

LEE HYL A
We Speak Etruscan

New World Records 80491

Lee Hyla's music is profoundly individual. Its extremes of expression are all unmistakable facets of one wide-ranging musical personality. Hyla has fashioned a personal language capable of both the simple, exquisitely polished opening of the *String Quartet No. 3* and the raw Jerry Lee Lewis-like riffs in the *Piano Concerto No. 2*. This Jekyll-and-Hyde nature is to some extent the natural consequence of a musical background informed equally by classical music, improvisation, and rock-and-roll. The diversity of his background and the way it finds an outlet in the music may explain why his music appeals to a variety of listeners, including both uptown and downtown audiences. Appealing though it is, the music is not cynically ingratiating: Hyla consistently shies away from emulating the commercial end of each of these musics. He avoids, for example, tired textbook classical orchestrations; seventh-chord progressions have no place in his harmonic vocabulary; and he has no patience for the bland formulas of easy-listening pop. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hyla actually was a practicing rocker (as well as an accomplished new-music keyboardist and improviser), and has an insider's knowledge of rock's glories and limitations. What he brings from rock is its energy, and, on occasion, its brute power and rhythmic sensibilities, so different from those of jazz and classical music. From his classical training he brings a gift for musical organization and, unapologetically, a modernist aesthetic; from jazz, a melodic and gestural language that he separates from its traditional harmonic underpinnings. All of this makes for very exciting listening indeed: Hyla's music is always direct, its drama visceral, its organic unity palpable.

Pre-Pulse Suspended is a tight piece structurally, but it covers a lot of ground in its concise single movement. The striking opening, a gritty and incisive duet for violin and bass clarinet, with each instrument restricted to a very narrow compass like a genie struggling to escape from a bottle, is mined continually in the course of the piece. Elements of this duet are almost always perceptible throughout the piece and are alternately fragmented and sustained. After a craggy beginning in which both the repeated note idea and fast aggressive rhythmic gestures play a prominent role, more lyrical versions of the opening material take hold in the quiet center, culminating in a heartbreaking passage for strings alone. The noisier music creeps back bit by bit, and the repeated notes--now chords--ultimately hit a frenzied pace. The piece ends with a quotation from Stefan Wolpe's Chamber Piece No. 1, a masterly, idiosyncratic work that was a source of inspiration.

Pre-Pulse was commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and was written in 1984. It received its first performance at the Tanglewood Music Festival in the same year. The work is scored for a chamber orchestra of twelve players: flute (doubling alto flute), clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon; horn, trombone; piano; two violins, viola, cello, and contrabass. *Pre-Pulse Suspended* is dedicated to the composer's parents; the elegiac core of the piece is *in memoriam* for Hyla's father, who died in the year of its composition.

The String Quartet *No. 2* (1985) compartmentalizes its more extreme contrasts in three movements. The opening movement, the most complex of the three, displays an intriguing rotation of foreground and background elements, as the fast, repeated figure accompaniment comes to occupy center stage and then moves off again to one side. The second movement, marked "nearly motionless," suspends all conflict. The overtones of the cello tremolos furnish much of the pitch material of the upper parts. The spirited third movement resumes some of the arguments of the first

movement with a catchy modal melody--knowledgeable listeners may detect a quotation from "Hip Hug-Her" by Booker T. and the MGs.

Both of Hyla's string quartets on this CD were written for the superb Lydian String Quartet, in an ongoing collaboration that has continued for more than a decade. The String Quartet *No. 2* was commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation for the Lydian Quartet, and was premiered by them in Alice Tully Hall in New York City, in 1985.

The creation of *We Speak Etruscan* was initiated by saxophonist Tim Berne over a beer with the composer at the Great Jones Cafe in New York City. The work is dedicated to Berne, bass clarinetist Tim Smith, and Norm Roberson, *portiere* and Etruscan enthusiast and tour guide at the American Academy in Rome. The piece represents the latest chapter in a large body of work written by the composer for or involving Smith, whose remarkable playing is featured on three of the works on this CD, in an artistic friendship that has spanned more than twenty years. The piece was written in 1992 in New York in the year following Hyla's Rome Prize residency at the Academy, and was premiered by Berne and Smith in 1993 at Jordan Hall in Boston.

The title's bold claim cannot be challenged; the ancient Etruscans, creators of extraordinary artwork, spoke a language that is now lost (only the alphabet is decipherable). The obvious connection to the plight of contemporary art music is contradicted by the engaging surface of the piece, which bubbles with jazz-like riffs. An eerie beginning leads quickly to a bebop-like head and ensuing hyperactivity. A more serene interlude, capped by a passage marked "sustained, intimate, molto legato" for the two instruments playing pianissimo in their highest registers, gives way to a compressed and raucous recapitulation. The instrumental writing gives ample scope for Berne and Smith, two of the most versatile and energetic of reed players, to exercise their talents.

String Quartet No. 3 (1989), in one movement, opens with a ravishingly beautiful homophonic passage which haunts much of the subsequent music. The unity of purpose persists somewhat into a faster music characterized by repeated notes, but then becomes increasingly fragmented. The viola plays a crucial role here, its frequent solos harking back to the piece's origins and triggering a kaleidoscopic set of responses from the other instruments. The pervasive rhythmic riff draws on the opening as well, but for its pitch, rather than gestural, content. The ensemble eventually reunites to present an intensely agitated tremolo version of the opening, the major climax of the work, which is then led to a quiet conclusion.

String Quartet No. 3 was written in 1989 on a commission by Chamber Music America and the Pew Charitable Trust for the Lydian Quartet. It was premiered in the same year by the Lydian Quartet at the Sacramento New Music Festival. This recording of the work is dedicated to the memory of poet Lynn Luria Sukenick.

The Concerto for Piano and *Chamber Orchestra No. 2* (1991), like so many classical concerti, is permeated by the principle of call-and-response on many levels of the structure in the course of its four movements. Here the principle is extended to interactions within the pocket orchestra, as well as between the soloist and the rest of the ensemble. On a larger scale, the piano plays the role of responder in the first two movements. The orchestra sets forth most of the musical material of the entire piece in the first movement, with the piano offering mostly short, pithy commentary; it eventually blooms in a vigorous cadenza for piano and percussion, which foreshadows the third movement. The second movement, with its extremely restricted orchestral material and remarkable

twittering piano solo, feels like an afterbeat response to the first movement. The short, sizzling third movement, an aggressive duet for piano and percussion, serves as an upbeat ‘call’ to the last movement, where the orchestra makes its raucous response. The piano, which has been locked in partnership with the percussion for much of the piece, finally achieves a greater degree of independence in a series of remarkable solo passages.

The work is scored for an ensemble almost identical to that of *Pre-Pulse Suspended*, with the addition of percussion, including a hammered dulcimer. Although the dulcimer plays a quiet role in the work, its soul appears to infuse much of the piano writing, which is alive with oddly voiced tremolos, glissandi, and repeated note passages.

The *Concerto*, dedicated to the writer Joan Silber, was commissioned by the Shifting Foundation for Speculum Musicae and Aleck Karis, a pianist of consummate skill and dedication to new art music. Speculum premiered the work in 1991 at the Miller Theater in New York City.

The *Concerto*, the largest and most ambitious of Hyla's purely instrumental work to date, is a fitting conclusion for this collection of his music. It demonstrates in the clearest possible way that Hyla is one of the major composers of his generation.

—Eric Moe

Eric Moe, a composer and keyboardist, has received numerous grants and awards for composition. Recordings of his music can be found on the CRI and Centaur labels. Mr. Moe is currently associate professor and director of composition and theory at the University of Pittsburgh.

Lee Hyla was born in Niagara Falls, New York, in 1952 and grew up in Greencastle, Indiana. He studied composition with Malcolm Peyton at the New England Conservatory, and with David Lewin at SUNY Stony Brook. A series of honors and distinctions include residencies in composition at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Djerassi Foundation, and commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Meet-the Composer/Reader's Digest commissioning program, the Naumburg Foundation, the Fromm Foundation, the Shifting Foundation, Chamber Music America, and, most recently, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust for a new work for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. In addition, he has been the recipient of the Elise L. Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, a Guggenheim fellowship, the Goddard Lieberman award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, two fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Rome Prize Fellowship. He currently teaches composition at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Since its formation in 1980, the **Lydian String Quartet** (Daniel Stepner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello) has won the ensemble prizes at international competitions in Canada, France, England, and the Naumburg Award for Chamber Music. Their project, *American Originals: 20th-Century Classics of Today and Tomorrow*, celebrates contemporary American classical music through the voice of the string quartet. They have concertized extensively throughout the United States, including at Lincoln Center, the Library of Congress, and the Kennedy Center. Internationally the quartet has been presented in a series at Wigmore Hall (London), and has performed in France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Russia, and Armenia. The quartet has received grants from the Meet the Composer/Rockefeller Foundation/AT&T Jazz Program in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, and

the Aaron Copland Fund for Music. As artists in residence on the faculty of Brandeis University, the members of the quartet coach chamber music ensembles and work with student composers on works in progress, in addition to performing an annual series of quartet concerts.

For more than 20 years, **Speculum Musicae** has been performing the chamber music repertory of the twentieth century. Its mission is threefold: to preserve and represent the classical musical works of our time, to participate in the development and expansion of the repertory by collaborating with living composers, and to educate the musicians and audiences of the future. Speculum Musicae's concerts have taken the ensemble from coast to coast in the United States, including appearances at the University of California schools; the Denver Friends of Chamber Music; the Baltimore Chamber Music Society; Princeton, Harvard, and Columbia Universities, and the North Carolina School of the Arts. Overseas tours have taken the ensemble to Great Britain for the Bath Festival; Germany; and Poland, for the Warsaw Autumn Festival. Speculum Musicae's role in education includes an ongoing residency at Columbia University and a program of workshops in New York City public high schools. The Ensemble's discography includes works by Elliott Carter, Stefan Wolpe, Charles Wuorinen, William Kraft, Eric Chasalow, and David Rakowski, among others.

Tim Berne, baritone saxophone, has been presenting his music in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan since 1983. Since April 1993 he has given more than 70 performances of his works with his current groups, bloodcount and Caos Totale. His ensembles have included Paul Motian, Joey Baron, Bill Frisell, Dave Sanborn, Mark Dresser, and Hank Roberts, to name a few. Tim has received commissions from the Shifting Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York State Foundation for the Arts, the Meet the Composers/Reader Digest commissioning program, and Birmingham Jazz in England. Residencies have included the Djerassi Foundation and MacDowell Colony. Tim has performed and recorded with John Zorn, Ray Anderson, Julius Hemphill, Michael Formanek, ROVA, Mark Helias, and Herb Robertson, among others. His work, "The Visible Man," has been performed worldwide by ROVA, and he recently wrote "Dry Ink, Silence" for the Kronos Quartet.

Aleck Karis, piano, has appeared in recital, with orchestra, and in chamber music around the United States, Europe, and South America with both contemporary and classical works. Karis has recorded for Nonesuch, New World, Neuma, Centaur, and CRI Records. His debut album for Bridge Records of music by Chopin, Carter, and Schumann was followed by two more CDs of piano music by Mozart and Stravinsky. In 1995 CRI released his recording of music for piano and electronics. Artur Balsam and Beveridge Webster were among his major teachers at the Manhattan School of Music and The Juilliard School. He credits William Daglian as a key mentor and his most important teacher. Mr. Karis is currently a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego.

Tim Smith, bass clarinet, was born and raised in Lawrence, Kansas. He studied saxophone with Joseph Allard while attending the New England Conservatory of Music and clarinet with David Glazer at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and with Kalmen Opperman in New York. He has appeared as a soloist and in ensembles in the United States and Europe, and has premiered music by Lee Hyla, Eric Moe, Ezra Sims, Ned Rothenberg, Anthony Coleman, Marty Ehrlich, and Mark Dresser. Mr. Smith has recorded for the Avant, Opus One and Knitting Factory Works record labels and currently resides in New York City.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Ciao Manhattan*. Elizabeth Brown, flute; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Theodore Mook, cello; Lee Hyla, piano. Avant 015.
- The Dream of Innocent III*. Rhonda Rider, cello; Lee Hyla, piano; Jim Pugliese, percussion. CRI CD-564.
- Howl*. Kronos Quartet; Allen Ginsberg, speaker. Nonesuch (1996 release).
- In Double Light*. Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Tim Smith, bass clarinet; Elizabeth Rodgers, piano; Jim Pugliese, percussion; Lee Hyla, conductor. Avant 015.
- Mythic Birds of Saugerties*. Tim Smith, bass clarinet. Avant 015.
- Pre-Amnesia*. Tim Smith, alto saxophone. Opus One 79.
- Revisible Light*. Lee Hyla, piano. Opus One 75.
- String Trio*. Dinosaur Annex String Trio. CRI SD-513.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Wheeler, Scott. "Beyond the Flat Surface: Form and Rhetoric in Machover, Hyla and Lindroth" in *American Composers: the Emerging Generation*, David Froom, ed. Contemporary Music Review, vol. 10, part 1 (1994), pp. 75-100.

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Pre-Pulse Suspended was recorded October 24, 1995 and *Concerto for Piano and Chamber Orchestra No. 2* was recorded October 25, 1995 at the Music Division Recital Hall of the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College, State University of New York. *We Speak Etruscan* and *String Quartet No. 3* were recorded December 18, 1994 and *String Quartet No. 2* was recorded September 26, 1995 at Slosberg Auditorium at Brandeis University.

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LEE HYLA (b. 1952) 80491-2

WE SPEAK ETRUSCAN

1 *Pre-Pulse Suspended* (1984) (12:13)

Speculum Musicae: Susan Palma Nidel, flute; Yann Ghiro, clarinet; Tim Smith, bass clarinet; Donald MacCourt, bassoon; William Purvis, French horn; Mike Powell, trombone; Aleck Karis, piano; Curtis Macomber, violin; Carol Zeavin, violin; Maureen Gallagher, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello; Marji Danilow, double bass; Donald Palma, conductor

String Quartet No. 2 (1985)

2 I (6:41)

3 II (3:32)

4 III (4:49)

Lydian String Quartet: Daniel Stepner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello

5 *We Speak Etruscan* (1992) (8:32)

Tim Berne, baritone saxophone; Tim Smith, bass clarinet

6 String Quartet No. 3 (1989) (13:01)

Lydian String Quartet: Daniel Stepner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello

Concerto for Piano and Chamber Orchestra No. 2 (1991)

7 I (8:52)

8 II (2:45)

9 III (1:05)

10 IV (6:53)

Aleck Karis, piano; Speculum Musicae: Susan Palma Nidel, flute; John Moses, clarinet; Tim Smith, bass clarinet; Donald MacCourt, bassoon, contrabassoon; Stuart Rose, French horn; Mike Powell, trombone; James Baker, percussion; Curtis Macomber, violin; Carol Zeavin, violin; Maureen Gallagher, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello; Marji Danilow, double bass; William Purvis, conductor

All compositions BMI.

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