

## Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

"Spells": Jack Behrens: *Fiona's Flute. Dialogue*. Peter Racine Fricker: *Two Spells for Solo Flute. Ballade for Flute and Piano*, Op. 68. *Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 83. Jack Behrens, piano; Robert Riseling, clarinet; Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, violoncello; Fiona Wilkinson, flute. Orion Master Recordings ORS 83455

Patrick Cardy

Numéro 6, 1985

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014080ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014080ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Cardy, P. (1985). Compte rendu de ["Spells": Jack Behrens: *Fiona's Flute. Dialogue*. Peter Racine Fricker: *Two Spells for Solo Flute. Ballade for Flute and Piano*, Op. 68. *Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 83. Jack Behrens, piano; Robert Riseling, clarinet; Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, violoncello; Fiona Wilkinson, flute. Orion Master Recordings ORS 83455]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, (6), 349–351.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014080ar>

sparse bits of dry pulse prepare a quiet entrance for the Marimba in the low register that hints at Phrygian. Rapid treble ostinati combine with their own accelerated recorded images in an extended shimmer. Sprinkles of notes suggesting diminutions of the opening figures lead to a striking coda where subdued explosions are gradually penetrated by a hymn-like melody that the marimba and tape play in near unisons, layering long rolled notes upon themselves like facing mirrors. This piece seems a bit stiffer than *East Wind*; the marimba's part-writing is less fluid than the recorder's and relies overly on glissandi.

The synthesized compositions are still bolder and clearer in design than these first pieces. In *Wave Edge* ("Youthful Folly, . . . water and mountain") the waves enfold us in a submarine vista of shiny, darting sounds. Plunging octaves pile up into deep rich chords which recall and enlarge the foghorn motif that frames the music. It is a work of sustained tonal beauty though the transition that brings us back to shore with slow out-of-phase beats sounds a bit pedantic. *Solar Ellipse* ("Revolution, . . . fire and lake") is a staunch composition, its architecture a planetarium of strict cycles converging and diverging with a colossal climax right at midpoint. This piece, like the others but more thoroughly and dogmatically, reveals a tendency towards automation in its composition which purges the sound shape of nearly every impress of the individual, idiosyncratic human physique. It roots out the very basis of our subjective identification with music. The sonic object is alienating: dazzling in its presentation but disappointing to memory, a technological display. But it is a towering display, a brilliant and fascinating spectacle. Toward its center the whole cosmos seems to slide and shake, almost to dance. Whether this was a moiré effect of the compounding patterns or an added intervention, I was not quite sure. The composer's metaphor depicts the music aptly: "fire whose energy is . . . being dissipated yet, like the sun, appears to remain constant."

David Lidov

"SPELLS": JACK BEHRENS: *Fiona's Flute. Dialogue*. PETER RACINE FRICKER: *Two Spells for Solo Flute. Ballade for Flute and Piano*, Op. 68. *Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 83. Jack Behrens, piano; Robert Riseling, clarinet; Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, violoncello; Fiona Wilkinson, flute. ORION MASTER RECORDINGS ORS 83455 (Available from: P.O. Box 4087, Malibu, California 90265).

This attractive record of five recent works provides an enjoyable sample of the music of two "transplanted" composers: Jack Behrens, since 1981 the Dean of the Faculty of Music of the University of Western Ontario, was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and taught at California State College at Bakersfield, Simon Fraser University and the University

of Regina before arriving at Western, while Peter Racine Fricker, after twelve years as the Director of Music of Morley College and Professor at the Royal College of Music in his native London, England, joined the Faculty of the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1964. While neither composer amazes the listener with a sense of striking freshness or originality in his music, both are highly competent and capable of moments of genuine feeling.

I find myself most attracted to the two works by Behrens that open the record. The pitch structures of *Fiona's Flute* (1982), dedicated to Fiona Wilkinson and her newly acquired flute, are all derived from a kind of *soggetto cavato*, based on the flutist's name: two superimposed sets, one ascending and chromatic (F-F-sharp-G-G-sharp-A), and the other descending and whole-tone (F-E-flat-D-flat-B-A), are transcriptions of FIONA (F=F, I=F-sharp/E-flat, O=G/D-flat, N=G-sharp/B, A=A), and the remaining four pitches, an ascending whole-tone set (B-flat-C-D-E), are assigned to the consonants WLKS in WILKINSON (W=B-flat, I=F-sharp/E-flat, L=C, K=D, I=F-sharp/E-flat, N=G-sharp/B, S=E, O=G/D-flat, N=G-sharp/B). While this may sound somewhat dry and academic in description, the results are anything but. One may take a certain pleasure in recognizing the flutist's signature as it reappears throughout the piece (indeed, at one point, her name is sounded in Morse Code on a repeated B-flat), but Behrens' talent for creating memorable melodic/rhythmic shapes transcends the extramusical associations of the pitch material and the listener is quickly drawn into the purely musical flow of the work.

So, too, with his second work, *Dialogues* (1981) for violoncello and piano, dedicated to Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi — the program note quotes several dictionary definitions of the title, and one might expect with dread yet another example of the ubiquitous "dialogue" piece, but Behrens's handling of a small number of musical gestures is unflinchingly interesting. Particularly effective passages for the cello include the rich, aggressively droning multiple stops at the opening, the slowly oscillating C/E — A-flat/D double stops under delicate piano lines a few minutes into the work, and the poignant return of the same figure over a C pedal at the close of the piece. The clearly articulated formal outlines and the consistent use of a rather rhetorical (usually three-fold) repetition of individual phrases contribute greatly to the success and the accessibility of these works, as do the fine performances — Wilkinson projects a full, rich and varied tonal palette (marred only by an occasional tendency to "splat" in rapid staccato passages in the upper register), while Tsutsumi and Behrens are utterly convincing.

The three works by Fricker are not as immediately appealing, but they do repay repeated close listening. The most effective is the shortest, *Two Spells for Solo Flute* (1980), dedicated again to Fiona Wilkinson. The opening phrase of the first movement (Slow), a rising E-B-flat-C, with its whole-tone implications, provides material for much of the rest of the piece; it returns, extended melodically and rhythmically, in several

guises, before closing the movement in retrograde. The second movement (Fast), is a delightful rondo, with a three-fold varied repetition of an energetic rhythmic section enclosing two more lyrical periods.

The *Ballade for Flute and Piano*, Op. 68 (1972) is again in a kind of rondo form, with a varied return of the opening declamatory passage framing music which, in the composer's words, "contains a variety of moods, declamatory to martial, to quiet and brooding" — this type of sectional recycling of motivic material seems to be a characteristic of Fricker's style. The music is at its best in the three lyrical interludes — in the first the piano provides a gentle undulating background to a melancholy meandering flute, and in the second the piano accompanies with a gesture that is almost a mannerism with Fricker: a moderately fast alternation (usually of only two to three repetitions) between two chords/notes, which appears in some form in all his works on this record.

The *Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 83 (1981) show few technical or stylistic changes from the period of the *Ballade*. While this work contains four individual movements (Lento Sognando, Dramatic, Poco Allegro, Adagio), framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue, Fricker still organizes the piece with an ear to the unifying possibilities of the rondo-like repetition of material that informs his earlier works. Thus, the light, staccato gestures of the Poco Allegro and the pounded chords of the Adagio are announced at the beginning of the Prologue, while the Epilogue recapitulates the declamatory stance of the Dramatic second movement and the dreamy reverie of the Lento. A first hearing of these last two works left me rather indifferent, but with repeated listening I found that they revealed themselves to be much more enjoyable and well-constructed than they had originally seemed. Again, the performances by Wilkinson, Behrens and Riseling are admirably shaped and, I suspect, faithful to the composer's intentions.

The recording quality and the pressing are generally good and the performances have an immediacy and presence that is effectively enhanced by close miking. However, a too resonant ambience in the solo flute pieces and an annoying pre-echo in all the pieces mar the overall sonic effect. The packaging is adequate, the artwork on the monochrome cover is attractive, and the liner notes by the composers give a requisite, but not overly generous amount of information — all told, a disc worth a listen.

Patrick Cardy