

STEPHEN DRURY • Piano
ELLIOTT CARTER • Night Fantasies
JOHN CAGE • Etudes Australes (Book 1)

ELLIOT CARTER

- 1 *Night Fantasies* 21:15
Boosey & Hawkes

JOHN CAGE

Etudes Australes

C.F. Peters

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 2 | <i>Etude No. 1</i> | 3:55 |
| 3 | <i>Etude No. 2</i> | 4:09 |
| 4 | <i>Etude No. 3</i> | 4:18 |
| 5 | <i>Etude No. 4</i> | 3:48 |
| 6 | <i>Etude No. 5</i> | 4:00 |
| 7 | <i>Etude No. 6</i> | 4:20 |
| 8 | <i>Etude No. 7</i> | 4:18 |
| 9 | <i>Etude No. 8</i> | 4:07 |

Total Time 54:56

Recorded at Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory,
Boston MA, July 1990.

Cover Art • Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed* (1955)

Combine Painting: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt & sheet, on wood supports,
6'3 1/4" x 31 1/2" x 8." Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
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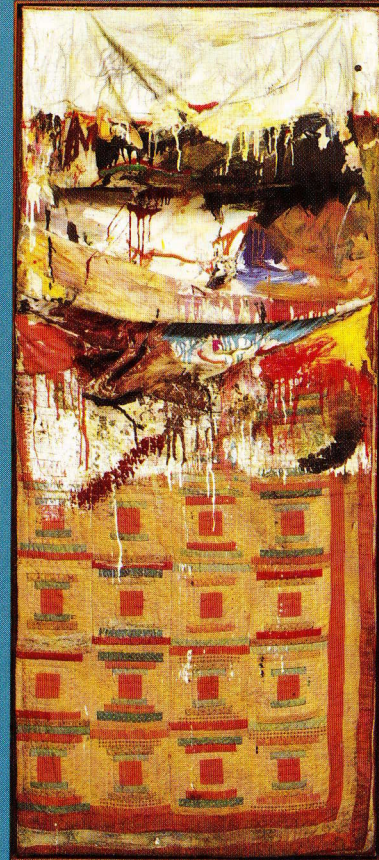
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ELLIOTT
CARTER

Night Fantasies

JOHN
CAGE

Etudes Australes
(Book 1)

STEPHEN
DRURY
Piano

Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies* and John Cage's *Etudes Australes*

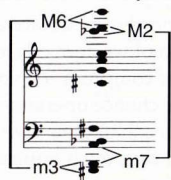
live in two seemingly unrelated worlds.

Carter, for all the complexity and advanced compositional technique of his music, writes firmly within the tradition of western concert music—melodies, harmonies, counterpoints created by the composer to express an inner vision or narrative. Cage, on the other hand, uses chance operations to free the sounds of his music from expressing anything other than their own nature. But underlying both works is a wedding of fantasy and rigorously controlled structure.

Carter's music works much the way a dream works—the foundation lies buried and almost undetectable beneath the surface. In this music a straightforward, mechanical polyrhythm and a well-defined collection of harmonies give rise to a fantasy world of overlapping fragments and an astonishingly wide array of colors. Only on rare occasions does the “deep structure” rise to the audible surface.

Throughout *Night Fantasies* an extremely slow polyrhythm ticks away, with one series of pulses occurring about every $6\frac{6}{7}$ seconds, and another series of pulses every $5\frac{5}{9}$ seconds. (We can hear this briefly represented by the loud staccato notes at bar 419, starting around 17:20 in this recording.) The two series coincide at the beginning (the third chord of the piece) and again, twenty minutes later, at the very end. Carter maneuvers his notation so that a variety of speeds and rhythmic gestures can fit onto this basic polyrhythm. Generally there are two different speeds going on at any given time. Sometimes they are regular, sounding like two clocks ticking against each other. Other times one or both move freely, seeming to speed up or slow down in such a way as to belie the precision of the notation (not once are directions for *tempo rubato* found in the score). But always there is a note on every beat of the polyrhythm—sometimes hidden in the midst of a flurry, sometimes clearly articulated, sometimes standing alone.

In an analogous way, the harmonic deep structure—a set of eighty-eight all-interval chords—generates the harmonic surface of the piece. Each of the eighty-eight chords contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale arranged so that every interval within an octave is symmetrically paired with its mirror interval. For example,



Occasionally, one of these chords is sounded clearly (the above chord is heard at bar 23, 1:21). More frequently one or two intervals will be extracted from the harmonic field offered by these chords giving a specific color to a passage (the open fifths of bar 179 at 7:55). For Carter, every interval has its own evocative quality and lends that quality to the passage which features it. Thus the feeling of calm and stability which pervades the last-mentioned passage.

This rhythmic and harmonic deep structure lies obscured by the fantastic swirls and blocks of sound which make up the surface content of the piece. Carter's music emerges out of that point between wakefulness and sleep where the shoelaces of reason come untied, and the mind wanders weightlessly through a shifting landscape of its own invention, no longer restricted to the snug confines of logical argument or clear emotional imperative. Different kinds of music appear and disappear, in fragments, frequently overlapping. A scherzlike music, built from an extremely rapid three against five rhythm and using major thirds and perfect fifths, occupies much of the middle third of the piece (measures 195 - 354). The recitatives which interrupt this music—melodies moving freely against block chords (the first is heard at bar 235, 9:48) are the true heart of the piece. For *Night Fantasies* is bursting with melody: wild, expressive, careening melodies which sometimes cover the entire keyboard.

The score of Cage's *Etudes Australes* contains not a single suggestion for tempo or dynamics, leaving all such decisions to the performer. (I have chosen the widest possible dynamic range for this recording of the first of the four books of etudes, emphasizing the continuum from sound to silence. Some notes here are barely audible, if at all.) This blank canvas demands the performer's own invention to give life to the music. But if this element of fantasy seems to float detached above the surface of the music, the generative structure lies buried even more deeply than in Carter's music. John Cage has long used chance as a major creative tool in his work, following his decision to let sounds be sounds independent of the composer's desire for self-expression. The pitches in *Etudes Australes* began life as the positions of stars on an astronomical atlas. Through a series of chance operations, selected stars became pitches in the chromatic scale and were then projected throughout the range of the keyboard. Certain notes were expanded into chords, and the odds of a single note becoming a chord increases with each succeeding etude. (In Etude I, roughly one out of sixty-four notes becomes a chord; by Etude VIII chance operations yield a possible eight chords from sixty-four notes. This continues through Etudes IX - XXXII in Books 2 - 4). This whole process was gone through for each hand independently of the other, with the result that each etude is actually two etudes, one per hand, performed simultaneously. The performance can be quite athletic, as the hands are continually crossing over and under each other.

I think of the *Etudes* as a kind of piano transcription of Cage's orchestral work *Atlas Eclipticalis*, also written with the aid of star maps. In both pieces, most of the notes are very short, with only an occasional sustained tone. There is, however, an additional element in the *Etudes* which transforms them into one of Cage's profoundest creations. A different set of keys at the bottom of the piano are held down silently with rubber wedges throughout each etude. The open strings ring sympathetically with the sounded tones, creating a kind of hovering cloud which changes color for each etude. This cloud is often so faint that we can't really hear where it ends, and we end up listening to the quiet sounds of the environment, or

silence, as an integral part of the piece. Cage has often expressed his desire to write music in such a way as to not interrupt the silence which already exists. Here, weaving an incredible variation on his famous silent piece 4'33" of 1952, Cage creates a continuum which extends from the loudest note played to the silence of the environment, indiscernible from the "silence" of Cage's own creation.

Performing and recording these pieces has been a joy for me—the rewards they offer (to both listener and performer) seem to be inexhaustible. I have had the privilege of playing both pieces for their composers, and I would like to thank John Cage and Elliott Carter for their encouragement, inspiration, suggestions, and wonderful music. My thanks also to Joel Gordon for his patience, good humor, and deft hands at the controls during the recording sessions, and to New England Conservatory and piano technician Scott Higgins for providing a truly happening Steinway.

For like truly excellent discussions of both pieces on this recording, please see *The Music of Elliott Carter* by David Schiff (Eulenberg/Da Capo) and *Conversing with Cage* by Richard Kostelanetz (Limelight).

—Stephen Drury

Stephen Drury is a champion of twentieth-century music, and has performed works by John Cage, Elliott Carter, John Zorn, Charles Ives, Morton Feldman, Gyorgy Ligeti, John Adams and others throughout the United States, Europe and the Far East, taking the sound of dissonance into remote corners of Pakistan, Greenland and Montana. The United States Information Agency selected him twice for its Artistic Ambassador program. Recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist grant in 1989, he has been chosen for the rosters of both Affiliate Artists and Concert Artists Guild. Stephen Drury teaches at the New England Conservatory in Boston.