

**MICHAEL LOWENSTERN**  
**Spasm**

**New World Records 80468**

If their purposes were more didactic and their affects less visceral, the works on this recording might constitute a primer on music in the post-modern world. Collectively, and sometimes individually, they cross a variety of stylistic boundaries, interacting with and absorbing energies from the great wide world of music. There are influences from folk, jazz, blues, progressive rock, and performance art, within a classical music context. There is a deep indebtedness to technology (five of the works include electronics) as well as to the most profound sensibilities of pre-Industrial cultures. Metaphysics and electricity, nostalgia and the look ahead go hand in hand and have their advocates here. Six of the ten works on this recording were produced by composers associated with the State University of New York at Stony Brook, but the artists' proximity to each other has done nothing to influence the independence and individuality that distinguishes their works.

Chicago-born **Michael Lowenstern**, at age twenty-eight already one of the premier bass clarinetists in the world, is one of the new breed of select performers who presides over this welter of styles with complete commitment and convincing mastery. He is equally comfortable with the subtlest of gestural nuances in Kreiger's *Joint Session*, the timbral variety of Gibbons' *What I'm Getting At*, the dizzying virtuoso challenges of Goldstein's *Total Absorption*, and the evocative spirituality of both Kitzke's *Regina Takes the Holy Road, 3 December 1994* and Robert Rowe's folk-inspired *Shells*. Lowenstern idiomatically projects the relaxed and bluesy language of Winkler's *Solitaire* and Gershwin's "Summertime," and lyrical sweetness pervades his own *But Would She Remember You?* For raw power, there is the take-no-prisoners directness of *Spasm* and the last moments of Weymouth's *Rare Events*. As this recording makes compellingly clear, no technical difficulty daunts him, and no stylistic sensibility eludes him.

Lowenstern's *Spasm* (1993), for bass clarinet and electronic tape of exclusively bass clarinet sounds, borrows the in-your-face energy of progressive rock and jazz, as well as their gritty relentlessness. A funky beat is immediately laid down by a manic, obsessive bass line, timbrally calibrated to smoothly partner the attacks of the entering bass clarinet, which percussively slap-tongues detached single notes. These notes multiply to form couplets and longer gestures, eventually compounding into long lines pushing forward in a profusion of sixteenth notes and leaping agitatedly between extreme registers. The extroversion of all this energy cannot, however, hide the subtleties that lie just below the surface in the almost continuous, if quirky, imitative counterpoint between the bass clarinet and the electronic tape, and in the two-chord riff that resurfaces ubiquitously throughout the piece, always unpredictably, in different parts of the metric texture. The piece seems to celebrate the arrival of an art form that marries the sophisticated performance and compositional practices of classical music with the vibrant electricity, iconoclasm, and emotional immediacy of popular music.

When **George Gershwin** (born 1898 in Brooklyn, New York; died 1937 in Hollywood, California) composed *Porgy and Bess* in 1935, he hardly could have imagined the version of "Summertime" that Lowenstern would create some sixty years later. In Gershwin's day, the bass clarinet was a single-line instrument. Since the Sixties, however, considerable conceptual and technical advancements have expanded the instrument's capabilities. In Lowenstern's hands, primarily through the use of multiphonics and a deeply contrapuntal approach to Gershwin's creation, the unaccompanied bass clarinet becomes a little wind-band, effectively self-contained. The tune is presented at the outset,

unaccompanied yet soulfully colored by subtly inflected changes of timbre applied even to sustained notes. Bass riffs, followed, remarkably, by multiphonic chords above a sustained bass, introduce an accompaniment to the tune in the succeeding chorus. Once the instrument takes on both melodic and accompanimental functions, it is a logical step to the invention of two independent lines, in the treble and bass, behaving antiphonally. The various elements--improvisations on the tune, contrapuntal rejoinders to it, and accompanimental figures--are eventually interlaced as the treatment gains in complexity. However, just as the tune threatens to disappear, first in a slap-tonguing trope on the accompaniment figure, and then in increasingly elaborate improvisations, it is restored, with its accompaniment, one last time. The re-presentation of this classic tune concludes with a gesture of simple casualness.

**Daniel Allen Weymouth** (born 1953 in Poughkeepsie, New York) is Director of Computer Music and Co-Director of the Laboratory for Technology in the Arts at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Educated at Michigan State University and at the University of California-Berkeley, his fascination with sound brought him to Stanford's Center for Computer Research, Pierre Boulez's IRCAM, and Iannis Xenakis' CEMAMu. Experience gained in these world-class studios for electro-acoustic music has borne fruit in the composition of *Rare Events* (1994), in which Lowenstern plays a duet with his own bass clarinet source materials, manipulated at the Computer Music Studio at Stony Brook. Weymouth views his music as an exploration of the possible coexistence of opposites; here we have a mostly quiet work that still manages to manifest "raw energy." To this might be added other opposites, apparent in the piece, that constitute his musical experience and form his compositional personality. His formal musical training might account for the recurrence and development of the rustling opening gesture throughout the piece, as well as for his subtle and imaginative sensitivity to color. But there is also iconoclasm and whimsy in this music, shaped perhaps by his ten years as an itinerant musician, playing all manner of popular music and jazz in clubs, concerts, and studios. This aspect of his experience is manifested in the work's formal fluency and apparent spontaneity, as well as in the emotionally supercharged shrieks that shock the listener toward the end of the piece. Finally, the title of the work reflects, in the composer's words, "my ongoing fascination with the formal possibilities of 'rare events,' " two of which--the early, diaphanous quiet section and those shrieks--interrupt the ongoing narrative and unbalance the otherwise symmetrical form. Rare events, writes Weymouth, "set their own timetable. They can wake you up, but are not always unwelcome or even shocking... All of life is made up of a wonderful series of rare events, if we only have the energy to notice them." Weymouth also admits that the gestation of the piece was influenced by the wonderful, if not unexpected, "rare event" of the birth of his daughter, Kelsey Ren Weymouth Little, two weeks after the completion of the piece.

**Jerome Kitzke** (born 1955 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) studied at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with John Downey, and took up residence in New York City in 1984. In 1992, he founded The Mad Coyote, a contemporary music ensemble devoted to performance of his music as well as to improvisation. Kitzke's work draws heavily from American vernacular sources, especially from bebop and progressive jazz as well as rock and roll. His sensitivities to ethical and spiritual questions have also led to an exploration of Native American culture: powerful chants and explicit pulses continually resurface in his music, which has been called "direct, dramatic, and visceral--always with an ear to the sacred ground." Such is the case with *Regina Takes the Holy Road, 3 December 1994*. This central movement of a larger work entitled *The Redness of Blood*, composed in tribute to Kitzke's family, is dedicated to the composer's grandmother, Regina Kitzke, who died in December of 1994 at the age of ninety-one and to whose "indomitable spirit and shining exemplary life" this music is dedicated. The movement is for bass clarinet as well as human speakers, who supply a

reverential, yet spirited, context of chants, verbal sound effects, and percussive responses to the bass clarinetist, who begins by playing short phrases of dignified simplicity. The music slowly gains intensity through registral expansion and rhythmic acceleration. Changes of musical direction, either through stylistic juxtaposition or unexpected successions of disparate material, are at the heart of Kitzke's music. The last moments of the piece supersede the previous climax with the fluttering of "ghostly" harmonics, as though representing the release of a benign spirit, hovering in benedictory protection over the proceedings.

**Arthur Kreiger** (born 1945 in New Haven, Connecticut) stands in the first rank of composers who have explored the amalgamation of live instruments and electro-acoustic sounds. After being graduated from the University of Connecticut, Kreiger became a central figure of the prestigious Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center at Columbia University, where, during a fecund twenty-three-year association as teacher and composer, he produced over twenty-five works that involve electronic sounds. Attention to the subtlest of timbral nuances gained by experience in the studio, a preference for rich counterpoint, gestural variety, the fast-paced unfolding of events, and sheer delight in sound and its possibilities are all apparent in *Joint Session* (1992), for bass clarinet and electronic tape. The composer's attention to minute timbral detail enables him to use electronics to extend the sonic capabilities of the bass clarinet and fuse the two media in intimate mutual enhancement. At the same time, the electronics also serve a dramatic function, as a textural foil to the bass clarinet's soliloquies, and a contrapuntal role, offering a vast array of accompaniments, from melodic lines to bell-like chorale sounds and startling percussive punctuations. The rigorous pitch language, reminiscent of the melodic approach at the heart of the music of East Coast composers of the post-World War II avant garde, is tempered by dramatic arrival points and a degree of pitch centricity, as well as a harmonic language that is, at critical structural points, quite consonant.

*Joint Session* was composed with support from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University and is dedicated to Dennis Smylie, who gave the premiere performance at a concert celebrating the Fortieth Anniversary of the Fromm Foundation in 1993.

**Perry Goldstein** (born 1952 in New York City) is on the music faculty at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. His stylistic eclecticism has perhaps been shaped by the divergent musical personalities and values of the composers with whom he has studied, who include Herbert Brün, Ben Johnston, and Paul Zonn at the University of Illinois, as well as Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia University.

*Total Absorption* (1994), for solo bass clarinet, was composed for, and is affectionately dedicated to, Michael Lowenstern, whose electrifying performance persona and intrepid disregard for all pitfalls on the dangerous byroads of extreme virtuosity suggested the manic, breathless energy and rambunctious jazziness of the piece as well as its structure. Beginning with only a few notes played at blazing speed in the instrument's lowest register, the four-minute work makes a celebratory event out of each newly added pitch and register, gradually working up and down to the highest and lowest extremes of the instrument. As if the frenetic pace of the opening were not demanding enough, the virtuoso challenges increase as new pitches, registers, gestures, and dynamics are integrated into the piece's fabric, requiring that the performer "dance" with the utmost skill to negotiate the treacherous registral leaps, while still managing to bring out the complicated counterpoint of pitches and events.

The title, *Total Absorption*, refers to the slow and gradual incorporation of all twelve tones of the Western scale in the course of the piece, as well as to the fierce demands made on the concentration of the performer.

**Robert Rowe** (born 1954 in Marshfield, Wisconsin) holds degrees in music from the University of Wisconsin, the University of Iowa, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from which he earned a Ph.D. in the combined fields of music and cognition in 1991. As Associate Director of Music Technology at New York University, he has worked extensively in the areas of electronic and computer music. Rowe has branched out into the pioneering field of interactive media, in which computer sounds are generated spontaneously in response to live performance. *Shells* (1993) was originally scored for *tarogato*, a traditional Hungarian single-reed wind instrument, and just such an interactive music system. The tarogato part (played here on bass clarinet) includes notated and improvised material and was inspired by performance practices associated with the long history of that noble instrument. The computer "listens" to the tarogato's performance and adds drones, ostinati, and counterpoint as the piece unfolds. The software generating the computer music, a program written by the composer and called Cypher, is capable of analyzing the human performance and responding with new material of its own. Because of this capability, the program can accompany both the notated music and the improvisation. With the notated material, the program adds the same counterpoint. When the bass clarinet improvises, in three sections that are characterized by increased activity and wilder gestures, the program also improvises, elaborating on material taken from the tarogato part. The result is a meeting of the traditional and technological, in which the exotic strains of Hungarian folk music are enhanced by the computer context created to support it.

*Shells* was composed in collaboration with Esther Lamneck and is dedicated to the memory of Mary Cowin Rowe.

**Mark Gibbons** (born 1960 in Glen Cove, New York) studied with Milton Babbitt and David Diamond at The Juilliard School, and holds a PhD from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where his principal composition teachers were John Lessard and Daniel Weymouth. In 1989, he received a National Orchestral Fellowship for Orchestral Music, which resulted in the composition of *Stories of Passion* for soprano and orchestra, premiered the same year at the Manhattan School of Music under the direction of Arthur Weisberg. *What I'm Getting At* (1995), for bass clarinet, is the third piece the composer has written for Michael Lowenstern, and imaginatively incorporates into its texture a wide variety of sounds that expand the timbral vocabulary of the bass clarinet. Key clicks and short bursts of air blown through the instrument are the timbral ingredients that introduce the piece. Pitched sounds speckle this texture and eventually take over to produce jazzy lines in the lower register, balanced twice in the piece by long melodies of ethereal "ghost" harmonics in the upper register. The composer writes that an important procedure in the piece is "the arc of one thing changing into another." He continues, "I wrote out several different kinds of sound progressions (timbral, dynamic, etc.) and went about trying to relate them to each other." This program is suggested, if only subliminally, at the piece's conclusion, when the airy sounds that open the work are now produced by bits of text, spoken rhythmically into the instrument, that ultimately compound into the not-quite-audible sentence, "What I am getting at is the gradual arc of one sound changing into another."

**Peter Winkler** (born 1943 in Los Angeles) is currently Director of Graduate Studies in the Music Department of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where he has served on the faculty since 1971. He studied with Seymour Shifrin, Earl Kim, and Milton Babbitt at the University of

California-Berkeley, Harvard, and Princeton universities. While a graduate student at the latter institution, he became seriously interested in various forms of popular music, and this enthusiasm has figured prominently in his career as a scholar (teaching in, and publishing about, popular music subjects) and as a composer. *Solitaire* (1989), which was commissioned by clarinetist Philip Rehfeldt as part of a set of "Etudes for the Twenty-First Century," a tribute to composer-clarinetist Barney Childs, testifies to Winkler's affection for jazz. *Solitaire*, originally for solo B flat clarinet, but equally effective for its lower-voiced cousin, evokes the wailing, flamboyant sound of such great old jazz clarinetists as Sidney Bechet, Jimmy Noone, and Barney Bigard. The piece is cast as a dialogue between two voices, one dominant (marked "bright, bluesy, wailing") and inhabiting the upper register, the other, "breathy," smoky," generally soft, and located in the lower register. "Since the piece is unaccompanied," writes the composer, "the situation might suggest that one is remembering one of those good old slow dance tunes, running over the melody and riffs in one's head, hearing it against the solid, relaxed 4/4 beat of an imaginary rhythm section."

*But Would She Remember You?* (1996) is performance art, Michael Lowenstern's paean to the feminine in the form of taped recollections of five men discussing important women in their lives, accompanied by bass clarinet and electronic tape with manipulated bass clarinet sounds. The piece is divided into three sections, centering around reflections on each interviewee's "first serious girlfriend" (section 1), "a mother figure who is not your mother" (section 2), and "a deceased female relative" (section 3). Rhythmic clapping (the homage of applause?) introduces a benignly nostalgic music that supports sentiments that are largely appreciative and adoring ("I couldn't keep my eyes off of her"). The inevitable shoals in the clear waters of love ("she had to make it my fault, somehow") elicit a more dissonant harmonic language from the musical accompaniment and lead to the second section, introduced by an active, percussive bass line. Recollections of nurturing women ("she mothered me the way my mother never could or did") are accompanied by bluesier melodies. Various kinds of distortion pepper the texture and lead to the sound of a scratchy 78-rpm record, suggesting the leaps backwards in time that constitute remembrance. The last section gently confronts the death of loved ones and the images that they leave behind. An intermittent thumping suggests perhaps the failing heart. The live bass clarinet, disappearing after playing lines so sweetly lyrical in the first two sections, now resurfaces as a distant, disembodied voice on the electronic tape, and provides a final commentary on death and loss.

—Perry Goldstein

*Composer Perry Goldstein has written extensively on modern music for National Public Radio, Musical America, The New York Times, the Library of Congress, and Carnegie Hall. He is currently (1996) on the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.*

**Michael Lowenstern** has worked as a soloist and with groups throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, variously performing and composing music for dance, film, and the Portable Electronic Coffee House, a multimedia interactive electronic music group he co-founded in 1992. He is a member of the Steve Reich Ensemble, Zeitgeist, Jerome Kitzke's The Mad Coyote, and the Ensemble st-X, with which he recently performed and recorded the New York premiere of Iannis Xenakis' *Exchange* for Bass Clarinet and Orchestra. In 1989, Lowenstern was the recipient of a Fulbright grant to study in Amsterdam, and in 1991 he was awarded Second Prize at the International Gaudeamus Competition in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Lowenstern has performed and engineered music for two feature films (*Dead Funny* and *Deep South*) and has written music for his own ambient funk ensemble, "isms," and avant hip-hop artists, Slow Boys. In addition to

performing his own works, during the past five years Lowenstern has commissioned more than twenty American composers to write solo works for the bass clarinet. He received his training from the Eastman School of Music, the Sweelinck Conservatorium Amsterdam, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook, studying clarinet and bass clarinet with Charles Neidich, Harry Sparnaay, and John Bruce Yeh, and composition with Daniel Weymouth. Born and raised in Chicago, Lowenstern now lives in Brooklyn, New York.

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### Mark Gibbons

*scrub-reverse*, for amplified violin, interactive electronics and tape. Todd Reynolds, violin. SEAMUS EAM-9501.

### Perry Goldstein

*Blow!* Aurelia Saxophone Quartet. Vanguard Records (1997 Release).

### Arthur Kreiger

*Fantasy for Piano and Electronic Tape*. Aleck Karis, piano. CRI CD 707.

*Intimate Exchanges*. Patricia Spencer, flute. NEUMA Records 450-88.

*Passacaglia on "Spring and All."* The New Calliope Singers. Peter Schubert, conductor. Finnadar 90850-1.

*Short Piece, in Memory of My Father*. Electronic tape. Odyssey Y 34139.

*Dance for Sarah*. Theme and Variations. Electronic tape. CRI SD 483.

*Variations on a Theme by Davidovsky*. Electronic tape. CRI SD 495.

### Robert Rowe

*Flood Gate*, for violin, piano, and interactive music system. Nancy Cirillo, violin; Sandra Hebert, piano. Le Chant du Monde LDC 278051/52.

### Daniel Weymouth

*Another Violin*, for MIDI violin and computer-interactive electronics. Todd Reynolds, violin. SEAMUS EAM-9501.

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Producer: Michael Lowenstern

Engineers: Michael Lowenstern (*Spasm*; *Summertime*; *Total Absorption*; *Solitaire*); Daniel Weymouth (*Rare Events*; *Joint Session*); Lynn Peterson (*Regina Takes the Holy Road, 3 December 1994*); Paul Geluso (*Shells*); Mark Gibbons (*What I'm Getting At*; *But Would She Remember You?*)

Recorded from August 1994 through July 1996. *Spasm*, *Summertime*, *Rare Events*, *Joint Session*, *Total Absorption*, *What I'm Getting At*, *Solitaire*, and *But Would She Remember You?* recorded at Studio A, Stony Brook. *Shells* recorded at NYU Studios, New York City. *Regina Takes The Holy Road, 3 December 1994* recorded at Creation Audio, Minneapolis.

Post production/Mastering: The BPM Loft, Brooklyn, NY; Stony Brook Computer Music Studios, Stony Brook, NY

Digital mastering: George Blood, George Blood Professional Audio Services, Philadelphia, PA

Cover design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

The electronic tapes for *Spasm* and *But Would She Remember You?* were realized at The BPM Loft in New York; for *Rare Events* at the Computer Music Studio of the State University of New York at Stony Brook; and for *Joint Session* at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center at Columbia University. Interactive software for *Shells* was developed at the Music Technology Studios of New York University.

Thanks to: Mark Gibbons, Jerome Kitze, Art Kreiger, Robert Rowe, and Dan Weymouth; all of the musicians, advice-givers, and friends who donated their time in order to make this recording possible; Sarah Fuller, Andy Nittoli, Gary Van Sise, Stony Brook University, and New York University; everyone who opened up to the tape recorder and allowed me to record their personal experiences for *But Would She Remember You?*

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Michael Lowenstern plays Selmer Bass Clarinets exclusively.

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## Spasm

Michael Lowenstern, bass clarinet 80468-2

Michael Lowenstern (b. 1968)

1 *Spasm* (publ. Earspasm Music) 5:04

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

2 *Summertime* (publ. Chappell & Co.) 8:16

Daniel Weymouth (b. 1953)

3 *Rare Events* (publ. Jomar Press) 5:13

Jerome Kitzke (b. 1955)

4 *Regina Takes the Holy Road, 3 December 1994* (publ. Peermusic) 3:41

Voices and human percussion: Heather Barringer, Jay Johnson, Jerome Kitzke, Tom Linker

Arthur Kreiger (b. 1945)

5 *Joint Session* (publ. C. F. Peters Corp.) 11:53

Perry Goldstein (b. 1952)

6 *Total Absorption* (publ. Stone Breaker Music) 4:29

Robert Rowe (b. 1954)

7 *Shells* (publ. Robert Rowe) 7:58

Mark Edward Gibbons (b. 1960)

8 *What I'm Getting At* (publ. Mark Edward Gibbons) 6:23

Peter Winkler (b. 1943)

9 *Solitaire* (publ. Peter Winkler) 4:07

Michael Lowenstern

10 *But Would She Remember You?* (publ. Earspasm Music) 9:13

Recorded voices: Mark Gibbons, Jerome Kitzke, Matt Lambiase, Ed Lowenstern

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