

Entering the 21st Century with Kitty Brazelton

In the quest to discover the music of the 21st century, a great place to start is this recording of five works by Kitty Brazelton, even though all of them were composed in the final years of the 20th century. But just as historians frequently state that the 20th century really only began in earnest with the onslaught of the First World War, it also ended earlier than expected with the fizzling out of the Cold War and the subsequent emergence of a world where nothing seems so certain anymore. And just as the music of the 20th century reflected the geopolitics of



the 20th century with all its competing -isms attempting to overthrow previous notions of how order could be established, the music at the dawn of the 21st century is a borderless powder keg.

In true schizoid fashion, this music can appear in many guises as it does in the five works by Kitty Brazelton featured on this disc which range from an experimental duo for the unlikely combination of cello and alto sax, to a multi-movement suite for a standard classical brass quintet, which is ultimately unlike anything else in the brass quintet literature.

Brazelton composed *Come Spring!* for the Manhattan Brass Quintet in 1996 after MBQ hornist Greg Evans, while subbing in Brazelton's *Dadadah*, asked her what her "serious" music was like. In response she

created a work that somehow blends ingredients from Morton Feldman, James Brown, Howard Hanson, Miles Davis, Janis Joplin and even Elliott Carter into a sound world entirely her own.

In Brazelton's description of the "riff-centric" first movement, *Dogwood Petals & Hormones*, she ponders: "Why doesn't the rock world recognize a wall of brass is as hormonal as a Marshall stack?" "*Dogwood Petals & Hormones*" is an exuberant challenge to that question featuring the brass instruments in contours that run the gamut from psychedelic trip-out harmonic ambiguity to heavy metal unison blaring.

The "groove-centric" tri-partite second movement, *Miles Through an Open Window*, begins with an intense extended-technique French horn solo called "what you think you might be hearing," which Brazelton, in characteristic polyglot fashion, describes as a "funk haiku" in the score. It leads directly into "when you were sure it WAS what you heard" in which short polyrhythmic bursts from the other four brass players come across as a West African tuned drum ensemble against the wailing of the horn, which Brazelton in the score, requests to sound like a "snare drum." In the concluding section, "hearing it again later in your mind," the horn and tuba are actually literally transformed into percussion instruments: the players are instructed to quietly tap their nails on the resonant part of their instruments' bells.

The "voice-centric" third movement *Harmonic Fable*, which is also tri-partite, merges a bebop-like riff with a majestic contrapuntal setting of the Gregorian hymn "Pange Lingua." Lest we become misled by this sudden incursion of medieval spirituality, Brazelton, a self-described "21st-century infidel," labels the three inner sections "animism," "the rise of the church" and "we shoot the moon and return to our keen animal state."

Brazelton describes the "party-centric" final movement, *First Second Seder at the Knitting Factory* as "a rave-up in the truly punky attitude of NYC." The title is a reference to the Manhattan alternative music club originally located on Houston Street, between SoHo and the East Village. In 1994-96, club owner Michael Dorf threw annual "Second Seder" feasts for the musician community who helped tear down the walls that divided various genres of music throughout the 20th century. The movement combines jazz-like improvisation with strictly notated polyrhythms culminating in a euphoric group scream (MBQ's idea).

- excerpted from a larger article by **Frank J. Oteri**; a New York-based composer and the editor of *NewMusicBox*, the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award-winning Web magazine from the American Music Center. Read the whole article at <http://www.sequenza21.com/041502.html>