



**BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH**

(b. 1943)

**1 - 4 Four Miniatures (1965) (7:10)**

*Flute and Piano*

I (0:57)

II (2:08)

III (2:27)

IV (1:38)

**5 Cassandra's Dream Song (1970) (9:39)**

*Solo Flute*

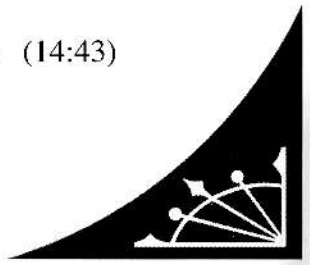
**6 - 8 Unity Capsule (1975-1976) (14:43)**

*Solo Flute*

I (3:41)

II (5:05)

III (5:57)



**9 Superscriptio (1981) (5:32)**

*Solo Piccolo*

**10 Carceri d'Invenzione IIb (1984) (11:07)**

*Solo Flute*

**11 Mnemosyne (1986) (10:49)**


*Solo Bass Flute &*

*Eight Accompanying Bass Flutes*

Kolbeinn Bjarnason, piccolo, flute, bass flute

Valgerður Andrésdóttir, piano

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# BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH MUSIC FOR FLUTE

notes by Úlfar Ingi Haraldsson

The music of Brian Ferneyhough is one of the extreme exemplifications of complex musical thought. It has a close connection with the articulate total serialism of the late 50's and 60's, which provided the point of departure for developing a profoundly personal approach. The connection resides less in the use of related compositional techniques than in a contemplative examination of the multidimensional implications of the musical language of particular 'successful' serial works.

Ferneyhough's music is composed with a high regard for the microscopic detail which results in a musical notation that seems at first insurmountable for most performers. The music seems to explode on the written page and leave the performer with mostly nervous questions about how to approach the learning of the work. It demands an extended period of preparation from a dedicated performer where gradually he must find his way through a labyrinth of interpretational possibilities and constantly evaluate the priorities within the musical texture. The music tends to become an examination of an instrument's inner essence and therefore is very specific to a particular instrument. At times, seemingly going beyond what might be considered as humanly possible, these complex scores nevertheless bring forth a musical language that is absolutely unique with regard to nuance and energy.



The sheer intensity and rapidity of the musical experience frequently leaves the listener with a feeling of the musical ideas escaping the attention by constant metamorphosis within a highly stratified musical texture. This is perhaps similar to being repeatedly made to catch up with the discourse and giving the sensation of being behind which intentionally serves to energize the sonic flow. Nevertheless, the musical gestures have a close resemblance to gestural conventions familiar from other contexts, which merely have become unfamiliar due to the speed of unfolding, informational density, and extreme demands on the performer's technique and concentration.

The music presents a supreme challenge to the way we listen to music, as one must attend to the minute details while relating them to several concurrent strata within the larger structure. Ferneyhough's attitude is "to suggest to the ear sequential bundles of possible paths through the labyrinth...to create one's own insights when immersed in the complex ambiguity of the art object." Correspondingly the music becomes perhaps one of the most honest reflections on our current epoch and at the same time a critique of the current socio-economic norms surrounding the world of contemporary music.

The *Four Miniatures* from 1965 is the first work in the composer's catalog. It is composed under a considerable influence from the early non-tonal pieces of Anton Webern, whom Ferneyhough has cited as one of his primary influences at an early stage. Ferneyhough's concerns were at the time in his own words, "...exploring species of discourse in which overall form and detailed, moment-to-moment invention could be uniquely brought together." The work is fairly informal with regard to the overall structure with all the more attention given to articulation of various local elements and strategies and their coherent employment.



*Cassandra's Dream Song* from 1970 contains two different musical structures converging to form a blend of fixed and open form. Six parts with musical material centered around the tone "A" are performed in a fixed order but intersected by five other parts which order is chosen by the performer. The work demonstrates a continuing occupation with the relation between musical notation and performance. Here the complex notation becomes a vehicle for defining the quality of sound with the aim of realizing "the written specifications in practice which is designed to produce the desired (but unnotatable) sound quality." Therefore it is a deviation from the role we usually assign to notation and presents a perspective where the musical results are consciously being made to transcend the manner of writing.

*Unity Capsule* is a further exploration of concepts related to *Cassandra*. It was composed during the period 1975-1976 and is the most virtuosic of all Ferneyhough's solo flute pieces. The traditional tricks and trade of the instrument do not define the virtuosity but rather, it is embedded in the compositional process where multiple strata emerge from out of the limitations of the instrument. The overall form consists of three non-separate main parts (marked here by a distinct track number) that are further divided into a number of strategically significant subsections. Each main part represents a different degree of emphasis in the progressive transformation of the materials from an extended silence in the very beginning towards a maximum density in the final part. The aim is unification of form, material and idiomatic articulative qualities, where the unique sonic world of the flute becomes defined by its outer extremes. As a result, performances of the work are bound to become very personal or performer specific due to the confrontation of several distinct and independent layers of activity



acting as a labyrinth of interpretational possibilities. The approach to the instrument is very physical where it becomes a "theatrical space for the disposition of actions" creating a notion of polyphony between the visible degree of difficulty and actual performative complexity. The work, therefore, might be best described as a sort of ultimate polyphonic music for a solo instrument.

The final three works on this disc are a part or related to the composer's *Carceri d'Invenzione* (Dungeons of Invention) cycle composed during the period 1981-86. It consists of seven compositions for solo instruments with or without a chamber orchestra, and chamber ensembles of various sizes. The cycle in whole is inspired from a series of etchings by the Roman architect and artist, Piranesi, which struck the composer as a "masterly deployment of layering and perspective which gave rise to the impression of extraordinary immediacy and almost physical impact." *Superscriptio* for a solo piccolo flute is the first work in the cycle. It focuses around the idea of borders and boundaries evoked by the high sound of the piccolo. It almost seems to reflect beyond these borders which fade in and out of view. One of the most unique aspects of this work is the deployment of a rhythmic concept that makes the metric organization operate as a trigger for variable velocities. From moment to moment, one experiences clicking back and forth between different speeds which seem both to define the cycle of individual materials and cause the sort of physical impact and/or friction associated with the Piranesi etchings. *Carceri d'Invenzione IIb* is from 1984-85 and it is the solo version of the primary *Carceri d'Invenzione IIa* for solo flute and chamber orchestra. The IIb version is not an integral part of the cycle although obviously related. The solo part was in fact composed in its entirety before determining the orchestral material and consists of "rigorously pre-determined



modular patterns” which are cyclically permuted.

The music is characterized by an exposition of material in the extreme upper and lower registers which gradually gravitate towards a detailed elaboration around central A and F#. Through the latter half of the piece the texture gradually resumes its former variety and registral richness by the overlapping of cycles leading to a *quasi una cadenza*, exploiting the full articulatory capacity of the instrument. The work seems to provide an excellent analogy to the role of perspective in the Piranesi etchings, drawing the observer towards a center “while forcibly thrust away along centrifugal rays of absolutely non-naturalistic, mutually conflicting lines of force.”

*Mnemosyne* for bass flute and prerecorded 8-track tape dates from 1986. With its title referring to the Greek goddess of memory, this work reflects on harmonic patterns relating to previous pieces from the cycle. Although it is still based on similar interaction of rhythmic materials as in the earlier pieces, its pace is considerably slower, making it more harmonically explicit. The tape part does not function on an equal level to that of the soloist. Rather, it acts as a “backdrop” serving to re-introduce harmonic ideas and to provide central pitches, around which the soloist weaves intervallic chains.



Icelandic flute virtuoso **Kolbeinn Bjarnason** worked closely with composer Brian Ferneyhough on the production of these recordings, gaining the composer’s approval for these remarkable performances. Bjarnason has appeared as a soloist in Japan, the USA, Mexico and throughout Europe, and frequently performs with the CAPUT ensemble, a group he has been the co-artistic director of since its founding in 1987. Among his recordings are a CD of flute solos by Lavista, Huber, Sollberger, Ferneyhough, Hallgrímsson, and Haukson (Audiart-Italy/Japis-Iceland, 1995); and *Music for Flute and Harpsichord* by Leifur Thorarínsson (Badtaste 1999).

Kolbeinn Bjarnason was educated at the University of Iceland, where he studied philosophy and literature. Bjarnason’s received a degree in flute performance from the Reykjavík College of Music in 1979 and then went on to study with the Austrian flutist, Manuela Wiesler. Other prominent flute players that Bjarnason studied with include Kyoshi Kasai, Robert Aitken, Julius Baker, Robert Dick and Harvey Sollberger.

**Valgerður Andrésdóttir** has given numerous concerts in Iceland and abroad, and is active as a chamber musician and vocal accompanist. She is the pianist of the CAPUT Ensemble and of the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Andrésdóttir studied piano at the Reykjavík College of Music, completing her soloists examination in 1985. She continued her studies with Georg Sava in Berlin, and received a diploma from the Hochschule der Kunste in 1992.



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