

Paul Lansky

Conversation Pieces

- 1- **For the Moment** 12:20
- 2- **Chords** 10:54
- 3- **Now That You Mention It** 10:43
- 4- **Same Scene, Nine Years Later** 11:13
- 5- **Andalusia** 10:17
- 6- **Shadows** 7:11

Total Playing Time 63:06

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Conversation Pieces is a collection of works loosely joined by the idea of musical journeys to new places in the company of familiar friends. Relatively unaltered piano sounds, the rhythms and contours of casual conversation, some straightforward string and orchestral sounds, and a generally uncomplicated harmonic language accompany us into realms where, with the help of the computer, musical ways of speaking and understanding combine in unusual patterns.

In another sense the pieces all attempt to look at these familiar things from new vantage points, using a novel perch to gain a fresh perspective on things we may have come to take for granted. In a way it's like squinting your eyes tightly to get a multifaceted, jewel-like image of light, or imagining familiar shapes among the clouds. In some of these pieces we 'squint' our ears to imagine music talking, or is it talking music...

Finally, all of these pieces are specifically composed, designed and conceived for recording: they will either live or die on record, not in performance. A measure of their success in this respect is in the extent to which they remain lively on repeated hearings. I leave the verdict to my listeners.

Three of the pieces are based on a recording of a conversation I had with my wife Hannah MacKay on January 19, 1997.

For the Moment maps the flow and shape of our conversation into the lightning-fast fingers of a virtual pianist, who uses it to cook up a brew of sustained and rapid piano notes atop a bed of string sounds. The title is actually a listening suggestion: concentrate on the small details. Imagine yourself zooming in on the minutiae of a large abstract painting, for example, noticing figurative shapes — in this case tunes — made from the details. Zoom out, however, and they're gone.

Chords is made with a virtual orchestra of strings, oboes, trumpets and flutes which play nothing but a series of rich chords for ten minutes. Any impression that this is an attempt to emulate the luxurious sound of a large orchestra is entirely justified.

Now That You Mention It again calls on the pianist to interpret our conversation, but this time in a more chordal, almost Keith Jarrett-like style. This piece also models a conversation more literally. It can be heard to characterize two speakers, one of whom always talks in A flat major, while the second argues and replies using other chords in the key of A flat. This second speaker is finally convinced by the end, however, and comes around to A flat, making sure to insert a few G flats (which are not in the A flat scale) to maintain some pride in the face of such persuasive argument. Or, it can just be heard as a talkative piano piece.

Same Scene, Nine Years Later is a processing of our actual conversation, and we can be distantly heard beneath the surface while a complex and detailed texture is generated by the conversational contours. The title refers to my piece *Smalltalk* (New Albion NA 030CD), written in 1988. I wanted to see what would happen, given nine years of composing as well as development of computer software and hardware, were I to write a piece using the same initial conditions. (We sat in the same seats in the same room, in fact, and talked about some of the same things.) As in *Smalltalk* the piece attempts to distill the spirit and emotion of the conversation while masking its sense. The results, however, are quite different.

Andalusia, is dedicated to Juan Navarro Baldeweg, the distinguished Spanish architect and painter, who designed the new music building at Princeton University, completed in 1997. In this piece a real pianist (the composer, aided *a bit* by the computer) improvises around, and alternates with, a distant processing of an old Andalusian folk song.

Finally, **Shadows** is a quiet celebration and contemplation of the resonance of single piano notes as they are extended by voices, strings, and bowed piano sounds. One can forget what a wonderfully rich sound a single note on a piano can be.

Technical notes: All the pieces were created using a Silicon Graphics workstation during 1997-98. More extensive (even gory) details, including all the software used, can be gleaned from my web page, www.music.princeton.edu/~paul.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Dan Trueman and Virgil Moorefield for their sharp ears, Steve Mackey, for his moveable ones, and of course Hannah, for her voice, once again.

Graphics: The images on the front, inside and back of the CD are computer-processed photographs of the rehearsal room, skylight, and stairway of the new Woolworth Center of Musical Studies at Princeton University, designed by Juan Navarro Baldeweg. I and my colleagues in the Music Department worked with this distinguished architect and his associates over a period of four or five years to design and build a new addition to the Woolworth Center at Princeton. It was a wonderful experience, we are thrilled with the results, and I learned that architecture *is* like music, in more ways than one could imagine.

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Executive Producers: David and Becky Starobin

Cover Art: Paul Lansky

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Other recordings of music by Paul Lansky

Things She Carried: Bridge Records, CD 9076.

Folk Images: Bridge Records, CD 9060, *Strut, TenderLadies, Delia, Ash Grove, Hammer, Barbara, Allen, Howl, Pine Ridge, Wayfaring Stranger, Pretty Polly, Blue Wine, Motherless Child.*

More Than Idle Chatter: Bridge Records, CD 9050, *Idle Chatter, Word Color, just_more_idle_chatter, The Lesson, Notjustmoreidlechatter, Memory Pages.*

Fantasies and Tableaux: CRI, CD 683, *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion, Still Time.*

Homebrew: Bridge Records, CD 9035, *Table's Clear, Night Traffic, Now and Then, Quakerbridge, The Sound of Two Hands.*

Smalltalk: New Albion Records, NA030CD, *Smalltalk, Guy's Harp, Late August, Not So Heavy Metal.*

in collections

Dancetracks: (guitar and computer), with Steve Mackey, Bridge Records 9065,

Lost and Found.

Hop: (marimba and violin): Marimolin BMG/Catalyst 62667-2, **Combo Platter.**

Stroll: (chamber ensemble and computer), Centaur CRC 2213 **Composer in the Computer Age- III.**

As If: (string trio and computer), Centaur CRC 2110, **Virtuoso in the Computer Age-I.**

Wasting: (With Brad Garton and Andy Milburn) Centaur CRC 2076, **Inner Voices.**

As it grew dark: Wergo 2031-2 **Computer Music Currents**, vol.11.

