



GREGORY HALL
COMPOSITIONAL
IMPROVISATIONS
FROM THE MYSTERIA, VOL I



Composer/Improviser **GREGORY HALL** (b. 1959) holds degrees from the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with composer Ned Rorem. His written works are featured on a number of commercial albums, and he performs his compositional improvisations live twice weekly in the online virtual world Second Life, and in a variety of real-world venues.

"I am a composer of contemporary classical music who has always improvised 'in my style,' both in support of my written work, and more recently as an independent form of creative expression. I call these 'compositional improvisations' to distinguish them from 'classical improvisations,' which are often performed using older styles of classical music. I have actively performed my compositional improvisations for the piano in front of live audiences in the online world Second Life since March 2009. As a compositional improviser, I have participated in the 2010 Back Cove Contemporary Music Festival (Portland), the 2010 and 2011 Yarmouth Contemporary Music Festivals (Yarmouth), as well as an ongoing concert series at the Meetinghouse Concert Hall (Wells), 2010-2011; Harvest on the Harbor, October 2011; and numerous Maine/New Hampshire venues."

In 1991 Hall received a commission for the *Hardanger Trio* from the Maine Music Teachers National Association. Mr. Hall was selected as the "Maine Composer of the

Year" in 1997 by the Gamper Festival of Contemporary Music, Brunswick ME. *Arkadia*, commissioned in 2000 by the Arcady Chamber Orchestra, Bar Harbor ME, received several performances at various venues in Maine. He appeared as guest and subject of the July 8, 2000 Kalvos and Damien New Music Bazaar radio show entitled "Basic Instinct," Mr. Hall's *Water: 2 Poems of W.S. Merwin for Soprano and Orchestra* appears in Vol. 15 of ERMMedia's *Masterworks of the New Era* series. Navona Records released his *Variations on Ongiara* on the album HARMONIOUS DISSONANCE, and his *Quartet* for saxophones was released on Ravello Records CRS Recordings will release his solo work *Halling* in 2013.

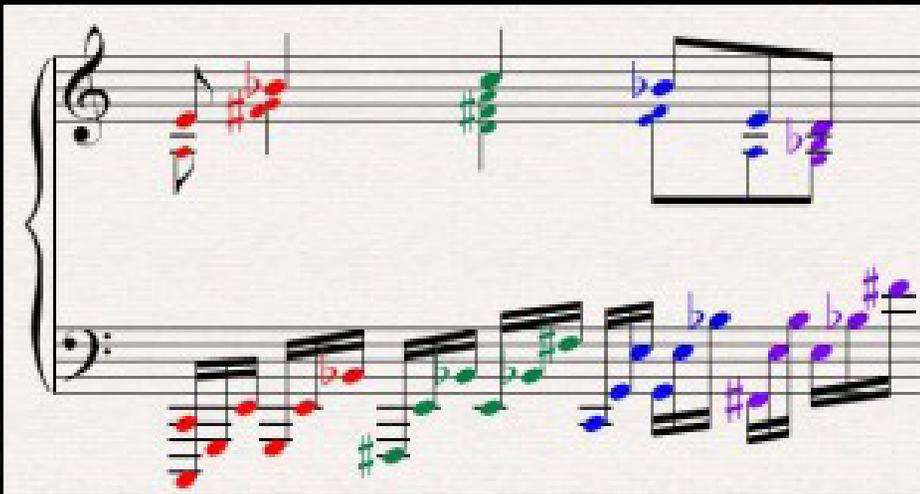
He has composed nearly 40 works for varied ensembles. He has participated in concerts by the ACA; Society of Composers, Inc; Maine Arts, Gamper Festival; The Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States; Ought-One Festival, and in numerous concerts of the Maine Composers Forum. His MAX algorithm *21st Century Baroque* for computer and sampling device(s) appeared on the MAX list CD-ROM.

Hall's works have been reviewed several times in the *New Music Connoisseur*, and in the *New York Times* as well as the *Portland (Maine) Press-Herald*. He currently reviews albums for the Contemporary Record Society (CRS) *Society News Magazine*.

Hall is listed in Marquis' *Who's Who in America* and Marquis' *Who's Who in the World*.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

About five years ago I decided to create musical templates which would assist me in what I call “compositional improvisation.” The reason for this – as is the case with many classical performers and composers – is that I was born a sight-reader rather than a by-ear player of music. Throughout my career I have wanted to improvise as freely as those lucky individuals who can sit down and play/improvise using their ear alone. Thus were born my “compositional improvisation templates”:



Selections from a “compositional improvisation” template.



These two images show the same motive with different harmonizations and accompaniment textures. Unlike standard written music, these templates utilize a “mix and match” system of randomization rather than a linear “read” format. The templates take advantage of many

of the latest discoveries in what in contemporary musical theory is referred to as “set theory.” The advantage of using these templates is that improvisation may be done as a kind of randomized sight reading.



My live performance “avatar” in the online world Second Life. Photo courtesy of Sheri Solomon.

Performing live weekly concerts for the past three years in the online world Second Life has been a unique experience. Where else in the “real world” can a musician perform weekly for a live audience without worrying about distracting background noise, have the ability to share instant messages with an audience, and with both audience and performer in their respective homes? In this context creation of new music becomes such a constant that one almost forgets about the need for a medium to convey one’s musical message to a wider audience; i.e., recordings. Thus, I hope this album will showcase the best of what I have done so far in my live Second Life performances, and may lead the listener to discover the world of my live online performances, available not only in Second Life but easily on the web.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCES

Since these tracks are all improvisations realized in their entirety live, I will describe the motives and melodies involved rather than the process of creation, which was an instantaneous experience at the time. My true job in collecting these tracks was to winnow through literally hundreds of performances to find the right “instantaneous creations.”

Reflets dans le soleil (February 24, 2011)

The title refers to one of the melodies used, “*Sunset Water*”, which opens the improvisation.

Sunset Water was an art song of mine for voice and chamber ensemble composed in 1996 (revised for orchestra in 2005), and recorded on ERMMedia's "Masterworks of the New Era, Vol. 15" (ERM5999).

Introduction to "The Mysteria" (April 9, 2011)

The motive for this improvisation is based on my *Dream Tune*, a melody specifically written for my improvisation templates. The minute-long passage beginning around 8' 30" is perhaps the definitive music so far for *The Mysteria*.

Thouros and Phosphoros (February 3, 2012)

Motives taken from an unfinished stage work based on the writings of Ovid. One of the great things about compositional improvisation is that the composer may also use unfinished or orphan melodies in improvisation, so nothing goes to waste.

Mabou (April 11, 2011)

The motive here is taken from my solo violin work *Clayton Run-Around*, inspired by the sight of kittens running around Clayton Farm, Mabou, Nova Scotia. Mabou is also at the heart of the legendary Cape Breton fiddle tradition; a visit to a local Ceilidh was sufficient to inspire the melody of the work.

Appledore (February 24, 2011)

Appledore Island, a member of the Isles of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire,

is perhaps best known as the home of the nineteenth-century poet Celia Thaxter. Her poem "Foreboding" was set to music by me in 1993, and the main melody of that song figures prominently in this improvisation.

Symbolist Minimal (August 16, 2011)

Motives taken from a work of mine for flute, viola and harp, this improvisation was directly inspired by one of my Second Life listeners (Katharine Anderson-Dávila), and it is to her credit that the track appears on the album.

Apotheosis (2009)

A short live studio recording of mine based on another theme composed for one of my improvisational templates.



Artwork by Karen Norteman

- 1 Reflects dans le soleil.....13:20
(February 24, 2011)
- 2 Introduction to "The Mysteria"..... 11:54
(April 9, 2011)
- 3 Thouros and Phosphoros..... 12:43
(February 3, 2012)
- 4 Mabou..... 8:21
(April 11, 2011)
- 5 Appledore..... 11:51
(February 24, 2011)
- 6 Symbolist Minimal..... 11:37
(August 16, 2011)
- 7 Apotheosis..... 1:59
(2009)

Gregory Hall, piano

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