

WENDY MAE CHAMBERS
*Twelve*²

New World Records 80526

The fact of your reading this suggests an affinity for a contemplative category which, for our purpose, we shall call Discophile. For a yet narrower purpose, you likely occupy one of two subcategories. The first is Sybarite. (Mind, this is *not* a dirty word.) If the reader yearns in a somewhat passive manner for sonic thrills and chills, he or she has certainly come to the right place. I've no hesitation in assigning the sole impediment to the visceral pleasures that await to one's sound system's limitations (which, I trust, dwell off in a distance as hypothetical), with particular regard to threats to unsecured bric-a-brac. (The music-loving discophile is not to be confused with that callow airhead, the unalloyed, recidivistic audiophile, with particular regard to that which fuels one's sounding hardware. When, as music lovers, we speak of thrills and chills, craft and merit oversee as givens. However expertly performed and recorded, nothing palls as swiftly as insubstantial music.)

Let's call the other subcategory Historic. Rather as if in a parlor game, the listener generates names and relationships, discovering therein great satisfaction. (Not nearly so saucy as who's bedding whom, but for our nobler purpose, interesting enough.) As Saddam Hussein might have put it, Wendy Mae Chambers' *Twelve*² is a mother of a work capable of jolting your annotator into fin-de-siècle reflections on precedents and fellow travelers. Her signature toy piano aside, Chambers' reputation rests in substantial part on the insouciant grandeur of her conceptions. One casts about for forebears and relations. Louis Moreau Gottschalk springs to mind. An inappropriate dalliance required the virtuoso pianist-composer to depart his homeland for, finally, Rio, where within a year of his demise he organized those peculiarly nineteenth-century, Barnumesque events know as "monster concerts," incorporating as many as 650 participants. (Gottschalk's remains lie, with those of Lola Montez, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Samuel Morse, and Currier & Ives, some few miles distant from my desk, in Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery.) So there's that, the national precedent, carried to extravagant, latter-day fulfillment by, for example, Alvin Curran, whose memorial piece, *Crystal Psalms*, marking Kristallnacht's fiftieth anniversary, connected six nations in concert via broadcast. The composer Frederic Rzewski in *New American Grove* tells us that Curran's *Maritime Rites* incorporates ships at anchor, foghorns, radio broadcasts, and boatloads of vocalists "on various European and North American lakes." Berlioz's taste for giantistic enterprise stands in clear view, as do two rather more recent masterworks, Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* and Schönberg's *Gurrelieder*. In any event, little, however novel, occurs within a precedential vacuum.

Yet in this daunting, disparate company, as the sketchiest of descriptions attest, Chambers cuts a fully formed figure, in terms both of scope and originality: 1993, *A Mass for Mass Trombones*, 77 of them, as a requiem for her father, performed in New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine; 1989, *Symphony of the Universe*, for 100 timpani, choir, organ, jazz band, horn solo, and metal percussion, performed in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; 1986, a *Liberty Overture* in celebration of the statue's centennial, performed aboard the Brooklyn V, a vessel 100 feet in length; *Marimba!*, for 26 marimbas, performed in Washington's Kennedy Center, a commission by the Percussive Arts Society; 1985, *Solar Diptych*, for 30 trumpets, performed in New York City's Central Park; 1984, *The Grand Harp Event*, for 30 harps, performed in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; 1983, *10 Grand*, for ten grand pianos; 1980, *Prime Time*, for nine TVs; *Busy Box Quartet*, for four crib toys; *Clean Sweep*, for nine vacuum cleaners; 1979, *Music for Choreographed Rowboats*, with 24 musicians afloat, performed in New York City's Central Park Lake; 1978, *The Kitchen*, for nine performers on pots and pans, with

three more preparing food; *Street Music*, for 30 musicians and coordinated radio broadcast based on the theme from *Close Encounters*; *Real Music*, for nine automobiles.

I cannot help but think by way of stark contrast of the remarks of a composer of the solitary persuasion, keyboard plugged to computers: His attraction to electronic media arises not from their timbral seductions but rather from the gratifications immediacy provides. He composes and--*poof!*--the sounding result. Inveigling, inveighing, cajoling, pleading, proselytizing, bullying, in one way or another enlisting the participation of living, breathing instrumentalists had simply become for him too difficult a chore. And we speak of relatively conventional forces! One wonders what marvels of rhetoric or legerdemain secured for Chambers such extraordinary combinations of cooperation. Be these sociological astonishments as they may, by dint alone of means and armamentaria, we perceive in several of these works fertile grounds for happenstance, suggesting an affinity with John Cage's esthetic philosophy. It comes therefore as no surprise that the work here presented, *Twelve²*, honors Cage's memory. As an unhappy aside, it also honors the work's principal percussionist, Michael Pugliese, who died, as I write, but a few weeks ago.

It was the architect Mies van der Rohe, I believe, who housed God famously in the details. Someone in a bleaker mood, a victim perhaps of Murphy's Law, posited the obverse, that the devil dwells there too. Though not perhaps in domestic felicity. On listening to an early pressing of this recording, I further suggest the proof of an impish Providence in an oddly resonant accident, an aleatory-driven epiphany, if you like: A doppelgänger haunts "Manman Brigitte," *Twelve²*'s eighth of eleven parts. At a quite magical moment, it wandered in off a New York street. The movement calls, inter alia, for a hand-cranked siren, as in, and as a salute to, Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*. During a long moment of scored silence, the siren's unscheduled, offstage mimic sounds a disembodied, Gabriellian flourish. As the humorist likes to say, "You can't make this stuff up." Least of all Wendy Mae Chambers, who, in a telephone conversation, described the moment as cosmic, as befits the composer's far-reaching temperament. (It was I who had called to say, Please tell me it wasn't planned! On the strength of a skepticism borne of experience, I have often questioned the given, here shelved in abeyance for obvious reasons, that live performance conveys an élan recording sessions too often neglect. What fun to hear oneself proved wrong!)

In Chambers' own words, *Twelve²* (one says that *Twelve Squared*) is a "voodoo tone poem in eleven movements . . . each . . . about 4 minutes [in length]. The last movement is 4'33" of lots of sound (in tribute to Cage's 4'33" of silence). Voodoo drumming [calls] forth Cage's spirit . . . the bells, chimes and gongs [celebrate] . . . celestial qualities. The work is a ritual to a great man . . . [structured] by means of a New Orleans Voodoo Tarot Card "Tree of Life" reading. Each of the 11 cards (picked by chance) determines the character of a movement."

A subtrahend of eleven parts from the title's minuend of twelve leaves a difference of one enigma, which for the moment stands unmolested. If *Twelve²*'s honoree could hone his timed pieces by many thousandths of a second--e.g., 31'57.9864"--and not only get away with it but elicit celebration thereby, we'd be ungracious indeed to demand an accounting of the smallest of units or, more broadly, the title's implied product of 144. As an aspect of divination by tarot deck? As an oblique expression of a twelve-strong ensemble? If the likely latter, whence the superscripted two? My guess is as a promise of the impact they create.

A “Tree of Life” tarot reading determined the sequence of the work’s eleven movements, which take their character from the card that identifies them. *Twelve*²’s instrumentation includes theremin, Chinese cymbals and gongs, five-tone marimbula, and bowed suspended cymbals. John Beck writes that “each movement, although different from the other, [contains] an element of subtle association with Cage’s music. Even the loud, fast movements have these underlying currents. . . . As in much of Cage’s music, there is a great deal of unison among groups of instruments, long ostinatos, phrasing over the barline, sameness of sound for long periods of time and fugal-type material.”

One, *Snake Dancer*, “a joining of spirits; creation flowing freely.”

Two, *Dance*, “adherence to set forms; the shredded skin of a snake maintains its shape. This movement is a metal minuet.”

Three, *Snake of Deep Waters*, “hypnotic confusion; the path from the intellect to the emotions is often clouded. I heard this music in a dream as a piece by someone else. I was asked what I thought about it and I said it was ‘static.’ It was very somnambulistic.”

Four, *Hoodoo Root Doctor*, “a healer who does much with little; closeness to the Earth creates a knowledge of its less obvious gifts.”

Five, *Wild Ride (Run the Mardi Gras)*, “is a tradition in Louisiana. On Fat Tuesday riders in bizarre costumes set out in the early morning. Farmhouses are approached and owners climb to their roofs and drop a chicken. Time stops, caught in the rush of free fall. Horses circle the house as their riders fight over the chicken (later to become gumbo). This is an apocalyptic display of sacred frenzy.”

Six, *The Barons*, “. . . spirits dressed in long black tailcoats and tall top hats, filled with irreverent humor. They are disruptive. These are horsemen of a different type with gaiety. The horses they ride are well fed and pampered.”

Seven, *Shango*, “master for magic; the power of Shango is the mind working through the Earth. His is the grace not so much of creation as of administration. He is a ruler who is able to balance resources with great skill.”

Eight, *Manman Brigitte*, “a renowned lawyer with wise judgment; a corpse-like woman is sitting on a pile of stones in a cemetery. In the perfect stillness of the night air, a rock dislodges itself and rolls with a great noise to the ground. All is silent again.”

Nine, *The Sun*, “first light breaks and all begins to stir; this card depicts dynamic movement and the energy of fusion. It is bright and shimmering.”

Ten, *A Priest*, “having great skill in bringing practical matters to fruition; the reference is to the story of Excalibur, in which a young man pulls a sword from a stone to prove himself worthy of being a king.”

Eleven, *Fire-Breathing Serpent*, “ablaze with the fires of life; pure and active energy; strength and natural force; the vigor of fire!”

—Mike Silverton

Mike Silverton *reviews new music for Fanfare, a bimonthly publication, and The Absolute Sound, a publication devoted to high-end audio. He will soon be editing his own online music review, La Folia. As Irving Washington, he is currently at work on a long comic poem, Airscoop Destin, A Narrative Cassation in Vers Atroce with Magic-Lantern Slides.*

WENDY MAE CHAMBERS received her bachelor's degree from Barnard College in 1975 and her M.A. in composition from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1977. Her grants include a Composer's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1985; a National Endowment Interarts Program, 1983; the New York State Council on the Arts from 1981 through 1990; the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, 1984, 1989, and 1994; the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, 1994; and a New York State CAPS Grant, 1980. She is currently president of Artmusic, Inc. She was executive producer of the television series *Videonville* for PBS's WNYC-TV from 1982-86, and for The Learning Channel, a national cable station, in 1988.

The inventor of the car-horn organ, Ms. Chambers has performed on this, the piano, and toy piano, also serving as conductor for events at the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the New York Historical Society, as well as the Brooklyn Bridge Centennial and the Statue of Liberty Centennial; in Town Hall, the Knitting Factory, CBGB's, assorted East Village venues, for National Public Radio, the Voice of America, WNYC-FM, CNN, BBC-TV, Nickelodeon, and WNEW-TV's *Good Morning New York*.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

A Mass for Mass Trombones. Centaur Records CD CRC 2263.

Car Horn Organ. Artmusic 001 (45 r.p.m. analog recording).

Symphony of the Universe. Newport Classic CD NPD 85552.

Ten Grand. Newport Classic CD NPD 85553.

Producer: Wendy Mae Chambers

Engineers: Lars Hoel and Manoli Wetherell

Digital mastering: Hal Chaney, Audio Arts, NYC

Recorded July 21, 1994 at St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, NYC

Cover art: Sallie Ann Glassman. *Voodoo Tarot Cards.*

Cover design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

This recording was made possible with grants from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust and Francis Goelet.

This CD is in loving memory of Michael Pugliese, who supported my music with his wonderful energy and talent. He gave me faith in my own talent and helped me realize my musical creations, particularly on this CD.

FOR NEW WORLD RECORDS:

Herman E. Krawitz, President; Paul Marotta, Managing Director; Paul M. Tai, Director of Artists and Repertory; Lisa Kahlden, Director of Information Technology; Virginia Hayward, Administrative Associate; Mojisola Oké, Bookkeeper; Ben Schmich, Production Associate.

RECORDED ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN MUSIC, INC., BOARD OF TRUSTEES:
David Hamilton, Treasurer; Milton Babbitt; Emanuel Gerard; Adolph Green; Rita Hauser; Herman
E. Krawitz; Arthur Moorhead; Elizabeth Ostrow; Don Roberts; Patrick Smith; Frank Stanton.

Francis Goelet (1926-1998), Chairman

©1998 ©1998 Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

WENDY MAE CHAMBERS (b. 1953) 80526-2

12²

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 1 | Snake Dancer | 3:19 |
| 2 | Dance | 5:05 |
| 3 | Snake of Deep Waters | 4:02 |
| 4 | Hoodoo Root Doctor | 4:52 |
| 5 | Wild Ride | 4:09 |
| 6 | The Barons | 3:43 |
| 7 | Shango | 4:10 |
| 8 | Manman Brigitte | 4:42 |
| 9 | The Sun | 3:14 |
| 10 | A Priest | 5:01 |
| 11 | Fire-Breathing Serpent | 4:56 |

Conductor: Howard Van Hyning

Percussionists: Michael Pugliese, Randy Crafton, Jason Cirker, Charles Kiger, Andy Bowman, Kory Grossman, Mark Belair, Dan McMillan, Frank Cassara, David Cossin, Jimmy Musto, Dominic Donato

Published by Whole>Sum Productions

**NO PART OF THIS RECORDING MAY BE COPIED OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF R.A.A.M., INC.**

NEW WORLD RECORDS
16 Penn Plaza #835
NEW YORK, NY 10001-1820
TEL 212.290-1680 FAX 212.290-1685
Website: www.newworldrecords.org
email: info@newworldrecords.org

LINER NOTES © Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc.