

This gathering of music by five composers spanning more than seventy years demonstrates the richness and possibility of the stylistic freedom that is sometimes called the American experimental tradition. Timelessly potent for their careful exploration of musical material, these are works which have no cause to be esoteric, by leading American composers who deserve much higher regard. And in the hands of a performer and new-music advocate, Margaret Lancaster, who curates her repertoire with an attention to a continuum which composer Johanna Beyer calls “future, present, past,” we are given the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how this tradition lives.

**Johanna Beyer** (1888–1944) composed some of the most enigmatic and bold music of the 1930s. Largely ignored during her lifetime, her work received resurrection in concerts celebrating her centenary by Essential Music in New York in 1988, and in the subsequent first publication of some of her scores by Frog Peak Music. Her catalog of more than fifty compositions reveal the influence and experimentalism of her teachers (who included Ruth Crawford Seeger, Charles Seeger, and Henry Cowell), but Beyer’s works distinguish themselves with a gripping commitment to a structure, soundworld, or the aesthetic exploration of an idea. Some of her works and techniques (particularly those for percussion) predate better-known works by John Cage, Cowell, and others, and her influence during this period of American music may not be fully appreciated.

*Have Faith!*, composed for soprano and flute in 1936, was dedicated to Ethel Luening, an important singer of contemporary music and the wife of composer Otto Luening. Existing in three similar manuscript versions, there is no evidence that *Have Faith!* was performed during Beyer’s lifetime; in which case, the premiere occurred in 1996 in a performance by the Astra Chamber Society of Melbourne, Australia.

*Have Faith!* is emblematic of Beyer’s isolation, with a text written by Beyer infused with a longing for a better future (“have faith in things to come”). The few writings that exist of Beyer’s are for vocal texts, and share an almost naive optimism for future happiness, perhaps influenced by the ethos of her Federal Music Project and WPA-era experiences. Nevertheless, the piece unfolds as a quiet incantation—marked pianissimo throughout—of a tightly constricted chromatic space being opened to light. Typical of her musical vocabulary, Beyer uses the methods of “dissonant counterpoint,” first advanced by Charles Seeger. The flute, cast as a nightingale being addressed by the singer, intones an opening statement which begins with a half-octave array of the six pitches from D to G. After the statement, the flute settles into an E-flat long tone which is returned to as a pedal throughout, while the soprano opens the song with a variation of the six-pitch chromatic array. The piece is crafted carefully: A delicate urgency in the vocal line finds within the dissonant material true moments of light and space, aligned with the optimism of the text.

Beyer’s best-known work is perhaps *Music of the Spheres*, a piece dating from 1938 which is a series of perpetual glissandi or sliding tones which never remain stable. While composers including György Ligeti, James Tenney, and Iannis Xenakis have since then prominently utilized glissandi in their work, the contemporary composer **Lois V Vierk** (b. 1951) has perhaps most thoroughly incorporated glissandi as a signature element in her music and as an active feature of melodic development.

Vierk’s use of slides emanates from her study of Japanese *gagaku*, which she described this way in an interview with Frank Oteri: “. . . in *gagaku*, this idea is right in front of you: that continuously changing sound, the glissando. It sounded great to me. But also in *gagaku* the glissando always has a musical function. It isn’t a decoration. There’s always a musical phrase that’s going from one point to the other point, and the glissando gets you there . . . the gliss has a meaning in the phrase.”<sup>1</sup>

*Io*, composed in 1999 for Hamburg's Ensemble L'Art Pour L'Art and revised in the years since, is composed for an amplified ensemble of flute, electric guitar, and marimba. The piece incorporates glissandi but also Vierk's techniques of drones (here through repeated running notes) and what she calls "exponential structure," by which subsequent sections of a piece relate proportionally while the music becomes more dense. In *Io*, short, dynamic phrases are developed additively, and as Vierk describes, ". . . each phrase develops materials from the one before, gradually producing longer and longer phrases, and dense textures of interlocking tremolos and glissandi, with sharply articulated sounds in all instruments."<sup>2</sup> A striking feature of *Io* is the unusual combination of these three instruments, which through amplification attain a remarkable surface texture which supports their composite interplay.

Vierk's music is one of malleable textures, varying lengths of directional travel, distortion of tonality through sliding tones, and changing tonal centers—all of which push and pull the listener like a kind of musical gravity. For *Io*, Vierk elucidates this through her choice of title: "The work is titled after Jupiter's innermost moon, which in turn was named for the mythological beautiful maiden Io, beloved of Zeus but tormented by Zeus's wife, Hera. The moon Io was discovered by Galileo in 1610. In the 1970s it was discovered to have over 100 active volcanoes, the only known volcanoes outside the Earth. At times the volcanoes shoot huge plumes of sulfur up over 300 kilometers into the sky. Io is caught in a gravitational tug of war. It is periodically nudged out of regular orbit by two other nearby moons, Europa and Ganymede, then pulled back by the massive gravitational field of Jupiter. Io is constantly squeezed and distorted, like a rubber ball held in the hand. The friction produced by this action produces enormous heat—enough to melt the rock deep within and cause the great volcanoes and lava flow."<sup>3</sup>

Myth, nature, and the primal also inform *Atmos*, conceived as a kind of creation drama by **Joan La Barbara** (b. 1947). Composed as a vehicle for the remarkable talents and virtuosity of Margaret Lancaster, *Atmos* was created as a theater piece that when performed live at its premiere in 2008 at Hallwalls in Buffalo, involved the contributions of a director and movement coach. Lancaster, in addition to being a flutist, has extensive experience as an actor and dancer, and even when performing works that are not specifically theatrical, Lancaster conceives her performances as having a theatrical basis. Composers have frequently utilized her multiple talents in the many pieces she has commissioned, forging more expansive forms of performance practice for their work.

In developing such a work for Lancaster, La Barbara brings her own experience as a vocalist who has expanded the range of performance practice both as a singer and composer. La Barbara's conception of the flute in *Atmos* is reminiscent of her works for voice, in which she explores the extensive vocabulary and technique of the instrument through evocative sonic landscapes. The piece utilizes live flutes with a pre-recorded "sonic atmosphere" assembled by La Barbara using recordings of Lancaster interpreting the composer's instructions. La Barbara describes her process as ". . . working with the flute sounds as I work with my own vocal sounds, creating a palette of colors, energies, pitched and non-pitched material."<sup>4</sup>

La Barbara's manuscript consists mostly of graphic notation drawings as well as written instructions, giving the performer a collaborative role in realizing the musical intent. La Barbara writes that "*Atmos* is a work about primal energy, particles and matter, interlocking systems, overwhelming and untamable forces of nature and visceral reactions."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the work takes on the theatrical quality of a natural world drama, conveyed by the remarkable array of techniques used by Lancaster. In *Atmos*, we hear a catalog of the flute's extended techniques—including percussive key clicks, all manner of exhalation and inhalation sounds, vocalization with vowel and sibilant attacks, whistle tones, lip pizzicati, tongue rams, overtone columns—as well as plaintive and sensuous flute phrasing, in conveying the sound world of this remarkable cylindrical instrument. *Atmos* seems to be probing the mysteries of the relationship of breath to its medium of air, and the flute and flutist are the vessels which convey the story.

One of the many synchronicities that make the repertoire choices on this CD so compelling on close examination, is the inclusion of **James Tenney's** (1934–2006) *Seegersong #2*, a piece which opens with a five-note chromatic statement very similar in structure to the opening motive of *Have Faith!* Tenney is a link to the composers of Beyer's generation as well as the living composers on this disc. As Kyle Gann has noted:

In a way he stands at the center of American music, a kind of focal point: he studied and worked with seminal figures such as Varèse, Partch, Ruggles, Cage, Kenneth Gaburo, and Lejaren Hiller; he performed in the ensembles of his contemporaries Philip Glass and Steve Reich; and he has taught some of the leading young composers, including John Luther Adams, Larry Polansky and Peter Garland.<sup>6</sup>

Tenney composed *Seegersong #2* with reference to the material in Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, a piece which utilizes a technique that she labeled "perpetuo mobile" melodies. Stretching Crawford Seeger's tempo, rests, and dynamic changes, Tenney reinterprets her work as a long arch of acceleration and deceleration, using a kind of cosine function to devise the process, and in so doing, evoking the possibilities for rhythmic freedom described as "tempo melody" by Henry Cowell. In this process, each note-value duration is independently elastic and devised by creating non-integer rhythmic relationships (a concept related to Lois V Vierk's "exponential structure" which we hear in *Io*). Tenney, who utilized computer applications in constructing his music, developed what Larry Polansky has called the "dissonant counterpoint algorithm" as the process underlying this work's choice of pitch.

*Seegersong #2* is thus not only homage, but also an expansion and evolution of rich ideas in American compositional theory, extending a logic implied by his predecessors. Tenney spoke of this notion explicitly:

I like to think that I deliberately connected myself to the experimental tradition as much as I could, by getting to know as many of them as possible. But I was too late to meet Ives, and I never got to meet Cowell. I was also too late to meet Ruth Crawford Seeger. But I have written pieces that were homages to every one of those composers, and that is a way of trying to establish a connection and make a public statement; yes, there is a lineage here and I choose to be in that line. That is my position. And whether a hundred years from now I'll be considered part of it is another question, but at least I feel that I'm part of it.<sup>7</sup>

As much theory as there is behind the composition of *Seegersong # 2*, the work has an intensely expressive quality. Its form and supple lines engage the listener in a directionality disposed to reflection and the nature of the psyche; its expansion of space and time cross the years to the source of its homage. This capacity of Tenney, to integrate his theory with magical musical results, is described by Polansky: "After Cage, no other composer so elegantly and beautifully integrated ideas and music. No one else's work, as a whole, is as profound, experimental, wide-ranging, accomplished, or revolutionary . . . his ideas delineate and explore the most important musical ideas of the past 50 years: form, perception, timbre, harmony, and the nature of the compositional process."<sup>8</sup>

As significant as Tenney's influence has been, it must be acknowledged that for over the past three decades, **Larry Polansky** (b. 1954) has been a central and indefatigable figure in enriching and extending the American experimental tradition. Polansky's work reaches both into the present and future, through the maintenance of Frog Peak Music, a composers' publishing collective, as well as deep into the past, through his advocacy of Beyer and Crawford Seeger, as well as his inclusion of Shaker and other "folk" or populist music traditions in his framework of musical culture. While also heard on this recording as a guitarist, ultimately Polansky must be more closely appreciated as one of the most accomplished, innovative, and visionary composers of his generation.

His *Piker* for solo piccolo (or any appropriate wind instrument) is a five-movement work composed for Margaret Lancaster, that she premiered at the BONK Festival in Tampa in 1998. *Piker* is an extremely challenging virtuoso work, demanding of the performer extreme technical skill while sometimes executing alternative tunings and complex polyrhythmic layers. The titles of the movements, with their touches of humor ("piker" means a stingy person or cheapskate), derive from a letter written by the composer Marion Bauer to Ruth Crawford Seeger. Seeger had moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 1935, and fell out of touch with the "ultramodern" composer scene in New York. Bauer, trying to arrange a performance of one of Seeger's works, complained in a letter early the next year: "I have wanted to get in touch with you for weeks . . . I suppose it will take you another month to answer this. I know you! You're no piker! But please drop me a card from somewhere."

In each of the movements, Polansky uses a different process or technique that defines the movement's form. *Daughter of Piker* is based on the Shaker tune "Love, More Love," which is played four times, each with a different set of intonations derived from the harmonic series, which result in "modal" changes to the melody. *I Know You!* is a morph between two Shaker tunes, "O the Simple Gifts of God" and "Little Trumpet," ornamented and played with different degrees of articulation and legato. *You're No Piker!* consists of a series of rhythmic ratios proceeding from 2:1, 3:2, 4:3, etc., to 9:8, with an additive process pitch correlation to the ratios, unfolding on top of the player doing a pulse through foot stomps. *You're a Piker!* is based on the Shaker tune "Hop Up and Jump Up," and is described by the composer as "an experiment in melodic streaming." At the start of the piece, all notes are equally loud, but gradually the actual beats of the Shaker tune are increasingly accented, and all other notes are increasingly made softer for the melody to become prominent. Finally, *Piker* is a complex unfolding of a harmonic series rhythm and pitch matrix. Using pitches 4-17 of a series on the pitch E, Polansky assigns each pitch a proportional rhythmic value per measure equal to its harmonic number (e.g., 4 to 17 equally distributed iterations per measure). The piece then becomes a gradual buildup of a 17:16:15:14 . . . 7:6:5:4 rhythmic pattern, with iterations of the pitches beginning sparsely from the middle of the first measure, then growing "outside in" from the beginning and endings of subsequent measures with increasing density as the pattern is "filled in." An accompanying drone comprised of the chordal material is articulated at the beginning of each measure.

Rarely does one hear music that gives the lonely instrument of piccolo the opportunity to sound so soulful. With its integration of Shaker tunes, process and theory transformed into music of great expressivity, and a nod to the vision of composers past, *Piker* is a wonderful contemporary expression of having faith in the American experimental tradition.

—John Kennedy

*Composer and conductor John Kennedy is Artistic Associate of Spoleto Festival USA and Artistic Director of Santa Fe New Music.*

## Have Faith!

Here is a song for you,  
oh nightingale!  
a song of what?  
of hope, of future, present, past?  
it does not matter.  
But essential is,  
that you and I and all the others  
have faith in things to come,  
in things that passed, and are  
and we must try to understand  
and love and help each other,  
have faith in things to come,  
have faith!

—Johanna Beyer

**Johanna Magdalena Beyer** (1888–1944) was born in Leipzig and moved to New York around 1924. After studying with composers including Dane Rudhyar, Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell, and Ruth Crawford, she began a highly productive period of composition in the 1930s. She died of ALS in 1944, at the age of 56. Her work was almost completely overlooked during her life, and for nearly fifty years after her death. Her known works number more than fifty, and include several works for orchestra, concert band, a large number of chamber works (including notable works for percussion as well as string quartet), and works for choir, solo piano, and theater. Many of her pieces await their world premieres. Her music was resurrected when Essential Music presented two full programs of her work in 1988 for the centenary of her birth. Some of her scores are now available in annotated editions from Frog Peak Music.

Composer, performer, and sound-artist **Joan La Barbara** (b. 1947) creates sound-scores for film, video, and dance. Her multi-layered textural compositions are performed at international festivals including the Brisbane Biennial, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Warsaw Autumn, Frankfurt Feste, Metamusik-Berlin, Olympics Arts, and Lincoln Center. Awards include the American Music Center's Letter of Distinction (2008) for her significant contributions to American music, a Guggenheim Fellowship, DAAD-Berlin Artist-in-Residency, seven NEA grants, NYSCA, and numerous commissions for concert, theater and radio, including the St. Louis Symphony, Meet The Composer, Live Music for Dance, WDR-Cologne, RIAS, VPRO, and Radio Bremen. Recordings include *ShamanSong* (New World), *Sound Paintings*, and *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music). *73 Poems* appeared in the Whitney Museum "American Century Part II: SoundWorks." *Messa di Voce*, an award-winning interactive media performance work, premiered at Ars Electronica-Linz. Her voice with electronics score for Children's Television Workshop/Sesame Street has been broadcast worldwide since 1977. La Barbara is composing a new opera exploring the interior dialogue and sounds within the mind.  
[www.joanlabarbara.com](http://www.joanlabarbara.com)

**Larry Polansky** (b. 1954) is a composer, theorist, performer, teacher, writer, editor, and publisher. He is the Strauss Professor of Music at Dartmouth College, and worked for ten years at Mills College Center for Contemporary Music. He is one of the three co-authors (with Phil Burk and David Rosenboom) of the computer music language HMSL, and has written a great deal of other musical software. His music has been recorded, performed, and written about widely, and his articles and writings have appeared in numerous publications, on diverse topics including theory, computer music, and American music. He is the co-founder and co-director of Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective), the founding editor of the Leonardo Music Journal, and works with several other musical journals and institutions. His solo CDs are on Artifact, Cold Blue, and New World Records. His book on Ruth Crawford, *The Music of American Folk Song*, is published by Rochester University Press.

A performer as well as a composer and theorist, **James Tenney** (1934–2006) was co-founder and conductor of the Tone Roads Chamber Ensemble in New York City (1963–70). He was a pioneer in the field of electronic and computer music, working with Max Mathews and others at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in the early 1960s to develop programs for computer sound-generation and composition. His teachers and mentors included Eduard Steuermann, Chou Wen-Chung, Lionel Nowak, Carl Ruggles, Lejaren Hiller, Kenneth Gaburo, Edgard Varèse, Harry Partch, and John Cage. He wrote works for a variety of media, both instrumental and electronic, many of them using alternative tuning systems. He is the author of several articles on musical acoustics, computer music, and musical form and perception, as well as two books: *Meta + Hodos: A Phenomenology of 20th-Century Musical Materials and an Approach to the Study of Form* (1961; Frog Peak, 1988) and *A History of "Consonance" and "Dissonance"* (Excelsior, 1988).

**Lois V Vierk**, from Lansing, Illinois, in suburban Chicago, was born in 1951. She studied composition at California Institute of the Arts with Mel Powell, Leonard Stein, and Morton Subotnick. For ten years she studied *gagaku* (Japanese court music) with Suenobu Togi in Los Angeles and for two years she studied in Tokyo with Sukeyasu Shiba of the emperor's Gagaku Orchestra. Ms. Vierk has spent most of her career in New York City. She was presented recently in a Portrait Concert at German Radio Cologne. Among the many performers and presenters who have commissioned her are the pianists Ursula Oppens, Frederic Rzewski, Margaret Leng Tan, and Aki Takahashi; accordionist Guy Klucevsek; Lincoln Center Festival, Bang on a Can Festival, Ensemble Modern, Music from Japan, the Kronos Quartet, and Ensemble L'Art Pour L'Art. Co-creations with tap-dance choreographer Anita Feldman have been performed at major dance and music venues.

Noted for her interdisciplinary collaborations, **Margaret Lancaster** has premiered more than one hundred pieces and has built a large repertoire of new works composed specifically for her that employ extended techniques, dance, drama, multi-media, and electronics. Composers and directors she has worked with include Lee Breuer, Chen Shi Zheng, Milton Babbitt, Larry Polansky, Eve Beglarian, Jon Appleton, Phil Kline, Gerhard Stabler, Paul Steenhuisen, Christian Wolff, Jo Kondo, Jacob Ter Veldhuis, Corey Dargel, and the Common Sense Composers Collective. Current collaborations include theatrical works by Arthur Kampela, Ha-Yang Kim, and Juliet Palmer (with director Guillaume Bernardi).

Lancaster has played with many leading ensembles and is a recurring performer at Spoleto Festival USA and Santa Fe New Music. Performance highlights include the Lincoln Center Festival, Ibsen Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Whitney Museum, Festival de Otoño, Festival d'Automne, Subtropics Festival, and Bremen Musikfest with Absolute Ensemble. She has recorded on New World Records, OO Discs, Innova, Naxos, and Tzadik, and was selected for Meet The Composer's *New Works for Soloist Champions* project. An avid tap dancer and amateur furniture designer, Lancaster, who also works as an actor, choreographer, and dancer, can be seen onstage touring worldwide in Lee Breuer's Obie-winning Mabou Mines production *DOLLHOUSE*. [www.margaretlancaster.com](http://www.margaretlancaster.com)

Texas-born soprano **Beth Griffith** studied voice in Graz, Munich, and Cologne and was a pupil of Hanni Mack-Cosack. Specializing in contemporary music, she has sung at festivals across Europe, the United States, and South Africa and appeared with such groups as London New Music, Musikfabrik, Ensemble 13, Ensemble L'Art Pour L'Art, Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, Paris Nouvel Orchestra Philharmonique, and in New York City Opera's VOX. Of special significance to Ms. Griffith has been her work with contemporary composers, among them Morton Feldman, Mauricio Kagel, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. She has recorded for Sargasso, MFB Records, Tzadik, Largo, Stella Musical, and 1687.

**Matthew Gold** is a principal player in Sequitur, the Glass Farm Ensemble, the IFCP ensemble, and a co-director of the TimeTable percussion trio. An advocate of new music, he has commissioned and premiered numerous new works and has performed frequently with the Da Capo Chamber Players, New York New Music Ensemble, Argento Chamber Ensemble, SEM Ensemble, and New Juilliard Ensemble, and has been a member of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble. Mr. Gold is an instructor of percussion at Williams College where he directs the Percussion Ensemble, co-directs an in-residence new-music ensemble, and is principal percussionist in the Berkshire Symphony.

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##### **Johanna Beyer**

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##### **Joan La Barbara**

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*Lonesome Road*. Martin Christ, piano. New World Records 80566-2.

*Movement in E Major for John Cage*. Miwako Abe, violin; Michael Kieran Harvey, piano. New World Records 80641.

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### **James Tenney**

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### **Margaret Lancaster appears on the following recordings:**

*Culture Samples: Concerti for Flute with Percussion Orchestra*. Capstone Recordings CPS-8802.  
*Future Flute*. Sound's Bounty SB001.  
*Left at the Fork in the Road*. Sean Hickey, composer. Naxos (American Classics) 8.559279.  
*Overstepping*. Eve Beglarian, composer. OO Discs OO33.  
*Powder*. Drew Krause, composer. Innova Recordings 676.  
*Tell the Birds*. Eve Beglarian, composer. New World Records 80630-2.

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Kennedy, John and Larry Polansky. "Total Eclipse: The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer," *Musical Quarterly* 80 (4): 719-778, Winter 1996.

*Have Faith!, Io, Seegersong #2*, and *Piker* are published and distributed by Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective). [www.frogpeak.org](http://www.frogpeak.org).

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*Piker, Have Faith!, Seegersong #2*

Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman.

Engineering and editing assistant: Jeanne Velonis

Recorded July 1 & 2, 2008 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City.

*Atmos*

Recorded and mixed by Scott Lehrer.

Recorded December 16, 2008 at 2nd Story Sound, New York City.

*Io*

Produced and edited by Doug Perkins.

Recorded and mixed by Scott Lehrer.

Recorded February 6, 2009 at 2nd Story Sound, New York City.

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC

Design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

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1. Johanna Beyer (1888–1944)

*Have Faith!* (1936) 1:53

flute and soprano

Beth Griffith, soprano

2. Lois V Vierk (b. 1951)

*Io* (1999) 10:09

flute, electric guitar, marimba

Larry Polansky, electric guitar; Matthew Gold, marimba

3. Joan La Barbara (b. 1947)

*Atmos* (2008) 14:29

flutes (C, alto, bass, piccolo, Native American) and sonic atmosphere

4. James Tenney (1934–2006)

*Seegersong #2* (1999) 12:01

solo flute

Larry Polansky (b. 1954)

*Piker* (1998) 20:13

5. Daughter of Piker 2:56

6. I Know You ! 3:17

7. You're No Piker! 2:12

8. You're a Piker! 2:37

9. Piker 9:10

solo piccolo

(track 9) with Larry Polansky, electric guitar; Matthew Gold, percussion

TT: 59:13

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Frank J. Oteri, *NewMusicBox*, January 1, 2008. Archived at <http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=5393>

<sup>2</sup> From preface notes to the score of *Io* by Lois V Vierk, distributed by Frog Peak Music.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> From preface notes to the score of *Atmos* by Joan La Barbara.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 1997) p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> “James Tenney on his Cultural and Compositional Diversity: In Conversation with Gayle Young,” *Musicworks* 77 (Summer 2000): 23.

<sup>8</sup> Larry Polansky, “A Few Words about Jim Tenney,” 10/9/06. Available at [http://www.frogpeak.org/unbound/polansky/about\\_jim\\_tenney.pdf](http://www.frogpeak.org/unbound/polansky/about_jim_tenney.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger – A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 234.