

When I Get My New House Done represents an overdue and indispensable addition to the library of commercially reissued field recordings of southern folk music and secures Marcus Martin's place among the giants of Appalachian fiddling. These essential recordings provide a rare aural glimpse of a distant music, practiced by a true master of the style.

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Lukas Foss, *Curriculum Vitae*. New World Records 80703-2. 2010.

The reissue of recordings from two old CRI LPs provides an opportunity to revisit the music of the recently departed Lukas Foss (1922–2009) from the height of his experimentalist period. Like many composers of his generation and immigrant background, Foss began composing along the neo-Classical/modernist seam and found a home base in academia. While teaching at UCLA (he joined the faculty in 1953 as the youngest full professor in the institution's history), he became interested in improvisation, particularly its rawness and “‘exposed’ rather than ‘composed’” quality.¹ He founded the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble and began using elements of controlled chance in his compositions. Foss's experimentalist period displayed its first maturity in the celebrated *Time Cycle* (1960) and held sway through the early 1980s.

The four works on this CD, all hailing from 1976–78, also problematize the familiar evolutionary/reactionary narrative of concert music aesthetics in the 1970s. The simple version of this story suggests that minimalism flourished as the opposite partner to modernism, in both its traditional (integral serialism) and experimental (aleatory) branches. But Foss's skill with eclectic materials—already a hallmark before he began his experiments and (perhaps foreshadowed in these works) even more prominent in his music after 1980—readily synthesizes these putative stylistic opponents without guile or awkwardness.

The CD opens with String Quartet No. 3, a single-movement, twenty-one-minute monolith of nearly continuous sound and development written for the Concord String Quartet in 1976. The process begins with a simple dyad, the minor third between A3 and C4, played heterophonically by the entire quartet. The piece then unfolds in a series of closely related segments, featuring the repetition of similar motives in all parts (sometimes directly notated, but frequently chosen by the performers from a palette in the score) to create a uniform texture. The internal repetitions, timescale of gradual change, and often diatonic harmonic quality all

¹ Lukas Foss, “Improvisation versus Composition,” *The Musical Times* 103 (October 1962): 684.

suggest minimalism; and yet the aggregate effect is so ruggedly modernist that the final C major triad comes as a surprise.

Music for Six (1977–78) wears its minimalist influences (especially motivic repetition and gradual development over a long timeframe) more overtly. The materials are sometimes firmly diatonic but at other times shimmer in dissonances redolent of polytonality. The overall harmonic vocabulary, however, is rather small, with most sonorities recurring at various points throughout the composition. The instrumentation of the ensemble is unspecified—save for a requirement that all instruments fit in the notated range—and the music consists entirely of short repeated motives whose sequence and selection are determined by the performers per specific instructions. The rapid, somewhat relentless, and mostly detached nature of the music suggests that performance on percussion or keyboard instruments might be most effective (this thought is also, admittedly, an echo of the work's minimalist leanings), although a few sustaining sounds are necessary for the final section of the piece. The performance on this recording solves this issue by assigning two of the parts to electronic keyboards, which blend well with marimbas and vibraphones.

The second half of the CD exhibits fewer connections to minimalism, but Foss's eclectic modernist voice remains strong. *Curriculum Vitae* (1977) is a virtuoso toccata, meditation, and dance for solo accordion. The opening juxtaposes furious chords with rapid twelve-note figurations, both of which return in an improvised cadenza-reprise after the calmer middle section. The final segment draws on materials from Foss's own life (hence the title): Beloved snippets of Brahms and Mozart combine with the anthem of Nazi Germany in gradually increasing energy, leading to a climax and denouement that revisit the earlier parts of the piece.

The recording closes with *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* (1978), a setting of the poem of the same name by Wallace Stevens for soprano accompanied by flute, piano, and a percussionist who mostly performs inside the piano. The music is strongly influenced by the (often wildly diverging) images of the text, but bound together by strong associations between the Blackbird and the flute, the sonic palette created by direct engagement with the strings of the piano, and a tightly drawn harmonic vocabulary. For the final stanza, a tape-delay system is used to create the effect of the soloist in dialogue with herself, with further echoes provided by the ensemble. This dialogue of like parts provides an apt closing metaphor for the entire recording, reminding the listener that the seemingly eclectic surfaces of these compositions are all cut from the same cloth, dyed in Foss's own life and musical experiences.

We know from his own writings that Foss was especially interested in another kind of dialogue—the relationship between composers and performers—which he viewed as strongly suppressed in the first half of the twentieth century but gradually recovering and revitalizing in the 1950s and 1960s.² This interest is aptly demonstrated in all of these compositions, most notably through the use of controlled aleatory and the development of a sound world inclusive of extended techniques. As a metonym for Foss's complete creative output, however, this recording also

² See especially Lukas Foss, "The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship: A Monologue and a Dialogue," *Perspectives of New Music* 1/2 (Spring 1963): 45–53.

draws attention to another dialogue—illuminating for most composers, but perhaps especially for Foss—that of the composer with the music of both his present and the past.

The liner notes that accompany the CD include a generous and personal essay by Robert Kirzinger, a discography, and a bibliography; but the text of the Stevens poem is sadly missing. The original recordings date from 1980, and the remastering retains their intimate sound quality. The performances, by the Columbia String Quartet, the University of Buffalo Percussion Ensemble, Guy Klucevsek, Rose Marie Freni, Robert Dick, Jan Williams, and Yvar Mikhashoff, are uniformly strong and musically assured, as one would expect from premiere recordings by new-music luminaries.

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