

MACHINATIONS

For Timpani, Chimes, Xylophone, Glockenspiel,
Organ, Eb Flute, Ceramic Flute, Double Ocarina,
Double Flageolet and Harp

All instruments played by the composer

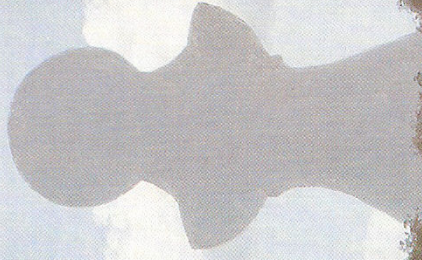
This is an example of Henry Brant's "instant composing." The plan and detailed action of the piece were predetermined before the recording sessions, but in very compressed verbal and schematic form, without recourse to musical notation. Brant then made four separate recordings, one for each channel, performing all the parts himself via planned improvisation. The four tracks were later compressed into two, to make a disk recording possible; combining timpani, chimes, glockenspiel and xylophone on to one track; and organ, double ocarina, double flageolet, Eb flute, ceramic flute and harp on the other. Some of the textures were subsequently altered via variable speed, *but there is no electronic sound used.*

The composer describes MACHINATIONS as a sort of last warning from the natural world to the human species — a kind of organizational underground meeting of animate and inanimate objects.

Henry Brant

■ KINGDOM COME
■ MACHINATIONS

OAKLAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
GERHARD SAMUEL, CONDUCTOR
OAKLAND YOUTH ORCHESTRA
ROBERT HUGHES, CONDUCTOR



HENRY BRANT

Henry Brant's catalogue comprises over 75 performed works, of which a large portion are, in one way or another, innovative in character. In 1921, at the age of eight, he organized a backyard "orchestra" of home-made instruments to play the first of these experimental pieces. Since then he has continued his explorations with each new work, ignoring current trends while frequently taking a pioneer role, always the practical musician seeking a new expressive potential in actual sound itself, uninvolved in theoretical schemes or musical dogma.

A characteristic fondness for both burlesque and street idiom appears as early as 1931 in his *Music for a Five and Dime Store* (for honky-tonk piano, clarinet and kitchen hardware). A continuing impulse to form complete families of single instrumental tone qualities finds its first elaborate expression in *Angels and Devils* (1932), a flute concerto with an accompaniment of three piccolos, two alto flutes and five C-flutes. This was a "sleeper" for twenty years and is now a much-performed best-seller. In the same year *Variations in Oblique Harmony* was performed and published; here he designated no instrumentation at all, explored flexible textures adaptable to many instrumentations, and ventured into a system of consistently delayed and staggered chordal resolutions which produced the effect of continuous polyphonic dissonance although based on triadic progressions. In *Faithful Portraits of the Marx Brothers* (1938), Brant pays homage to these comic heroes in a tone-poem and introduces the tin whistle as a solo instrument.

The Depression of the 1930's, the Second World War period and the immediate postwar years found him engaged in a busy and varied professional musical life, in the course of which he acquired a much-in-demand expertise in orchestration and conducting which was to serve him well in the practical organization and performance of his later larger works. During this period he continued his instrumental studies and performing activities, developing substantial solo skills on pianoforte, harpsichord, organ, flute and percussion (he was the first to play Harry Partch's 43-toned to the octave "chromelodion" in public in New York City, he appeared as pianist in programs devoted entirely to songs by Charles Ives, and he conducted the orchestral music of his Vermont neighbor, Carl Ruggles, including the first Vermont performance of his *Suntreater*).

Henry Brant's works of the 1940's, such as his *Clarinet Concerto with Jazz Orchestra*, *Saxophone Concerto*, *Symphony in B Flat* and *Dedication in Memory of a Great Man (for FDR)*, take their places among early American efforts to introduce jazz and other popular materials into concert music.

A trail-blazing work of 1951 in his *Origins*, suggested by Rachel Carson's book "The Sea Around Us," This is a four movement symphony of intricately polyphonic texture scored for

complete families of all the percussion of definite pitch, plus an additional group of percussion of indefinite pitch, sixty instruments in all. Brant's *Antiphony One*, for five separated and independent orchestral groups was first performed in 1953 and its priority over European orchestral works involving spatial arrangements is well established. His *December* (1954) was the first American work to win the Premio Radiotelevisione Italiana, and the first contemporary multi-spatial work to be performed in Carnegie Hall, New York City. Its introduction of controlled multi-polyphonic choral improvisation predates later European uses of this device.

Millennium 2 (1954) surrounds the audience on three sides with an unbroken wall of brass and percussion, and introduces cumulative 20-voice jazz linear heterophony pitted against a controlled 6-voice polyphony. In *Grand Universal Circus* (1956), contrasted dramatic situations, each based on a different creation myth with its own independent musical setting, are simultaneously enacted in widely separated locations in the theatre. In *Concerto with Lights* (1961), a small (audible) orchestra occupies the stage while another ensemble of musicians, working light switches from musical notations, project visual images on the ceiling in exact but silent rhythms contrasted to those sounding from the stage.

In *Voyage Four* (1963), the entire wall space of the hall is occupied by banks of instruments, as is the area under the orchestra floor, producing at times an almost total directional immersion of the hearer in sound. *Consort for True Violins* (1963) is written for a "family octet" of newly built violin-type instruments in a consistently graduated gamut of 8 sizes and tunings, which carried out a design concept which Brant had speculated on and experimented with for many years. *Windjammer* (1969) is a study in continuous sound-travel for live performers; a separate, fixed and required walking route, utilizing the entire hall, is prescribed for each player.

Henry Brant divides his time between composing commitments in New York City and the teaching of composition, orchestration and conducting at Bennington College, in Vermont, where he has conducted first performances of new American works every year since 1957.

"By 1950 I had come to feel that single-style music, no matter how experimental or full of variety, could no longer evoke the new stresses, layered insanities and multi-directional assaults of contemporary life on the spirit. Perhaps if the music itself were many-layered, multi-directional and hammered together out of irreconcilable elements, it could speak more expressively of the human predicament. This straightforward solution presented itself: Pit against each other, two (preferably more) entirely different kinds of music — a combination, say, as heterogeneous as something suggesting a Dixieland band versus a Balinese gamelan orchestra versus a military cortege. But it seemed that, if all this sounded from the same location (as I found out by trying), the result would surely be an indigestible holy mess, and if the attempt were made to notate all the contrasted rhythms involved, within a single common meter, the visual complexity and playing difficulty would be, from my standpoint, torturous; (I had always believ-

ed in idiomatic instrumental writing, comfortable and natural for the players, irrespective of the frequent oddness of the sounds produced).

“After numerous experiments with space, distance, direction and their effect (in live music) on harmony, polyphony and timbre, I arrived at the following *modus operandi* which has guided all my subsequent works:

1. Each piece comprises at least two (again, preferably more) distinct ensemble groups, each of which keeps to its own style, highly contrasted to the styles of the other groups, and retains its own rhythmic, harmonic and instrumental scheme consistently throughout. There is no interchange of style or material from group to group.
2. The ensembles must be dispersed to specific locations throughout the hall (not merely upon the stage) and must be widely separated from each other. My spatial plans are never optional or small-distanced, they are mandatory and the distance must be the maximum possible.
3. Each ensemble, although in itself rhythmically exact throughout, may, where an elaborate but natural-sounding complexity is desirable, be directed to perform in ‘non-co-ordinated rhythm’ (in partial or complete rhythmic independence of the other separated participating groups).
4. On occasion, in particular textures, I use controlled improvisation or what I call ‘instant composing.’ Here, tone-quality, range, dynamics, articulation and rhythmic character, (but not pitch) are specified in such detail that the same passage may be repeated in subsequent performances with substantially the same results. One advantage here over conventionally notated music is in the greater spontaneous caprice and individual complexity of material quickly available, and in the instant playability of technically difficult passages.

All these devices are anything but ‘aleatoric,’ indeed we are speaking of 1951 when the word was scarcely known. The element of chance, even in my most complicated spatial pieces of large instrumentation, is essentially not much greater than in an average classical work. These devices are to be distinguished also from the *collage* techniques introduced in the late 1960’s: designs in my work are fixed, ideas are presented in complete rather than fragmentary statements, and the street-music of quasi-ethnic elements are abstractions and not literal quotes. My objective throughout has been to produce complex impingements of details in multi-textures, without giving up overall control of rhythmic and vertical combinations.

For me, spatial amalgams of highly contrasted musical events, freely associated yet controlled, present opportunities for representing in the concert hall, musical equivalents of the incessant bombardment of social and environmental catastrophes which bedevil daily existence.”

KINGDOM COME

For Two Orchestras and Organ
Oakland Symphony Orchestra; Gerhard Samuel, conductor
Oakland Youth Orchestra; Robert Hughes, conductor
Henry Brant, organ

KINGDOM COME was recorded with a subsidy from the Ford Foundation Recording Publication Program. Additional grants were contributed by the Oakland Symphony Orchestra and by Bennington College.

The work is scored for two separated orchestras, one on stage and the other in the balcony. To obtain maximum identification, each orchestra was recorded by itself at a separate session, and the two recordings were later joined in such a way that one orchestra alone is heard from each speaker. For optimum results, the composer recommends separating the two speakers as widely as possible, and situating them at raised levels, the “balcony” speaker (circus music) placed somewhat higher than the other. In the concert room, the stage orchestra and the balcony orchestra are substantially equal in volume, neither predominating, and if necessary, playback controls should be adjusted to obtain this balance.

The composer’s description follows:

“The stage orchestra, of normal symphonic proportions, plays at a strident forte throughout, in its highest-tension registers, and expresses its anxieties in long, frenzied phrases. It celebrates life in the human pressure cooker. The instrumentation of the balcony orchestra resembles that of a circus band and includes slide clarinets, slide trumpets, slide whistles, sirens, klaxons, buzzers, electric bells, ratchets, air-compressors and a soprano who impersonates a psychotic Valkyrie. Its idioms may sometimes suggest the bashed-up ruins of rusty calliopes still screeching; at other times a kind of computerized purgatory, all wires crossed, circuits blown to Kingdom Come, still grinding out the answers to its mispunched program. The two orchestras engage in violent dialogues leading to head-on collisions. The organ cadenza in the middle of the work, an improvisatory soap-box statement over a fixed balcony accompaniment of goading character, can stand for the successful struggle of one of the constricted souls to break out of his individual bag. The action then resumes as before, culminating in a final array of smash-ups which leaves the contradictory premises of the piece unreconciled.”

KINGDOM COME was commissioned by the Oakland (California) Youth Orchestra, Robert Hughes, Music Director. This group is sponsored by the Oakland Symphony Orchestra. The first performances, in which both organizations participated with the composer as organ soloist, took place in the Oakland Theatre Auditorium on April 14, 15 and 16, 1970.