



CHINARY UNG

(B. 1942)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS

- 1) **Child Song** (1985) [15:42]
Patricia Spencer, flute
David Bowlin, violin
André Emelianoff, cello
Blair McMillen, piano
- 2) **Luminous Spirals** (1997) [11:06]
Patricia Spencer, flute
William Anderson, guitar
André Emelianoff, cello
- 3) **Spiral VI** (1992) [10:24]
Meighan Stoops, clarinet
David Bowlin, violin
André Emelianoff, cello
Blair McMillen, piano

- 4) ...still life after death (1996) [8:45]
Lucy Shelton, soprano
Patricia Spencer, flute and alto flute
Meighan Stoops, clarinet
David Bowlin, violin and bass chanting at end
André Emelianoff, cello
Blair McMillen, piano
Pablo Rieppi, percussion

- 5) Oracle (2004) [14:24]
Patricia Spencer, flute, piccolo and alto flute
Meighan Stoops, clarinet and bass clarinet
David Bowlin, violin
André Emelianoff, cello
Tom Kolor, percussion
Steven Schick, percussion
Michael Adelson, conductor
Written for the Da Capo Chamber Players with funding from
the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

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Total Time: 61:00

CHINARYUNG is widely recognized for his special ability to draw together materials, concepts, and sounds from East and West in a music that appears wholly organic despite its disparate components. Although born in Cambodia, Ung developed his compositional voice—his creative *fingerprint*, as he terms it—as an American, living in the United States since the mid-1960s.

Unique voices come from unique circumstances, it seems, and Ung's is one of the more unusual stories among the cadre of contemporary composers. Arriving in the U.S. with a quite limited background in Western classical music, Ung took to his studies with alacrity, earning degrees in music from the Manhattan School of Music and Columbia University. These studies were extended both by virtue of his heightened interest in learning the craft of the West and as a consequence of the Cambodian holocaust, which prevented his return to his homeland. When the dimensions of that country's devastation became clear, Ung shifted his attention toward reconnecting with Eastern traditional practices, training on the *roneat-ek* (the Cambodian xylophone), and learning about instrumental techniques and musical traditions from a range of Asian cultures. Ung's work with Cambodian music reflects a sense of obligation to preserve traditions that were under direct assault from the Khmer Rouge, but his capacity to open his ears to other cultures is evidence of a wide-ranging curiosity.

The works presented on this disc were composed over a twenty-year period—virtually the entire span of Chinary Ung's mature compositional career. Although there have been distinct shifts in Ung's compositional interests over the years, his musical language has been remarkably consistent. Composed in 1985, *Child Song* is the earliest work presented here. It occupies an important place in the composer's oeuvre, for it is with this piece that Ung emerged fully from a self-imposed period

of creative silence that had seen him compose just one work since 1974. Composing receded into the background when Ung's work to preserve Cambodian musical culture became the priority. The work's title has two references: it was written as Ung's wife, Susan, was pregnant with their first child, and it contains a transcription of a song Ung remembered from his own childhood in rural Cambodia. The song itself is a Cambodian analog of "pat-a-cake" insofar as it accompanies a clapping game. The innocence of this moment in the piece, where dance-like unison rhythms prevail, comes in sharp contrast to the meditative expressive domain that dominates the piece. There is uncertainty and questioning—even foreboding—surrounding the moments of youthful ebullience, as if the composer were considering not only his child's future, but the futures of those with whom he had played clapping games as a child. How many of them had been extinguished?

The inclusion of actual folk materials from Cambodia (or elsewhere) is a rare occurrence in Ung's music, but the normative musical language of the piece—featuring modal scalar materials and instrumental behaviors that luxuriate in timbral shadings—is found throughout the composer's works. Indeed, Ung incorporated some fragments from *Child Song* into the orchestral work *Inner Voices*, which won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in 1989. *Inner Voices* would bring the composer tremendous acclaim, but his chamber works show remarkable ingenuity, producing a myriad of interesting sonic events using an economy of means.

The *Spiral* series consists mostly of chamber works and forms a sort of backbone to his compositional career. It was begun in 1987, and by virtue of the composer's continued fascination with the basic concept of the spiral (in which return is essential, but exact overlap never occurs) new works have appeared regularly, including an installment in 2008. There are two ideas that figure strongly in the *Spirals* works, one

melodic, one formal. Ung's melodies often consist of a few notes of a modal scale that are accented with elaborate, expressive figuration. In this regard, the spiral approach is an animating device that imbues a core idea with nuance and dimension. As a formal practice, fragments of musical materials have the tendency to reappear, where they are subject to reinterpretation. In a broader sense, Ung's capacity to derive new areas of interest from the spiral concept has allowed the series to extend outward to include instrumentation ranging from a solo viola to a full orchestra. *Luminous Spirals* has a wind part that can be played on *shakubachi*, the traditional bamboo flute from Japan. Even played on a western flute (as it is on this recording) there are certain behaviors and sounds that evoke the *shakubachi*. This is typical of Ung's approach to instrumental writing, where a 'cello might "become" an Indian *saranghi* or a guitar might become a *koto* (as it seems to only at the end of *Luminous Spirals*). Elsewhere—such as in *Spiral VI*—the entire ensemble resembles a gamelan, particularly with its layers of simultaneously unfolding lines based around a single melodic idea. Remarkably, these instrumental and textural chimeras arrive seamlessly—testament to the unifying force of Ung's aesthetic.

The disparate sources of Ung's sound world, while proliferant, are not incorporated for their surface charms; rather, they are linked by deeper spiritual considerations born out of long study of Buddhist practices. While this spiritual dimension is somewhat hidden in the works discussed previously, it appears in plain view in the remaining works on this recording. Consider ...*still life after death*, a work of stunning dramatic impact despite its modest duration. After the soprano recites the provocative title (sometimes spelling out its syllables, perhaps suggesting the dissolution of an earthly existence) the piece invokes a Buddhist funeral rite described in the so-called "Tibetan Book of the Dead" in which lamas chant over a dying person in order to guide the spirit to the next plane of existence. For the main

dramatic arc of the work Ung elaborates a series of intense musical phrases, as if to animate the fleeting memories of a waning life. The vocal part consists mainly of syllables of Pāli and Khmer origin, chosen as much for their sound as for meaning. On occasion, lines from the *Dhammapada* (from the Pāli Canon) appear intact. The “lifetime in an instant” conceit leads to highly concentrated phrasing interspersed with moments of repose, as if to draw out every bit of energy from a particular idea, no matter how agonizing. Somewhat audaciously, the work ends with a low voice chanting, which is repeated by the soprano. The cycle repeats two more times, with the soprano’s voice becoming weaker and more affected each time.

Oracle is a dramatic work that refers to the state oracle of Tibet, Nechung, who counsels the Dalai Lama. In his autobiography, the Dalai Lama describes his encounters with Nechung at the crucial moments prior to his escape from the Chinese authorities and his exile to India. During these encounters, Nechung goes into a trance-like state and is inhabited by the oracle—an ancient and powerful spirit. The process, as the Dalai Lama describes, is dramatic and frightening—Nechung stops breathing for some time, then begins to hiss. His eyes bulge and he is suddenly swelled in size as the spirit possesses him. All the while, he wears a heavy costume and a giant, ornamental helmet weighing upwards of thirty pounds that amplifies his grand movements. The Dalai Lama mentions being afraid that Nechung might snap his neck as he manipulated the great helmet in what appeared to be precarious positions.

This fantastic spectacle is the inspiration behind *Oracle*, in which Ung deploys a stunning display of musical creativity. All of the instrumental techniques heard in the other works featured on this recording are employed in *Oracle* as well, but they are augmented by the use of the performer’s voices. The musicians sing, hum, chant,

whistle, and shout, often while simultaneously playing their instruments. Thus, the music makes extraordinary demands of the performers as it takes them far outside of conventional instrumental practices. From Ung’s perspective, however, this approach reaches back toward an ancient music prior to the development of modern instruments and the necessity for specialization. This holistic view is perhaps a fantasy, at least in the sense that the performers here are required to execute highly refined behaviors on their instruments. Still, by employing the voices of people whose voices are not trained professionally, the composer emphasizes their humanity, their connection to one another and to the listeners, making the experience strangely intimate despite its intensely dramatic expressive world.

When Chinary Ung invokes the term *musical fingerprint* to describe a composer’s identifying characteristics it is not merely a synonym for “style.” Style is a fairly clumsy word, and is often misused in order to categorize an artist’s work, grouping it with that of other, presumably like-minded artists. A fingerprint is both inherent to the individual and it is something made—deposited as an impression of one’s actions. A composer’s musical fingerprint is comprised in part of a collection of sonic predilections, but also of the ideas that animate the music itself. When one considers a fingerprint, one doesn’t dwell on the object itself but rather on the multidimensional being that produced it.

Ung returned to Cambodia in 2002 for his first visit since leaving forty years before. In the process of reconnecting with his homeland he was faced with the problem of how to make an artistic statement that might mean something to the Cambodian people, who had little or no exposure to western classical music, and none to recently composed music. It was apparent to him that part of his project should be to “bring together the village and the concert hall,” where neither dimension is

cheated of its inherent richness but is allowed to combine with the other in order to illustrate a broader, more complete musical vision. To some extent, he has managed to engage in this project throughout his career, but *Oracle* (and the works that followed) represents a new level of achievement in this regard that makes one wonder what the next steps may bring.

—Adam Greene

ADAM GREENE is a composer living in San Diego. He holds degrees in music composition from the University of California, San Diego (Ph.D.) and the New England Conservatory of Music (M.M.).

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS

“Superb...gripping”
—The New York Times

SINCE 1970, the Naumburg Award-winning, internationally acclaimed Da Capo Chamber Players has built a reputation on working closely with composers, representing an enormous spectrum of compositional styles. Da Capo's five distinguished artists bring years of creative insight, involvement and artistic leadership to performances of today's repertoire, including well over 100 works written especially for the group.

Da Capo searches for the best new compositions and gives them a unique and dedicated attention, resulting in acclaimed performances consistent with the highest musical standards found in performances of traditional repertoire. Further, the group is committed to bringing American music to a variety of cultures, and conversely, presenting music from all over the world to American audiences.

From Da Capo's beginning, with founding member and pianist Joan Tower, interaction with composers has been part of its identity. Recent concerts have included music of Richard Teitelbaum, Benjamin Broening, Anna Clyne, Lydia Ayers, Judith Shatin, Hans Tutschku, Caroline Mallonée, Daniel Wohl, Raymond Lustig, Missy Mazzoli, David Laganella, Judd Greenstein, Paul Salerni, Louis Karchin, Mario Davidovsky, Chinary Ung, Sebastian Currier and Christopher Rouse. In January 2009, the group celebrated the 100th birthday of Elliott Carter with a performance of his *Tempo e tempi*, and on the same concert, a 100th birthday salute to Olivier



photo © Peter Schaar

Messiaen with his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. The 2010–2011 season, marking the group's 40th anniversary, will include a world premiere by George Tsontakis and the New York premiere of Shirish Korde's chamber opera, *Bandit Queen*.

Da Capo's members are André Emelianoff (cello), Curtis Macomber (violin), Blair McMillen (piano), Patricia Spencer (flute), and Meighan Stoops (clarinet). David Bowlin, heard on this recording, was violinist with the group from 2003–07. Da Capo has twice been featured at Moscow Autumn and St. Petersburg Sound Ways festivals, combining American works with seven by Russian composers (six written for Da Capo) and a signature work, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. For more than two decades, the group has been in residence at Bard College, and since 2006 has been Ensemble in Residence with the composition program of the Bard College Conservatory of Music.

Cellist **ANDRÉ EMELIANOFF** has toured throughout North America, Japan, Russia, Austria, and England, and as an American Ambassador for the Arts, sponsored by the United States Information Agency, given recitals throughout central Asia and the Mediterranean. Cellist with the Da Capo Chamber Players since 1976, he has also been involved with the Music Today Ensemble. Winner of a 1985 NEA Solo Recitalist Award, he has commissioned works by Aaron Kernis, Joan Tower, George Perle, Richard Wernick, Shulamit Ran, Stephen Jaffe, and Gerald Levinson. He has appeared as a guest artist with the Houston Da Camera, New Jersey Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Albany Symphony, and participated in the Marlboro, Chamber Music West, and Piccolo Spoleto Festivals. Mr. Emelianoff is on the faculty of The Juilliard School, as well as the Round Top (Texas) Festival and the Perlman Music Program. He has recorded for CRI, Opus One, New World Records, Nonesuch, GM Recordings,

RCA, Bridge Records, and Pro Arte. In 1997, Mr. Emelianoff made his Salzburg Festival debut in chamber music of Shostakovich.

BLAIR McMILLEN has established himself as one of the most sought-after and versatile pianists today. Comfortable as both performer and improviser, his solo repertoire runs the gamut, from late-medieval keyboard manuscripts to challenging scores from the 21st century. He has performed at Carnegie Hall, Miller Theatre, (Le) Poisson Rouge, Aspen Music Festival, Caramoor, Bard Summerscape, CalArts, the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), and Bargemusic, and as soloist with the American Symphony Orchestra and the Albany Symphony. His 2004 recording, *Soundings*, received wide critical acclaim, and more recent solo projects have included *Powerhouse Pianists* (Lumiere), *The Concert Music of Fred Hersch* (Naxos), and *Multiplicities: Born in '38* (Centaur).

Dedicated to groundbreaking projects, McMillen is intensely committed to commissioning and performing the music of today. In addition to Da Capo, he plays regularly with the American Modern Ensemble, the downtown NYC-based Avian Orchestra, the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, and the Locrian Chamber Players, among others. An active educator, a self-taught jazz pianist, and a fledgling electric guitar novice, McMillen serves on the piano and chamber music faculty at Bard College.

Historic career peaks for flutist **PATRICIA SPENCER** include premieres of Elliott Carter's *Enchanted Preludes*, Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kathinkas Gesang* (US premiere), Harvey Sollberger's *Riding the Wind*, and Shulamit Ran's concerto, *Voices*. In August 2009 she gave the world premiere of Shirish Korde's *Lalit*, written for her and renowned tabla player Samir Chatterjee. Other career highlights

include the Boulez *Sonatine* for the Bard Music Festival, Joan Tower's *Flute Concerto* for the National Flute Association Convention in Nashville, and a guest appearance with the Avalon String Quartet in Mario Davidovsky's *Quartetto* for the Washington Square Music Society. Recent New York Times reviews have cited her work in Tania León's *Alma*, and her "passionate, warm-blooded performance" of the Berio *Sequenza*. Spencer has commissioned dozens of pieces, including Thea Musgrave's now-classic *Narcissus* and Judith Shatin's *Kairos* (Neuma Records). Ms. Spencer has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music. She teaches flute and chamber music at Bard College and Hofstra University.

Clarinetist **MEIGHAN STOOPS** has distinguished herself in the classical and new-music realms as a solo, chamber, and orchestral performer. Recent highlights include: Ligeti's Chamber Concerto with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the premiere of Gunther Schuller's *Three Little Expressions* (Homage to Brahms), and a Switzerland tour with the Glass Farm Ensemble. Recent New York Times reviews praised her "vibrant, richly shaded" solo performance of Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms No. 12*, her "star turn" in Joan Tower's *Wings*, and her "impressive agility and a supple sound" in Schuller's *Three Little Expressions*. She has recorded for Bridge, CRI, Naxos, Albany, and Chesky Records, including music for some of the country's most cutting-edge films. A founding member of the American Modern Ensemble and Walden School Players, Stoops has also appeared with the Gotham Sinfonietta, Wet Ink, Talea Ensemble and Washington Square Chamber Music Society. Ms. Stoops teaches clarinet and piano privately and at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. She holds degrees from Northwestern and Yale, and is pursuing her doctorate at SUNY Stony Brook.

Conductor **MICHAEL ADELSON** made his first appearance with a major American orchestra in 1992 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has served on the conducting staff of the New York Philharmonic and has also led the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, among others. Equally at home with opera, Mr. Adelson has conducted Scandinavian productions of *Turandot*, *La Bohème*, *Der Schauspieldirektor*, and in Stockholm, the world premiere production of Qu Xiao-Song's *Oedipus*. He also assisted Esa-Pekka Salonen for Messiaen's *St. François d'Assise* at the Salzburg Festival. Deeply committed to music of our time, Mr. Adelson has worked with composers such as Pierre Boulez, Bernard Rands, Harrison Birtwistle, Magnus Lindberg and Donald Martino. He is conductor of Boston's Auros Group for New Music, in addition to frequent guest appearances with many other new music groups. Michael Adelson studied at the New England Conservatory, the Mannes College of Music, and graduated summa cum laude from Jorma Panula's conducting class at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki.

Guitarist/composer **WILLIAM ANDERSON** began performing chamber music at Tanglewood at age 19, and now performs in festivals across Europe, the United States, Latin America and Asia. Most recently, he appeared with the Great Mountains Music Festival in Korea. Based in New York, Anderson has performed with the MET Chamber Ensemble under James Levine, and appears regularly with many groups including the Cygnus Ensemble, which he founded in 1985, along with the New York Philharmonic, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Speculum Musicae, and the Da Capo Chamber Players. A recent New York Times review described his playing as "electrifying." Anderson has recorded for many labels including Sound-

spells, CRI, Furious Artisans, Koch, Albany, Bridge Records, and Open Space. His compositions have been performed throughout the world and have been broadcast on Danish National Radio, Radio Bremen (Germany) and WNYC. From 1993 through 2003 he was a member of the Theater Chamber Players in Washington, DC. Anderson currently teaches guitar at Sarah Lawrence College and Queens College.

Violinist **DAVID BOWLIN** is an accomplished performer of a broad range of repertoire both old and new. Among his performances are dozens of premieres, including the 2007 Weill Hall world premiere of *Mahagoni*, a violin concerto written for him by Austrian composer Alexandra Karastoyanova-Hermentin. Accolades include first prize in violin at the 2003 Washington International Competition and the 2007 Samuel Baron Prize from Stony Brook University. In addition to his tenure with the Da Capo Chamber Players, Bowlin is a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), which is based in both Chicago and New York. Chamber music credits include performances and recordings with Fred Sherry and other members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Musicians from Marlboro, and recordings for the Naxos, Bridge, New Albany, New Focus, and ArsIs labels. In 2007 David was appointed Assistant Professor of Violin at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he performs with the Oberlin Trio. He is also artistic director of Chamber Music Quad-Cities, an organization based in Illinois and Iowa.

Percussionist **TOM KOLOR** specializes in 20th and 21st-century music, and holds degrees from William Paterson University and The Juilliard School. He is currently Assistant Professor at the University at Buffalo (SUNY). As a chamber musician, Mr. Kolor is a member of Talujon Percussion, Manhattan Sinfonietta,

Ensemble 21, Ensemble Sospeso, American Modern Ensemble, Newband, and New Jersey Percussion Ensemble. He is a frequent guest of many groups including the New York New Music Ensemble, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum Musicae, Continuum, Da Capo Chamber Players, Group for Contemporary Music, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. As a soloist, Kolor has given dozens of premieres by such composers as Milton Babbitt, John Zorn, Wayne Peterson, Tania León, and Jerome Kitzke. He has recorded for many labels including Bridge, New World, Albany, Capstone, Innova, Wergo, Naxos, CRI, Koch, RCA Classics, Tzadik, and North/South Consonance.

After a recent performance The Houston Chronicle wrote, "PABLO RIEPPI sparked a lot of buzz at intermission with his ability... he was rock solid no matter what position he had to contort into to play." A native of Uruguay, Pablo lives and works in New York, where he performs a wide range of music with some of the world's leading artists and ensembles. He can be heard with the New York Philharmonic, the New York City Ballet Orchestra and on Broadway in West Side Story as well as the Metropolitan Opera, American Symphony Orchestra, New York City Opera, Gotham Symphony Orchestra, Speculum Musicae, New York New Music Ensemble, DaCapo Chamber Players and Perspectives Ensemble. He is a member of the internationally acclaimed multimedia collective VisionIntoArt, the Grammy®-nominated Absolute Ensemble, Manhattan Sinfonietta, Naked Ramp Love and the Jon Colman Group. Pablo has a Masters degree and Professional Studies Certificate from The Juilliard School, and a Bachelors degree from George Mason University. He teaches at SUNY Purchase College Conservatory of Music, The Juilliard School's Pre-College Division, and at Columbia University where he also directs the percussion ensemble. His book *Snare Drum Technique: Essential Basics for Daily Practice* is now available through Bachovic Publications. For more information visit: www.pablorieppi.com.

For the past thirty years, STEVEN SCHICK has championed contemporary percussion music as a performer and teacher, by commissioning and premiering over one hundred new works. Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego, where in 2008 he received the Distinguished Teaching Award, and a Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. From 1992–2002 he was the percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, and from 2000 to 2004 served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland. Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group, "red fish blue fish," which released a 3-CD set of the complete percussion music of Iannis Xenakis in 2006. That same year his book, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams*, was published by the University of Rochester Press, and in 2007 Schick became Music Director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus. Working with composer Paul Drescher and writer/director Rinde Eckert, Schick has recently created an evening-length solo theater work called "Schick Machine."

Winner of two Walter W. Naumburg Awards—for chamber music and solo singing—American soprano LUCY SHELTON is an internationally recognized exponent of 20th and 21st-century repertory. She has worked closely with some of the most important composers of our time including Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, György Kurtág, Kaija Saariaho, Oliver Knussen and Charles Wuorinen, many of whom have written expressly for her. Ms. Shelton has premiered more than 100 works, and her discography includes over 50 recordings for Nonesuch, Deutsche Grammophon, Koch International, NMC, Bridge, BIS, Albany and Innova. A quintessential collaborative artist, she has appeared with nearly all of the major orchestras in the United States and Europe, and with her vast repertoire she is a frequent guest at the world's most prominent festivals such as Tangle-

wood, Ojai, Santa Fe, Aspen, Salzburg, Kuhmo, Aldeburgh and the BBC Proms. Ms. Shelton has taught at the Eastman School, New England Conservatory, and Cleveland Institute, and is currently the voice faculty for Manhattan School of Music's Contemporary Performance Program. Her primary mentor was the legendary American mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani.

For more information: www.dacapochamberplayers.org

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Assistant engineer: Andy Ryder
Executive Producers: Becky and David Starobin
Design: Paige Freeman Hoover

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... still life after death and *Child Song*
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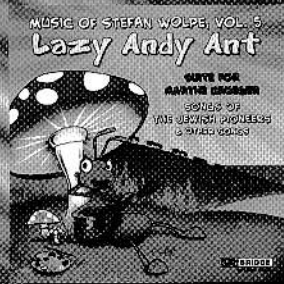
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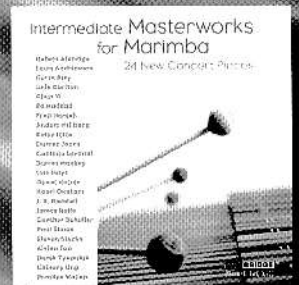
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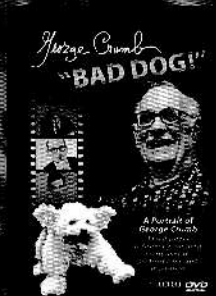
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