

NWCR761

Bruce Adolphe

Turning, Returning



String Quartet No. 2 “Turning, Returning” (1991) (14:59)

1. At Night (2:53)
2. From My Childhood (3:48)
3. Fantasia (4:04)
4. At Night II (4:03)

Brentano String Quartet: Mark Steinberg, violin; Serena Canin, violin; Misha Amory, viola; Michael Kannen, cello

5. *In Memories of* for Piano and String Quartet (1993) (14:52)

Brentano String Quartet; Marija Stroke, piano

6. String Quartet No. 1 “By A Grace of Sense Surrounded” (1989) (14:32)

Brentano String Quartet

7. *And All is Always Now* for violin and piano (1992) (12:47)

Mark Steinberg, violin; Marija Stroke, piano

Total playing time: 57:10

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Notes

Manic-depressive personalities and Doppelgänger syndromes are a fascination of current musicology. In this bicentennial year of Schubert’s birth, academics vigorously debate whether Schubert’s major-minor, hyper-hypo music can be seen as evidence of a clinical condition. Recently uncovered medical records shed new light on that other allegedly manic-depressive composer, Robert Schumann, whose celebrated imaginary angels, devils, and hyenas (not to mention Florestan and Eusebius) practically define the romantic’s view of madness. The tendency to discover split psyches portrayed in string quartets and piano quintets is all the rage these days. It behooves us composers to defend ourselves.

While I am not manic-depressive (I don’t even have lower-back pain), I do find that my music tends to fall into two categories that might be perceived by future musicologists with a melo-medical worldview an indicative of Doppelgängerism. Plainly put, some of my music is darkly obsessive, poetic, and dramatic, while the rest of it is comical, slippery and entertaining.

This is a recording of some of the darkly obsessive, poetic, and dramatic music—and what else would you reasonably expect from CRI, a rare breed of record label devoted to the true inner lives of American composers?

For me, a particularly delightful aspect of this recording is the band, which consists of the extraordinary Brentano String Quartet in their recording debut (I couldn’t be luckier) and Marija Stroke, a remarkable pianist who became my wife not long after these works were premiered.

The Brentano String Quartet gave the world premiere of “Turning, Returning” (String Quartet No. 2) in 1992, their first season together. The quartet also premiered *In Memories*

of... (for piano and string quartet) with Marija Stroke in 1994. Both of those works were commissioned by Wendela and Peter Moes, renowned makers of violins, violas and cellos. I composed *And All is Always Now* for Mark Steinberg, the first violinist of the Brentano String Quartet, and Marija Stroke for their recital at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Only my first string quartet, *By a Grace of Sense Surrounded*, was not premiered by the players on the disc, but by another wonderful ensemble, The Mendelssohn String Quartet, who commissioned it with a grant from Chamber Music America with funds from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Back to the darkly obsessive, poetic and dramatic nature of the music itself:

All four works deal with some sort of fixation: “Turning, Returning” is about sleeplessness caused by turning and returning an idea around in the mind. This, of course, happens at night when it seems impossible to let it go until morning. Different kinds of dreams and nightmares inspired the music. Fascinated by the fact that epic dreams might take only seconds of “real time,” I have attempted to capture that dichotomy by presenting a single musical idea in a variety of speeds, sometimes working in layers of tempo against a steady pulse.

In Memories of... is about the feeling of memories, of “relying” memories, and what the neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio calls the “body loop,” wherein memories activate bodily responses (see his book, *Descartes’ Error*). The piece is therefore structured in loops and shudders, with all paths leading back to the initial impulse. I have interest in the way memories can be manifested as physical sensations.

By a Grace of Sense Surrounded, its title borrowed from T.S. Eliot, is obsessed with the opening phrase of the Adagio from Brahms's Clarinet Quintet. I had to get Brahms's music out of my system before I composed my own clarinet quintet, and so I used it in a piece *without* a clarinet. The "grace of sense" refers to the phrase by Brahms that haunts the piece throughout.

And All is Always Now (another phrase of T.S. Eliot) is about all of the above—in other words, that our memories, hopes, obsessions, dreams, plans all exist now in the mind, in a kind of constant counterpoint, conscious and unconscious. I have been influenced by Antonio Damasio's phrase "memories of a possible future."

—Bruce Adolphe, 1997

Bruce Adolphe (b1955) has composed music for Itzhak Perlman, David Shifrin, the Beaux Arts Trio, TASHI, the National Symphony, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, the 92nd Street Y in New York, St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, the Golub-Kaplan-Carr Trio, the Brentano, Mendelssohn, and Miami string quartets, and many other ensembles. He has written more than thirty chamber works, four operas, two piano concertos, a clarinet concerto, theater pieces, orchestral works, film scores and many pieces for young listeners. Mr. Adolphe has been a music advisor and education director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where he lectures before the concerts in Alice Tully Hall, leads a variety of workshops and seminars, programs the Meet the Music! family concerts, and—working closely with artistic director David Shifrin—programs and hosts the Music of Our Time concerts.

Before that, Adolphe taught at the Juilliard School, Yale, and New York universities, where for ten years his specialty was foreign accents for actors in the Tisch School of Undergraduate Drama. His own brushes with acting have included several roles in the world premiere of Kurt Vonnegut's play *Make Up Your Mind*, frequent appearances as a narrator with music, and an increasing tendency to appear in his own scripts for family concerts, playing such characters as Inspector Pulse, Leopold Mozart, and Ferdinand Schubert.

Mr. Adolphe has written two books, *The Mind's Ear: Exercises for Improving the Musical Imagination* (1990, M.M.B., St. Louis) and *What to Listen for in the World* (1996, Limelight Editions, New York). He also writes CD booklets for Sony Classical, including the Juilliard String Quartet's fiftieth Anniversary Collection.

Other recordings of Bruce Adolphe's music include: *Marita and Her Heart's Desire* (a chamber music fairy tale with a story by Louise Gikow) with Itzhak Perlman, Michele Mariana and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (Telarc); *The Bitter, Sour, Salt Suite* (for solo violin, with comic poems about food by Louise Gikow) with Itzhak Perlman (Telarc); *At the Still Point, there the Dance Is* (for clarinet and string quartet) with David Shifrin and the

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (Delos); *Soliloquy* (for solo violin) with Curtis Macomber (Koch); *Night Journey* with the Dorian Wind Quintet (Summit); and *Triskelion* with the American Brass Quintet (Summit).

As this disc goes to press, Mr. Adolphe is developing a weekly radio show, *Bruce Adolphe's Classical Music Show*, for WQXR in New York.

Marija Stroke has performed as soloist and chamber musician throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, including concerts in New York, Boston, Chicago, Washington, Toronto, London, Dublin, Paris, Geneva, Munich, Bonn, Vilnius, and Moscow. Her many appearances at music festivals include Caramoor, the City of London Festival, Soirées des Junies in France, Chamber Music Virginia, the Moab Festival in Utah, and Chamber Music Northwest in Oregon. She is an artist member of the Garden City Chamber Music Society, New York, and has appeared frequently as a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Her long-standing duo partnership with violinist Mark Steinberg has included New York recitals in Weill Hall at Carnegie, Merkin Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Introduction Series" and the 92nd Street Y's "Meet the Virtuoso" concerts. She is a member of the Apollo Trio.

Since its inception in 1992, the **Brentano String Quartet** has been singled out for technical brilliance, musical insight and stylistic elegance. Already it has received three major awards: the first Cleveland Quartet Award; and the 10th Annual Martin E. Segal Award. It is the first quartet-in-residence at New York University and was also chosen by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center to be the inaugural ensemble of Chamber Music Society Two, a program designed for outstanding emerging artists on the verge of international careers in chamber music.

The Brentano String Quartet's North American appearances have included Alice Tully Hall in New York (Naumburg recital in January, 1996), the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Pittsburgh's Frick Museum, Baltimore, Houston, New Orleans, La Jolla Chamber Music Society, and the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts in North York, Ontario. The quartet's European debuts were at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and Wigmore Hall in London.

Serena Canin, Mark Steinberg, and Misha Amory met while they were students at Juilliard and decided to join forces with cellist Michael Kannen to found the ensemble. The quartet is named after Antoine Brentano, whom many scholars believe to have been Beethoven's mysterious "Immortal Beloved", and to whom he wrote his famous love confession.

The Quartet maintains a strong interest in the music of our time and has had several works written for them, including the Sixth String Quartet of Milton Babbitt, the Second String Quartet and a Piano Quintet by Bruce Adolphe, and a Quartet by Chou Wen-chung. This is their debut recording.

Production Notes

Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman.

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Editing assistance: Jeanne Velonis

Recorded July 1995, in the Recital Hall, Music Division, SUNY, Purchase, NY

Steinway piano supplied by Mary Schwendemann

“Turning, Returning” (String Quartet No.2) 1991 was commissioned by Wendela and Peter Moes; Premiered by the Brentano String Quartet at the Garden City Chamber Music Society, New York, 1992.

In Memories of (Piano and String Quartet) 1993 was commissioned by Wendela and Peter Moes; Premiered by the Brentano String Quartet and pianist Marija Stroke at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York, “Music of Our Time” series, 1994.

By a Grace of Sense Surrounded (String Quartet No.1) 1989 was commissioned by The Mendelssohn Sting Quartet with a grant from Chamber Music America, with funds from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Premiered by the Mendelssohn String Quartet at Merkin Concert Hall, New York, 1990. *All is Always Now* (piano and violin) 1992 was premiered by Mark Steinberg and Marija Stroke at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993.

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