

BARNEY CHILDS (1926–2000)
A MUSIC; THAT IT MIGHT BE....

New World Records 80595-2

Barney Childs was born in Spokane, Washington, February 13, 1926; he died on January 11, 2000. He earned a B.A. from the University of Nevada; a B.A. and M.A. in English language and literature as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University; and a Ph.D. in English and music from Stanford University. His dissertation topic was “The Setting of Poetry in the English Madrigal, with an edition of *The Teares or Lamentacions of a Sorrowfull Soule*.” As a composer, he was largely self-taught until the early 1950s, at which time he studied at Tanglewood with Carlos Chavez and Aaron Copland and in New York with Elliott Carter; by the late fifties, his works were performed regularly in New York and elsewhere throughout the U.S. His teaching positions included those with the English department at the University of Arizona (1961–1965); as dean of Deep Springs College (1965–1969); as composer in residence at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, Milwaukee (1969–1971); and with Johnston College and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Redlands, teaching English literature and music (1971–1993). He was active as poetry editor of *Genesis West* magazine, co-editor of *The New Instrumentation* book series (University of California Press), co-founder of Advance Recordings (a non-profit educational project for recording new music), an associate editor for *Perspectives of New Music*, director of new-music ensembles in Arizona, Wisconsin, and California, and as a performing participant (with Phillip Rehfeldt) in the commissioning series “Music for Clarinet and Friend.” He was co-editor (with Elliott Schwartz) of the book *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*. He left behind approximately 160 compositions in almost all genres and styles as well as a little-known beginning poetry text, *The Poetry-I Book*.

Childs published approximately twenty-two articles on new-music aesthetics and theory in various literary and music journals. He served on governing committees of the American Society of University Composers, was on the national advisory committee of the American Composers Alliance, and was an associate editor for *Perspectives of New Music*. He is listed in Grove’s *Dictionary*, *American Grove’s*, *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary*, *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, David Ewen’s *American Composers*, David Cope’s *New Directions in Music*, Joseph Machlis’s *20th Century Music*, Edward Jablonski’s *Encyclopedia of American Music*, *Dictionary of International Biography*, *International Who’s Who in Music*, and *Who’s Who in the West*.

Childs is particularly noted for his innovative and influential scores in which indeterminacy and improvisation sit side by side with traditional forms of structure and notation; his early works show influences of Hindemith and Carter. He is also remembered for such remarks as “an eraser is a composer’s best friend,” for titles such as “Welcome to Whipperginney” and “Couriers of the Crimson Dawn,” and for shouting “rubbish” in public concerts after hearing works that he particularly disliked.

His compositions are available through the American Composers’ Alliance as well as Smith Publications and Tritone; his manuscripts and other works are housed in a special archive at the Armacost Library of the University of Redlands, available on the Internet at www.redlands.edu/library/. Although ever willing to send out scores when requested, Childs did very little in the way of promoting his own music. He wrote mostly on “commissions” (which often involved very little money) from his many friends. The present recording is the first that is dedicated to his works exclusively.

“Sometimes I wonder about what we are doing: the writing of music hardly anyone wants to hear is pretty well the bottom of the list in terms of today’s consumer-approved activities although I concede there is something to be said for the preparation of a dictionary of pre-medieval Finno-Ugric. Anyway, there’s the music; may those who wish use it as they may please.”

Take 5 (1962)

Take 5 is one of the first of its type to feature the element of chance/indeterminacy in music. There is a set of 105 cards, each with instructions (“fairly fast,” “first note fluttertongued,” “pause,” “repeat previous card,” “change tempo,” “ostinato,” “canon,” “change timbre,” and so forth), often accompanied by unpitched rhythmic figures (the players add their own pitches). Sometimes range inflections are specified. The composer wanted a piece that (1) would make itself, and (2) that would serve the pedagogical purpose of ensemble listening. “The first two or three tries with any group will be more or less unsatisfactory; after that, however, the players will begin to listen to what happens, to time their entries by a sense of the constantly renewing ensemble balance, and to feel the silences for what they are, a creative part of the total piece.”

A music; that it might be.... (1973)

“. . . a work ‘in memoriam’ to a dear friend of the composer, was written for and premiered by Drs. Phillip Rehfeldt and F. Gerard Errante at the first International Clarinet Clinic (Denver, 1973). The work’s five movements reflect the composer’s concern with musical structures other than the usual introduction—development—denouement—conclusion curve so endemic in Western art; the second movement contrasts light and dark as represented each by one instrumental part; the third movement moves to conclusion through an isorhythmic canon; and the concluding movement, whose material has appeared briefly previously, is a kind of suspended benediction. Micro- and colortones are used throughout as part of the expressive rhetoric, and during the entire brief and somber fourth movement the instruments are tuned a quarter-tone apart.”

Grande Fantasie de Concert (“Masters of the Game”) (1990)

“This piece is concerned mainly with expressive articulation of a line in complex rhythmic relationships. These must be performed with precision and accuracy, no rubato or fudging. The overall idea of the piece was to produce a compacted (and as such perhaps parodistic) version of those silly concours pieces that every clarinetist eventually bumps into; just as they include sections dealing with What You Should Be Able to Play, so here: some high speed finger licks, some altissimo, a repeated notes bit, microtones, the odd problem here and there....” The work, “in memoriam Charles Whittenberg,” is from *Etudes for the 21st-Century-Clarinetist: A Festschrift for Barney Childs on the occasion of his 64th birthday from his friends and former students*, Phillip Rehfeldt, ed.

London Rice Wine (1973)

Written for any woodwind instrument, the score is a set of written instructions to the player:

“Play a pitch. Bend it a little (leisurely, exploratory) and then let it come back. Stop it harshly (with tongue and/or breath), play another nearby pitch briefly, almost hesitantly; let it not be. A silence: think about it. Play another pitch, a pitch not too far away from the first, not long. A pause. A pause. Play the first pitch again; alter it by depressing or releasing a key or keys and by changing embouchure (don’t consciously decide on another note and finger it, just change fingers at random and let the sound come out) tentatively, work with the alteration, blow harder, push it, break it up. Hardly a pause. Play a note, almost immediately break it up by *hard* blowing.

Quartet for Bassoons (1958)

“My affection for the bassoon prompted me to study the instrument for several months, culminating in my sole concert appearance, playing second bassoon in the Stravinsky *Mass*, a performance hopefully making up in musicality for technical ineptitude.

The one-movement quartet, begun in 1956, was completed in Tucson in 1958. After an opening passage of sonorous chords, two themes are presented (the first a Papago Indian tune) and developed. A solo for the first player leads to the recapitulation: first the second theme disassembled into short parts over a drowsy repeated-note pulse; and what’s left of the Papago tune dissolves into an open-spaced version of the sonorous chord passage which began the piece, this serving as part of a frame or suggested palindrome. In writing this close-out I discovered the potential of silence as a contributing structural element.”

The Golden Bubble (1967), for E flat contrabass sarrusophone and solo percussion

Written for the New Music Ensemble, University of California at Davis, *The Golden Bubble* may be the only solo “literature” written specifically for the now defunct E flat contrabass sarrusophone. Among the percussion is an Oscar Mayer weenie-whistle, heard before the first sarrusophone entrance. The sarrusophone used in the present recording was one of the 148 instruments made by C. G. Conn in 1921 for the U.S. Army (#V117); the weenie-whistle is also authentic. The “Golden Bubble” was/is a combination service station, curio shop/restaurant, and nightclub outside of Reno, Nevada.

Variation on Night River Music (1969)

“(If performed, the following is read aloud.)

This piece is *Variation on Night River Music*, by Barney Childs.

Night River Music is a piece by Barney Childs for solo E flat alto horn. The Player is to be, at night, at a river, on the right bank as one faces downstream, at minimum 200 feet from any people or any man-made structure. The evening should be quiet and clear. The player is to wear ONLY black or blue-black bathing trunks or rolled-up trousers. Standing in the river no more than knee-deep, the player performs the 24 short musical phrases provided, once each only, in any order, with a pause of up to five minutes after each phrase to think about what has been played.

Unless you perform the work, you will never hear it except in your mind as you imagine it sounds. Hear it now, in your mind.”

—*Phillip Rehfeldt*

Elliott Schwartz Remembers Barney Childs

Barney Childs and I first met in the summer of 1962 (or perhaps '63) at the Bennington Composers Conference in Vermont. He was one of the most outsize personalities I had ever encountered: brash, irreverent, bright, wonderfully articulate, and an anomaly at Bennington—in part because he was concerned with issues of chance, performer-choice and controlled group improvisation while virtually everyone else there was a hard-edged post-Weberian, and in part because he was (assertively, almost defiantly) a Westerner marooned in New England. His lack of interest in the “mysterious east” (his term for any part of the United States that was not west of the Mississippi) was exceeded only by his dismissal of the European high-modernist avant-garde. Barney was known to scold American colleagues for using the word “aleatory”—a high-falutin’ Europeanism, in his view—when they could be thinking along lines of “indeterminacy” or (even more simply) “chance” and “choice.” Boulez and Stockhausen meant very little to Barney; his real heroes were the rugged-individualist composers of this continent, many of them rooted in the American West as he was.

But this was only one side of the paradoxical Barney. He wore his scholarly hat—his Stanford doctorate in English, his Rhodes Scholarship, his “other life” as published poet and literary editor—very lightly. On various occasions, however—giving a guest lecture to an upper-level English class at my college, for instance, or delivering a carefully researched and footnoted paper at an SCI conference—that other Barney would appear, revealed as an erudite, first-class scholar. (But never an “academic!”) His comments, both spoken and printed, could range from the blunt—“Hearing a performance isn’t much of anything; music is to *do!*”—to the eloquent, as evidenced in his observations on open form and (as he put it) the “inescapable peculiarities of time:”

It’s always now.
Something is always happening.
One thing irrevocably succeeds another.
Something just became “past.”

The paradoxes were, in fact, many. Barney Childs could be transformed from a ground-breaking, innovative creative artist one moment to a supporting player in a John Wayne Western movie the next, or an Oxford don, or a brilliant public speaker, or a thoroughly professional no-nonsense copy editor. He had a weather-beaten face but a poet’s hands and fingers. Although his surface demeanor was cynical, often testy and curmudgeonly, he was also a remarkably supportive colleague, a sensitive, sympathetic ear, and the most loyal of friends. I remember the gifts he would send, for no apparent reason other than the desire to give pleasure: a box of cigars, a jar of hot chili peppers, a record album. He may have seemed the quintessential loner, leery of institutions and “establishments.” But he dedicated the greater part of his professional life to the University of Redlands (where he taught) and the Society of Composers, Inc. (where his contributions over many decades are legendary).

He was a very special human being, one whose life (and work) influenced many other lives—and he will be greatly missed.

Phillip Rehfeldt is Professor of Woodwind Instruments (clarinet) and teaches courses in music literature and musicology at the University of Redlands in California. His solo performances include the Monday Evening Concerts, International Clarinet Clinic/Symposia and ClariNetwork conferences, ASUC national and regional conferences, the International Computer Music Conference, the Schoenberg Institute, Arcosanti Arts Festival, Scottsdale Arts Center, the 1980 ISCM in Israel, and, beginning in 1974

with composer Barney Childs, concerts and recordings of specially commissioned works under the title "Music for Clarinet and Friend." His publications include *New Directions for Clarinet* (1978; 1993) and *Playing Woodwind Instruments: A Guide for Teachers, Doublers, and Composers* (1987; 2002); he has also published a number of ensemble and pedagogical editions including *Study Materials for Clarinet* (1987; 1990); *The Renaissance Band Book* (1981); *Making and Adjusting Single Reeds* (1983; 1991); and *Etudes for the Twenty-First-Century Clarinetist: A Festschrift for Barney Childs on the occasion of his 64th birthday from his colleagues and former students* (1990; 1992). He has recorded approximately 75 works on Advance, Brewster, CRI, Desto, Grenadilla, Roncorp, Edi Pan, Society of Composers, Leonarda, and Zanja labels, most recently *Phillip Rehfeldt Plays New Music* (Advance Recordings FGR-81). He has degrees from the University of Arizona, Mount St. Mary's College, and an A.Mus.D. degree in clarinet performance from the University of Michigan (1969). His association with Barney Childs, beginning in Tucson in the early sixties, spanned nearly four decades.

Ron George is an international performing and recording artist as well as inventor of seven major new percussion instruments, including a system of multiple percussion construction, the Percussion Console, a Tablature Notation System for Percussion and a totally modular percussion instrument, the Tambellans (a tubular, modular percussion orchestra inspired by the gamelans of Indonesia). He concertizes extensively, performing his original scores as well as those written for him by other composers.

He has recently been awarded an NEA Recording Grant and the Aaron Copland Fund Support for a solo CD, *Magic Ears (Music for and by Ron George)*, as well as the McKnight Visiting Composers Award, a Composers Commissioning Program Grant, and awards from the American Composers Forum, the Center for Arts for Children and Young People (Poznan, Poland), and the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department. He currently teaches at Inner City Arts, a privately funded arts organization that serves inner-city children and is involved with "hands-on" Creative Music Programs for children with his "American Gamelan."

Marco Schindelmann is a professor of voice at the University of Redlands. He has performed as a soloist throughout Europe and Japan with such organizations as the Bayerische Staatsoper, Bayerische Staatsballet, and Radio Vaticana. Co-founder and core member of the conceptual pop collective M@L@M, Mr. Schindelmann is actively engaged in southern California as a subterranean composer and performance artist.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

37 Songs. Richard Bunker. Avant AV-1008.

Barnard I. Phillip and Sally Rehfeldt. Advance Recordings FGR-17.

A Box of Views. Sierra Wind Quintet. Cambria 1044 (CD).

A Clarinet Piece. Phillip Rehfeldt. Roncorp EMS-021.

Clay Music. Susan Rawcliffe and friends playing specially made ceramic instruments. Cold Blue E1.

Duo for flute and bassoon. Peter Middleton and Les Weil. CRI 253.

The Edge of the World. Marty Walker and David Hiatt. Advance Recordings FGR-13.

Heal Me, O Lord; This Is the Praise of Created Things. Mid-America Chorale, John Dexter, director. Gregorian.

Mr. T, His Fancy. Bertram Turetzky, contrabass. Ars Nova/Ars Antiqua 1001.

Music for Two Flute Players. Harvey and Sophie Sollberger. CRI 253.

Of place, as altered. Phillip Rehfeldt and friends. Brewster BR-1317.

A Question of Summer. Ivan Hammond and Ruth Inglefield. CRI 556.

Sonata for solo trombone. S. Witser. Albany 373 (CD).

Sunshine lunchh, & like matters. Phillip Rehfeldt. Advance Recordings FGR-81.
Trio for clarinet, cello, and piano. Montagnana Trio. MCA 67103.
Variations sur une Chanson de Canotier. Dallas Brass Quintet. Crystal S-203.

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A MUSIC; THAT IT MIGHT BE....

1. *Take 5* (1962) 3:50
(publ. by Tritone Press)
(flute with pre-recorded clarinet, bass clarinet, saxophone, and bassoon)
2. *A music; that it might be...* (1973) 11:38
(publ. by Seesaw Music Corp.)
(clarinet and pre-recorded clarinet)
3. *Grande Fantasia de Concert ("Masters of the Game")* (1990) 4:13
(publ. by Mill Creek Publications)
(solo clarinet)
4. *London Rice Wine* (1973) 4:35
(ms)
(flute and "live" electronics)
5. *Pastoral* (1983) 5:59
(ms)
(bass clarinet and electronic sounds)
6. *Instant Winners* (1986) 9:55
(ms)
(solo E flat clarinet)
7. *Changes for Three Oboes* (1959) 6:02
(ms)
8. *Quartet for Bassoons* (1958) 7:27
(publ. by American Composer's Alliance)

9. *The Golden Bubble* (1967) 9:35
(publ. by American Composer's Alliance)
(E flat contrabass sarrusophone and solo percussion)

10. *Variation on Night River Music* (1969) :59
(ms)
(reader)

Phillip Rehfeldt, woodwinds
Ron George, percussion
Marco Schindelmann, reader

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