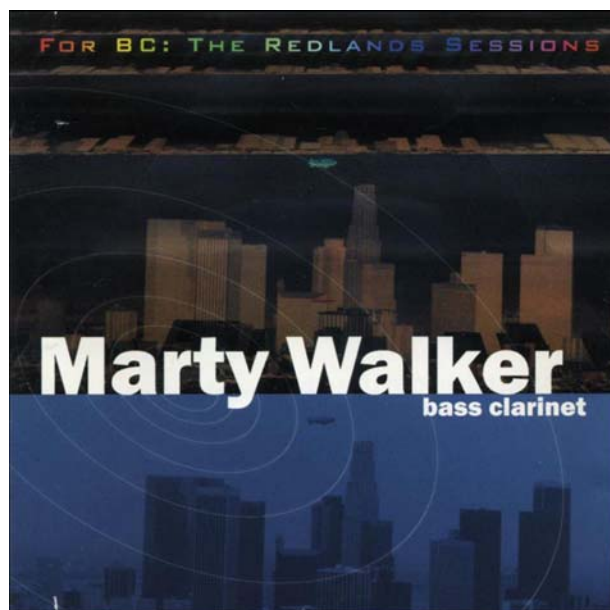


NWCR866

For BC: The Redlands Sessions

Marty Walker, Bass Clarinet



1. Wadada Leo Smith: *Betty Shabazz: A Consistent Voice of Love, An Inspiration For Life* for bass clarinet and piano (1998) (10:32)
Vicki Ray, piano
2. Michael Jon Fink: *Din/Epitaph* for solo bass clarinet (1996/1990) (6:31)
3. Bernardo Feldman: *Portraits of Friends and Relatives, Recuerdos de un Año Triste* for bass clarinet and tape (1991) (13:59)
4. Barney Childs: *London Rice Wine* for solo bass clarinet (1973) (4:48)
5. Arthur Jarvinen: *Carbon 1999* for multi-tracked bass clarinet (1999) (12:58)
6. Shaun Naidoo: *Waking in the Dirt* for bass clarinet and tape (1999) (14:07)
7. Jim Fox: *All Fall Down* for three bass clarinets (1999) (2:40)

Total playing time: 65:56

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Notes

There's a special world of sound that Marty Walker traverses, just off the radar of traditional instrument usage. He understands that the bass clarinet is a particular beast unto itself, accessible to a broad and sometimes enigmatic range of tones—and, not incidentally, overtones. He savors the exploratory nature and the secret passageways tucked into this instrument, suitably dignified in the jazz world by the likes of Eric Dolphy and others, but still a *rara avis* as a solo instrument in the classical orbit.

Some connected exploratory instinct also governs his attitude towards music itself, an attitude fostered by composer and teacher Barney Childs. The title of Walker's recording—*For BC: The Redlands Sessions*—can be freely interpreted as both an ode to the instrument heard mostly solo here, and a dedication to an important early mentor, Barney Childs, an individualistic American composer who taught for many years at the University of Redlands in California.

Childs, who died in January 2000, imparted an important philosophy to a young, impressionable Walker. He remembers that “Barney was intolerant of performers who strive only to play hackneyed pieces carved from the Western European tradition; they were loathsome in his eyes. Instead, his sights were on encouraging local composers and performers to collaborate and create *new* music. I admire his thinking, and largely because of it, I work to do the same.”

For Walker, as evidenced on this project, the importance of the here-and-now reigns supreme. Improvisation is central to his musical being, the dominant practice in settings like his *Ghost Duo*, and a recurrent feature on this CD. That link to things current also extends to his active engagement in the small but healthy new-music scene in the Los Angeles region. He is currently a member of the California E.A.R. Unit,

among other liaisons, and is seen frequently on local stages where new music rears its feisty head.

That ongoing, interactive pact with local musical thinking is a subplot on this album in its own way, a portfolio about West Coast new music making. More to the point of Walker's own personal history, this recording was done in the Frederick Loewe Performance Hall at the University of Redlands. The space was recently renovated with a mind for recording. “It has tunable acoustics along the side walls and all wood flooring. Plus, the stage's ceiling, sides and back are rough cedar, which all makes for a nice sound. Except on the electronics, none of the recording has any artificial reverb added.” Electronics notwithstanding, the only effects you hear—the expressive palette of extended techniques—are summoned from the musician in question.

We're sitting on the balcony of his house, overlooking Sunset Boulevard and the maze-like sprawl of Los Angeles below, and Walker is musing about his instrumental cause. With this project, as with much of his musical work, Walker generally states a case for the bass clarinet and its farther-reaching possibilities. Standard practices are not the main concern.

“I remember saying to someone after the recording that there are very few *regular* notes on this CD. For example, on Leo's piece, there are a lot of places in the score where he wanted harmonics and multiphonics added.” Fink's piece *Epitaph*, he comments, “is one of the few places where I'm just reading notes and playing them straight; although *Din*, which Michael wrote later, as a prelude, is all humming and playing. The composers I work with are always very interested in the improvising I do. My focus while improvising is usually on seeing what kinds of sounds I can pull from the instrument.

Then these sounds creep back into the pieces that are written for me. That's the result of collaboration."

Aside from its "legitimate" tonal range, a vast timbral world lurks within the bass clarinet, waiting to be coaxed out. He's happy to be associated with the instrument, although, he admits, "I used to shy away from solely bass clarinet projects because I didn't want people to think that I don't play the other clarinet, too. I don't really care what they think now," he laughs. "The bass clarinet is rich with possibilities. Also, I've never studied bass clarinet formally, so I don't have teachers' voices in my ears saying 'no, no, can't do that.'"

Wadada Leo Smith is a composer and trumpeter whose roots in the Chicagoan AACM and other "jazz" traditions (he also played the "Miles Davis" role in the *Yo Miles!* project) confer a particular patina on his writings for new musical settings. Improvisation often plays a role in his compositional processes, as does a certain looseness of scoring. The vertical coordination of parts on *Betty Shabazz: A Consistent Voice of Love, An Inspiration for Life* is flexible, a situation in which Walker and pianist Vicki Ray engage in a fluid dance around Smith's impressionistic evocations.

Din/Epitaph is an integrated combine of pieces by an old ally of Walker's, composer Michael Jon Fink (also the guitar-playing half of *Ghost Duo*). Whereas the free-range scheme of *Din* was conceived in 1996, *Epitaph* (a requiem for no one in particular) is an ethereal dirge, written in 1990.

One of the earliest compositions in the set dates from 1991, when Walker had returned to the Southern California swim of things from a teaching post at Northern Michigan University and taught at the College of the Canyons, alongside Bernardo Feldman, who, keen on electro-acoustic interactions, wrote the textural mosaic that wound up being *Portraits of Friends and Relatives, Recuerdos de un Antaño Triste*. Walker notes that the piece "started with Bernardo sampling some of the sounds I use when I improvise, free-jazz-based, non-pitched material for the most part. He would sample those and then manipulate them in different ways. I then would add more stuff, and we assembled it like that over quite a long time, about a year and a half. Eventually, this piece came out."r

The only piece here not written specifically for Walker is Barney Childs's *London Rice Wine*, although the composer did ask Walker to perform it. Dedicated to Robert Hall and Gavin Bryars, and designated for "any woodwind instrument," the piece mines the poetic and conceptual aspects of Childs' compositional thinking. As Walker says, in Childs's music, "style ran the gamut. He was known for indeterminacy, and there's a lot of room for performer choice in his music, but it's not all verbal instructions like this one." Said verbal instructions, in this case, make their own kind of music. However, given the liberties of these instructions, Walker reacts accordingly, on his own musical terms. An excerpt:

Play a pitch. This is the real sound, and by making it you rule all. Enjoy this.
PLAY. Make it be heard.

Stop playing it (but it goes on,
somewhere)

Think about it going on.

Play it as it will sound,

somewhere,

and stop before you think they expect it to stop.

But now you have played too much. Perhaps all (we all)

play too much. Think about this. The instrument should be put away.

However

When Walker asked Arthur Jarvinen to write a piece, the composer revisited an old score dating from 1982, *Carbon*, and reconfigured it into *Carbon 1999*. In performance,

Walker uses delay units to create shifting contrapuntal voices. In this recorded version, Walker thickens the textural plot via overdubbing in an unfussy cascade of echoing "clones."

Many instances of player-specific influence emerge in this set of recordings, such as in the works of both Bernardo Feldman and Shaun Naidoo. "Shaun's piece and Bernardo's are very different, yet they're very similar. I like to think that that's my influence on them."

Shaun Naidoo, a versatile young composer, incorporated Walker's instrumental voice into his score for *Waking in the Dirt*. Naidoo had been moved upon seeing photographs of mass graves in Bosnia, and the piece is partly an elegy for that troubled geography. Sampled bass clarinet parts provide the sonic foundation of the tape aspect. While Walker moves freely in the first half, he adheres to a strict structure in the second part, subtitled "Turning the Soil," a title which assumes chilling, ironic double meaning considering the work's original visual impetus.

For the final piece, Jim Fox's *All Fall Down*, Walker again departs from a strict solo context. Walker overdubbed three parts, on a sad and graceful piece that basks in languid and deceptive simplicity, a quality that the composer equates with an ambiguous "film noir" quality. Closing with Fox's music makes for a logical finale for the project on extra-musical terms as well. Fox and Walker are frequent collaborators who first met at the University of Redlands, where Fox came to study with Childs in the mid-1970s. Fox also presented Childs's music on his own West Coast-oriented Cold Blue label.

Walker maintains standards about what new music is, and should be, about. This project, though, has nothing to do with upholding an easily defined stylistic agenda. It's about paying respects to influential histories and forging new paths and new liaisons, whatever the incidental matters of tonality and/or structure. By turns contemplative, provocative, impressionistic and abstract, this recording paints imagery and tells stories-within-stories, as only the not-so-lowly bass clarinet can.

—Josef Woodard, 2000

Marty Walker (b 1953) has devoted himself to new music and improvisation for over two decades, concentrating on collaborating with composers to inspire new works, and earning a reputation as one of the finer new music clarinetists in the country. Premiering over 80 pieces written especially for him, many of which highlight his bass clarinet playing, he has performed as a soloist at venues throughout the United States and Mexico. These include the New Music America, Miami, and Houston Festivals, the International Festival of New Music at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Mexico City's New Music International Festival, Boston's Berklee College of Music, Chicago's Links Hall, Berkeley's Maybeck Recital Hall and Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut. In Los Angeles, he has performed in concerts presented by the Monday Evening Concerts, FaultLines, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Wires, the Alligator Lounge's New Music Mondays, and more. Walker has also broadcast live performances for Pacifica and National Public Radio.

Walker is a member of both the California E.A.R. Unit, recognized as one of today's premiere contemporary chamber ensembles, and Ghost Duo, an improvisation duo with composer/electric guitarist Michael Jon Fink. He performs and records regularly with Art Jarvinen's Some Over History and the Gong Farmers. Walker's playing can be heard on several labels, including Advance Recordings, O. O. Discs, Cold Blue Records, Raptoria Caam, Grenadilla Records, Bare Bones Records, Tzadik, and Rastascan Records.

Marty Walker holds degrees from the California Institute of the Arts and the University of Redlands, with additional study at the Vienna Academy of Music and Michigan State University. He has been active in community arts organizations and spent twelve years as a college-level faculty member, teaching clarinet and courses that explore music's role and function within society.

Wadada Leo Smith (b 1941) is a trumpet player, multi-instrumentalist, composer and improviser who received his formal musical education from his father, as well as the U.S. Military band program, Sherwood School of Music, and Wesleyan University. He taught at the University of New Haven and Bard College. He was the first holder of the Dizzy Gillespie Chair at the California Institute of the Arts, where he has been a director of the African American improvisational music program since 1998. Smith has received grants and awards from Meet the Composer, New York Foundation on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts and others. His Nda-Kulture ensemble has performed most of his music since 1970; however, his compositions also have been performed by many other contemporary music ensembles, including the Kronos Quartet, the Da Capo Chamber Players, and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

Michael Jon Fink (b 1954) has had his instrumental and electronic music performed at concerts and festivals throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. His works appear on Contagion, Cold Blue, Trance Port and Raptoria Caam labels. He has composed concertos for soprano saxophone, bass clarinet, violin and cello, as well as incidental music for two plays of William Butler Yeats. For nearly twenty years, Fink has served on the music faculty at California Institute of the Arts, teaching composition, orchestration, and analysis. A former member of such experimental new music groups as The Negative Band, Musica Veneris Nocturnus and Stillife, he currently performs on electric guitar with Marty Walker as Ghost Duo.

Bernardo Feldman (b 1955) has a catalogue of works that include music for chamber and symphonic groups, as well as compositions involving the use of computers to combine and process electronic and acoustic sounds. His music has been performed throughout the United States, Mexico, Brazil, several European countries, and Israel by some of the major ensembles specializing in contemporary music. Feldman has been the recipient of awards from the University of California, Meet the Composer, and ASCAP. He is a former president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States and was a faculty member at the California Institute of the Arts until 1989. He is currently director of the music department at College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, California.

Barney Childs (1926–2000) was a prolific composer. His works explored diverse avenues of musical thought, and were built loosely upon influences from within and outside the Western art-music tradition, especially jazz of all styles. He was particularly noted for his innovative and influential scores in which indeterminacy and improvisation sat side-by-side with traditional structures and notation. Childs earned

degrees in English from the University of Nevada, Oxford University (which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar), and Stanford University. As a composer, he was largely self-taught until the early 1950s, when he studied at Tanglewood with Aaron Copland and Carlos Chavez and in New York with Elliott Carter. Childs taught English and music at the University of Arizona, Deep Springs College, the Wisconsin College Conservatory, the University of Redlands and Goldsmith College at the University of London. He was the author of numerous scholarly articles affirming his musical and aesthetic views, an editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, and the co-editor of the book *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*. In the '60s and '70s, he ran Advance Recordings, a record company that championed the music of composers such as Richard Maxfield and Harold Budd. Childs' compositions include symphonies, concertos, wind quintets, brass quintets, string quartets, choral works, songs, chamber pieces for unusual groupings of instruments and solo works (often written specifically for such new music virtuosos as Bertram Turetzky and Phillip Rehfeldt).

Arthur Jarvinen (b 1956) is well-known as a new music performer, composer and a physical poet, and has been featured on concerts and festivals throughout the U.S. and abroad for two decades. He was a founding member of the California E.A.R. Unit and is a member of the percussion trio The Antenna Repairmen, as well as his own ensemble, Some Over History. Jarvinen was educated at Ohio University and the California Institute of the Arts. He is currently on the composition faculty of the California Institute of the Arts. He has received commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Fromm Foundation, and the American Composers Forum, among others.

Shaun Naidoo (b 1962) has written extensively for cabaret, musical theater and modern dance in South Africa, where was commissioned by the major dance companies and his music has received critical acclaim. His music has been performed throughout the United States. Naidoo has received a Fulbright Fellowship, grants from Meet the Composer, the Halsey Stevens Composition Prize and numerous academic honors and awards. He holds a doctor of musical arts degree in composition from the University of Southern California School of Music and is currently assistant professor of music theory at the Chapman University School of Music. He is artistic co-director of the FaultLines Contemporary Music Series.

Jim Fox (b 1953) is a Los Angeles-based composer whose instrumental and electro-acoustic music has been commissioned and performed by chamber groups and soloists throughout the U.S. He also has scored feature films. His music, which has been described by critics as both "austere" and "sensuous," has been recorded on the Advance, Cold Blue, Grenadilla, Raptoria Caam and Citadel labels and published in such new-music anthologies as *Soundings* and *Scores*. In the early 1980s, he founded and directed Cold Blue Records, a West Coast new-music label. In addition to his musical activities, Fox is the co-publisher and principal editor of Silman-James Press.

Production Notes

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Recording/editing: Scott Vance

Mastering: Joe Gastwirt, OceanView Digital Mastering

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