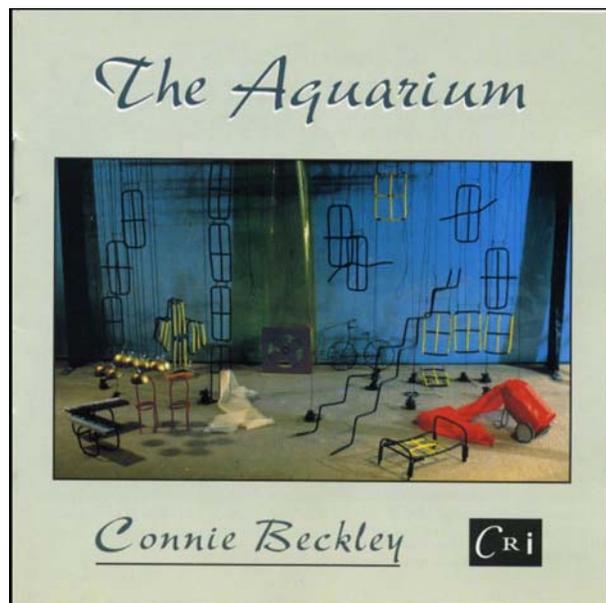


NWCR756

# Connie Beckley

## The Aquarium



### *The Aquarium*

Sonic Meditations on Life in the City (1995)

1. Dream Sequence ..... (2:39)

#### *Morning:*

2. Two-Way Mirror ..... (4:07)
3. Alice on the Stairs ..... (6:43)
4. A Fish against the Flow ..... (7:06)
5. Time/Life ..... (6:39)

#### *Afternoon:*

6. A Cushion on the Sill ..... (5:39)
7. Moses and the Bulldozer ..... (7:01)
8. The Ladies of Third ..... (6:01)
9. The Seduction at Dante's Café ..... (9:04)

#### *Evening:*

10. Sunset, Again ..... (5:23)
11. The Aquarium ..... (6:37)
12. No Messages ..... (4:50)
13. Edison Night ..... (5:00)

Connie Beckley, voice and electronics

Total playing time: 73:18

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## Notes

The *Aquarium* series began with a walk in Chinatown. I had been standing on the sidewalk in front of the window aquarium of a Chinese seafood restaurant, looking through the aquarium at a woman inside the restaurant. I imagined her as part of the aquarium (perhaps an urban Ophelia?) and in my fantasy I thought of her, the fish, Chinatown, and all of New York as part of one big fish bowl, albeit surrounded by water rather than filled with it. I thought of all the so-called ordinary happenings I witness just in the course of a single day, and how, with a little bit of help from a metaphor, they can evolve into things quite extraordinary.

I thought of the many encounters I've had with people who seem to be merely going about their daily routines but whom I imagine as characters of myth and fantasy, like the neighbor whose apartment I can see from my window, but to whom I've never spoken. Or the young woman I encounter on the stairs of my apartment building who, like Alice in the rabbit hole, disappears downward every morning. I remember the subway commuter who tried to go against the flow of morning rush hour like a fish swimming upstream, and the old woman who raised her cane like an urban Moses and stopped a sea of construction on Broadway. I think about the two people at separate tables in a cafe who may have shared a fantasy of seduction when their coffee cups met on the waiter's tray. And about the messages of desperation I overheard that were left and lost at a public telephone. And about my return home at the end of the day with an overwhelming longing for reassurance.

Then something extraordinary happened. The woman in the restaurant looked through the aquarium at me. And to her, I'm sure, I became one of the fish.

*The Aquarium* is not about the throbbing violence of The Big City. It

is about searching for meaning within the daily routine of being in constant proximity to people with whom we have little or no interaction, but who provide the familiar "setting" for the crowded city. And while not a single mugging occurs in *The Aquarium*, a fear does emerge that is perhaps more unsettling to many city-dwellers—the fear of getting lost in the shuffle. But this piece is not about being afraid in the big city. It is about *being* in the city.

—Connie Beckley

Despite her interest in the relationship between art and music, which was apparent from adolescence, **Connie Beckley** (b PA, 1951) chose to receive a formal education in music, acquired through private training in keyboard and voice. In 1973 Beckley moved to New York, where she became involved in the visual arts scene, to which she brought her background in music. She participated in the works of other artists and composers who shared her interdisciplinary interest, most notably appearing in the 1976 production of *Einstein on the Beach* by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson. At the same time, she was beginning to develop her own distinct style as a composer and performance artist.

During these years, Beckley's sound installations in art galleries and other exhibition spaces continued to reflect a dialogue between the visual arts and music. By the mid-eighties, she began to think of her performance work as "temporal sculptures," and to focus on the musical element more lyrically. In her outdoor performance piece *Spiral Cloud*, a pianist played a theme and variations on a baby grand piano in an open field, surrounded by a spiral of black helium balloons, which were at first attached to the ground, and then gradually released in an evolving and rising spiral. In another performance that initiated a

solo exhibition, Beckley constructed a glass spiral while tethered to two microphones (one in real time, one in delay) and sang in harmony with herself. The resulting sculpture remained on display, in silence.

Beckley has presented her work throughout Europe and North America, both at commercial and public cultural institutions and events, including the New Music America Festival, the Venice Biennale, the Paris Biennale, and the Museum of Modern Art. She has received grants and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

*The Aquarium* is Beckley's on-going series of musical compositions, texts, performances, sculptures, and paperworks.

The musical composition was first conceived in a version for solo voice and electronics, as presented on this CD. An expanded performance version, which includes six other musicians, was presented in a preliminary form at the opening of the Steirischer Herbst Festival in Graz, Austria, in September 1995. Sculptures and paperworks from *The Aquarium* were presented at the Nicholas Davies Gallery in New York City in 1995 and 1997. The complete performance version, with newly developed visuals, will be presented at the 1997 Lincoln Center Festival. An Internet site for *The Aquarium*, sponsored by Hard Press (<http://www.hardpress.com>), includes texts, graphics, and sound.

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## Production Notes

Original recording produced by Connie Beckley.

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton.

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