

INGRAM MARSHALL/IKON
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Confession: I'm not a great fan of electronic music. I flee much of it, shrug off most of it, revisit little of it. Yet I find myself returning to Ingram Marshall's work, principally because the music sounds like the product of a human being, and one who conveys a sense of depth as well as breadth of experience.

For the past decade or so Marshall has been recognized mainly for complex works combining electronics with scoring for traditional ensembles such as quartet (the Kronos and Maia Quartets, the Dunsmuir Piano Quartet) or orchestra (Saint Louis Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra). He has occasionally been classed as a "New Romantic," largely on the basis of his symphonic works: *Sinfonia "Dolce far niente"* (1988), *A Peaceable Kingdom* (1990), and *Kingdom Come* (1997). In the period from which the works on this CD are drawn (1972 to 1976), however, Marshall was far outside the concert mainstream and very much left to his own devices, literally as well as figuratively. On both coasts and on both sides of the Atlantic, he was a young man with a synthesizer and a tape machine, with which he managed to weave some of the most interesting electronic tapestries of the time.

Marshall is an Easterner by birth, born in Mount Vernon, a northern suburb of New York City, in 1942. He did his undergraduate work at Lake Forest College in Illinois before returning to New York for graduate studies in historical musicology at Columbia University, his theoretical interests centering on the Baroque composer and theorist Johann Mattheson and his codification of the concept of *Affekten*. Marshall, however, spent much of his time in what had been inaugurated in 1951 as the first American electronic music studio (later renamed the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center) after realizing the unmediated compositional technique it permitted. "I could compose directly onto tape as an artist paints directly on his canvas," he explains. "That's the great advantage of tape music, the direct relationship between the head sound and the composer's work—there's no middleman." The painterly quality in his work persists to this day: Most of his compositions, at least from *Fog Tropes* on, might be called "tone paintings" more accurately than "tone poems" (the Straussian rubric now in its second century). Just as the propulsive music of Philip Glass seems fated from birth for the dance stage it took a decade to reach, so Marshall's often static and profoundly mysterious sonic landscapes led inevitably to a series of collaborative works, "musico-visual operas," with a photographer—his friend from Lake Forest days, Jim Bengston (*Eberbach, Alcatraz*).

Marshall studied with Ilhan Mimaroglu and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia, but was more strongly influenced—and encouraged—by Vladimir Ussachevsky, who had worked with Otto Luening since the early fifties, together producing the first concert of American tape music at the Museum of Modern Art on November 22, 1952, shortly after John Cage completed what is generally regarded as the first American tape composition, *Imaginary Landscape no. 5* (dated 1951-52; the series itself went back to 1939, *no. 1* being scored for two record players, piano, and percussion). While there was no direct stylistic influence of any of these composers on Marshall's work, the experience of Columbia opened up worlds of possibilities.

Marshall moved downtown (literally and perhaps symbolically) to the Composers Workshop at the New York University School of the Arts, a kind of open-admissions creative experiment inspired by 2 Morton Subotnick. One of the founding members of the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1959, Subotnick performed in its 1964 premiere of Terry Riley's *In C* and recorded pioneering synthesizer compositions for Nonesuch and Columbia, beginning in 1966 with the first LP of electronic music commissioned by a record company, the Nonesuch *Silver Apples of the Moon*. Subotnick had in fact collaborated with Donald Buchla in the development of what would prove, with Robert Moog's, the first commercially available synthesizers. Though Moogs were to prove more popular on the East Coast (especially after the splash of *Switched-On Bach*), Subotnick brought back some of the West with him in his Buchla. Marshall met him in 1967, looking for a place to continue his electronic experiments after leaving Columbia. He was welcomed to Subotnick's studio above the late-lamented Bleecker Street Cinema, centered around a Buchla, the instrument on which Marshall would continue to compose until 1974. Among Marshall's fellow composers sharing the "air of convivial collegiality" at NYU were Maryanne Amacher, Rhys Chatham, Charlemagne Palestine, and Serge Tcherepnin (who created the kit for the Serge synthesizer Marshall built in 1974 and was soon hauling across two continents).

While academic serialism reigned uptown in those years, downtown music was post-Cageian and Minimalist. La Monte Young had lived in the Village and points south since 1960; Steve Reich had returned from San Francisco for good in the fall of 1965; Terry Riley arrived shortly thereafter and stayed for more than three years; Philip Glass returned from his Parisian studies and Asian travels early in 1967. Though Marshall's initial acquaintance with their music was through records (Reich's *It's Gonna Rain* on Odyssey in 1967 and *Come Out* on Columbia in 1969, Riley's *In C* in late 1968), the influence of Minimalism on Marshall is as strong as that of the *musique concrète* tradition in electronic music. Marshall has added as much as he has extracted from either, by means of a progressively more distinctive contribution to both.

Indeed, the debt of Minimalism itself to electronic music has been insufficiently acknowledged. The drone music of La Monte Young, called by Marshall "the mother of us all," may derive ultimately from what Young calls a "telescoping" of Webern's sustained intervals but was realized only through electronic means: the sine-wave generators and oscillators that replaced his turtles' terrarium motor as the pedal for the *Theatre of Eternal Music*, and later the computers he employed to tune intervals. Terry Riley's *In C*, recorded and still most often performed as an acoustic love-in, derives directly from Riley's tape experiments of the previous five years (most specifically the 1963 *Music for "The Gift"*); its now-legendary repeated modules are in fact clones of Uher tape-loops. (Both Young and Riley, by the way, attended the Darmstadt seminars of Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose initial fame derived from Köln experiments beginning with the 1953 *Study I*, in which the referentiality of the *musique concrète* pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer in Paris five years earlier was superseded in the avant-garde by the self-generating autonomy of *Elektronische Musik*.) During Marshall's New York years, Steve Reich was the most techno-freakish of the group, not only in his adaptation of Riley's tape techniques into the "process music" of phasing—another technique that would be translated from tape to instruments—but also in his experiments with electronic feedback in *Pendulum Music* and the "phase shifting pulse gate" he developed at Bell Labs for

Pulse Music (the invention mothballed and composition disavowed by Reich after three performances). The sound of the Philip Glass Ensemble is unthinkable without electronic amplification, despite the fact that until 1968 Glass scored exclusively for traditional forces.

When Subotnick was named assistant dean at the California Institute for the Arts in 1970, Marshall went west as his graduate assistant, convinced by Charlemagne Palestine to make the move. He had visited California briefly in 1967, but his only musical contact at the time was a chance meeting with Big Brother and the Holding Company, Janis Joplin still their lead singer, in a Lake Tahoe bar. In 1971 he spent the summer in Indonesia with Palestine, studying with K.A.T. Wasitodipura, a Jogyakarta gamelan master on the CalArts faculty. After Indian raga, the repeating cycles of interlocking modules in gamelan were the most important foreign influence on Minimalism, and while Marshall did not compose gamelan in any formal sense, it reconfirmed the viability of unhurriedness in the unfolding of the musical process and repetition as a controlling structural principle. His later *Woodstone* is a gamelanic retake on the Beethoven sonata of the same name, but a more significant Indonesian element in Marshall's music was his incorporation of the wooden *gambuh* flute into several compositions, employed somewhat in the manner of a rondo in *The Fragility Cycles*. The delicacy of the instrument proved to be a perfect match for the title.

This CD emphasizes the text-sound works on which Marshall concentrated throughout the seventies and falls, for me, into two parts: the works from the *Fragility Cycles* period (*Cries Upon the Mountains*, *SUNG*, *Sibelius in His Radio Corner*, and *IKON*) and the earlier works (*Cortez*, *Weather Report*, and *The Emperor's Birthday*).

Cortez was composed in 1972-73 but was conceived in New York, where Marshall recorded poet Don McCaig's recitation of the poem, which is heard near the end of the piece. I can think of at least one other equally valid way to interpret it, but at the moment I hear *Cortez* as a mini-allegory, the menacingly filtered human voice of mechanism encroaching upon the nature sounds of crickets and birds and frogs representing the uncolonized landscape. (Interpretation aside, the most remarkable thing about those creatures is their non-existence—all were created electronically from McCaig's simply saying "aahh.") Marshall regards it as his first successful piece; the coexistence in it of the pristine and the gloomy foreshadows the starkness of much of his later work.

Weather Report was done at CalArts, like *Cortez*, but a year later. While Marshall acknowledges his debt to Reich and Alvin Lucier on *Cortez*, for me it is more evident here, in the composer's "orchestration" of the weather update by a Danish radio announcer (from Jutland, to judge by her absence of gutturals). Marshall taped her from Norway on his first visit to Scandinavia in 1973. It is a Minimalist exercise in elaborating rudimentary material into rich textures (cf. Reich's multi-canonic *It's Gonna Rain* or Lucier's neo-Wagnerian self-immolation in *I Am Sitting in a Room*).

The Emperor's Birthday is a rare indulgence in levity in Marshall's work. It is an exploration of incongruity, from the contrast of diction between the *Noo Yawk* ethnographer and his African interviewee, to the contrast of activities the straight-faced researcher catalogues as reporter-on-the-scene. Even professional anthropologists should enjoy a giggle (and if not, should immediately apply for a sabbatical). The antiphonal texture (with sporadic chorus) generated by Marshall in his Berkeley studio in 1974-75

marks his best work to that point. You can even dance to it . . . particularly if you've come up with the appropriate choice in the Ethiopian sand.

If this CD is an anthology, so too was *The Fragility Cycles* itself. The LP was a compilation of separately created works, despite its apparent seamlessness. The “lineup,” furthermore, might change from one performance to the next of the many Marshall gave from 1975 to 1979 in the United States and Europe “in churches, art museums and galleries, ancient houses of nobility, school 4 auditoriums, lofts, monumental public buildings—rarely in a concert hall.” In some instances *Cortez* was included as the first or last section of a particular realization.

The LP version opened with *Rop på fjellet (Cries Upon the Mountains)*, which like all the *Fragility Cycles* selections here, has Nordic roots. The titular cries, which serve as Minimalist long-tones, are *Locklåtar*, calls of shepherders in the mountains of Norway and Sweden (though the Mahlerian cowbells were recorded in mountains half a world away, outside Marshall's cabin in the Sierra Nevada). Despite the otherworldliness of these high-altitude sounds, however, it is that recurrent child's voice opening with a sixth and ending transformed electronically into a wraith that has always haunted me. She too was recorded off Norwegian radio, while the other sounds include the rustle of snow as Marshall trudged through on skis with a microphone hung from his neck.

Marshall was able to make the trip to Scandinavia after being awarded a Senior Fulbright Research Fellowship to work on text-sound composition. The two direct products of that research are the pieces *SUNG* and *IKON*, both based on poems by Gunnar Ekelöf. The first piece, referring to the Sung Dynasty, is scored initially as a solo/duo recitative by painter Jan Håfström and dancer Margareta Åsberg, after which the tape processes multiply their voices into a ghostly chorus as Marshall's spectral bass appears with the English translation, to be in turn transformed into its own small chorus. *SUNG* was not included on the original *Fragility Cycles* LP. *IKON*, Marshall's setting of Ekelöf's *Ayiasma*, concluded it, appropriately enough. The air of apocalyptic finality in the text is enhanced by the electronics, with the pervasive soundscape being that of an entropic cosmic machine. Marshall again intones the English translation; the incantatory recitation of the Swedish original is by Ekelöf himself. To state it simply, it is a terrific piece—in both the strict and loose sense of the adjective.

Mention was made above of the later characterization of Marshall as a “New Romantic.” His affinities in the perforce-Old Romanticism are with later Romanticism: Bruckner is a favorite for the very weightiness and earnestness that turn most listeners away. Another is Sibelius, here paid homage in the first of Marshall's “tone-paintings”—and his first piece remotely classifiable as “New Romantic” as much as Minimalist. *Sibelius in His Radio Corner* was inspired by a photograph of the Finnish composer during his “forty years of silence,” sitting in an armchair and listening to his own work being performed on the radio. Marshall's composition, in its non-narrative depiction of the scene, complete with an allusion to Sibelius' Sixth Symphony, is an aural equivalent of the photograph. The very fragmentary nature of the symphonic allusion preserves the sense of frozen moment rather than compositional momentum, while a sense of harmonic stasis is retained despite the multiplicity of sonic events.

The works here only fitfully anticipate developments in Marshall's music in what has been nearly a quarter-century. While availing himself of the latest technological developments like digital sampling, Marshall has become more profoundly retrospective.

Along with world music and the European Romantic tradition, he has explored the tradition of Protestant hymnody with particular cogency, most notably in his *Evensongs* CD—he was a choirboy and his mother a Sunday-school pianist in their Congregational church. The influence is by no means obvious in these early works, but the hymnal may subliminally inform, for example, the treatment of—and attraction to—Ekelöf's *Ayiasma*.

In the gravity of that setting, I feel, Marshall found his purest and most distinctive voice. There is a clear—and noble—line of descent from *IKON* to the solemnity of 1980s works like *Gradual Requiem* and compositions of the 1990s like the masterly *Kingdom Come*. —Edward Strickland

Edward Strickland has lectured and published on literature, music, and art in North America, Europe, and Asia. His *American Composers* recently appeared in Japanese translation. An emended paperback edition of *Minimalism: Origins* is now in press.

Cortez, *Weather Report*, and *The Emperor's Birthday* form a kind of trilogy representing my work with "text-sound" in the early seventies. The techniques used to generate musical fabrics and structures out of spoken text are similar in all three works, but the source materials are all quite different. I used tape loops to create repetitive patterns from words or phrases; musical structures were developed out of the resulting fabric. It is not the original utterance or sound bit that is the building block, but the whole cloth created from it.

The original idea for *Cortez* came to me while still living in New York in the late sixties. The poet Snee McCaig, a friend and drinking buddy, was a brilliant master of the short, epigrammatic poem, which tended to either knock you over or simply go by—it was one or the other. He recorded this poem for me, but I wasn't able to find a way into it musically at first. I carried it with me to California in 1970 where I finally found the technique to transform it into a musical structure. This discovery came about after a year of intensive study of Indonesian gamelan music, including a three-month sojourn in Bali. The value of repetition was not lost on me.

The idea was to present the poem in the middle of the composition, with the material leading up to and away from it being like great accumulations of waves, winds, and small insects. The first hearing of *Cortez* was in May 1972 at Theater Vanguard in Los Angeles in a quadraphonic "surround" version.

Like *Cortez*, *Weather Report* was made of loops and filters, the former being lengths of tape spliced together, revolving around the perimeter of the studio through one or sometimes two tape decks. This was a common "classical studio" trick from the sixties, but you might say I exploited it to its fullest. The filters were voltage controlled hi-q band pass.

I had spent a few weeks in Norway during the winter of 1974 and was fascinated with things I heard on the radio. This weather report emanated from Denmark. The soft, sensual (to me) inflections of the Danish woman's voice giving out the temperatures and conditions in far-flung places from Greenland (Julianehåb) down through Europe (Stockholm, Warsaw, Paris) to the Mediterranean (Mallorca, Tunis) and out to the Canary Islands, seemed like a beacon of hope for the sun-starved Scandinavians in the midst of the bleak mid-winter. At any rate that was my take on it, a meteorological journey from the frigid and dark to the limpid and warm. There are some other "ghostly"

voices and sounds that appear in the middle of the piece which have nothing to do with the weather report; they also were harvested from the Norwegian radio, but what were they? a Russian-language program? a children's show?

The Emperor's Birthday, first heard at The Kitchen in New York in December 1974 (along with *Weather Report*), is another text sound piece which uses found materials, this time from an old ethnographic record. Speech fragments are assiduously dissected and processed. What it all adds up to, I've never been sure, but it does have an ironic cast. The tail end of the piece obviously has a different source—it was from a BBC radio English-language course.

In the late seventies, I developed an approach to live-electronic music performance in which prerecorded and/or synthesized materials could be processed in real time with certain live elements such as voice, piano and *gambuh* (a Balinese flute). Interwoven with the live action, pieces which existed on tape could be added, thus integrating the studio "tape piece" into a more performative environment. The principal concert-length work I developed was called *The Fragility Cycles*, and I performed it throughout North America and Europe over a period of several years.]

Rop på fjellet (Cries Upon the Mountains) again uses materials "collected" in Scandinavia, most significantly an ancient recording of *locklåtar* and *rop* from Swedish mountain *herdinner* (shepherdesses) traditionally used to call goats and cattle from great distances, although clearly also cultivated for their own intrinsic, shrill beauty. The live element is my own voice, a high keening processed through a tape delay system. *Rop* became the opening section of *The Fragility Cycles*.

SUNG is a "live" text sound translation piece, realized first in 1977 at SITE, an alternative performance venue in San Francisco (*The Fragility Cycles* had premiered there the year before). It was a stand-alone piece, although I occasionally performed it in conjunction with *The Fragility Cycles*. In my travels to Scandinavia in 1975 and 1976, I became friends with the dancer Margareta Åsberg and her husband, the painter Jan Håfström. They introduced me to the work of one of the great poets of the twentieth century—Gunnar Ekelöf. The intrinsic beauty of this poet's voice, and hearing Jan and Margareta read his work, encouraged me in my learning of the Swedish language—I wanted to penetrate his deceptively simple poems.

I think the poem and its meaning are clear, but I should mention that *SUNG* refers to the Chinese dynasty (960-1279), and that Ekelöf seems to be contemplating a painting from that period. The poem's three ending lines are heard repetitively at the end of the piece like a perpetual mantra.

Sibelius in His Radio Corner appeared in *The Fragility Cycles* late—I devised it after the initial performances, and it appears toward the end of the whole work. In his old age Sibelius enjoyed pulling in distant broadcasts of his music off the short-wave. I imagined that with all the static and signal drift, some of these listening experiences might have been proleptically like a modern-day electronically processed *kurzwellen* piece. I was inspired to do the piece after a visit made to his house in Järvenpää in 1976 where I was able to see the "radio corner" with its big easy chair, in which, by the way, I was able to take the liberty of sitting.

During performances of *The Fragility Cycles*, while this part was in progress—I took a deconstructed recording of a fragment of the Sixth Symphony from a 1920s recording and ran it through the same tape delay system through which I was cycling my

synthesizer sequencer at the time—I would simply sit in an easy chair while a slide of this evocative photograph was shown; it was very minimal, very "performative." In the version heard here, a few minutes of the swirling synthesizer sequences from the "Gambuh" section of *The Fragility Cycles* is heard as a lead in to *Sibelius*.

IKON (Ayiasma) uses the short poem of the same name by Ekelöf. My own voice gradually emerges from the murky repetitions of Ekelöf's, a high pass filter gradually opening up, as the poet's voice turns into simply rhythm and tone—getting lower and slower. The key words are "sönderkysst" (kissed asunder) and "mörker, o mörker" (darkness, oh darkness). It is a mystical meditation on an ancient ikon seen in a Greek church whose dark image and the silver frame around it have been worn away by the adoring kisses of thousands of worshipers over the years. To say this piece strives toward profundity is an apt description, in more ways than one. — *Ingram Marshall, December 17, 1999.*

DISCOGRAPHY

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1. Cortez 8:29

Text and voice: Snee McCaig

2. Weather Report 12:12

3. The Emperor's Birthday 13:36
4. Rop på fjellet (Cries Upon the Mountains) 6:59
Text: Gunnar Ekelöf. Voices: Margareta Åsberg, Jan Håfström
5. SUNG 7:37
6. Sibelius in His Radio Corner 8:26
7. IKON (Ayiasma) 9:06
Text and voice: Gunnar Ekelöf

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