



Michael Hersch

the wreckage of flowers

Miranda Cuckson, violin

Blair McMillen, piano

Michael Hersch (b. 1971)

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|-----------|--|-------|
| 1 - 1 4 | Fourteen Pieces (2007)
for unaccompanied violin | 31:45 |
| 1 5 - 3 5 | the wreckage of flowers (2003)
for violin and piano | 31:31 |
| 3 6 - 4 0 | Five Fragments (2004)
for unaccompanied violin | 3:39 |

T T: 66:55

Miranda Cuckson, violin
Blair McMillen, piano



Vanguard Classics is proud to be dedicated to the music of contemporary composers. Since Vanguard began recording sixty years ago, the company has sought out ways to continue to keep newly composed works before the public. In the 1950s and 1960s, Vanguard released world premiere recordings of major new works by American composers Aaron Copland, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Virgil Thomson and Samuel Barber. Debut recordings of European composers such as Darius Milhaud, Jean Sibelius, Ernst Bloch, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, were also made. Through its dedication to contemporary musicians and composers in the early years of this century, recordings of works by composers Michael Hersch, Osvaldo Golijov, and Tod Machover were recorded and released for the first time through the artists' relationship with Vanguard Classics.

This disc is the second in a major survey of Michael Hersch's solo works for string instruments, pieces that make up a significant, yet still relatively unknown portion of the composer's output. The current recording focuses on his works for violin written over the past decade.

VOLUME I

Works for Violoncello

Sonata No. 1 for Unaccompanied Cello (1994)

Sonata No. 2 for Unaccompanied Cello (2000)

VOLUME II

Works for Violin

the wreckage of flowers for violin and piano (2003)

Five Fragments for unaccompanied violin (2005)

Fourteen Pieces after Primo Levi for unaccompanied violin (2007)

VOLUME III

Works for Double Bass and Viola

Caelum Dedecoratum for unaccompanied double bass (2006)

Sonata for Unaccompanied Viola (2009)

Fourteen Pieces after texts of Primo Levi

1. And overhead, unreachable,
The water of cirrus clouds,
He found the well and descended.
Plunged his hands in and the water turned red ...

2. INTERMEZZO I

3. As mad Ulysses sowed salt in the furrows
I've found you everywhere ...

4. This is a time of lightning without thunder ...
Before the leaves fall,
Before the sky closes again,
Before we are awakened again ...

5. INTERMEZZO II (a)

6. I won't go far; just to the other shore.
I want to observe at close hand that dark cloud ...
... And find the source of this strange light.

Quick, get the boat ready, it is already night:

Of course I'll come back quickly. Just give me time.

7. INTERMEZZO II (b)

8. ... Beyond the glass, upon the snow.
As he fell silent, he looked about ...
Marked a cross on the ground with his beak,
And opened his black wings wide.
9. ... Dense violent dreams,
Dreamed with soul and body: ...
... the heart cracked in the breast.
10. NOCTURNE I
11. INTERMEZZO III
12. The heavenly legions are a tangle of monsters.
The universe – blind, violent and strange – assails us.
The sky is strewn with horrible dead suns ...
- Light itself falls back down, broken by its own weight.
The skies perpetually revolve in vain.
13. NOCTURNE II
14. When all the snow has melted
We'll go to look for the old path,
The one with the brambles growing over it
Behind the monastery wall.
Everything will be the way it used to be.

Translations by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann

the wreckage of flowers

twenty-one movements after poetry and prose of Czeslaw Milosz

1. On the wall a painting that depicts winter.
Between the trees, smoke comes from a chimney,
And crows fly in an overcast sky.
2. A still-looking branch, both cold and living.
3. ... and the sky far up above was the only element we shared with the other people on the face of the earth
4. Over the gate of the rectory, fragments of brick among weeds ...
5. Now there is only the earth, sandy, trodden down,
With one leafless tree.
6. To lay bare a monument like a nest in a thicket,
Though all you wanted was to pluck a few roses.
7. He wakes up, rubs his eyes, and above the tossed-back scarecrows of the pines
he sees a dark blue expanse in which, low on the horizon,
one blood-red star is glowing.
8. Beyond a field, a wood and a second field,
The expanse of water, a white mirror, glitters.
9. The din ceases.
Memory closes down its dark waters.
And those, as if behind a glass, stare out, silent.
10. From afar, from somewhere beyond the river, echoes of lingering voices.
11. ... the wind rattling the metal sheets hanging from a cliff-like wall.
Rusting machines stood among the high weeds.

12. The sky before sunrise is soaked with light.
Rosy color tints buildings, bridges ...
And the cities on a distant plain stood intact ...
I cast a spell on the city asking it to last.
13. And that snow will remain forever,
unredeemed, not spoken of to anyone.
14. ... but here there was not a tree,
or even lichens growing on the rocks,
and in the birdless sky, racing through filmy clouds
the sun went down between black concretions.
15. Starry skies go out.
16. Winter, night, the frozen sky is flooded with red.
17. ... and the sky far up above was the only element we shared with the other people on the face of the earth
18. ... huge flocks of crows, freezing in mid-air,
exploded under the clouds ...
19. Layers of white clouds on a fragment of sky between the brightness of the birches.
20. Farther, under the arch of ancient ruins
You see a few tiny walking figures.
21. A still-looking branch, both cold and living.

Translations by Jan Darowski, Lawrence Davis,
Renata Gorczynski, Robert Haas, Richard
Lourie, Czeslaw Milosz, Leonard Nathan, Lillian
Vallee, and Jan Zielonko.

Michael Hersch: Works for Violin

by Miranda Cuckson

Michael Hersch's music forms a unique world; one highly recognizable as his own and difficult to associate closely with stylistic movements. He uses spare materials to grippingly visceral effect, packing the utmost expression into very simple bits of material. It can at times be almost unbearably intense. Using isolated clusters or chords, he masterfully employs the power of a single attack, or of a precisely shaped crescendo on a single note, to express his aims. His markings are careful and concise, outlining both gentle motions and violent contrasts across an immense dynamic and pitch range.

The music poses extreme technical challenges. Loud and turbulent passages requiring great accuracy combined with wildly unleashed energy and speed adjoin extensive sections or brief moments of restraint and simplicity, where bow control of every inflection becomes paramount. The sudden switches from furious virtuosity to still, delicate playing, along with some abnormally large stretches and leaps, test the performer's skill and stamina. These instrumental issues are very particular to Hersch's music, and they serve its basic expressive paradox, for the listener is simultaneously impacted by its huge dimensions and

powerful gestures, and drawn in by its acute focus on subtle detail and nuance.

A remarkable pianist himself, it is apparent that Hersch's writing has been informed by his own firsthand sense of the importance of the player's intentions and imagination. It is true and important in all music that the inert symbols on the page must be infused with meaning, but Hersch's music relies crucially on the symbiosis of composer and performer in order for its emotional power and sonic possibilities to come forth. The performer cannot be passive. In every gesture, in all fluctuations of volume, articulation and color, the music needs to be executed with the same sense of purpose as it was written.

Many of his works, including two of those on this recording, are companioned with text. In these pieces he selects fragments of poetry and employs them as a counterpart to his composition, placing the fragments in conjunction with specific musical movements. The text, however, remains unsung and unspoken. If it is to be digested by the listener at all, it must be read, silently, on the page. Situated somewhere between the abstraction of pure music and the pictorial and poetic associations of programmatic composition, Hersch's text-based works bear multiple layers of meaning.

Fourteen Pieces for unaccompanied violin (2007) is the latest in a series of large-scale compositions Hersch has written for solo instruments, going back to the early 1990s. *Fourteen Pieces* was written soon after his monumental two-hour piano work, *The Vanishing Pavilions*, which he composed from 2001-2005, and performed and recorded himself. The two works are related in their emotional and atmospheric expression, and in their compositional approach. Both are paired with poetic texts, *The Vanishing Pavilions* with poetry of Christopher Middleton, *Fourteen Pieces* with poetry of Primo Levi.

The texts of *The Vanishing Pavilions* and *Fourteen Pieces* conjure similar images from nature: birds in motion, water, lightning, snow, fiery skies. The poetry and the music evoke a range of darkly tinged emotional states, from feelings of desolation and frustration, to horror, to a kind of fearful wonder. Though the impetus might have been similar, the two pieces came into being in different ways: *The Vanishing Pavilions* was formed during a years-long process, whereas the *Fourteen Pieces* was written in a creative surge of several weeks. The two works share certain structural traits, including the insertion of purely musical interludes among the text-based movements, and the interleaving of motives throughout.

In the *Fourteen Pieces*, Hersch employs extremes of

register, dynamics, and types of directional motion. There is wild, violent chordal playing; there are sections of slow, soft pulses and cavernous gaps of silence. The persistent recurrence of material and the passages of stillness counteract the volatile aspects of the music, invoking a suffocating sense of despair and stasis. More than in *the wreckage of flowers*, the text fragments have a narrative quality, and the music is correspondingly, I believe, somewhat more directly programmatic in its expression: the painfully searing double-stops as "mad Ulysses sowed salt in the furrows", the music's inexorable lilt as "the boat" sails "to the other shore", the nightmarish, unrelenting storm of raging passagework in the lengthy twelfth movement, in which he depicts "the heavenly legions are a tangle of monsters. The universe - blind, violent and strange - assails us."

the wreckage of flowers, completed in 2003, is a series of 21 movements for violin and piano, based on fragments from the writings of Polish author Czeslaw Milosz. The scenes evoked by Milosz are often ones of decay, both natural ("one leafless tree...", "that snow will remain forever...", "the birdless sky...") and man-made ("rusting machines...", "fragments of brick among weeds...", "the arch of ancient ruins..."). A forlorn line describing loneliness and alienation - "and the sky far up above was the only element we shared with the other people on the face of the earth" - heads one of two early movements that return late in the piece.

The work's movements are mostly brief, sometimes startlingly so. While there are many passages of strongly insistent or quietly deliberate pulses, the feeling of rhythmic firmness often gets destabilized by rubato or more abrupt tempo shifts. Throughout the work, the violin shifts from one eerily shaded tone color to another, veering between breathy and sul ponticello tone, using percussive pizzicato and hitting the string with the stick of the bow, and contrasting all this with rich chordal playing and energetic, forceful strokes. The violin and piano react attentively to each other, sometimes alternating eloquent statements, sometimes erupting suddenly with a combined series of attacks, a brilliant high unison, or tightly-wound bursts of complex passagework that explode out of the texture.

The Five Fragments were written in 2004, soon after *the wreckage of flowers*. Unlinked to any literary text, this piece concisely presents Hersch's compositional language and its emotional content in pure musical form. After the opening's clashing double-stops and brusque pizzicatos, played "with great ferocity", the expression in the three middle fragments turns inward, as a sequence of quietly lilting melodies passes like a series of mournful thoughts. At the piece's end, the beginning material returns, accelerating into a few defiantly torn-off gestures before closing with a whisper.

In demand as a soloist and chamber musician in a wide range of repertoire, **Miranda Cuckson** has been lauded by *The New York Times* as a "superb violinist" and "a brilliant young performer who plays daunting contemporary music with insight, honesty, and temperament." She has made acclaimed appearances as soloist with many orchestras, including her recent debut with the Jerusalem Symphony and her upcoming Carnegie Hall debut with the American Symphony Orchestra. Her four CDs on the Centaur Records label - concertos by Korngold and Ponce with the Czech National Symphony, and violin works by Ralph Shapey, Donald Martino and Ross Lee Finney - were all released to great critical praise. She is the recipient of several grants from the Aaron Copland and Ditson Funds.

A highly active exponent of contemporary classical music, Ms. Cuckson has worked with many of the preeminent composers of our era, including Henri Dutilleux, Elliott Carter, John Adams, Salvatore Sciarrino, Georg Friedrich Haas, Helmut Lachenmann and Mario Davidovsky. She is violinist of several highly regarded new-music groups, including the Argento Ensemble, counter) induction, Sequitur, and the concert series Transit Circle, of which she is the director. She recently curated and performed in a Composers Portrait concert of Shapey's music at Miller Theatre in New York, and was featured at a gala benefit for the American Composers Orchestra. She made her recital debut at Carnegie Hall's Weill Hall as winner of the Juilliard School's Presser Award. She has appeared at such venues as the Library of Congress, Berlin Philharmonie, Zankel Hall, the 92nd St Y, the Phillips Collection, Bargemusic, Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles, and the Bard, Marlboro, Lincoln Center, Bridgehampton, Bodensee and Kilkenny festivals. She is greatly interested in all forms of art and enjoys collaborative projects such as her appearances as soloist in Barber's Violin Concerto with the New York City Ballet, and the Stravinsky Violin Concerto on the Guggenheim Museum's "Works and Process" series.

At the age of nine, she began her studies in Juilliard's Pre-College division. She received her BM, MM and DMA degrees from Juilliard, and graduated with the Richard F. French Prize for best doctoral dissertation. She worked with Robert Mann, Dorothy DeLay, Felix Galimir and Shirley Givens, and studied chamber music with Fred Sherry and the Juilliard String Quartet. She teaches violin at Mannes the New School for Music.





Blair McMillen has established himself as one of the most versatile and sought-after pianists today. *The New York Times* has described him as "new music's torchbearer," his playing as "riveting," "prodigiously accomplished." Recent performances include Carnegie Hall, Moscow Conservatory, Miller Theatre, Bard Summerscape, (le) Poisson Rouge, the Aspen Music Festival, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Caramoor, the Library of Congress, Casals Hall (Tokyo), the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), and Musica Antica e Nuova at Columbia University. Concerto appearances have included the American Symphony Orchestra, the Juilliard Orchestra on a tour of Japan, the Albany Symphony, and the Zankel Band in New York City.

Known for his imaginative and daring programming, Mr. McMillen's repertoire spans from late-medieval keyboard manuscripts to today's up-and-coming younger generation of composers. Recent recitals have included performances of selections from the Codex Faenza (some of the earliest-surviving keyboard music in the world, composed in the early 15th-century), a New York recital of piano music inspired by the art of improvisation, and a "Composer Portrait" concert of music by Esa-Pekka Salonen. His first solo CD *Soundings*; featuring music of Debussy, Scriabin, Liszt, and Bolcom; was released in 2004 to critical acclaim. More recent solo recordings include *Powerhouse Pianists* on Lumiere Records, *Concert Music of Fred Hersch* on Naxos, and *Multiplicities: Born in '38* on Centaur.

Dedicated to new and pathbreaking projects, Mr. McMillen is intensely committed to commissioning and performing the music of today. He has premiered hundreds of pieces, and constantly works with both established and emerging composers in commissioning new works for the piano. Pianist for the Naumburg Award-winning Da Capo Chamber Players, he plays regularly with the American Modern Ensemble, the downtown NYC-based Avian Orchestra, St. Luke's Chamber Ensembles, and the Locrian Chamber Players, among others.

Raised in San Francisco and Charlotte, NC; Mr. McMillen holds degrees from Oberlin College, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School. A past winner of the Aspen Music Festival's Time-Warner Award, he won the Gina Bachauer Competition and the Sony ES Grant for Musical Excellence while studying at Juilliard. Mr. McMillen serves on the piano and chamber music faculty at Bard College and Conservatory.



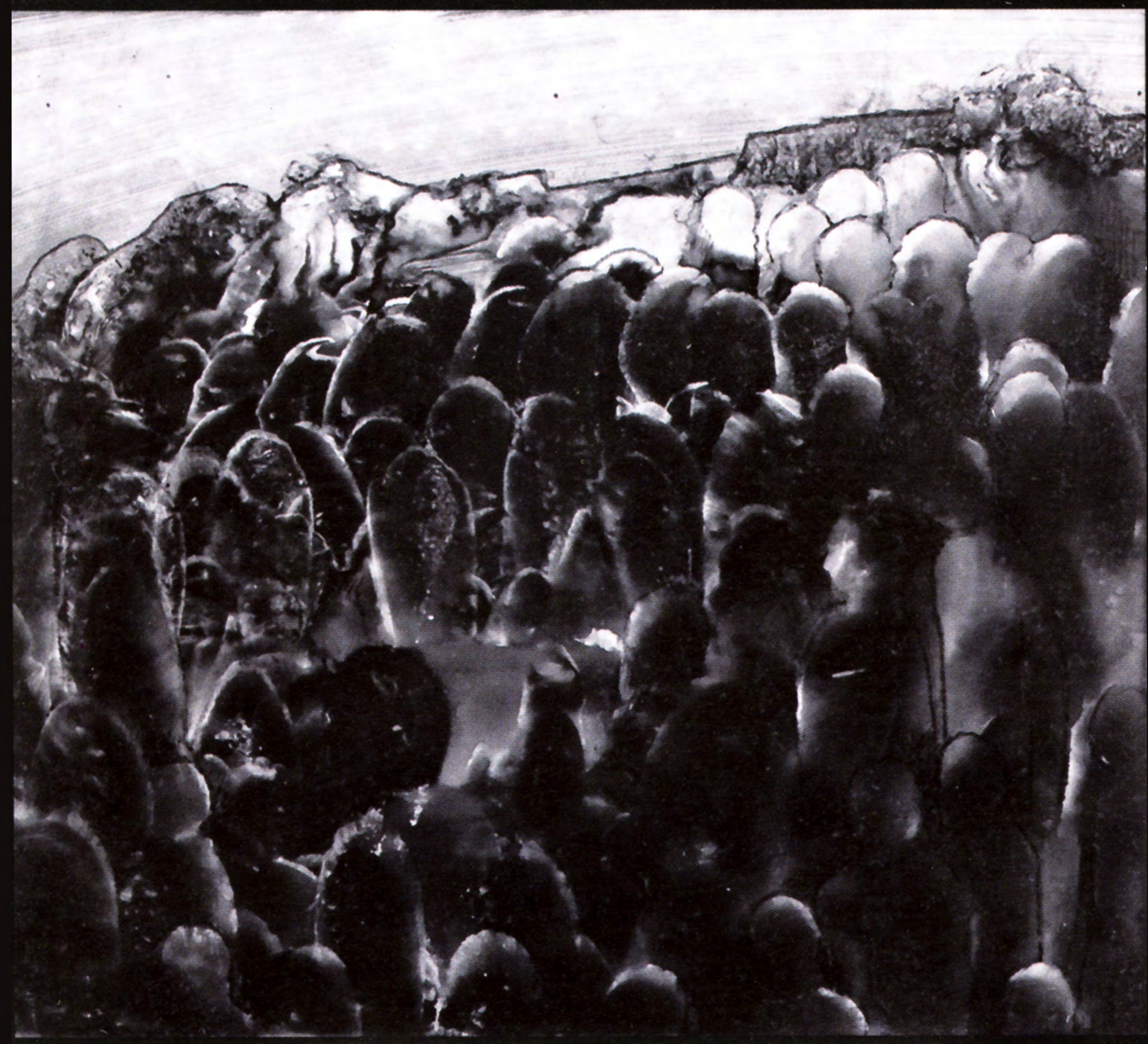
Noted as "one of the most fertile musical minds to emerge in the US over the past generation" by Andrew Clark of *The Financial Times of London*, **Michael Hersch** continues to write music of tremendous power and invention. Writing in *The Washington Post* more than ten years ago, critic Tim Page heralded the arrival on the international stage of "a Promethean creator who has been charged with relaying his particular message. He combines a mixture of urgency and facility that is dazzling."

Major recent commissions include those from the Cleveland Orchestra, baritone Thomas Hampson, and the Cabrillo Festival for Contemporary Music.

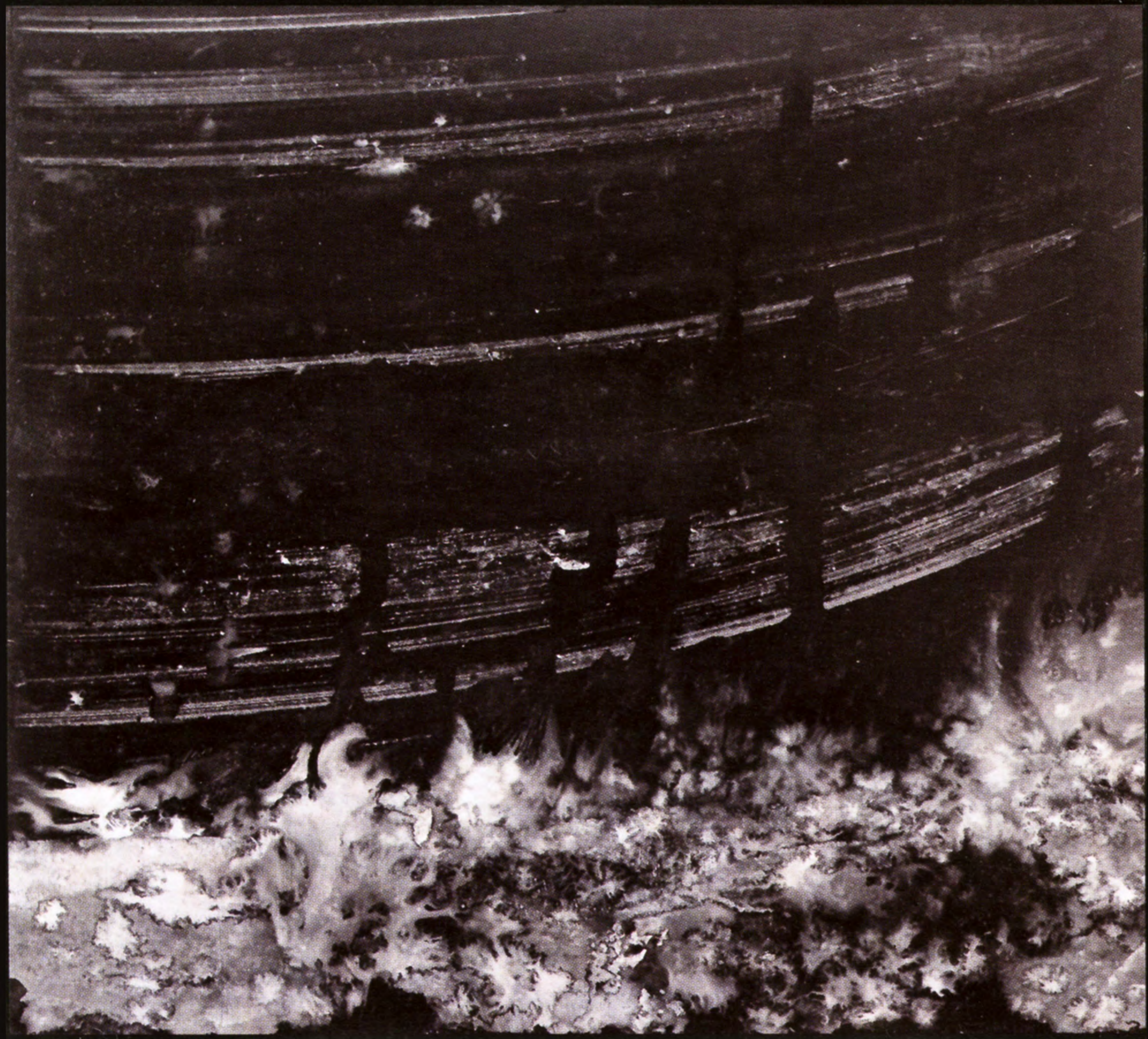
Mr. Hersch's work has been conducted in the U.S. and abroad under conductors including Mariss Jansons, Alan Gilbert, Marin Alsop, Robert Spano, James DePriest, Carlos Kalmar, and Gerard Schwarz, and has been performed by the major orchestras of Saint Louis, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Dallas, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Seattle, and Oregon, among others, and ensembles including the String Soloists of the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, and the Network for New Music. During the 2002-03 season, Mariss Jansons named Mr. Hersch composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Hersch has written for such soloists as Garrick Ohlsson, Boris Pergamenschikow, Peter Sheppard-Skaerved, Daniel Gaisford, Walter Boeykens, Shai Wosner, and Midori. His work has been performed at festivals including Tanglewood, Schloss Neuhardenberg, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Musica XXI Romaeuropa Festival, and the Transit Circle Contemporary Music Series, among many others. Other commissioning organizations include Carnegie Hall, the Washington Performing Arts Society, the Kronberg Akademie, the 92nd St. Y - Tisch Center for the Performing Arts, and the Borletti-Buitoni Trust.

Mr. Hersch first came to international attention at the age of 25, when he was awarded First Prize in the American Composers Awards. This resulted in a performance in New York's Alice Tully Hall early in 1997. Later that year he became one of the youngest composers ever to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition. Mr. Hersch has also received the Rome Prize, the Berlin Prize, and both the Charles Ives Scholarship and Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Also recognized as among today's most formidable pianists, he has performed throughout the U.S. and Europe.

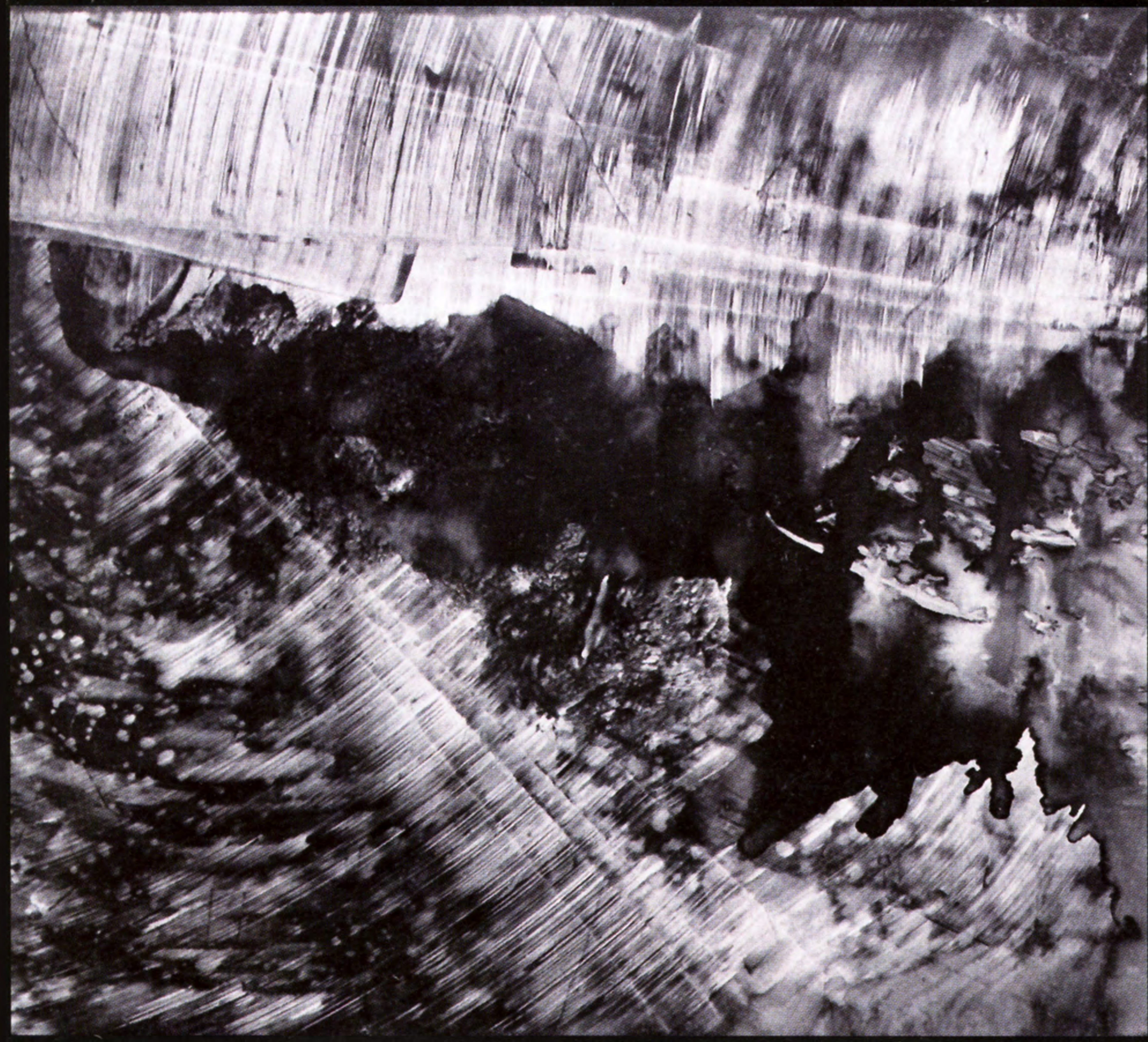








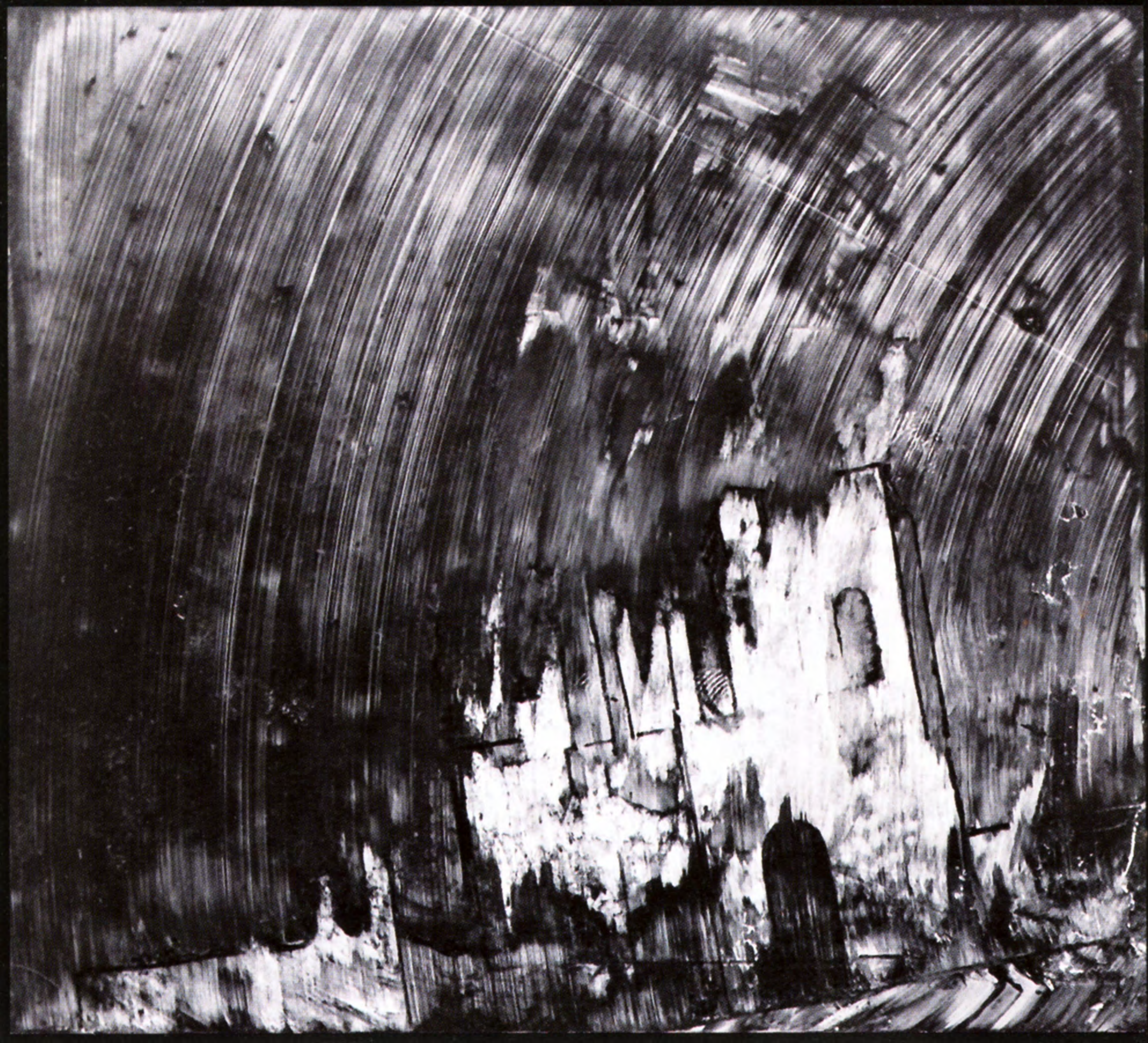
















Michael Hersch: Sonatas Nos. 1 & 2 for Unaccompanied Cello
Music for String Instruments - Volume I

Daniel Gaisford, cello
 Release Date: 2009
 Vanguard Classics (MCS-CD-104)



Michael Hersch
 Sonatas Nos. 1 & 2
 for Unaccompanied Cello
 Daniel Gaisford

Michael Hersch: The Vanishing Pavilions

Michael Hersch, piano
 Release Date: 2007
 Vanguard Classics / Musical Concepts (MC-101)
 [2 CD Box Set]



Hersch – Josquin – Rihm – Feldman

Michael Hersch, piano
 Daniel Gaisford, cello
 Release Date: 2004
 Vanguard Classics (ATM-CD-1558)



Michael Hersch: Chamber Music

String Soloists of the Berlin Philharmonic
 Michael Hersch, piano
 Release Date: 2003
 Vanguard Classics (ATM-CD-1240)



Michael Hersch (b. 1971)

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Miranda Cuckson, violin

Blair McMillen, piano

All works recorded in the Miriam A. Friedberg Concert Hall, The Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University - Baltimore, Maryland. *the wreckage of flowers* recorded October 2009. *Fourteen Pieces* and *Five Fragments* recorded March 2010.

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