

AN ILLUSION OF DESIRE

EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC BY CHRISTOPHER SHULTIS

1988-1992

Produced and mixed by Douglas Nottingham (DN) and Brett Reed (BR)
Mastered by Nathan James, Vault Mastering

1 ONEIRO (1988, revised 1992) **18:12**

Performed by Crossing 32nd Street
Simone Mancuso, Douglas Nottingham and
Brett Reed, percussion
Engineered by BR and DN,
assisted by David Thibodeaux

2 METAPHYSICS (1992) **10:42**

Christopher Shultis, voice
Max programming by Barry Moon
Engineered by BR and DN,
assisted by Neel Madala and Matthew Ward

3 4-7-3 (1989, revised 2015) **25:21**

Performed by Crossing 32nd Street
Robert Esler and Simone Mancuso, percussion
Douglas Nottingham, crotales and piano
Garth Paine, field recordings
Brett Reed, vibraphone
Christopher Shultis, tam-tam
Engineered by BR and DN

4 GESTURING HANDS (1992) **7:25**

Douglas Nottingham, theremin
Engineered by BR

5 FRIENDS (1991) **9:04**

Performed by LINKS Ensemble
John Bartlit, piano
Douglas Nottingham, crotales
Christopher Shultis, voice
Engineered by BR and Manny Rettinger,
assisted by DN

Total time: 70:46

BONUS TRACK

MOTION/LESS (1988) 9:08

(Originally released on The Aerial #2, 1990)

Christopher Shultis, percussion
Engineered by Kevin Campbell
Original master by Roger Seibel
Digitally remixed by BR

Download at www.neuma-music.com

Cover art and graphic design by Hee Sook Kim

Liner notes by Christopher Shultis © 2016

Photos by CS, DN and James Dyrek

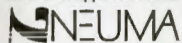
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 NEUMA

AN ILLUSION OF DESIRE

SILENCE

EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC BY CHRISTOPHER SHULTIS
1988-1992

An Illusion of Desire: The (re) making of Experimental Music by Christopher Shultis (1988-1992)

“Recordings are an illusion, an illusion of stopping time, of postponing death.”
Christopher Shultis, *Metaphysics* (1992)

This is not my project. Even the title, *An Illusion of Desire*, comes, not from me – never at a loss for coming up with titles – but from Doug Nottingham, one of the producers of this recording who, along with Brett Reed, are the real energy behind these amazing performances, more than twenty years after they were written.

And performed. There is an important reason why the last paragraph ends with “written,” now the normal part of what I do as composer, and this paragraph starts with “performed,” which is both what I used to do and what distinguishes these pieces from everything that has followed. All of these pieces were written to be performed by me—*motion/less* was the first; *Oneiro*, along with my students John Bartlit and Fred Bugbee, the second; *4-7-3* in its original incarnation, a collaboration with sculptor Basia Irland then titled *water/peace*, third; fourth was *Friends* which, though written for the LINKS Ensemble who also performs it here, includes *Bow* for solo crotales, a piece I performed often; next was *Metaphysics*, first performed as part of a summer festival at the University of New Mexico’s Experimental Theater, curated by then Assistant Professor Kestutis Nakas, with the technical assistance of fellow composer Daniel Paul Davis and several UNM percussion students operating the boomboxes; finally *Gesturing Hands*, which I composed (and performed) on the occasion of Professor Emeritus Charles Mattox having donated an original theremin, which he purchased while living in Venice, California, to the University of New Mexico Art Museum. It was the only time I performed the piece and, to my knowledge, it was the last time this theremin was ever used.

Looking back on these pieces, none of which have any connection to nature, the passion for which came later, and now essential to how I live and to everything I write, one thing seems worth mentioning as an introduction to the performances recorded here. I only wrote them so I could perform them and, since I was losing the ability to perform (due to a physical injury worsening as these pieces were written, being investigated by doctors but not yet discovered), increasingly the compositions became less virtuosic, less notated and more improvisational. Trusting in skills unrelated to technical prowess and more concerned with musicality and the sheer pleasure of unadulterated sound in itself, this was music not manipulated by the compositional mind (though still creating the form in which those sounds occur) but instead explored by sensitive ears listening, and carefully trained hands responding in time, to what is being played and heard.

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I finally let go of these pieces in 1994, while I was living in Germany for the first time and where, finishing my solo marimba piece *Blindness* for Robert Van Sice and the yet to be performed *Written on the Body*, I put all these compositions to rest and moved on. That summer, when I returned to the United States, I played timpani for a performance by the Santa Fe Symphony of Verdi’s *Requiem* and, after that, never touched a percussion instrument again. I sold most of my large collection of percussion instruments to current and former students. And I didn’t complete another piece until the next century, after one more year in Germany, *a little light, in great darkness*: my first fully-notated composition and the first composition intentionally not written with me as a performer in mind. But *a little light* is from a later period, documented in my previous CD *Devisadero*, a collection of all the compositions I wrote between 1995 and 2009, and all written during long walks in mountains and woods—places that cured me of the “dis-ease” that informs all of the music that makes up *An Illusion of Desire*. With these two CDs now available, it is finally possible to listen to them together, not in contrast but as companions, using intentionally opposed materials, but connected by a similar means of creation: placement of sound not by compositional intention but by listening, an ongoing experimental process where the original is still possible, regardless of whether the materials are clichés of experimentalism or clichés of tonality.

Not until 2003 did I revisit these early compositions, putting them together as a book, *Experimental Music and Writings (1988-1994)*, during a Wurlitzer residency in Taos, New Mexico. I published it years later, thanks to the encouragement of Gina Genova, after I became a member of the American Composers Alliance, for which she serves as Executive Director. Now there is increased interest in my early pieces, mostly from percussionists of a younger generation who reawakened me to my percussionist past, long forgotten, reminding me that, as Janet Abel once told me, “there’s no such thing as an ex-percussionist.”

In conclusion, I want to express the enormous gratitude I have for my former students, too numerous to mention but who know who they are, always there ready to help anytime I’d written a piece that needed assistance. Even the owner of Neuma, Jerry Tabor, is a former student who played on some of my early compositions, and I appreciate his continued support of me and my work. Some percussion



Left to right: producers Douglas Nottingham and Brett Reed with Christopher Shultis.

students, in particular, kept my early music alive during the years I myself had abandoned it, by continuing to champion my work and perform these pieces: Erica Jett, Tracy Wiggins and, finally the LINKS Ensemble, including Fred Bugbee, Hovey Corbin and the members found in these recordings, John Bartlit and Doug Nottingham. Doug Nottingham and Brett Reed, who came to study with me at the University of New Mexico in the late 1980s, and who are now highly successful performers and educators, have, by making this recording, accomplished something I never intended when I wrote these pieces: meant to be an ephemeral ending to my life as a performer, this music now continues to exist through the virtuosity of other performers. Through the permanence of recording, thanks to their Herculean labor on this project (performing, recording, producing, contracting), this "illusion of desire," has, using current digital means, "put the fixity of that illusion on a piece of magnetic tape." While it comes not in time to postpone the death of my early life as a performing percussionist, experienced as I composed these pieces, it has breathed new life into this music—a shared life, among friends.

*The following notes about individual pieces, except for 4-7-3 and Friends, were all written at the time of composition, printed here unchanged, and taken from the book, **Experimental Music and Writings (1988-1994)**, published by the American Composers Alliance.*



New York City premiere of *Oneiro* with video by Hee Sook Kim (DIMenna Center, 14 March, 2015). Left to right: Brett Reed, Christopher Shultis, Hee Sook Kim, Douglas Nottingham, Simone Mancuso.

Oneiro was the first composition of mine that used something "named" as a way of making a musical structure. I wrote it for an art opening entitled, "Oneiromancy," featuring paintings by Jeanine Laguna. The materials (metal and glass) come from what Jeanine used to make the paintings. The structure comes from the word *oneiro*, the root of *oneiromancy*, which by itself simply means "dream." There are six sections, one for each letter of the word, and each section relates to those letters in specific ways. The notes themselves, as well as the specific instruments, are chosen by the

performers. What I have composed is the structure in which performers place those notes. When I first wrote *Oneiro*, I had no notion of a meaningful interaction between my music and Jeanine's paintings; nor do I now. However, I do see the "borrowing" of her title as lending a direction to my work. I also see the title (*Oneiro*/"dream") as an overall reference to certain aspirations I find useful. First, the acceptance of a structure (a boundary that defines both our beginnings and our endings) as one might accept one's own body as a structure. Second, the possibility of individual actions within that structure freely associating one to another without conflict. Third, an appreciation, through memories, for the existence of others as part of our own consciousness that then brings about a desire to continue sharing one with another. When I revised the piece in 1992 I added the following text to the written score. "If one wishes to make music using this structure, the following statements may be helpful: This piece was written with peaceful coexistence in mind. What I envision is a performance in that spirit."

Metaphysics. Written in response to a recurrent thought of mine at the time: how technology has affected the perception of reality. *Metaphysics* "a philosophic discipline concerned with the nature of the real only so far as that problem is amenable to the reflective method." Mind not matter, ontology and epistemology, being and knowledge, Aristotle's metaphysics "knowing and understanding characterize art rather than experience." Art opposed to experience: why vs. how, permanence vs. impermanence, eternal vs. ephemeral, recordings vs. physical human presence. *Metaphysics* asks questions within the context of time as tragedy, time measured as reality. Recordings and human presence meet: what is reality? what is illusion?

4-7-3 for electronics and two percussionists is a 2015 revision of an earlier piece, completed in 1989, for a collaboration with sculptor Basia Irland titled *water/peace*. I began working on it not



Douglas Nottingham using the *Metaphysics* Max patch created by composer Barry Moon.

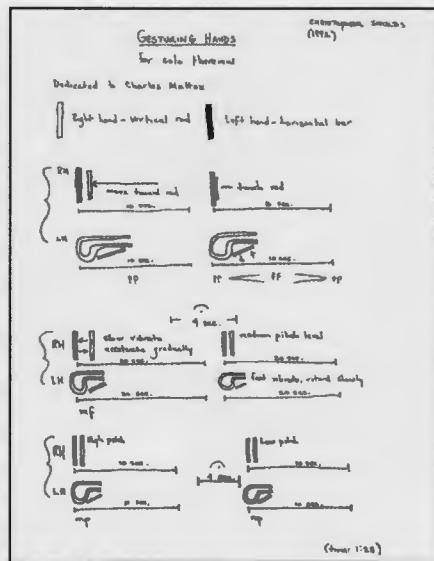


4-7-3 recording sessions: Left, Douglas Nottingham, Brett Reed, Robert Esler (Photo by James Dyrek); Right, Simone Mancuso. (Photo by Douglas Nottingham.)

long after completing *Oneiro* for percussion trio in the summer of 1988. Composer Daniel Paul Davis recorded me playing three parts, seven minutes each for piano interior, vibraphone and piano. He also recorded me playing the tam-tam and found recordings of a waterfall and of the ocean. The piece begins with a four minute collage of all this. It was actually quite complicated to do back then, using 4-track reel tapes and then transferring them to cassettes. The problem was how to continue using those tapes of me performing and removing Basia's contribution (she chose texts) so that the composition could stand alone. When Basia and I premiered it, we used instruments of mine gathered from around the world and also some of Basia's sound sculptures and, in addition to reading the aforementioned texts, we improvised on those instruments. I've written elsewhere about the process of how I composed the piece but really, in its present form, it exists as a work that reflected how I thought about composition back then—as a structure. Thanks to Doug and Brett, the problem of what to do with those tapes was solved by recording new versions of everything, Doug on piano and crotales, Brett on vibraphone. They even found a way to use the original tape of me playing the tam-tam. Simone Mancuso and Robert Esler improvised on top of the structure I composed. When I heard the finished result, while still trying to come up with alternate texts, I realized the piece didn't need text anymore. It exists as a pure structure, whose realization is determined solely by those who interpret it; and fortunately this recording includes four great percussionists who, through their interpretive gifts, have taken an old structure and made it something completely new.

Gesturing Hands. One day Joseph Traugott, then head of the Jonson Gallery at the University of New Mexico, asked me if I would be interested in seeing a theremin that had just been donated to the Gallery by long-time Professor of Art and Sculptor Charles Mattox. Joe wanted to publicly acknowledge the donation at a reception and wondered if I would be willing to write something for the theremin that would be premiered at this gathering. I said yes. Prior to the reception, Joe took me to meet Charles Mattox at his home. We were treated to marvelous stories of Mattox's days in California, where he had befriended people like the great composer Harry Partch and where he had come into possession of his theremin. What I remember most about the visit was what served as the inspiration for this piece. Charles told me about how he liked to use the theremin as a way of turning the visual into music. This instrument was built to look like a podium and had, as a result, a surface where one could "draw" like on a desk. Every gesture produced a consequent sound. *Gesturing Hands* was an experiment following that direction with gestures drawn and placed in time so that literally what you see is what you hear.

Friends. The program note for *Friends* is the text read on this recording. But that note was written in early April 1996, two years past the end of what I call my "experimental period," and two years into the composing of *a little light, in great darkness*, which I didn't finish until 2000, with a text written for that too: "no more/idealism grounded in the tragic." The text for *Friends* looks back in a way at a piece that was written in the thick of the experimental work I did between 1988 and 1994. But it was also firmly rooted in the times when it was written. *Friends*, as a musical work, is deeply connected to the philosophy behind my experimentalism ("idealism grounded in



Original score page of *Gesturing Hands*, from *Experimental Music and Writings (1988-1994)*, published by American Composers Alliance.

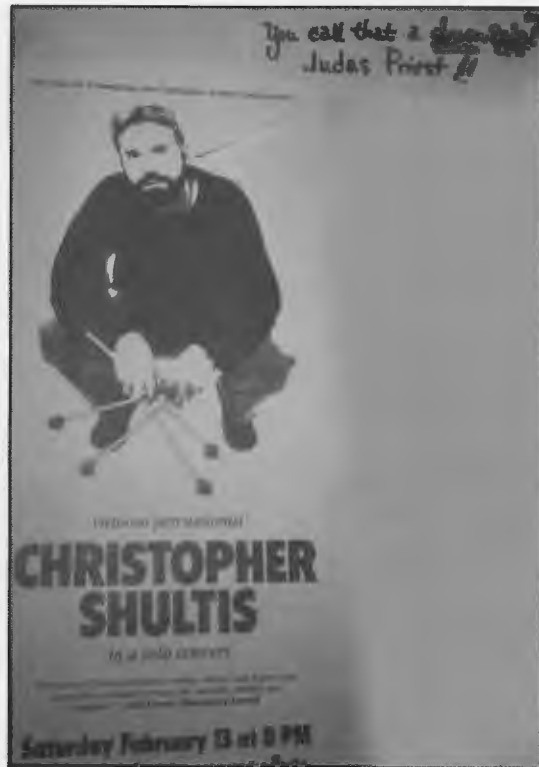


Trio performance of *Branches*, Sena Gallery East, Santa Fe New Mexico, 6 July, 1990, which took place around the time *Friends* was composed and premiered. Left to right: Douglas Nottingham, John Bartlit, John Cage, Christopher Shultis. (Photo by Daniel Ward.)

the tragic") but the text is not. In March 1996, Beth Harcourt, one of my most gifted students, was supposed to be working at a video store when three employees were brutally murdered and the grandparents of one of the employees were killed as well. At the time, it was the worst mass killing in Albuquerque's history. Beth was spared their tragic fate but we were stunned by the randomness of it all and in that moment chance took on a darker meaning for me. I wrote the text in that frame of mind. *Friends* was programmed on the John Donald Robb Composers' Symposium at the beginning of April and I read the text prior to John Bartlit and Doug Nottingham performing it.

motion/less. Completed in March 1988, *motion/less* is written in the form of a mobile. In discussing these structures, theorist and composer John Welsh applies the following conditions: "The coexistence and interaction of variable with non-variable elements." In *motion/less* there

are eleven non-variable gestures. The elements within these gestures are related by pitch as well as material. Seven pitches – D, F, A flat, C (almglocken) and C sharp, F sharp, B (stainless steel bowls) are divided into open consonances in the bowls and an ambiguous pitch arrangement in the almglocken. The materials themselves are metal in origin, a predilection dating back to my earlier composition *for: metal* (1982, lost). Utilizing these elements, the performer moves from gesture to gesture. Improvisation is used as a connection between gestures, thus acting as the variable element. The title is purely descriptive in nature. "Motion" and its additive "less" (signifying in this case "less motion") are used as separate manifestations incorporated into specific gestures. The combined "motionless" can be heard as the structural ground with musical equivalents occurring throughout the composition. In all my compositional endeavors I adhere to John Cage's definition of music as "sounds moving through time." Consequently, my work is in no way associated with literature, holding no other meaning apart from the sole experience of hearing it.



Concert poster (13 February, 1988) found in Max Roach Memorial Practice Room, caption by John Bartlit. Center for the Arts basement, University of New Mexico. (Photo by Christopher Shultis, 1989.)

Brett Reed is a performer, audio engineer, producer and composer specializing in contemporary and improvised music. He regularly performs as a solo percussionist, as a member of several ensembles, including Crossing 32nd Street, The Tjader Project, Skin & Bones and as a jazz vibraphonist in solo and ensemble settings. Reed has also produced and performed on numerous recordings featuring the music of Mark Applebaum, Anthony Davis, Keith Kelly, Stellacutta and Iannis Xenakis. In addition, Reed has had performances of his own compositions including works for solo percussion, chamber ensembles, and mixed-media groups. Reed holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of California, San Diego where he studied with renowned percussionist, Steven Schick. Dr. Reed is currently the Director of the Commercial Music and Percussion programs at Paradise Valley Community College in Phoenix, AZ.



Photo by James Dyrek.

Douglas Nottingham has been active throughout the United States as a percussionist, performance artist, composer, recording artist, producer and teacher. As a professional educator for over thirty years he has enjoyed engaging all levels of students from elementary through graduate school, committed to the idea of music education as a vehicle for aesthetic education. As a solo percussionist and member of Phoenix's Crossing 32nd Street and the New Mexico-based LINKS Ensemble he has specialized in the performance of contemporary chamber works. This has led to rewarding collaborations and commissions with notable composers and performers from the United States and abroad. He has appeared as featured artist at the conventions of the Percussive Arts Society, Society of Composers, Society for Electroacoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS), and the Society of American Music. In addition to his solo recital work, he regularly performs with Crossing 32nd Street, the marimba group Vespus, and the infamous avant-garde heavy-metal vaudeville rock group, Skümbääg. In 2014, in collaboration with Dr. Barry Moon, Dr. Nottingham completed a 38-concert tour of the United States presenting collaborative works featuring percussion and electronics and presenting performances and lecture/demonstrations with the duo pincushioned. As a faculty member at Glendale Community College, he teaches electroacoustic music, digital recording, and commercial music. At GCC he also teaches applied percussion and directs the award-winning Glendale Community College Percussion Ensemble. He holds degrees from Arizona State University, the University of New Mexico and Limestone College (SC).

Crossing 32nd Street (X32st) strives to increase the awareness and understanding of modern music through an aggressive commitment to performing relevant contemporary works at the highest level. This has led to critical recognition—the group was recognized as Phoenix's "Best New Classical Music Ensemble" by the *Arizona Republic*. Each concert season (fifteen and counting) routinely includes the music of the modern masters—John Luther Adams, Louis Andriessen, John Cage, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Karlheinz Stockhausen, James Tenney, and Iannis Xenakis, among others. Congruent to these efforts, X32st is equally focused on presenting and commissioning premiere works by lesser known but equally innovative composers. The ensemble has recently embarked on a long-term project of curating and crafting recordings of essential new chamber works. Founded in 2000 by contemporary music enthusiasts from Arizona State University, the University of New Mexico, and the University of California, San Diego, X32st is an ensemble-in-residence at the Maricopa Community Colleges. Though its instrumentation changes with the needs of each piece, the core plays percussion, winds and electronics while also composing and improvising with acoustic, electroacoustic, and multimedia tools. As community engagement practitioners, the ensemble regularly performs free concerts in alternative spaces in downtown Phoenix, the Phoenix Art Museum, the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) and on the campuses of Arizona State University, ASU West, Glendale Community College, Paradise Valley Community College and Phoenix College.

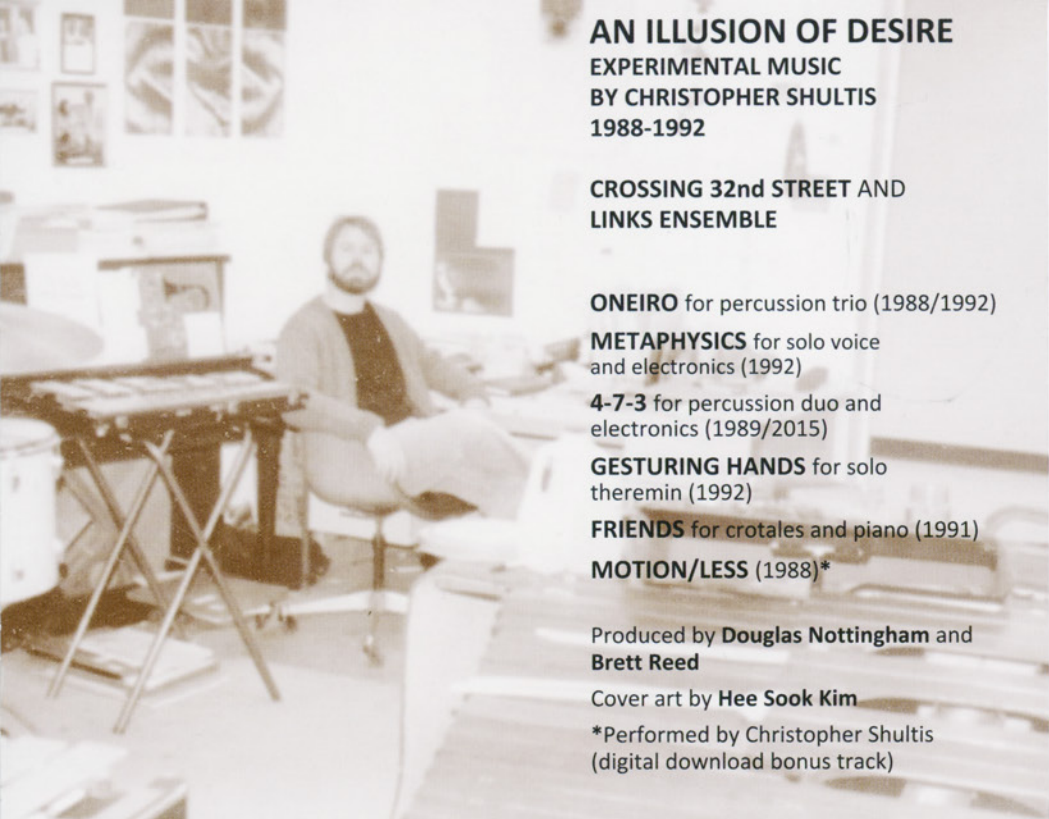
Since its inception in Albuquerque, NM in 1988, the **LINKS Ensemble** has been solely dedicated to presenting experimental art—their own creative practice as well as works by established and emerging artists. LINKS is committed to preserving the practice of the American experimental tradition through three efforts—meticulous live performances of works of iconoclast artists, innovative recordings, and essential aesthetic educational engagement. A group of life-long friends, the collective is inspired by the ethos of creating "art for art's sake." In its over twenty-five years of existence and through various personnel configurations LINKS has devoted its energies to premiering new sonic, theater, dance, multimedia, and trans-media works. Concurrently, the ensemble is committed to presentations of essential performances illustrative of the historical progression of the experimental tradition. In this capacity, LINKS has been featured on the University of Maryland, Baltimore County Progressions Series, the Percussive Arts Society New Music/Research Day, the Society of American Music National Convention, and the recital series of New Mexico State University, the University of Hawai'i, Arizona State University, the Maricopa Community Colleges and Western Colorado University. Additionally, the ensemble has appeared on the University of New Mexico Keller Hall Series/UNM Composers' Symposium, the Phoenix Experimental Arts Festival (Xfest), the Abiquiu Chamber Music Festival, the Prisms Contemporary Music Festival, Sunday Chatter and the Nonsequitur/Outpost Concert Series.

Christopher Shultis is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico where he taught percussion, composition and musicology. He also served as Regents' Professor of Music and in 2010 gave the 55th Annual Research Lecture: "the highest award UNM bestows upon its faculty members." He was awarded two Fulbrights to Germany: the first



Christopher Shultis, Popejoy Hall, January 1989 (Recording session of Thomas DeLio's *Against the Silence*.)

can be found on this CD and all of which are published in book form by ACA, with a shift to fully-notated work in the mid-1990s. His music is available through the American Composers Alliance and he has been a member since 2010. Shultis still regards himself as an experimental composer and his inspiration now comes from long walks in mountains and woods. A previously released CD of his music, *Devisadero: Music from the New Mexico Wilderness*, is available through Navona Records.



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EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC
BY CHRISTOPHER SHULTIS
1988-1992

**CROSSING 32nd STREET AND
LINKS ENSEMBLE**

ONEIRO for percussion trio (1988/1992)

METAPHYSICS for solo voice
and electronics (1992)

4-7-3 for percussion duo and
electronics (1989/2015)

GESTURING HANDS for solo
theremin (1992)

FRIENDS for crotales and piano (1991)

MOTION/LESS (1988)*

Produced by **Douglas Nottingham** and
Brett Reed

Cover art by **Hee Sook Kim**

*Performed by Christopher Shultis
(digital download bonus track)

CHRISTOPHER SHULTIS

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Doug Nottingham and Brett Reed with Christopher Shultis,
Phoenix, Arizona, June 2015. (Photo by Doug Nottingham.)

