

## THE WAY OF LIVING

A column of contemporary historical recordings performed by the composers.

### DANIEL LENTZ: After Images.

Joanne Christensen, Arlene Flynn Dunlap, Richard Dunlap, Gary Eister (voices and keyboards), Daniel Lentz (cascading echo systems).  
Cold Blue E4.

This must be some of the loveliest to be put on disc...four movements consisting of celestial singing as one might expect from mermaids or... to change the metaphor ...to arise out of the cosmic silence. Daniel Lentz is a composer based in Pittsburgh and here has written music that is slow moving but lush, consisting of a series of undulating sonic pulsations like musical waves upon a tropical shore. You provide your own daydreams.

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### PETER GARLAND: Matachin Dances

Ronald Erickson and John Tenney (violins), Peter Garland (gourd rattles).  
Cold Blue E6.

Peter Garland is an extraordinary young Santa Fe composer and proselytizer for new music. He has composed six deceptively simple violin duos with percussion that sound stylistically like the Lou Harrison of Music for Violin out of the first half dozen of Bartok's Violin Duets. Like the latter music, though, there is considerable depth of feeling behind the pretty facade. There is to this music a touching quality of innocence and, in "The Dance Of Death - to the memory of John Lennon", a moving grace. Although there are no direct quotations from Mexican music, there is the distinct aroma of the Indian dance. The violins are played with a light touch by Erickson and Tenney and there should be no reason why these delightfully perfumed works should not become as popular as the Bartok duos.

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### WILLIAM ALWYN: Symphony No. 1

London Philharmonic conducted by William Alwyn.  
HNH 4040

The deep murmurs of the atmospheric opening demand immediate attention and the gravity of the music gradually works itself up to an impassioned and insistent allegro. Following a pleasant yet complex scherzo, the adagio provides a moment of great stillness whose calm surface is ruffled by pianissimo timpani strokes - as though some menace lay barely discernible just below. The menace passes and the symphony ends with a jubilant finale. A beautiful performance and recording that is

a model of moderation, though this wonderfully distinctive music could stand a little more passion in the execution.

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WILLIAM ALWYN: Symphony No. 2; Sinfonietta for Strings.

London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by William Alwyn.  
HNH 4020.

The music of the Symphony No. 2 has passages of intense brilliance that stand in relief to more meditative moments. The adagio is a particularly lovely meditation. Part 2 of this two part symphony starts out vigorously and proceeds with liveliness and color to be big impassioned, lush melody for full orchestra. This is a concise but powerful work that receives a steady performance but the music cries for a more dynamic reading.

The Sinfonietta is a fabulous work of rich sonorities and magical harmonies. Out of the pulsating, repeating chords and a brief germ of a phrase Alwyn builds a vibrant opening movement which is followed by a lushly becalmed adagio. The mystical third movement subsides after an ebullient opening into a stillness out of which develops a final leaping fugue. Alwyn conducts a satisfying account of this wonderful work.

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WILLIAM ALWYN: Symphony No. 3; Symphonic Prelude: The Magic Island

London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by William Alwyn.  
Musical Heritage Society MHS 3300.

This symphony seems more open-faced and less desolate than its predecessors. Even the adagio, despite the funereal march sequence, seems to have a more placid surface. The gripping and dramatic third movement provides a highly charged contrast before dissolving in a halo of late Straussian beauty...a great movement capping an extraordinary work.

The Magic Island was inspired by Caliban's speech in The Tempest and is a fascinating tone poem, though without the strong emotional grip of the Symphony No. 3. More characterful conducting might have helped, though Alwyn is clearly a fine interpreter of his own works.

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STEVE REICH: Octet; Music for a Large Ensemble; Violin Phases.

Steve Reich and Musicians.  
ECM 1168

The Octet is happy music...sounds like a person dancing a jig and singing in a corner. The Music for Large Ensemble is based on Gamellan music and African drum rhythms. Though it is basically

cheerful stuff, it is also unrelieved and undifferentiated in its effect. The sound on this track by the way is wide and spacious with reasonable imaging but no depth and little presence. The Violin Phases consist of short, overlapping violin phrases: the live violin playing against (or is it with?) two prerecorded tape tracks. A musically attractive album that is also attractively produced in terms of its visual layout, but not musically something that will provide you with one of life's Great Experiences.

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TERRY RILEY: Descending Moonshine Dervishers

Terry Riley (electronic organ).  
Kuckuck 047

I know a person who uses this as background music - but as background music it slips by and it's over and I remember nothing. It's music to concentrate on, but that becomes tedious since there is nothing there to challenge the attention anyway. Continuous variations on repeated minimal motifs reproduced in average sonics: not much width of soundstage, but some depth, good dimensionality and a presence that is best during the bell-like registrations. The music is performed within a real acoustic envelope with good sonic cohesion - a function perhaps of the fact that this is a recording of a live performance that was given at Metamusik Festival in Berlin in 1975.

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STEVE REICH: Tehillim.

Steve Reich and Musicians, George Manahan (conductor).  
ECM 1215

Join the rhythmic vitality of mediaeval music with the clear-voiced harmonies of Gregorian chant, mix in a large dose of joy and paint with a light dusting of minimalism and you get this infectious work.

Gently filligreed and attractive, the music is the aural equivalent to a Florentine tapestry.

So sad that the sonics are not up to the quality of the music, nevertheless this is definitely a recording to treasure. "Tehillim" is the original Hebrew word for "psalms" and the work consists of a setting of Hebrew texts from The Bible. Literally translated, Tehillim means "praises", and this is definitely music for praising.

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PHILIP GLASS: The Photographer

Ensemble conducted by Michael Riesman, Philip Glass (electric organ).  
CBS 37848

Lush, romantic and many layered, this is the music to a theater work that, like Einstein on the Beach, confirms Philip Glass as one of the foremost composers of theatrical music of our day. The three-faceted work which retells the story of Eadweard Muybridge from multiple viewpoints is beautifully performed. The work includes a setting of words from Muybridge's trial, a concert for violin solo (performed by Paul Zukovsky), and a ballet. The recorded sound has a disembodied, artificial quality to it...maybe that's what the composer wanted.

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF WIRELESS.

Thomas Dolby.  
Capitol ST-12271.

When the most recent advances in synthesizer technology come together with the best recording techniques there's electricity in the air, especially when the wireless is hooked up. This album has astonishingly vivid and impactful electronic sounds that bounce and reverberate around the soundstage in multilayered, cohesive creations that are extraordinary for their crystalline, sharp-edged quality. No, it's not great music...but it is as exciting as anything else coming out of the loudspeakers these days and good deal more lively and sonically creative than most. In terms of creativity, the wireless may have come and gone but electronic music is here to stay and hasn't even begun to enter its golden age yet.

Ifan Payne