

Imagine, if you will, a busy, furiously humming beehive, and, within it, a calm, meditative bee. The image comes from only one work on this disc, and yet it seems curiously apropos to so much of Robert Carl's music. There is a still center in his music, even at its modernist rowdiest. Among Carl's teachers, Ralph Shapey and Iannis Xenakis inaugurated him into the high dissonant tradition; George Rochberg and the lesser-known but brilliant theorist-composer Jonathan Kramer added a more reflective strain of ironic distancing. And so Carl is of that contemporary-music world, yet removed from it. He wrote his dissertation on Carl Ruggles's *Sun-Treader*, a craggy masterpiece of angular counterpoint; years later, he wrote a book on Terry Riley's *In C*, the jinglingly meditative piece that brought minimalism to life. Ruggles and Riley? How can two diverse influences coexist within one person's music?

And yet they do in Carl's. His jaggedly dissonant melodies still remind one of Ruggles in places, and yet the music returns to its center and is capable of the most simple repetitions; he even has some arguably minimalist pieces. Carl practices Buddhist meditation, and his primary instrument in recent years is the shakuhachi, the quietly fluid Japanese wooden flute. In his music dissonance and rhythmic complexity do not connote anxiety, fear, violence, but rather the overflow of the exuberant noise that springs up from the ground of life. His music embraces extremes of simplicity and complexity, which in his vision interpenetrate each other.

Let's take his **Symphony No. 4** (2008), one of his best and most ambitious works, and also a score often dense with polyrhythms and dissonant counterpoint. Its subtitle is "The Ladder," and the ladder in this case is the harmonic series, the series of overtones that arises naturally as you move your finger along a piano or guitar string while playing it. The basis of the Fourth Symphony are six "series of harmonic series," as approximated in the equal temperament of our modern tuning. The opening chord is a very clear statement of the first such harmonic series on a low A. A is the fundamental, E the third harmonic, C# the fifth, and so on—but the way Carl builds up his harmonic series yields more density than we expect:

D# = 11	F# = 27
B = 9	D = 21
G = 7	C = 19
C# = 5	A# = 17
E = 3	G# = 15
A = 1	F = 13

Thus we see that, by building up a harmonic series large enough, Carl has yielded a chord containing all twelve pitches, on the theory that ultimately, every pitch is approximated high enough up in the harmonic series of any note. By pivoting between notes of the same pitch and register in any two different harmonic series, then, we can move, ladder-like, from one to another. This was the principle of a 2005 improvisatory work Carl wrote titled *Changing My Spots*, and it is also the principle of an electronic improvisatory work he's been developing since. It is a core paradigm of his music of the last ten or so years. It is also a development of a gesture common in Charles Ives's music, in which soft, dissonant notes in the high treble are grounded in consonant triads in the bass—the song "The Housatonic at Stockbridge" (appropriated for the third movement of *Three Places in New England*) is perhaps Ives's most sustained example. A philosophical principle is implied, that all reality, despite its apparent heterogeneity, is grounded in some primal and universal experience.

So this is background to keep in mind while listening to Symphony No. 4. It won't become very evident, but if you listen at the beginning, the strings open with a harmonic series chord, which is then rhythmically articulated by the contrabass and timpani. Then, the higher harmonics of that chord (first B-flat and C as the 17th and 19th harmonics) begin to peel away to form melodies (and will establish themselves as 11th and 13th partials of E, the fundamental of the next organizing harmonic "ladder" of the piece). And thus it is often through the piece, that a web of dissonant, essentially atonal melodies is sometimes eventually heard to be grounded in a consonant sonority that enters at the bottom register. The piece is not thoroughly atonal in the Schoenbergian sense, because there is a clear hierarchy of which intervals get to form the bass harmonies, and so the music glides smoothly back and forth between searching atonality and comforting consonance. This is how you channel those antipodes, Ruggles and Riley, both at the same time.

More formally, let me also point out that the Symphony No. 4, while continuous, is marked off into five movements in the score. Their length decreases from one to the next, following Fibonacci series ratios. The first is by far the longest; its heading is "Towards an Inner Order," and it is characterized by long chords rhythmically articulated by the almost gamelan-like percussion, which gives the impression of a lumbering army on the march; note especially the glockenspiel, crotales (antique cymbals), vibraphone, and piano, which are quite active throughout this work. Within this movement there is also a section near its end marked by rapid arpeggiations of the upper harmonics in the strings. The work contains two scherzos, one titled "First Approach" and the other "Second Approach," both propelled by repeated notes and chords. In between them is a tender *Adagio*, marked "The Still Point of Compassion," whose yearning melodies from all points of the harmonic series form the emotional center of the work. The second scherzo with its insistent chords is quite brief and leads to the fifth movement, "The Gate," which is an apotheosis bringing back the rhythmic percussion from the beginning.

Two pieces on this disc were born from the sense of loss following the deaths of both of Carl's parents, in quick succession. The less obvious one is the **Chamber Concerto for Guitar**, subtitled "*The Calm Bee in the Busy Hive*" (2009–10). The ten-member ensemble includes a second guitar, and both guitars are tuned to a scordatura (alternate tuning) that facilitates a harmonic series on E: E–G#–D–F#–Bb–F (approximating the 1st, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, and 17th harmonics). The first movement, "Building the Hive," has a remarkable additive structure, very unlike any concerto known to me: It is a quasi-canon, in which the material presented first by the soloist is then echoed by the second guitar, then the vibraphone, the three strings, the three winds, and lastly the harp and piano. Somewhat as in the Fourth Symphony, Carl's reliance on the harmonic series allows him to restate a solo line in the guitar as a line of chords in the strings. The echoing of material is quite loose, accommodating for the different instruments and allowing changes of harmony, but the form gives the movement a distinct centeredness as the buzzing activity increases. The metaphor of building a hive could hardly be more aptly conveyed.

The second movement, "Songs, Dances, and Laments of the Hive," is the more openly funereal movement. It opens with, and is based around, a four-note motif whose diminished fourth places it squarely within the lamentation conventions of Baroque music (though harmonized here with subsets of a harmonic series). Eventually the second note is moved to fourth place, giving us the four-note downward scale known as the Andalusian bass, used for songs of mourning throughout history. Carl's unusual scoring results in delightfully strange textures, as when the first guitar solo grows into a passage of two guitars, harp, and vibraphone for a thick yet transparent welter of

plucked and struck notes. Subsequently, the winds (most notably the trumpet) begin to overlap in a rising figure strongly suggestive, to my ears, of the questioning trumpet from Charles Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, which likewise leaps up to a descending diminished fourth. There is, indeed, here, a question that cannot be answered. At last the quiet flurries of activity subside for the solo guitar to bring back the first movement's opening solo, and the movement ends with the repeated D juxtaposed with the mournful Andalusian bass motif.

Written considerably earlier than the other works on this disc, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1999/2000) is somewhat in a different idiom, but Carl considers it a turning point in his output, and its coda the initiation of the harmonic-series practice. Like Ives, Carl is a composer who will rework earlier material into new pieces, and the chronology of the piece is complex. It originated during a residency at the Aaron Copland House as the third and final movement of his Piano Sonata No. 2, "The Big Room" (1999), and was orchestrated a few months later at the Djerassi Foundation as the third movement of his Symphony No. 3, though it has also been presented, as here, as a stand-alone movement. As indicated by the title, the piece is based on an eponymous English political song of the 1640s, meant to protest the suppression of Christmas celebrations by Parliament after the army of Parliament defeated King Charles I at the Battle of Naseby in 1645:

Listen to me and you shall hear, news hath not been this thousand year:  
Since Herod, Caesar, and many more, you never heard the like before.  
Holy-dayes are despis'd, new fashions are devis'd.  
Old Christmas is kickt out of Town.

*Yet let's be content, and the times lament, you see the world turn'd upside down.*

The song was also played (ostensibly) by the British when they surrendered at Yorktown, and Carl, a history buff as a child, came to know it in this context. There are many versions of the tune, and also of the lyrics; Carl picked the one he found most suitable. Whatever its provenance, it fit his needs at the time. It signified a moment in which the whole world was changing (and this was before 9/11), and for him, the tune with its historical implications also became a portal toward a new personalized sort of tonality.

The piece is a nearly uninterrupted crescendo, starting from a lone C in the strings and building to a statement of the English tune as grandly Romantic as Brahms or Mahler. The "World Turned Upside Down" tune is built up cumulatively (a technique reminiscent of Ives) and with a sense at the beginning of minimalist additive process, adding one new pitch at a time. The general crescendo pauses momentarily for a line of rushing 32nd-notes to start in the cellos, which will spread through most of the strings like a rushing wind as phrases of the tune assemble themselves in the winds and brass. This gives way to a long, expectant pedal point in the winds and strings, heavily punctuated by percussion, until at last the orchestra becomes suddenly quiet for the entrance of the theme in its entirety. The subsequent growing climax is surprisingly conventional for so experimental a composer, but notice that the violins keep up a rhythmic dissonance that seems to place the tune in a spatial context. The piano version ends in quiet and tranquil dissolution; the symphonic version ends with a bang.

The other work of mourning, *The Geography of Loss* (2010), was written soon following the death of Carl's parents, three months apart. The form is an alternation of choral and instrumental movements with the chorus and instruments together in two movements and a baritone solo and soprano solo, respectively, in each of those movements:

- |                     |                                                   |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Anxiety Overture | instruments                                       |
| 2. Chorale 1        | chorus (a cappella)                               |
| 3. Portraits        |                                                   |
| Portrait 1          | instruments                                       |
| Chorale 2a          | chorus (a cappella)                               |
| Portrait 2          | instruments                                       |
| Chorale 2b          | chorus (a cappella, very brief)                   |
| 4. Fear No          | chorus (a cappella)                               |
| 5. Last Words       | baritone solo, instruments, chorus                |
| 6. Choral 3         | chorus (a cappella)                               |
| 7. Double Portrait  | instruments                                       |
| 8. Going Solo       | soprano solo, chorus, instruments enter gradually |

Such a contrast of forces brings to mind another funereal work, Stravinsky's penultimate work *Requiem Canticles*, and Carl cites both Stravinsky and Bach as inspirations. The soprano solo was actually written first, in 2002, as Carl's response to his divorce, and without accompaniment. The central and most ambitious chorale, *Fear No*, was written after his mother's death, and after his father followed he surrounded both works with other movements to create a deeply felt and highly individual cantata.

The "Anxiety Overture" is brief and rather complex sounding but static and inconclusive, with the contrabass only playing a low A, the flute playing only D, F#, and B in a high register, and the other instruments similarly constrained to a small number of pitches. The three Chorales are extremely simple, mostly in half-notes with frequent silences, starting with only the words *open* and *empty* and adding the words *endless*, *spacious*, *rising*, and *boundless* in Chorale III. Portrait I is an homage to Carl's mother, with a rather loquacious oboe solo accompanied only by rising chords in the strings. Portrait 2, for his father, is more contrapuntal, using only flute, bass clarinet, and contrabass, plus arpeggiated punctuations by the marimba. Later, in the Double Portrait, Carl rewrites both portraits to be played simultaneously by all eight instruments, in a *tour de force* of heterophonic counterpoint.

The central chorus *Fear No* is the cantata's emotional center, and quite moving. Carl constructed his own text in response to a passage of Shakespeare that his mother had asked him to read at her funeral, from Act IV, scene 2, of *Cymbeline*. The passage begins:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
 Nor the furious winter's rages;  
 Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
 Home art gone and ta'en thy wages;  
 Golden lads and girls all must,  
 As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

The various phrases—"Fear no phantom," "Fear no shadow," and so forth—are built up from one voice to another, always rooted on the basses' bass note so that the most dissonant notes (as in the harmonic series) are in the treble.

“Last Words,” which follows, is a remarkable impressionist portrait of a hospital ward; the steady pulse of clicking noises is meant to evoke the medical machinery, and the baritone’s text is made up of isolated phrases, some of them incomplete, that Carl’s father spoke on his deathbed. Responses given by Carl and the nurses at the scene are sung by the chorus, which sometimes mumble indistinctly. For the final movement, Carl undertook the difficult task of writing a chordal accompaniment to his soprano solo *Going Solo*. At first only the chorus enters, with the sopranos often echoing the soloist’s notes and sustaining them for a ghostly effect. The strings gradually enter, building up chords, and finally the winds and marimba, as the soprano continues to float through clouds of notes, shifting from one harmonic series to another, as the contrabass sustains the fundamentals, moving from E to G to F and finally down to D.

Overall, this group of pieces leads us through an enormous diversity of idioms, and Carl has never been one to cultivate a single well-defined style and stick to it. Yet if one listens with an ear for his procedure of shifting from one harmonic series to another, the underlying unity is perceptible, and the disc as a whole gives us a striking picture of one of one of the most remarkable of early 21st-century composers.

—Kyle Gann

*Kyle Gann is a composer and the author, so far, of six books on American classical music, including monographs on Nancarrow, Cage, Ashley, and Charles Ives’s Concord Sonata. He wrote music criticism for The Village Voice for nineteen years, and has taught at Bard College since 1997.*

## **The Geography of Loss**

### **Chorale 1**

Open, empty.

### **Portraits**

#### **Chorale 2a**

Open, empty.

#### **Chorale 2b**

Empty.

### **Fear No**

Fear no phantom.

Fear no shadow.

Fear no darkness.

Fear no burning light.

Fear no monster.

Fear no demon.

Fear no panic.

Fear no fright.

### **Last Words**

I'm so happy to see you.

I love to see you.

I'm barely ar...

(I'm here.)

I'm here too.

Terrific, wonderful, thank you.

Enough.

I'm sorry.

I smell something burning.

My thumb is burning.

My thumb is burning!

Ah!

Intervene!

(We're coming.)

Put it in water.

Thank you.

Both watches are waterproof.

Please excuse my noise.

Is it Thursday?

What does the clock say?

I want you to. . .

You really have to. . .

It's that way, isn't it?

Is that picture for sale?

Who will pay for this?

Is it on top of?

Let's go.

### **Choral 3**

Open, empty.

Open, endless.

Open, endless,

Open spacious.

Endless.

Spacious.

Endless.

Empty, empty, open.

Open, empty.  
Open, rising.  
Open, rising, rounded, boundless.  
Open, empty.

### **Going Solo**

Going solo.  
So low.  
Sowing, low.  
Sowing, go.  
Oh Soul, Go.  
Go, oh Soul.  
Souling go.  
Oh Soul.  
Oh.  
Go so low.  
Soul Oh.  
Oh Soul, Oh.  
Oh Soul, Low.  
Oh Soul,  
Oh Soul, Low.  
So low,  
Oh Soul.

(Chorus: Oh. . .)

[All texts original, by composer, except words of Robert A. Carl, transcribed for No.5] © Robert Carl

**Robert Carl** (b. 1954) studied composition with Jonathan Kramer, George Rochberg, Ralph Shapey, and Iannis Xenakis. His music is performed throughout the U.S. and Europe, and is published by American Composers' Alliance, Boosey&Hawkes, and Northeastern. In 2016 Mr. Carl received the Award in Music of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and was given the Charles Ives Fellowship from the same organization in 1998. He has also received prizes and fellowships from such organizations as the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, American Chamber Symphony, NACUSA, and Tanglewood. His residencies include the Camargo Foundation, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Ucross, Ragdale, Millay Colony, Bogliasco Foundation, Djerassi Foundation, the Aaron Copland House, Youkobo ArtSpace and the Tokyo Wonder Site, and the Rockefeller Foundation (Bellagio). He was awarded a 2005 Chamber Music America commission for a string quintet written for the Miami String Quartet and Robert Black. An excerpt from his opera-in-progress *Harmony* (with novelist Russell Banks) was presented in May 2006 in the New York City Opera's VOX Showcase series. In 2007 he received a fellowship from the Asian Cultural Council for travel to Japan to research contemporary Japanese composers, and his book on Terry Riley's *In C* (Oxford University Press) was released in summer 2009. In 2010 he was the featured composer for the Festival of Contemporary Art Music at Washington State University, in 2011 he was resident composer for

performances and masterclasses at Hacettepe University National Conservatory, Ankara, Turkey, and in July 2013 he was composer-in-residence at the Wintergreen Music Festival in the Virginia Blue Ridge. In March 2014 he was honored with a retrospective concert of works 1978-2013 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. For fifteen years he was a co-director of the Extension Works new-music ensemble in Boston; he is chair of the composition program at the Hartt School of Music, University of Hartford, and writes extensively on new music for *Fanfare Magazine*.

**Matthew Aubin** is the Artistic Director of the Chelsea Symphony (New York City) and, beginning in 2017, Music Director of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra (Michigan). A passionate advocate for American and contemporary music, he has conducted the New York and world premieres of works by Robert Carl, Mark O'Connor, Gerard Schwarz, and Caroline Shaw, among others. Dr. Aubin is a champion of the critical role of women in composition and is the foremost scholar on the French composer Fernande Breilh-Decruck. Previously, he was the Educational Programs Conductor for the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and served on the faculties of Washington State University and The Hartt School.

**Foot in the Door** is the new-music ensemble of the Hartt School, University of Hartford, directed by Glen Adsit and Edward Cumming. In 2015 it toured Iceland, appearing in the Dark Music Days festival.

**Jolle Greenleaf** is a much sought-after soloist in music by Bach, Buxtehude, Handel, Purcell, and Monteverdi. Her performances have earned rave reviews from *The Oregonian* and *The New York Times*. As artistic director of TENET, Ms. Greenleaf creates diverse programs, and directs and sings in performances of repertoire spanning the Middle Ages to the present day. Notably, she spearheaded TENET's Green Mountain Project, whose annual performances of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* have been universally acclaimed. In 2014, she launched the inaugural Early Music Festival: New York City with co-director Donald Meineke, a week-long celebration with performances by numerous artists and ensembles in all five of the city's boroughs.

Guitarist **Christopher Ladd's** performances have been critically acclaimed and he is highly sought after as a soloist and chamber musician. Mr. Ladd is a founding member of The Pandora Duo, which features acclaimed flutist Janet Arms, and The Amaranth Duo with Icelandic violinist Asa Gudjonsdottir. As a recording artist Mr. Ladd's continual search for new ways to present the classical guitar has resulted in numerous projects for feature film, theater, and the stage. He is currently on the faculty of The Hartt School, University of Hartford, serving as the Chair of the Guitar and Harp Program.

At the age of eighteen, **Jesse Mark Peckham** was invited to conduct the Beethoven Chamber Orchestra in Hradec, and then went on to conduct many of the leading orchestras in the Czech Republic, including the Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic, Moravian Philharmonic, and the Ceska Kormoni Philharmonic orchestras. From January 2001 to October 2004, he also served as the Artistic Director of the Czech World Orchestra. Mr. Peckham founded KHORIKOS in 2005 and formed Dorian Artists Corporation in 2007.

**KHORIKOS** has quickly gained a reputation for excellent programming (especially of early and contemporary music), and is recognized as one of New York's premiere choral ensembles. The ensemble has toured the Czech Republic as a part of the Svatováclavský hudební festival. Subsequent performance venues include the Kennedy Center, Avery Fisher Hall, and the Wang Theater in Boston as a part of the "Songs of Life Festival." Its collaborators have included The National Philharmonic, The Boston Modern Orchestra Project, The Indianapolis Children Choir, and the Philip Kutev National Folklore Ensemble, Bulgaria.

**Vince B. Vincent's** roles include the title character in Viktor Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* and Mordecai in Hugo Weisgall's *Esther*, and the baritone soloist in Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles*. In October 2011 Mr. Vincent performed the role of Ashmenton in Anthony Braxton's *Trillium 7*, and the following month he made his debut with Opera Moderne in Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's *Le Donne Curiose*. He holds an M.M. degree in Opera Performance with Yale Opera, where he performed the roles of Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Bustamente in Massenet's *La Navarraise*, and Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He has enlarged his vocal range and repertoire with recent tenor roles, including Ojuwain, again in Braxton's *Trillium 7*.

**Christopher Zimmerman** is currently Music Director of the Fairfax (FSO) and Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestras. Zimmerman graduated from Yale with a B.A. in Music, and received his master's degree from the University of Michigan. He also studied with Seiji Ozawa and Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood, served as an apprentice to Andrew Davis and the Toronto Symphony and, in Prague, as assistant conductor to Vaclav Neumann and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. A recipient of several awards, Zimmerman and the FSO were honored as the 2013 winner of Washington Area Music Award (WAMMIE) for the best classical orchestra, and in 2011 Zimmerman was selected as the first-place winner in the professional orchestra category of "The American Prize in Conducting." An enthusiast of contemporary music, Zimmerman has conducted more than 25 premieres for orchestra by such American composers as William Bolcom, Susan Botti, Martin Bresnick, Robert Carl, Avner Dorman, Christopher Rouse, Bright Sheng, Chris Theofanidis, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

**The Hartt Symphony Orchestra** is the flagship musical performing ensemble of the Hartt School, University of Hartford.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Bells Dance, Drums Ring; Die Berliner Hornisse, El Canto de los Asesinados, Haiku of Buson, Lesgedowdaheah, Nell Miller Op. 1, Roundabout.* Innova Records 596.

*From Japan.* New World Records 80732-2.

*Music for Strings.* New World Records 80645-2.

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#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Robert Carl: The Time-Keeper." NewMusicBox feature interview by Molly Sheridan, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/robert-carl-the-time-keeper/>

“Robert Carl,” by Eric Smigel, *Grove Dictionary of American Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

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ROBERT CARL (b. 1954)  
*THE GEOGRAPHY OF LOSS*

80780-2

1. *Symphony No. 4, "The Ladder"* (2008) 21:38  
Hartt Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Zimmerman, conductor

*Chamber Concerto for Guitar and 10 Instruments,*  
*"The Calm Bee in the Busy Hive"* (2009–10)

2. I. Building the Hive 8:00  
3. II. Songs, Dances, and Laments of the Hive 8:14

Christopher Ladd, solo guitar; Dan Hartington, guitar 2; Michael Anderson, vibraphone; Michelle Stockman, flute; Brian Nekoloff, clarinet; Jess Turner, trumpet; Haley Hewitt, harp; Cihan Yucel, piano; Gwyneth Haydock, violin; Laura Krentzman, viola; Haeyoon Shin, cello; Matthew Aubin, conductor

4. *The World Turned Upside Down* (1999/2000) 9:43  
Hartt Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Zimmerman, conductor

*The Geography of Loss* (2010) 25:51  
5. Anxiety Overture 1:49  
6. Chorale 1 1:32  
7. Portrait 1/Chorale 2a/Portrait 2/Chorale 2b 3:53  
8. Fear No 5:27  
9. Last Words 3:51  
10. Chorale 3 1:35  
11. Double Portrait 1:41  
12. Going Solo 6:02

Jolle Greenleaf, soprano; Vince B. Vincent, baritone; Caroline Sonett, flute, piccolo; Terry Keevil, oboe, English horn; Benjamin Fingland, clarinet, bass clarinet; Ian Rosenbaum, percussion; Pauline Kim, violin; Catie Longhi, viola; Leigh Stuart, cello; Brian Coughlin, double bass; KHORIKOS, Jesse Mark Peckham, conductor

TT: 73:39

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