

One consequence of the Depression in the Thirties was that complex, radical, experimental music, which had flourished (if such music can ever be said to have "flourished" in the usual sense) in the Twenties, found itself almost abruptly without performers willing to present it, or audiences willing to listen to it, at least in the U.S. Our composers had three choices

- a) to stop composing all together (Varese did just that).
- b) to compose and/or orchestrate commercially, for documentary or feature films, for radio minidramas, for jazz groups. There was still some work of all of these kinds available.
- c) to compose in a simpler, much less radical style (Aaron Copland became the leading exponent of this practice).

At various times during this period I wrote in both the (b) and (c) types and found that my symphonic style was often almost indistinguishable from my commercial music.

There was a fourth possibility. Satiric and comedic ingredients, echoes of the circus, the dance hall, and of street music, insincere nostalgias, and more or less glossed-over horseplay were all tolerated in the concert music of the time. I found in this approach a welcome escape from the grim goings-on of the concert world. *All Souls Carnival* (1949), *Music of an Imaginary Ballet* (1948), and *Les Frères Marx* (1938) are all efforts in the permitted genres emerging from the Depression years.

After the Second World War, our composers gradually discovered that they could again safely write as wildly as they pleased, and many did. A surprising number, however, still stuck pretty much in the same bland musical straitjackets of the Depression.

By 1950, as a teacher at Juilliard performing Gabrieli and Ives in ensemble classes, and after hearing the Berlioz *Requiem* in Paris, I stumbled upon the "spatial" music that has determined my own route ever since. *An Era Any Time of Year* (1987) and *Pathways to Security* (1990) are examples of spatial chamber music, both representative attempts to run for cover during the grandiose, deceptive, and world-tottering forebodings of the Recession-driven Eighties (this last sentence must be understood as the overheated talk of a musician somewhat out of his depth). The cryptic language of the recondite Brooklyn poet Louis Zukofsky in his monumental one-volume lifework "A" led me to *An Era Any Time of Year*, while for *Pathways to Security*, I felt compelled to invent (or reinvent) a new synthetic language.

**Henry Brant, March 1993**

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Many of these works have also come to deal with environmental subjects, evidenced here by *Pathways to Security* and *An Era Any Time of Year*.

Given the wide range of his work and the unusual nature of his choice of instrumentation, it is hardly surprising that Henry often revises his compositions to adapt to the exigencies of a particular performance. That *Millenium II* score I bought as a student now exists in a version for thirty-five brass, jazz combo, percussion ensemble, gospel choir, gamelan ensemble, bluegrass group, boy's choir, three pianos, organ, and ten vocal soloists. For the performance of *Pathways* presented here, Henry added a harp part because a harp was already being used in another piece on the program.

Henry gets nervous listening to his own music; consequently, he almost always participates in the performances. A strong, versatile performer, Henry often creates new parts for himself. He plays a newly added part for keyboard mouth organ in *Pathways to Security*, for example, as well as added parts for glockenspiel, xylophone, cowbell, and keyboard mouth organ in *All Souls Carnival*. On the other hand, the piano parts (all played by Henry) on *Music for an Imaginary Ballet*, *An Era Any Time of Year*, and *Homage to the Three Marx Brothers*, (along with the tin whistle) are all present in the original scores.

Henry Brant was a living national treasure. As with other composers of stature, what makes his music of lasting value is its content and what Henry has to say as a human being to the rest of us. The originality, the eccentricities of combinations of performing forces, the cleverly funny titles and the high level of compositional craftsmanship are at the service of a musical content and ideal that speak to us with an honesty, an energy, and a warmth that enrich and refreshes us all.

**Richard Pittman**

**Henry Brant** (1913-2008), one of the most original composers of the twentieth century and a pioneer of twentieth-century spatial music, began composing at the age of eight. Moving to New York in 1929, he composed and conducted for radio, films, ballet and jazz groups, at the same time composing experimentally for the concert hall. Until 1955, he taught orchestration and conducted ensembles at Juilliard and Columbia University. Afterwards, he taught at Bennington College



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Henry Brant has always been an original in his concept of music, an original in his composing and orchestration, an original in his approach to life. One of my most unforgettable experiences as a music student was hearing Henry's music for the first time on a recording: such energy, such instrumentation, such wild exuberance and humor! *Signs and Alarms* was so striking with its wild virtuosic trumpet and trombone solos, the striking sonority of tuba and tympani in unison and so mesmerizing from start to finish. *Angels and Devils* for flute choir was as unusual as *Signs*, carrying with it the same aura of demonic mischief. A little later I acquired the score to *Millenium II* for large brass choir and soprano solo - yet another unique work in its conception and execution.

After I graduated from the Peabody Conservatory and was working professionally, I saw, but did not meet, Henry for the first time in a Peabody classroom. He was wearing a deerstalker hat in the classroom - a clear indication that this was a man whose way of life was as distinctive and original as his music.

Later, after conducting various works of Henry's, including the European premiere of *Signs and Alarms*, I had the privilege and delight of conducting *Homage to the Three Marx Brothers*, the funniest piece of music I know. Henry's wonderful sense of humor is very evident in some of the other works on this CD as well.

Henry's fascination with acoustical properties, evident in the colorful orchestration of his early works, led decades ago to his present preoccupation with spatial music. He says that he got the idea from Ives of an "omni" music (*Ives' unfinished Symphony of the Universe*), for example, places a number of symphony orchestras in different locations around a valley - which had the sonic complexity of day-to-day life and which could only be rendered clear through spatial separation. Henry is, of course, working in a tradition that goes back to Gabrieli at Saint Mark's in Venice, but once again, he manages to put his own unique twist on it. Henry has written outdoor pieces for the canals of Amsterdam as well as for New York's Lincoln Center Plaza. The acoustical environment is a major element in the shaping of a Brant spatial piece. Like the "pre-spatial" works, the spatial pieces are unusual and varied, such as *Orbits*, composed for 80 trombones and organ. Sometimes, the players can be counted in the hundreds, as one finds with *Meteor Farm*, a multi cultural work for expanded orchestra, two choirs, jazz band, gamelan, African drummers and singers as well as South Indian soloists (each group retains unaltered its traditional musical style and form).

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until 1981, when he moved to Santa Barbara, California. In 1950, Brant began to write his spatial works in which the planned positioning of the performers is an essential element in the compositional design. Since then, his principal works have all been spatial - over seventy such works, all commissioned, each for a different instrumentation and requiring different spatial deployment in the hall. Brant's music has been widely performed in the United States and Europe, and his long career has been marked by numerous awards and honors, including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Prix Italia (which he was the first American composer to win), the American Music Center's Letter of Distinction, election to the American Academy- Institute of Arts and Letters and the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Music. Henry Brant died in April, 2008.

**Michael Ingham**, baritone, has appeared as a recitalist and soloist with orchestra in a number of European festivals, including the Berlin International Festwochen, the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music, and the Wiener Festwochen. He has also performed at the Guelph Festival, the American Liszt Festival, the Ojai Festival, and the Baltimore Chamber Music Society (which commissioned two works for him), among others. He has recorded frequently for the national radios of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and Italy as well as for America's NPR. Ingham taught at the Conservatory for Theater and Music in Bern, at Arts and Letters at Brunnenburg, and is currently Professor of Music at UC/Santa Barbara, where he is Music Department Chairman and Director of the Opera Theater Program.

**The Boston Musica Viva**

Nancy Cirillo, violin	Kazuko Matsusaka, viola
Ronald Lowry, cello	James Orleans, contrabass
Stacey Shames, harp	Renee Krimstier, flute
Frank Charnley, oboe	William Wrzesien, clarinet
Dean Anderson, percussion	Hugh Hinton, piano
Katherine Matasy, accordion	

**Henry Brant:** piano, percussion,  
keyboard mouth organ, tin life  
**Richard Pittman,** conductor

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The **Boston Musica Viva** was established in 1969 as the first professional ensemble for twentieth-century music in Massachusetts. With rare exceptions, the ensemble premieres a new work at each concert, typically by an American composer. Under the direction of Mr. Pittman, BMV has performed over three hundred and seventy works by some one hundred and sixty eight composers, including seventy-nine works commissioned by BMV, eighty world premieres, and forty two Boston premieres. Seven players form the core of BMV in the course of a season, but their numbers are frequently augmented from one concert to the next. BMV often collaborates with a variety of different theater and dance groups to present musical theater and other multimedia presentations.

In addition to its five-concert series at home, BMV regularly tours its programs, with four European tours as well as two special trips to European festivals. At the time of writing, BMV has performed in ten European countries to concert, radio, and national television audiences.

Among the American composers the ensemble has championed are such Pulitzer Prize winners as John Harbison, Donald Martino, Joseph Schwantner, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, and Henry Brant.

**Richard Pittman** (music director and conductor) founded the Boston Musica Viva in 1969. Although he has built his career on repertoire of the twentieth century, the scope of his activities belies this aura of specialism. A former member of the conducting faculty for both orchestra and opera at the Eastman School of Music, where he was founder/director of the Eastman Musica Nova, Mr. Pittman has also taught orchestral conducting at the New England Conservatory. Among Mr. Pittman's own conducting teachers are: Laszlo Halasz, Sergiu Celibidache, and Pierre Boulez. Active in both North America and Europe, Mr. Pittman has conducted all four BBC Symphony Orchestras, the London Sinfonietta, and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. In the United States, he has conducted the National Symphony Orchestra and the Concerto Soloists in Philadelphia. He also recently served as an assistant conductor with the New York Philharmonic. Along with his BMV duties, Mr. Pittman is the music director of the Concord Orchestra.

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**Rust Rain I**

yet in cells not vacuum  
recitals as the horses rashed  
definite as an aching nerve  
pleads back and feed back -  
spine follows path once born,  
to arrogate its small eloquence,  
an affair with the moon  
it looked as if it looked up  
some way above the earth  
a hectic of an instant

**Stone Thunder I**

until computed in the metal -  
tidal waves also timing it  
moon's day and earth's month  
figured closer - blazed sun, white  
under weightless dancing after the  
predictable vaguer with time's increase,  
seemed to say: the same earth gaze  
returns to them weightless, inking  
of outlines, unearthing  
always only their past futures

**Rust Rain II**

hearing iron horse scrape me  
begging so to speak, stay -  
history their figment of miracle -  
young led, painting a standpipe  
seeing it swan or stork -  
fish part in the wear:  
we are caught by our  
own knowing, barb yellow hard  
every yet - oink little jangler  
thumis - sigh, prattle sea flood -

**Stone Thunder II**

shard porcelain learned blue veined  
by wreathed penny in ice -  
coo (where?) dig or not  
piece dig who with what  
what with ninth year's gait  
of eight, weird's lettered pebble  
a pan plinth table of  
law - noon wait a weight  
wait it is very right,  
sink killick read the kelp -

**Brass Icicles II**

cherries, knife of a valentine,  
were ever blue of yellow,  
birds, harp in three trees -  
now summer happy new year  
any time of year - so  
no piper lead with nonsense  
before its music don't, horse,  
brag of faith too much -  
four clawed reach three-fingered choad  
sweet treble hold lovely - initial

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Louis Zukofsky:  
from "A":

**An Era Any Time of Year**  
(with subtitles added by Henry  
Brant to denote musical "sections")

**Bronze  
Hailstones I**

Others letters a sum owed  
ages account years each year  
out of old fields, permute  
blow blue up against yellow  
- scapes welcome young birds - initial  
transmutes itself, swim near and  
read a weed's reward - grain  
an omen a good omen  
the chill mists greet woods  
ice, flowers - their soul's return

**Iron Waves I**

let me live here ever,  
sweet now, silence foison to  
on top of the weather  
it has said it before  
why that was you that  
is how you weather division  
a peacocks grammer perching -  
and perhaps think that they  
see or they fly thru a  
window not knowing it there

**Bronze  
Hailstones II**

the window could they sing  
it broken need not bleed  
one proof of its strength  
a need birds cannot feign  
persisting for flight as when  
they began to exist - error  
if error veritigo their sun  
eyes delirium - both initial together  
rove into the blue initial  
surely it carves a breath  
leaf a flower to fruit

**Iron Waves II**

one air then a host  
an air not my own  
an earth of three trees  
sleep revives - night adds hours  
awake to augur days impend  
the trumpet ice ages shrill,  
twigged heart flounce the Land  
be not fought - greatness remain  
what awaits the life to  
leaf a flower to fruit

**Brass Icicles I**


the season's colors a ripening  
work their detail - the perennial  
invariance won't hollow it, no  
averaging makes their tones -  
Paradise  
the swept blood warmer  
leaving it eyes' heat stars'  
dawn mirror to west window  
binds the sun's east - steersman's  
one guess at certainty made  
with an assemblage of naught -

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PHICD 174 Music of HENRY BRANT Pittman/The Boston Musica Viva

**Henry  
BRANT**


The Boston Musica Viva  
Richard Pittman, Music Director



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1 - 3	Homage aux Frères Marx (1938) Three Faithful Portraits	9:23
	1. Chico 2. Groucho 3. Harpo	
4	An Era Any Time of Year (1987) A Walking Ceremony Text Louis Zukofsky Michael Ingham, baritone	19:23
5 - 10	All Souls Carnival (1949) 5. Overture 6. Questions 7. Intermittent Explosions 8. Outside and Inside 9. Wheels 10. Finale	15:44
11	Pathways to Security (1990) Ambulant Spatial Cantata Michael Ingham, baritone	23:00
12 - 14	Music for an Imaginary Ballet (1946) 12. My mental marionettes 13. The theme (that tango) 14. Ten years later	8:14

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