart in a long development section which admits brief episodes that embroider and comment on the main musical themes. The closing section explicitly recalls the piece's opening, and the presence of sustained tones and extended lines suggest a rapprochement between the work's two principal contrasting musical identities.

In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World (1975) is the earliest, and *On Civil Disobedience* (1993) is the most recent of the composers twelve orchestral pieces. Although separated by eighteen years, both works pay homage to Thoreau. However, while the later work is motivically economical, elegant in gesture, crystalline in form, refined in orchestration, and even comparatively restrained emotionally, the earlier work contains a wider variety of motivic figures and is denser in texture. In addition, the earlier piece is formally more spacious than its successor, and its greater degree of harmonic dissonance gives it a more expressionistic emotional charge.

The twelve-tone work is constructed in two overlapping parts, with a coda. The first section is by the far the longer and weightier of the two. It cycles fluently through varied episodes that grow out of the violins' initial theme. These episodes are widely contrasting, ranging from quiet, pastoral music to passages that are fiercely climactic. The main gesture of the second section is gradually introduced within the first, a scherzo figure that eventually takes over and forms the motivic backbone of the following part. Here, solo instruments distinguish themselves, in contrast to the massed sonorities that dominate the first section of the piece. Despite the steady pulse, 6/8 meter, and scherzo character, this section has its rhythmic anomalies. Cross accents and frequent, if brief, shifts of pulse disturb the metric regularity typical of the traditional scherzo, and create a weightiness that reinforces the emotional affect of the first section. The coda features a progressive thinning of the texture, and a layering of the scherzo figures over long string lines that recall the opening section of the piece.

String Quartet in Two Movements (1971-74) is the earliest work on this recording. The first movement is yang to the second movement's yin. The pair are perfect partners in contrariety. Something beyond tempo, mood, or even material is at the center of the gulf that divides them: at their core is a deep procedural divide, a difference in the assumptions about how music can be made, and how it is processed by the listener. At the heart of the first movement, the composer juxtaposes a set of almost violently different musical gestures. At the outset, he introduces a group of three-note motivic fragments, long-held tones, sputtering repeated and alternating notes, and a wealth of timbres created by extensive use of harmonics, pizzicati, and a variety of different devices. In addition, although the instruments share points of reference, they are fiercely independent; in the beginning, rarely do any two play the same gesture simultaneously. Silences permeate the texture. The movement stops and starts, stops and starts, as though the sheer weight of juxtaposing such inimical materials leads to overload, breakdown, and silence. The machine gives out. Then the music begins again, with no concession from the players and no greater consanguinity. Gradually through the movement, some of these tensions are worked out in sections of greater homogeneity, and the movement ends in an uneasy truce of rhythmic near-unison. However, these cooperative moments generally serve as a

foil to the more dramatic sections of thematic disparity. The irony is, perhaps, that for all its contrast, the movement is tightly economical. Virtually every gesture is recognizable as a similar or extended version of something exposed in the opening measure, and, finally, even the second movement's coda is pervaded by material from the first movement.

The second movement, in rondo form, has the playful character of a scherzo. After the fits, starts, and long pauses of the first movement, the second, released, bubbles and spills forth freely in long, pauseless phrases. Cooperative interaction among the instruments--even when they present unlike material--dominates the rondo "theme" and the two principal episodes.

Sonata Seria (1976) is the most formally complex and ambitious piece on this recording, interweaving two elaborate musical structures. One is a fantasy, based on the traditional four-movement sonata. It consists of an introduction, a "recitative and aria" section standing in for the traditional first movement sonata form, followed by a slow movement, (Maestoso), scherzo, and a coda that serves as its final movement. These movements are further linked by proportional tempo relationships. Interpolated between these fantasy movements is 2 another structure, four sections related by similar materials, sophisticated canonic mirroring techniques, and a different proportional tempo scheme than that employed in the fantasy. These sections consist of a two-voice mirror, a variation on this mirror, a four-voice mirror, and a variation on the four-voice mirror. The Epilogue (Maestosamente) resumes the discourse central to the Maestoso and provides appropriate points of repose both to that movement and to the work as a whole. *Sonata Seria* is divided into three large sections, delineated by significant pauses. The formal scheme is represented below:

Introduction	Recitative and Aria	Maestoso	Scherzoso	Coda	Epilogue
MIRROR		MIRROR: DOUBLE		DOUBLE	
		Double	MIRROR	MIRROR:	
				Double	

Fennelly develops a formal clarity by establishing different identities for the various sections of the piece. The mirror sections are contrapuntally pointillistic, creating textures and gestures reminiscent of the pioneering music of Anton Webern. Each fantasy movement has its own character, distinct from the music of the mirror sections. The recitative is rhythmically plastic, while the aria is tuneful, with repeated note accompaniments. The Maestoso is massive, juxtaposing sharp flitting gestures against a slow chordal background. The scherzo begins in two-part counterpoint of primarily sixteenth-note rhythms, eventually adding a chordal accompaniment. The coda is furious and virtuosic. Different as the mirror and fantasy sections are, they are unified by common serial materials and techniques, and they fulfill crucial functions within the formal vision of the entire sonata.

Empirical Rag, composed for the Empire Brass Quintet in 1977 and arranged for piano in 1978, is like no music Scott Joplin ever conceived. (Fennelly even includes a quote from Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in C minor {*Resurrection*} in the chorale-like B section.) Like its prototype, syncopations permeate the rhythmic texture, phrases tend to be regular, and the form consists of clearly delineated, discrete sections (in this case, A-B-A'). This work evokes a twilight harmonic world, a blend of rich jazz chords and

overheated, fin-de-siècle chromatic harmony. The harmony is smoky and sensual, the mood speakeasy languid. The rag context gives the composer an opportunity to explore his material in "unraggy" ways. The piece is highly contrapuntal, and thematic material in the left hand replaces the familiar oom-pah accompaniment of the rag; the composition is rich in developmental detail. Not one of the seven occurrences of the opening motive in the "A" section is stated in exactly the same way, and the counterpoint of motives in the left hand adds a dimension to what is typically a homophonic form. Like all of the music on this recording, the formal shell serves only as a container in which Brian Fennelly manifests his rich, rigorous, and ambitious musical vision. - *Perry Goldstein*

Composer **Perry Goldstein** has written extensively on modern music, for National Public Radio, Deutschlandfunk, *Musical America*, *The New York Times*, *Strings* magazine, The Library of Congress, Carnegie Hall, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. For several years he taught at Wilmington College of Ohio and is currently on the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

The **Audubon Quartet** came into existence at the 1974 Lenox Quartet Chamber Music Seminar. Within four years they won three major competitions, and were the first American quartet to win the top prize in an international string quartet competition. They perform regularly in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, and regularly program or premiere works by contemporary composers. The Audubon Quartet has recorded for the Telarc, RCA Red Seal, and Opus One labels.

John Cobb earned his master's and doctoral degrees in piano from Northwestern University. He simultaneously held a fellowship at the University of Chicago, where he was the pianist with Ralph Shapey's Contemporary Chamber Players. He made his New York debut at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1976 and has played solo recitals, chamber music concerts, and concerto engagements throughout the United States and Europe. In 1990 Dr. Cobb received the Distinguished Artist Award from Artists International.

The Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra of Katowice was founded in 1935 in Warsaw by conductor-composer Grzegorz Fitelberg. The orchestra was re-formed in 1945 in Katowice. The list of conductors and soloists who have worked with the orchestra includes Artur Rubenstein, Isaac Stern, Witold Lutoslawski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Leonard Bernstein, and Maurizio Pollini. The Polish Radio National Symphony has made more than 200 recordings for EMI, Decca, Newport Classics, CRI, and Polskie Nagranie.

Joel Eric Suben studied conducting with Jacques-Louis Monod, Witold Rowicki, and Sergiu Celibidache. He has led the American Symphony Orchestra, the Opera Orchestra of Boston, and many of the leading orchestras in Poland, where he was a Fulbright Scholar. Suben is currently (1994) music advisor of the Wellesley Philharmonic in Massachusetts and music director of the Composers Chorus in New York.

The Symphony Orchestra of the Czechoslovak Radio of Prague (now the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra) was founded in 1926, in the early days of Czech radio.

Guest conductors over the years have included Ottorino Respighi, Sergei Prokofiev, Hermann Scherchen, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Arthur Honegger, Charles Munch, and Krzysztof Penderecki. The orchestra has toured internationally, including Germany, France, Greece, South Korea, and Japan in its itinerary, and has recorded for Supraphon, Panton, Multisonic, Bonton, Bohemia Music, and Harmonia Mundi (France).

Eduard Fischer (1930-1993) studied violin and conducting at the Prague Academy and in 1956 was a prizewinner at The Besançon International Competition. Following ten years as principal conductor of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic, he was appointed principal conductor of the Prague Chamber Soloists. Fischer was guest conductor of many major international orchestras, and the founder-conductor of the National Chamber Orchestra of Zilina. Throughout his career, Fischer continually championed the works of contemporary composers.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Concerto for Saxophone and String Orchestra. David Pituch, saxophone; Polish Chamber Orchestra, Wojciech Michniewski, conductor. Pro Viva SPV122.

Evanescences for instruments and tape. Da Capo Chamber Players, Edward Murray, conductor. CRI SD322.

Fantasy Variations. The Louisville Orchestra, Lawrence Leighton Smith, conductor. Louisville LCD003.

Prelude and Elegy. Empire Brass Quintet. Advance FGR19.

Tesserae II. Fred Sherry, cello. CRI SD556.

Wind Quintet. Dorian Wind Quintet. CRI SD318.

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Fennelly, Brian. "A Descriptive Language for the Analysis of Electronic Music."

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On Civil Disobedience recorded September 1993, in Katowice, Poland.

Producer: Beata Jankowska-Burzynska

Engineer: Otto Nopp

Digital editor: Artur Moniuszko

In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World recorded October 1977, in Prague, Czech Republic.

Engineer: Bohumil Ciperka

String Quartet in Two Movements recorded September 1980, in New York City.

Engineer: Guillermo Mager

Sonata Seria and *Empirical Rag* recorded May 1980, in New York City.

Engineer: David Barnes

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1 *On Civil Disobedience* (1993), from *A Thoreau Symphony* 10:54

Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra; Joel Eric Suben, conductor.

2 *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World* (Orchestral Fantasy after Thoreau) (1975) 20:10

Symphony Orchestra of the Czechoslovak Radio of Prague; Eduard Fischer, conductor.

String Quartet in Two Movements (1971-74)

3 Movement I 8:11

4 Movement II 7:15

The Audubon Quartet: Dennis Cleveland, Sharon Smith, violins; Doris Lederer, viola; Clyde Shaw, violoncello.

Sonata Seria (1976)

5 Introduction-MIRROR-Recitative and Aria-MIRROR:Double 5:18

6 Maestoso-DOUBLE MIRROR-Scherzo 5:42

7 DOUBLE MIRROR:Double-Coda 4:58

8 Epilogue 2:24

John Cobb, piano.

9 *Empirical Rag* (version for piano, 1978) 5:33

Brian Fennelly, piano.

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