



Richard
FESTINGER

Diary of a Journey

The Coming of Age

Laws of Motion

A Dream Foretold

**New York
New Music
Ensemble**



Richard Festinger (b. 1948)

Diary of a Journey • The Coming of Age • Laws of Motion • A Dream Foretold



There is a Shaker expression, "every force evolves a form," that comes vividly to mind when listening to the music of Richard Festinger. The four works gathered here, written from 2001 to 2006, are each quintessential examples of his approach to composition. Festinger develops powerful generative ideas, examines their implications, and finds avenues for their inherent musical architecture and expressive possibilities to be revealed.

The composer's personal and artistic roots are in Northern California. He grew up in Palo Alto and studied composition at UC Berkeley with Andrew Imbrie, joining an important Bay Area musical lineage. The fine detail and expressive clarity found in his teacher's music are echoed in Festinger's own, very different body of work.

Festinger also has roots in jazz. After a sojourn to Boston's Berklee College of Music, he returned to the Bay Area to work as a jazz guitarist and bandleader before turning to composition full time. His concert works do not often contain overt reference to jazz, but they share some key characteristics – propulsive motion, harmonic richness, and complex interplay in which each ensemble member adds a distinct and vital contribution.

For three decades, Festinger has played an important role in the Bay Area's musical community. He founded the San Francisco contemporary music group Earplay in 1984 and has been Professor of Music Composition at San Francisco State University since 1990, while composing prolifically for the area's circle of contemporary music ensembles and many other musicians.

Festinger's music has been heard nationally in venues such as Tanglewood and Merkin Concert Hall, and at festivals in North America and Europe. Commissions and awards have come from the

Koussevitzky Foundation, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and many others. One important artistic partner has been the New York New Music Ensemble, which, with soprano Jo Ellen Miller and several other guest artists, provided the virtuosic, beautifully shaped performances on this recording.

Diary of a Journey, for clarinet, violin, viola, cello, vibraphone and glockenspiel, and piano, was written for Louis Karchin and the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, which premiered it in 2003. The composer marks the opening "magical," and there is a sense of portent in the sparse and evocative introductory music. String tremolos and trills and rising and falling clarinet and cello figures emerge and then come to rest, but do not resolve. Across a broad sonic canvas, a series of motives appears – dark, heavy chords, broad and unpredictable arpeggios, yearning clarinet lines. The musical space tightens as these gestures start to encounter each other with more frequency, until the piano and metallic percussion form a collective sonority, heightening both tension and momentum with rapid, sharply chiseled passages. After these dramatic changes in mood and style, the work nears its end, while the journey's forward motion and stillness, its uncertainty and exhilaration linger. As the quiet opening music returns and then dies out, there is a sense that as the metaphorical journey comes full circle, it has brought about a deep transformation.

The Coming of Age is a song cycle on four poems by American writer Denis Johnson, for soprano and a sextet of winds, strings, and piano. The artists met in 1984 when Festinger was in residence at the MacDowell Colony, a frequent home for his creative work, and Johnson was the Frost Poet at the annual Frost Place Festival and Conference in Franconia, NH. The work was commissioned by the Mary Flagler Cary Trust and premiered by the Group for Contemporary Music and soprano Amy Burton in the Guggenheim Museum's Works and Process series in May 2003.

The poems' images and feelings are precise and intimate, with the poet contemplating love, and a beloved, through a prism of heightened perceptions. *Upon Waking* begins with a delicate mix of string harmonics and wind tremolos, then gives way to more fully articulated sounds, prefacing the text's transition from night to morning. As light reaches a lover's face and brings an awareness in waking, it is the piano's more complex music that answers. The opening textures reappear and fade, as if the world of the poem had occurred in a single moment. A restrained, then increasingly active setting gives a home to the second poem. The vocal line first ascends stepwise and then broadens, capturing the poem's unfolding from the dry land of its title to the lush language of the final stanza. A pair of sudden vocal flourishes marks the poem's closing leap to an ecstatic, life-filled image. The third movement functions as a kind of scherzo, with the poetic change from a still, quiet tone to one of speed and motion. Festinger responds to the "ninety miles an hour" images with dashing piano lines and powerful rhythms. Widely arching vocal lines heighten the effect while a switch to bass clarinet adds a rougher texture. The score instructs the players to swing, and a bebop-styled piano mixes interjecting chords and virtuosic solo lines before its figures are taken up by the other players with even greater sweep. In the cycle's title poem, Johnson contemplates a paired destiny, from the present through the remainder of life. The setting is fittingly spare, giving a broad space to the voice. A striking moment occurs as the poet starts to consider togetherness until death, when a duet emerges between a moody alto flute and clarinet, encircling and considering, perhaps questioning each other. One last time, the delicate string and wind textures that opened the cycle return to gently end the piece.

Laws of Motion, for flute, clarinet, viola, cello and piano, again saw much of its genesis take place at MacDowell, and was completed at the Liguria Study Center in Bogliasco, Italy. It is dedicated to cellist Thalia Moore, a leading light in the Bay Area new music scene, and the Empyrean Ensemble. The cello is at the center of

the conversation, and succeeding encounters with the other instruments reveal new aspects of its persona, from wildly kinetic to mournful. An energetic introduction by the other instruments paves the way for the cello to join the viola in a slow, dark duet. A series of more animated passages finds the cello leading a rotating array of players through a mix of pointillistic textures and surging rhythms. An electric mood gradually takes hold of the full ensemble and brings a stretch of complex counterpoint, before a slower, soulful passage leads the cello to a gently rising line, saying a quiet goodbye.

A Dream Foretold was written for and dedicated to the New York New Music Ensemble, which premiered it at the 2001 Sonic Boom Festival at New York's Knitting Factory. The music begins with an eloquent solo cello, tracing short paths that rapidly alter course but ultimately reach a sustained topmost note, while the piano condenses the cello's pitches into enigmatic chords. This gesture of ascending to a summit along an unpredictable route appears at many points and in many variations, bringing both unity and surprise. The flute and clarinet soon take on larger roles, leading to a masterful stretch of counterpoint in which the parts seem both competing and interdependent. At several points the players trade a long series of trills, interrupting each other with rising tension, before bursting back into expansive lines that dovetail toward a soft, ambiguous conclusion. In the second movement, the piano is relieved of its contemplative role, and instead drives the music's perpetual motion. In a deft bit of orchestration, the other instruments grab bits and pieces of the piano lines, adding emphasis to key moments, and then take the lead with their own fuller parts. Despite the intense pace, there is a subtler touch at work, so that the driving rhythms do not demand volume and force. Instead, a carefully shaped series of phrases builds inexorably to a final chord, leaving a continued sense of anticipation even as the work concludes.

Ben Frandzel

New York New Music Ensemble



Since its inception in 1976 the New York New Music Ensemble has received the highest international praise and acclaim for its commissions, performances, and recordings of the American music of our time. The ensemble is sought after by composers and audiences in search of thoughtful, passionate and communicative performances. They have commissioned and given premières of over 130 new works by the most outstanding composers in the United States. Their musical interests span the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, encompassing established masterworks, the works of emerging composers, and music involving electronics, interactivity, graphics, theater, and extended instrumental techniques.

Margaret Kampmeier



Pianist Margaret Kampmeier enjoys a varied career as a soloist, collaborative artist and educator. A founding member of the Naumburg award-winning New Millennium Ensemble, she performs regularly with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. She has appeared with the Kronos Quartet, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Sherman Chamber Ensemble, Saratoga Chamber Players, Peter Schickele and many new music ensembles. Margaret Kampmeier teaches at Princeton University and Manhattan School of Music.

Sunghae Anna Lim



A native of Honolulu, Hawaii, violinist Sunghae Anna Lim has performed throughout the United States, Europe and Asia in her many capacities as chamber musician, soloist and orchestral player. She is a founding member of the Laurel Piano Trio, praised by *The New York Times* for their "lustrous tone and unerring interpretive intelligence". A keen advocate for new music, she is the violinist of the New Millennium Ensemble, winner of the 1995 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. She received a B.A. from Harvard University and completed her *Diplom* at the Mozarteum in Salzburg as a student of Sándor Végh. She currently teaches violin at Princeton University.

Lois Martin



The violist Lois Martin is originally from York, Penna. After graduating from the Eastman School of Music, she moved to New York for graduate studies at The Juilliard School. She is a founding member of the Atlantic String Quartet, which is dedicated to the performance of newly written compositions. Her continuing commitment to contemporary music includes performances with the Group for Contemporary Music, the ISCM Chamber Players, the Ensemble Sospeso, Ensemble 21, the New York New Music Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the Composers' Guild, the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Composers Forum and Steve Reich and Musicians. Currently, she is Principal Violist for the Stamford Symphony, OK Mozart Festival and The Little Orchestra Society, and is a member of the Orchestra of St. Luke's. She is also on the faculty of the Composers Conference at Wellesley College and has taught at Princeton University.

Throughout her career, she has recorded more than sixty chamber music pieces in many different genres including the GRAMMY® Award winning CD *Wide Angels*, with Michael Brecker.

Jo Ellen Miller



Photo: Mark Bradley Miller

Soprano Jo Ellen Miller is a versatile performer known for her “lovely, rounded tone” (*The New York Times*) in her work as an interpreter of contemporary works. She has worked as soloist with James Levine and the Met Chamber Ensemble and with Pierre Boulez and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She has sung extensive amounts of music at Tanglewood, Ravinia, the Library of Congress, and with the Boston Pops, East Coast Contemporary Ensemble, and League of Composers, and has collaborated with such composers as Charles Wuorinen, Ulrich Kreppein, Louis Karchin, and Matthias Pintscher. She is featured on the albums *Stillness and Change*, featuring music by John Aylward (Albany Records), and *Sumeida’s Song*, an opera by Mohammed Fairouz (Bridge Records).

The Coming of Age

Poems by Denis Johnson (b. 1949)

② Upon Waking

at the far edge of earth, night
is going away. another
poem begins. slumped over

the typewriter i must get this
exactly, i want to make it
clear this morning that your

face, as it opens
from its shadow, is more
perfect than yesterday; and

that the light, as it
hesitates over the approach
of your smile, has given this

aching bed more than warmth,
more than poems; someday

a generous rose, or a very
delicate arrangement of sounds,
has come to peace in this new room.

③ The Dry Dry Land. Here

the dry dry land. here
and there from the
rasp and muscle of its flatness
a tree gushes forth. i

have seen trees, have
heard them at night being
dragged into the sky.
i know they are very
real. i know they know.

lover, i am not
a tree, you would
never mistake me
for one, my arid movements

for its flowing coolness. but
sometimes in the dark silken
air of this room

i feel that we are
a liquid jumble of trees
falling interminably away from
the land, its dry infinitude.

Harvey Sollberger



Photo: Jan Boland

Harvey Sollberger is a composer, conductor and flutist whose work is represented on over 160 commercial recordings. He has given first performances of music by Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Mario Davidovsky, Donald Martino, Roger Reynolds and Charles Wuorinen, and has conducted first American performances of music by Morton Feldman, York Holler, Jean-Claude Risset and Iannis Xenakis. He was a co-founder of the Group for Contemporary Music in 1962, and subsequently led new music ensembles at the Manhattan School of Music, Indiana University and the University of California, San Diego. He was, as well, Music Director of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus from 1998 to 2005 where he achieved acclaim for his performances of Mahler, Bruckner, Berlioz, Sibelius and Stravinsky, as well as for premières of many new works.

4 Poem

Loving you is every bit as fine
as coming over a hill into the sun
at ninety miles an hour darling when
it's dawn and you can hear the stars unlocking
themselves from the designs of God beneath
the disintegrating orchestra of my black
Chevrolet. The radio clings to an un-
identified station – somewhere a tango suffers,
and the dance floor burns around two lovers
whom nothing can touch – no, not even death!
Oh! the acceleration with which my heart does proceed,
reaching like stars almost but never quite
of light the speed of light the speed of light.

Laws of Motion and Diary of a Journey were recorded
on 24th and 25th September, 2006, at the American
Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

Produced, engineered and edited by Judith Sherman

The Coming of Age was recorded on 17th and 18th April,
2012, at the American Academy of Arts and Letters
in New York.

Produced, engineered and edited by Judith Sherman.

A Dream Foretold was recorded on 9th June, 2002,
in Studio C at SUNY Purchase, New York.

Produced, engineered and edited by Adam Abeshouse.

Publisher: Wildcat Canyon Press

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5 The Coming of Age

Outside the spring
afternoon
is occurring, my love,
just as our voices
are going home from us
to the plains, and the shapes
of ourselves, as we impose
them on this one, prepare
to blend with other
afternoons, possibly in
this very room
as tiny dusts uplifted
in the bands of sunlight,
or in other still chambers.
I don't want you to be afraid
as we stand here losing
our lives, unable to speak,
soon to enter the dream
of once having touched
this portion, that smoothness
of flesh now buried dead
and having heard the lovely
tones ascending on a voice
merely speaking; there is
the chance there will be
the singing of the voiceless,
unraveling into the unenclosed
emptiness a silence
drawn taut so
slowly its
high music encounters
us before
it begins, and we are dancing.

"The Dry Dry Land. Here", "Upon Waking", "The Coming of Age" and "Poem"
are all published in *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations
Millennium General Assembly: Poems Collected and New*, by Denis
Johnson, HarperCollins Publishers, NY. Reproduced with permission.

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(b. 1948)

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|---|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Diary of a Journey (2003) | 11:03 |
| | The Coming of Age (2003) | 24:36 |
| 2 | Upon Waking | 5:12 |
| 3 | The Dry Dry Land. Here | 5:56 |
| 4 | Poem | 4:52 |
| 5 | The Coming of Age | 8:36 |
| 6 | Laws of Motion (2004) | 14:14 |
| | A Dream Foretold (2001) | 16:18 |
| 7 | Moderato | 10:46 |
| 8 | Allegro scherzando | 5:33 |

New York New Music Ensemble

James Baker, Percussion 1
Christopher Finckel, Cello 1-8
Stephen Gosling, Piano 1 6-8
Jean Kopperud, Clarinet 1-8
Linda Quan, Violin 1
Jayn Rosenfeld, Flute 2-8
Jeffrey Milarsky, Conductor 1 6

Jo Ellen Miller, Soprano 2-5
Sunghae Anna Lim, Violin 2-5
Lois Martin, Viola 1-6
Margaret Kampmeier, Piano 2-5
Harvey Sollberger, Conductor 2-5

Full recording and publishing details can be found inside the booklet. The sung texts can be found inside the booklet, and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/559399.htm
Booklet notes: Ben Frandzel • Cover: stereohype (iStockphoto.com)



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Richard Festinger has long been an essential part of Northern California Bay Area musical life, his works described as having a “combination of propulsive energy with an impeccable sense of poise and balance” (*Tanglewood Contemporary Music Festival*). Each of the works on this recording is a quintessential example of his approach to composition. *Diary of a Journey* is a metaphorical circle described in exhilarating forward motion and uncertain stillness. *The Coming of Age* reflects Denis Johnson’s poetry in its intimate precision, and wildly kinetic and mournful personas of the cello are at the center of *Laws of Motion*. *A Dream Foretold* is a rich tapestry of enigmatic eloquence, masterful counterpoint and constant surprise.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
66:13