

DONALD MARTINO
A Jazz Set

New World Records 80518

The Jimmie Vincent Story

Summer 1956. We encounter Our Hero, Jimmie Vincent, in a despondent mood:

I settled in New York on Ninety-First Street near Second Avenue and found work as best I could: club dates, Polish weddings, Italian feasts, some arranging.

I would get up early, look through *The New York Times*, find some line from an advertisement, and using it as a theme idea, sometimes a title, write the lyric and tune. By noon I'd take my lead sheet to Circle Blue Print, have some copies made and head on down Broadway to 1619, the Brill Building. I would stalk its corridors all afternoon. From office to office I'd go. No luck anywhere! Sometimes I would get friends to help me make a demo record. A jazz pianist, some singers from a Broadway show, and off to Nola's Studio we'd go. Then, armed with my demo, I'd stalk the corridors again. But it was always the same. No luck!

Jimmie's tale of woe could have been echoed by a legion of aspiring songwriters, drawn to Manhattan's booming music-publishing industry and the promise of quick big bucks. They flocked to the Brill Building. It was, in the words of the rhythm-and-blues producer Jerry Wexler, the "home of a thousand tunesmiths and assorted hustlers." 1619 Broadway was the epicenter of the industry. Canvassing the corridors, scoping out the potential clients and the competition, Vincent would find himself rubbing elbows with the likes of Mitch Miller (then a big-deal producer at Columbia Records and the ad agency J. Walter Thompson, Miller had played the oboe with everyone from the Budapest Quartet to Charlie Parker), Nesuhi Ertegun, the patrician jazz impresario and co-owner of Atlantic Records, or any number of other pop music moguls. Jimmie's prospects were uncertain, but he was fearless. Why not? His credentials were impeccable, and in the overheated jazz scene of the Fifties, anything seemed possible. Gigging steadily as a teenage reed player, he had had the good fortune to grow up in Plainfield, New Jersey, within striking distance of New York, (and in the same neighborhood as a future jazz luminary, the pianist Bill Evans). Vincent was already writing arrangements for the Gint Dexter Big Band, the hottest and biggest of the big bands in his hometown, and playing jobs across the state of New Jersey, from Bayonne's Navy Base in the east to Lehigh University in the west. Although he was still several years too young to drive or even walk into a bar, he grabbed rides into New York after hours to listen outside the big time Fifty-second Street clubs: Deuces, Onyx, and Downbeat.

Out of school and in his mid-twenties, Vincent hustled gigs up and down New York: He ghost-wrote for the music director at the *Today* show, sniffed out club dates at the Roseland Ballroom (the Manhattan Musicians' union hall), and taught clarinet at the Third Street Music School Settlement in the lower East Side. Between gigs, he organized recording sessions, cutting demos of his tunes to hawk at the Brill Building. His hometown friend, Bill Evans, often played on Vincent's sessions, and Jimmie's Syracuse University roommate, the singer, Roy Lazarus, then working in the Broadway show, *Most Happy Fella*, provided him with vocalists. Lazarus was also among the friends and acquaintances Vincent tapped for song lyrics. Lusting for a hit, the collaborators knew no shame.

One of their efforts, an outrageous genre spoof and classic Fifties send-up called "The Rock and Roll Neurosis (Back on the Couch)," offers an improbable mix of Nashville and Vienna, Elvis meeting Sigmund:

And if you got complexes
about your reflexes
here's his advice to you--
put your Mother Fixation
out on vacation
and teach her to do it too.

Pop music, however, was not the only outlet for Vincent's musical inspiration. During the years between high school and the time he spent paying dues and loitering at Roseland and the Brill Building, he began to explore other kinds of musical interests and experiences. In college, his already broad horizons exploded: He studied counterpoint, became absorbed in European modernist music, and started to explore the possibilities of chromaticism and large-scale forms in his own work. After graduate work in composition, he received a grant to study in Italy. And he began to generate a catalog of noncommercial music that would develop into one of the most important achievements of North American music in the late Twentieth century--this, under another name, his real name, the one his parents gave him: Donald Martino.

Now the Donald Martino story, it may be tempting to say, begins more or less where the Jimmie Vincent story ends. Jimmie's hyperactive year, 1956-7, seems anomalous; the unknown jazzier was already beginning to fade away, ignominiously (and pseudonym-iously), when Vincent/Martino graduated from high school, leaving behind the scenes of his childhood gigs. Literally speaking, "Jimmie Vincent" had an extremely brief career, for Martino first took the name in 1956 and retired it about a year later. The Vincent persona, however, was alive in the teenage musician who absorbed every musical experience he could, and Vincent's spirit survives to the present.

Nonetheless, when the story of Jimmie Vincent's *doppelgänger*, Donald Martino is told, Vincent is likely to be airbrushed out of the picture. Martino's biography in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, for example, has much to say about his teaching career at Princeton, Yale, the New England Conservatory, and Harvard. It mentions his honors, prizes, and commissions--Pulitzer, Guggenheim, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Boston Symphony, and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, among others. It goes on to summarize some of the technical and expressive innovations of his concert music. But there's not a word about Jimmie Vincent or his accomplishments.

* * * *

Telling the Jimmie Vincent story may seem over-dramatic. Still, we seem to resist giving Jimmie V. his due. Why should this street-smart character be Mr. Hyde to the professional Donald Martino's Dr. Jekyll? Why is it hard to affirm and integrate the different aspects of a multifaceted composer such as Martino/Vincent? In bringing even a small bit of Vincent's work together with Martino's, this recording recognizes the premise that Jimmie Vincent and Donald Martino are not incompatible personae.

What do we reveal in reuniting Martino/Vincent's divided self and allowing Jimmie V.'s music and story into the mix? Superficially, by focusing on Martino's early jazz experience we show that he had formidable clarinet chops during his days as a professional player, that as an arranger and composer he was fluent in the full range of jazz/pop idioms in vogue during the Fifties, and that he aspired to push out the boundaries of the "cool" contrapuntal jazz style that came into fashion with Lennie Tristano and the Modern Jazz Quartet. As Martino has put it:

It was the jazz pianist-composer Lennie Tristano who first suggested to me that Bach could swing. More important, Lennie pointed out that while bebop and swing are essentially homophonic, a Dixieland band quite naturally develops a polyphonic texture. Tristano, much maligned but much imitated, was a pioneer in the effort to create a contrapuntal modern jazz.

Of course, these impulses--to make Bach swing and to write and perform highly contrapuntal jazz--don't lead us from Jimmie Vincent's novelty tune "The Rock and Roll Neurosis" to Donald Martino's masterly *Preludes* for piano. They do, however, suggest an expansive sensibility, an impatience with fixed categories, and a fascination with the permeability of idioms and styles. But beyond this general disposition, how did Martino's jazz experience enter into the work for which he is known--a compositional catalog that is widely acknowledged for its deep originality, force of influence, and comprehensive vision?

"Serious" music students are well aware of Martino's compositional methods and their precedents in the work of Schoenberg and Dallapiccola, among others. The pertinence of the European musical canon to Martino's practices is also well documented and often transparent--for example, Bach's extended chorale literature, its contrapuntal densities and motive/chromatic saturation; or the intense narrativity and dramatic aura of Verdi. But jazz and popular music have had another, perhaps equally serious influence on Martino's compositional persona. His intense jazz experience must have revealed new musical possibilities, pointing the way to some of the most characteristic and original aspects of his mature work. Gigging with a panoply of jazzers--whether the occasional encounter with famous figures such as Teddy Wilson, Chet Baker, or Elvin Jones, or his ongoing jobs with such undiscovered but talented hometown boys as Specs Goldberg or Hunky Page--must have deeply affected his musical temperament. Martino's heightened awareness of the ways in which instrumental sounds could be articulated, accented, and connected--and his compulsive, breathtakingly effective specification of articulations--certainly derive in part from jazz. The variety of refined accents, nuances, and timbral inflections he experienced playing jazz infuses his artistic sensibility as much, perhaps, as Varèse's avant-garde experiments with sonority and electro-acoustic sounds, experiments that influenced so many other composers of his generation.

So, too, for Martino's distinctive approaches to form. There's an omnipresent potential in his chamber music for rhapsodic, spontaneous solos to burst out; and this subversive potential, which ratchets up the dramatic intensity and undermines any glimmer of conventionality in Martino's deployment of "conventional" forms, also seems rooted in jazz. Then there's the sound of Martino's chords themselves, the sonorities at the surface, which so often can be heard as revoiced jazz harmonies and so easily slide into jazz sonorities or quotations, however much they may be woven into other kinds of rigorous musical structure.

Among the work presented on this recording, perhaps *A Set for Clarinet* (here in a transcription for marimba prepared by Martino for the CORE's percussionist, Michael Parola) and the *Parisonatina Al'Dodecafonia* best demonstrate the way "jazz thinking" mingles with other aspects of his musical thought. Martino composed the *Set* in an environment that surely evoked both high school and his most active jazz years. Jazz was never far from the surface, either in the compositional process or the product:

A Set for Clarinet was composed--virtually improvised with clarinet in hand while strolling about my parents' richly resonant basement in Plainfield, New Jersey--at the rate of one movement per day, from February seventh to ninth, 1954. . . .

The term 'set' here refers not to the twelve-tone set. . . . but rather to the dance-band set which. . . . was always comprised of three musical compositions to be played without pause. This connection with popular music may be heard particularly in the overtly jazzy last movement and was reflected in the original movement titles: "Conservatory Stomp," "Blues in E flat," and "10th Avenue Shuffle."

In the *Set*, we encounter a young composer at play with a scale form that crossed over from jazz and "atonal" music practices--the alternating half/whole step scale called "double diminished" by jazzers and "octatonic" by highbrows. As Martino indicates, improvisation was built into the compositional process, and its mercurial register shifts and timbral fluency reflect its performative origins. But the *Set* also reveals a composer concerned with the development of motives and their narrative function, with themes, tonal centers, and the articulation of forms, and with the aesthetically meaningful integration of "tonal" and chromatic techniques.

The *Parisonatina Al'Dodecafonia*, another virtuoso solo piece, was composed a decade later, this time for cello. Now in New Haven--and away from both the Brill Building and his parents' basement--Martino wrote the work for his Yale colleague, the distinguished Brazilian cellist, Aldo Parisot, whose name is variously inscribed in the work and its title. By this time, Martino had worked out quite a few of the implications of the materials he had played with so productively in the *Set*: In the *Parisonatina*, the surface motivic/thematic structure of the earlier work is liquidated. Rather, the refined etching of chromatic/motivic details, already inchoately present in the *Set*, is subsumed into a comprehensive approach to pitch design. Similarly, the fascination with coloristic detailing, registral contrasts, and articulative nuances demonstrated in the earlier work now permeate larger systems--systems that empower the composer both to delineate a musical world and to explore all of its exotic places.

But however thoroughly Martino may have elaborated his musical thinking during the ten years separating the *Set* and the *Parisonatina*, the tension between rhapsodic improvisation and fixed form provides a dramatic impetus shared by both. The cello piece is divided into two large sections, each comprised of two movements: first a "species of passacaglia" and a "rondo-like scherzo," as Martino calls them, followed by a "three-part song" and a "free cadenza." As these designations suggest, the forms become freer over the course of the work. An improvisatory force is unleashed in the piece as its formal/structural ground rules gradually loosen. Martino describes it as "general progress . . . from the strictest specification of musical materials in Movement One, to the freest in the final

cadenza, wherein improvisation is encouraged." To my mind, the emergent freedom in the *Parisonatina* connects more strongly to the metabolic flow of a jazz solo than to avant-garde experiments with open form. And the work's more abstract approach to the dialectic of freedom and constraint seems jazz-like as well.

Although almost three decades separate Martino's *Twelve Preludes* from the *Parisonatina*, a dialectic of improvisation and strict structure remains at work. By analogy to the key scheme organizations of Bach's Preludes and Fugues and the Chopin *Preludes* (which use each pitch of the chromatic scale as a tonic just once for twelve major and twelve minor keys), Martino ends each of his twelve preludes on a different tone of the chromatic scale. Registral boundaries also articulate a scheme of chromatic completion: Grouping the highest notes in each prelude together yields an ordering of all twelve notes, a sequence mirrored by that of the preludes' lowest pitches. However, within this fixed spatial-temporal scheme (and various other structural conditions that Martino relates to it), there is ample place and time for apparently improvisatory juxtapositions and unanticipated shifts of affect. Martino has written that "the moods of *Twelve Preludes* are manifold":

As in much of my music, a stream of consciousness provides the vehicle for these moods, whose seeming brevity and randomness point onward from section to section, from movement to movement, until order is finally achieved when each voice in the subsuming counterpoint of discourse concludes its argument.

Whether or not the listener focuses on the pitch patterns of the top, bottom, and end notes of each of these preludes, such fixed elements of design intensify the interplay of structure and liberty that permeates the work: Martino's free "stream of consciousness" and the composition's fixed "argument," its "subsuming counterpoint of discourse." In learning from the prelude tradition--its exploration of the piano's tactile, textural, and sonorous potentials in diminutive, mercurial character pieces--Martino finds a new way to explore the perennial structure/freedom interplay in his work. As in Chopin's or Bach's prelude sets, a scheme of key (or pitch class) relationships may be exhausted, and the set of pieces ends. But the world of the prelude form is inherently inexhaustible, always open to the next improvisatory whim.

Written in 1984, seven years before *Twelve Preludes*, Martino's brief *Canzone e Tarantella sul nome Petrassi* responds to two occasions: the Italian composer's eightieth birthday and the first cello lessons of Martino's son, Christopher, who was then nine years old. Although the *Canzone* is playable by a cellist with minimal experience, the technical simplicity of the cello part does not call attention to itself, because of the delicate timbral connection between the two instrumental lines. (Martino later included more complicated options and an interpolated cadenza for more advanced players.) Christopher and Donald Martino played the premiere of the first movement at the Pontino Festival in Priverno, Italy in June of 1984. As in the *Parisonatina*, the dedicatee's name is inscribed in the pitch structure of the work. In this case, an initial statement of the first two syllable of "Petrassi" comprises a motive that generates much of what follows. Upon completing the honored name (with "ssi"/Bb), Martino continues to spell out a little tribute by permutating its notes: "*Petrassi, arte--si!*" and so forth. An occasional work rather than an exploration of a tightly defined world, the Petrassi birthday piece proceeds in a relaxed enough way to incorporate explicit bits of Verdi, specifically *La Traviata* and *Don Carlos*, in the little cadenzas that conclude the middle section of the Tarantella. Petrassi, whose name resounds in the piece, is thus linked to an honored predecessor in the Italian

tradition.

The 1990s and the 1950s come together in *A Jazz Set*, three pieces extracted and rearranged a few years ago from a larger group of ten compositions and arrangements written during "the Jimmie Vincent year," 1956-57. The three movements of *A Jazz Set* were among those recorded in the summer of 1957 by an extraordinarily talented pickup band: Bill Evans, the drummer Elvin Jones, the vibes player Bob Prince, the bassist Joe Benjamin, and the composer on clarinet. Their original, sometimes frantic recordings are always hot, sometimes brilliant, but occasionally teetering on the edge of catastrophe. By contrast, Martino's CORE performance of the Nineties transcription emphasizes refinement, subtlety, and a cool effect that comes close to that of the Modern Jazz Quartet. In both early and late performances, the ebullient inventiveness of the music and its equal delight in neo-Bachian counterpoint and lush jazz harmonies, come through forcefully:

One afternoon about three o'clock I was drinking a beer at the Turf Club bar when I overheard two song writers discussing their month-long struggle to perfect a lyric. . . .

After that I retired from song writing. . . . It had never occurred to me that the same commitment that is required of the symphonist might also be required of the Tin Pan Alley tunesmith. I had the patience for one, but not the other. Clearly, I was in the wrong business.

Martino's own explanation of the demise of Jimmie Vincent is that simple. His heart and his professional identity were elsewhere. But to choose the path of the symphonist rather than the tunesmith was not to abandon jazz. Rather, it was to incorporate what he experienced in jazz, pursuing his own distinctive contribution to an unending conversation, a dialogue of artistic freedom and constraint. As his adult compositional persona has developed, Martino has not abandoned Jimmie Vincent, but he has shown us the singular potential of this young jazzier's exuberant gift.

—Martin Brody

Composer Martin Brody has written extensively about American music. He is the Catherine Mills Davis Professor of Music at Wellesley College.

The CORE Ensemble commissions, performs, and records new American music for its instrumental combination of cello, piano, and percussion. Since its inception in 1993, touring and educational residencies have taken the trio to concert halls, schools, universities, and colleges around the United States. In 1995, the CORE Ensemble was the recipient of a three-year Chamber Music America Residency Grant based at the Duncan Theatre at Palm Beach Community College in Lake Worth, Florida. This residency provides concerts and educational programs throughout Palm Beach County, where percussionist Michael Parola is on the faculty of the Harid Conservatory of Music. The CORE Ensemble has also served as the ensemble in residence for the 1995 and 1996 New Music Festivals at the Boston Conservatory, where cellist Andrew Mark teaches and is chairman of the string department. Pianist Hugh Hinton has given multiple performances of the music of Donald Martino at Harvard University, where he has served as resident music tutor at Adams House, as well as being on the faculty of Holy Cross College. The CORE Ensemble has received support from The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Meet the Composer-Readers Digest

Commissioning Program, the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation. The CORE Ensemble specializes in producing new multi-genre works in collaboration with artists from the dance, theatre, and visual arts mediums. The first such large-scale work, Martin Brody's *Earth Studies* received its premiere in January 1996.

Ian Greitzer, clarinet, serves as principal clarinetist of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and the Boston Classical Orchestra. In addition, Mr. Greitzer is a member of both Boston Musica Viva and the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, and has performed with the Boston Symphony, the Boston Pops, and the Pittsburgh Symphony. He is a faculty member at Boston University and the Boston Conservatory, and has recorded for Philips, Koch, South German Radio, CRI, and Northeastern Records.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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Divertimento from the Other Side. Group for Contemporary Music. Koch International Classics CD 7245.

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DONALD MARTINO (b. 1931) 80518-2
A JAZZ SET

A Set for Marimba

(1995 transcription by the composer from *A Set for Clarinet* 1954) (publ. by McGinnis and Marx Music Publ.)

- 1 Allegro (3:15)
- 2 Adagio (3:32)
- 3 Allegro (2:31)

Parisonatina Al'Dodecafonia (1964) for solo cello

(publ. by Ione Press Inc.)

- 4 Agitato. (Motto Sul Nome Aldo Parisot: con larghezza) (1:15)
- 5 Scherzevole (4:04)
- 6 (Motto: Agitato) Teneramente, Agitato, Teneramente (3:12)
- 7 (Cadenza Sul Nome Aldo Parisot: Barbaro, Dolce, Feroce, Regale) (2:14)

Twelve Preludes (1991) for solo piano

(publ. by Dantalian Inc.)

Part I

- 8 I. Adagio con moto (1:07)
- 9 II. Drammatico (introduction): Doppio movimento (0:58)
- 10 III. Andantino (2:01)
- 11 IV. Adagio sentimentale--Adagietto (coda) (1:32)

- 12 V. Il pir presto possible--Meno (coda) (1:05)
- 13 VI. Presto--Andantino--Prestissimo (1:11)
- Part II
- 14 VII. Poco adagio (1:59)
- 15 VIII. Allegretto (0:42)
- 16 IX. Adagietto (1:45)
- 17 X. Allegretto (introduction): Allegretto (1:47)
- 18 XI. Largo (2:23)
- 19 XII. Allegretto gioioso--Cantabile--Andantino--Allegretto grazioso (codetta) (2:45)

Canzone e Tarantella sul nome Petrassi (1984) for clarinet and cello
 (publ. by Dantalian, Inc.)

- 20 Canzone (1:49)
- 21 Tarantella (3:59)

Guest Artist: Ian Greitzer, clarinet

A Jazz Set (1957; 1990 transcription by the composer)
 (publ. by Dantalian, Inc.)

- 22 I. Canon Ball (Duo for Vibraphone & Piano) (1:17)
- 23 II. Cathy (3:24)
- 24 III. Three Way (2:48)

The CORE Ensemble:

Hugh Hinton, piano
 Andrew Mark, cello
 Michael Parola, percussion

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