

MARY JANE LEACH
Ariadne's Lament

New World Records 80525

The music of Mary Jane Leach on this album draws on several sources of inspiration. The first is early music, with its polyphony and modal harmonies. Modal writing, as adapted to twentieth-century thought, focuses on the prolongation of a fixed collection of notes, arranged into either a traditional or an invented scale. Melodies and harmonies are created freely from this collection, without forcing them into highly directional and strongly articulated phrases. The result is a luxurious stasis, with poles of attraction--pitches that serve as points of repose--strongly stated. From modal antecedents, Leach derives her own unexpected twists and innovations.

The influence of early music is evident in other ways. Like those of the Renaissance, Leach's scores are free of dynamic and expressive markings. Two of the pieces draw their musical material directly from Renaissance works: *Ariadne's Lament* from Monteverdi, and *Tricky Pan* from the fourteenth-century poet and composer Solage. The languages Leach sets--early Italian and French, ancient Greek and Cretan--also evoke a sense of connection to a remote past.

In her early compositional work, Leach experimented with recording individual lines on 8-track tape and then accompanying herself. This enabled her to be musically self-sufficient, and also allowed for more intricate textures than she could create with a single-line instrument. *Tricky Pan*, for solo countertenor and tape, is modeled directly on this technique. Gradually, as her music began to be more widely sought after by ensembles, Leach's fascination with multiple tracks led her to adapt it to live players: The choral pieces on this album all divide the chorus into eight independent parts.

While there is a substantial body of twentieth-century music that delights in the chimerical and the quickly transformed, Leach's music is from the esthetic which favors prolongation, resonance, long statements of subtly varied persistence. In that sense, her music is both easy to follow and melliflously unpredictable. She has a careful ear for pacing and structural unfolding, often building her pieces to ardent, expressive arrivals. The traditional distinction between consonance, as pillars of stability, and dissonance--unstable moments that must inevitably seek out resolution--is maintained, though she will allow dissonances to flower and persist in ways her predecessors did not.

For many years, Leach has been involved in an ongoing project that focuses on the myth of Ariadne: Four of the works on this album, the earlier *Ariadne's Lament* and *Song of Sorrows* and the more recent *O Magna Vasti Creta* and *Call of the Dance*, are part of this project. In the classic telling of the myth, Ariadne falls in love with Theseus, and helps to rescue him from her half-brother, the Minotaur. But, after killing the Minotaur and fleeing with Ariadne to Naxos, Theseus abandons her there, never to return. In her later pieces, Leach has tried to recreate a "pre-Hellenic Ariadne," one less codified than the classic portrayal. Recently, in continuing her research, the composer came across this quote from historian Helmut Jaskolski [The Labyrinth, Symbol of Fear, Rebirth, and Liberation (translation by Michael H. Kohn)]: "The memory of Ariadne, the original lady of the labyrinth, has practically disappeared in the course of the history of European culture. What has survived in the male story of the Labyrinth is the clue that helped Theseus, the proverbial 'Ariadne's thread.' Sympathy for the Cretan princess has been expressed almost solely by composers . . . At the end of the twentieth century, the moment has certainly come not only to lament Ariadne but also to restore

to her her ancient rights." As the composer writes: "How could I resist this quote, since I heartily agree with its conclusion?"

O Magna Vasti Creta is scored for women's chorus and string quartet. Underlying the entire piece are pedal tones, which provide an insistent underlying rhythmic pulse, as well as a reference pitch upon which the varying melodies superimpose themselves. The pedal tones are shared by both chorus and ensemble: when the chorus intones them, it is always to the word "wanassa" ("Queen").

The half-step--the closest that two notes can lie together in the chromatic scale--is traditionally Western music's most powerful melodic motion and its strongest harmonic clash. The first section of *O Magna Vasti Creta* opens with such a half-step--D-flat and C-natural--intoned against each other. The C-natural is the stable pitch, by virtue of its unbroken presence, and the D-flat is repeatedly drawn down to it. For a while, carefully paced, that is all there is: the implication of melody, and the resolutely steadfast harmonic dissonance. Gradually, the texture thickens, as other notes are introduced. The mode created is an invented one, with C-natural as tonic, and an unpredictable zigzag of scalar steps. Squeezed into one octave, the superimposition of the vocal lines creates a delicately pulsing cluster. Words are broken into rhythmically disjunct syllables, which the chorus slowly intones out-of-phase with one another.

Then the texture lightens, and to the words "Ariadne agaklaya" ("glorious Ariadne"), a melody is clearly stated for the first time, using the same notes as in the first section. The melody returns repeatedly, but at unpredictable intervals and with slightly varying phrase lengths, creating a mellifluous continuity. In responsorial dialogue, "osya potna thayawn" ("Holiness, Holiness, queen of Heaven") answers with its own tune.

The shift in pedal tone from C-natural to G-natural introduces the text "O magna vasti Creta" ("Menacing, queenly Crete") in which the imitation and layering of voices reaches a climax. Here as well, the violins achieve the highest note in the piece. Different strands of text are intertwined, and the melodies are repeated sometimes a bar apart, sometimes a half-bar, creating another vision of steadfast, but gently unpredictable, prolongation. The piece comes to rest on the G-natural at the end, the change in pedal tones having created a long, underlying "Amen" cadence that is at once restful and suspenseful, inviting of further discourse.

In Call of the Dance, a solo voice is added to the chorus, now a capella. As the genesis in multi-tracking suggests, the chorus provides an underpinning, and receives only fleeting focus; on top of this, the soloist's soaring and expansive line traces itself out. All of the soloist's pitches are anticipated or reflected by the chorus, creating the impression that the chorus is the "air" which the soloist breathes to sing her song.

The piece is framed by a similar texture at opening and end: The chorus members intone quick, oscillating fragments, while the soloist declaims in slower, more forceful statements. When this texture returns at the end, the soloist sings a completely new line, suggesting the text's "longing for a new song."

Windjammer is filled with Leach's trademark imitations and prolongations, although in a fabric reduced to the sparser three parts. From a rhythmically hesitant beginning, the piece develops a fluid sense of activity, punctuated by new rhythmic and melodic details. Here, with the scoring for the

coloristically distinct winds, the passing of pitches from one instrument to another is particularly noticeable. The piece ends with a reflective nod back to its beginning.

In its distillation of Solage's "Très Gentil Cuer," *Tricky Pan* brings many of the Renaissance antecedents in Leach's music even more to the forefront: the freely shifting metric stresses; the emphasis on fifths and octaves; and the expressive use of "blue" notes, that is notes outside the harmony whose dissonance underlines a moment of textual poignancy. Formally, the piece is divided into two clear sections, separated by the piece's one long pause. The second section, which begins with the words "Quà vous amer" ("But to love"), presents most perceptibly a shift of harmony and new motivic details in the taped part. Taken as a whole, the piece is an extended, impassioned homage.

Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Ariana* is beautifully representative of that composer's immensely sensitive and flexible text-setting. Its close-fitting harmonies and aching dissonances are reflected in *Ariadne's Lament*, which isolates fragments from the Monteverdi and elaborates upon them. The piece opens with a long, densely textured, rhythmically continuous passage, which then leads to more isolated solo statements. Here, Leach's meditation on Monteverdi's gorgeous opening melody, *Lasciatemi morire* ("No longer let me wait"), is especially strong. A rhythmically more active passage follows, before the piece relaxes into a subdued close.

In *Song of Sorrows*, the strength of the tonality is mediated by disquieting shifts between major and minor tonalities. Though Leach usually declines explicit text-painting, here there are some suggestive moments: for instance, at the word "Misera" ("Misery"), one strongly affirmed chord is suddenly supplanted by a distantly related one. Near the end of the piece, to the words "Invan piangendo" ("In vain my weeping"), the vocal line edges upwards along a nearly chromatic scale, illustrating, with its sense of roving, unsettled focus, Ariadne's hopelessness and insecurity.

—Anthony K. Brandt

Anthony K. Brandt is a composer living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is editor-in-chief of *Soundout Digital Press*, the Web's first new-music publishing house, and has held visiting faculty positions at Harvard, M.I.T., and Tufts universities.

Tricky Pan

Très gentil cuer amoureux, atraiant
Frans et courtois, jolis et plains de joie,
A vous servir du tout mon temps emploie,
Quar il n'est riens qui tant me soit plaisant,
N'autre desir avoir je ne pourroie.

Most noble heart, loving and welcoming,
generous and courtly, cheerful and full of joy,
I devote my time to serving you utterly,
for nothing else could please me so much,
nor could I have any other desire

Quà vous amer, honnourer et cherir,
Cremir, doubter et loiaument servir
Par fine amour,

but to love, honour and cherish you,
fear, respect and loyally serve you
with true love,

Quar en vous sont mi penser, mi desir,
Mi oeil, mes cuers, mi vouloir, mi plaisir,
Et mi retour,

for you occupy all my thoughts, my desires,
my eyes, my heart, my wishes, my pleasures
and my consolation;

| | |
|--|---|
| Donc tant desir, flour trez souef fleirant, | that is why I so desire, most sweetly perfumed flower, |
| Belle et gente plus que dire ne sauroye; | more fair and noble than I can express, |
| De reveoir vo façon simple et coie, | to see again your frank, modest demeanor |
| Et l'esgart doulz de vo regart riant, | and the sweet look of your smiling face, |
| Qui tant me plaist; pour ce, ou que je soye. | which pleases me so much; therefore wherever I may be. |

O Magna Vasti Creta

queen (ancient Cretan)

But how did it all begin? (Ma com'era cominciato tutto? --Italian)

Holiness, Holiness, queen of Heaven (Euripides, The Bacchants)

glorious Ariadne (ancient Greek)

Menacing, queenly Crete (O magna vasti Creta--Seneca, Phaedra)

O holy haunts of Crete (Euripides, The Bacchants)

Call of the Dance

Sing in me muse. (Homer, The Odyssey)

Muse, spread the fame of this song. (Timocreon)

Terpsichore summons me to sing fine tales for the white-robed women of Knossos; and greatly does the city rejoice in my clear-coaxing utterances. (Corinna)

The choir is sacred (Euripides, The Trojan Women)

Come Muses, clear-voiced Muse of many songs, singer always, begin a new song for girls to sing. Begin the lovely verses; set desire on the song and make the choral dance graceful. Cretan Muses, fill my heart with longing for a new song; I am eager to hear the maiden voices of girls singing a beautiful melody to the heavens. (Alcman)

Song of Sorrows, by Ottavio Rinuccini and Mary Jane Leach

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Ahi! ch'è non pur risponde; | Ah, but he does not answer |
| Ch'è parlo, che vaneggio? | What words these, what do I picture? |
| Parlo la lingua sì, | My tongue is speaking, yes, |
| O Teseo mio, | Oh my love Theseus, |
| Si che mio ti vo' dir, | Yes, I would tell thee now |
| Ch'è mio pur sei, | That mine thou art still; |
| Benchè t'involi, ah! crudo, | Though thou hast left me, cruel, |
| Misera, Ohime! Ch'è chieggio? | Ah, wretched, alas, what ask I? |
| Ch'è non pur risponde; | But he does not answer |
| Ahi! ch'è più d'aspe | Ah, deaf as a serpent |
| E sordo a miei lamenti. | He to my lament. |
| Lasciarmi in abbandono, | Instead I am deserted |
| Lascierai tu morire, | It is he leaves me dying, |
| Parlo l'affano mio, Parlo il dolore, | 'Tis hunger speaks for me, the voice is sorrows, |
| Abbandonato e doloroso. | Abandoned and sad. |
| Lascierai tu morire, | It is he leaves me dying, |

Invan piangendo, invan gridando
aita
Misera Arianna.

In vain my weeping, in vain my cry
for succor.
Wretched Ariadne.

MARY JANE LEACH is a composer originally from Vermont who has lived in New York City since the mid-1970s. Her work explores the physicality of sound, working very carefully with the timbres of instruments, creating combination, difference, and interference tones. The use of sound phenomena, however, is only a means to an end, the ultimate goal being musicality. Her compositions have been performed throughout the world. She has CD recordings on the XI, Aerial, and Wave/Eva labels.

Arlene Travis, soprano, recently sang with AmorArtis as soloist in Copland's *In the Beginning* and Schubert's *Stabat Mater*. She has appeared both as a soloist and an ensemble member with many of New York's leading groups, including AmorArtis, Ascension Music, Concert Royal, Musica Sacra and Pomerium Musices.

David Lee Echelard, tenor, countertenor, is a singer of ancient and new music as well as a teacher of voice and the art of song. David is the artistic director of The Blue Heron Consort, an early music ensemble based in his sleepy Upper Mississippi River Town in Minnesota.

Patrick Burton, clarinet, earned his BFA from the Hartt School of Music and his MFA from SUNY Purchase.

Libby Van Cleve, oboe, is recognized as one of the foremost interpreters of contemporary music for the oboe. She has performed as a soloist throughout North America and has recorded for the CRI, Centrediscs, What Next?, OODisc, and Artifacts labels. Ms. Van Cleve received her DMA from Yale School of Music, her MFA from California Institute of the Arts and her BA, Magna cum Laude from Bowdoin College. Her teachers have included Ronald Roseman, Allan Vogel, and Basil Reeve.

New York Treble Singers, Virginia Davidson, conductor, is the only fully professional female chamber chorale in existence. Founder-conductor Dr. Virginia Davidson, has spent much of her career conducting orchestras. She conducts various workshops and festivals, including the All State Orchestra in New York in 1996. New York Treble Singers performs regularly in New York City, presenting premieres of new works.

NEW YORK TREBLE SINGERS

Arlene Travis, Eileen Clark, Maureen Haley, Therese McCormick, Judith Pannill, Karen Krueger, Karen Goldfeder, Nancy Wertsch, and Elsa Larsson

Bassoonist **Klyph Johnson** has performed on three continents in venues ranging from smoky bars to world-renowned concert halls. He earned a Master of Music degree from The Yale School of Music, where he studied with Arthur Weisberg and Stephen Maxym. In addition to his performing career, Klyph heads Busman's Holiday, a production company specializing in radio and television documentary soundtracks.

The Cassatt String Quartet has won fellowships at Tanglewood and Yale, subsequently capturing top prizes at the Fischhoff, Coleman, and Banff Competitions and receiving the 1995 Chamber Music America/ASCAP First Prize Award for Adventurous Programming. They currently serve as Quartet-in-Residence at New York City's "Bang on a Can" Festival, the Swannanoa Festival in North Carolina, East Carolina University, the Seal Bay Festival in Maine, and Syracuse University. The Cassatts frequently commission new works from contemporary composers while also performing a wide range of the standard repertory. It is from the pioneering American impressionist painter Mary Cassatt that the Quartet takes its name.

William Payn, conductor of the Rooke Chapel Choir, is Director of Choral Studies at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Within the past ten years his choirs have performed all over the world, including tours in England, Wales, Switzerland, Austria, Holland, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Belgium. Closer to home, they have recently sung in Florida, California, and Arizona. His choirs have been recorded on the Lovely Music and Albany labels. With the recent completion of several commissioned works, Payn has 22 published compositions. He received his Bachelor of Music degree from Westminster Choir College and his Doctor of Musical Arts in organ and harpsichord literature from West Virginia University. In 1987, he was presented with the Harriman Award of Bucknell University.

The Rooke Chapel Choir of Bucknell University has gained international recognition for its creative interpretations of significant twentieth-century American sacred repertory. The choir's select members represent many fields of study at Bucknell. In addition to singing throughout western Europe, the choir has performed with London's contemporary-music ensemble Electric Phoenix and has performed in a concert version of Handel's opera *Acis and Galatea* with the Brewer Chamber Orchestra. In 1992, the choir assisted the Gregg Smith Singers in the New York premiere performance of William Duckworth's *Southern Harmony* at Merkin Hall.

THE ROOKE CHAPEL CHOIR

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Megan Allen | Trey Helms | Gwynne Luminati | Arthur Thomas |
| Shannon Beam | Kimberly Herr | Matthew Mehaffey | Lisa Toccafondi |
| Megan Castrina | Catherine Hollyer | Susan Minsavage | Douglas Waage |
| Kiersten Drumm | Matthew Jesick | Michael Phillips | Melissa Wharton |
| Marianne Fallon | David Kim | David Regula | David Zettlemoyer |
| Julie Griesemer | Galen Knudson | Lindsey Rosenberg | Ryan Zollner |
| Meghan Griffith | Zachary Kulis | Elisabeth Stevens | |
| Troy Guinn-Bailey | Leslie Leeman | Becky Tarbell | |

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Ariel's Song. New York Treble Singers. XI 107.
- Bruckstuck. New York Treble Singers. XI 107.
- Feu de Joie. Shannon Peet, bassoon. XI 107.
- Guy de Polka. Guy Klucevsek, accordion. Eva WWCX 2037.
- Xantippe's Rebuke. Libby Van Cleve, oboe. The Aerial AER1994/6.

Producer: Mary Jane Leach

O Magna Vasti Creta, *Call of the Dance*, and *Ariadne's Lament* were recorded at the American Academy of Arts and Letters; Silas Brown, sound engineer and editor.

Windjammer was recorded at Baby Monster Studio; Jamie Candilor, sound engineer; Silas Brown, editor.

Tricky Pan was recorded at Baby Monster Studio; recorded and mixed by Thomas Lester.

Song of Sorrows was recorded at the Rooke Chapel; recorded and mixed by Rusty Richards.

Mastered by Allan Tucker at Foothill Digital, New York.

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ARIADNE'S LAMENT 80525-2

MARY JANE LEACH (b. 1949)

1 O Magna Vasti Creta (1997) 9:16

New York Treble Singers; Virginia Davidson, conductor; Cassatt String Quartet: Muneko Otani, violin; Jennifer Leshnower, violin; Michiko Oshima, viola; Kelley Mikkelsen, cello

2 Call of the Dance (1997) 9:57

New York Treble Singers; Virginia Davidson, conductor; Arlene Travis, soprano soloist

3 Windjammer (1995) 10:12

Libby Van Cleve, oboe; Patrick Burton, clarinet; Klyph Johnson, bassoon

4 *Tricky Pan* (1995) 9:33

David Lee Echelard, tenor, countertenor

5 Ariadne's Lament (1993) 8:12

New York Treble Singers; Virginia Davidson, conductor

6 Song of Sorrows (1995) 7:59
The Rooke Chapel Choir; William Payn, conductor

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