

Nothing in the world is softer or weaker than water,
and yet for attacking things that are firm and hard,
nothing is so effectual.

Everyone knows that the soft overcomes the hard,
and gentleness conquers the strong,
but few can carry it out in practice.

Therefore a sage has said,
he who bears men's sorrow
may be their king.

Tao Tê Ching, Chapter 78¹

The power of softness; lucid compositional structure found through intuition; expression of spiritual depth by framing everyday sounds—all seem paradoxical, like the verse from Lao Tse above. Yet these apparent contradictions come together in the music of Ingram Marshall. The pieces on this compact disk span almost three decades and represent the principal threads that have run through Marshall's work: his remarkable skill in using electronics to create expressive and voluptuously beautiful pieces; the influence of Indonesian music, particularly in the slowed-down sense of time and melodic repetition; a thorough knowledge of some of the most stirring and poignant compositions of the Western tradition, especially Sibelius and Bach; and the hovering presence of Charles Ives, particularly his use of quotation and juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated elements.

Born in 1942 in Mount Vernon, a New York City suburb, Ingram Marshall attended Lake Forest College in Illinois, then did graduate work at Columbia University in the mid-sixties. There he first encountered electronic music and worked at the legendary Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. After a stint at NYU's Composers Workshop, where he worked with Morton Subotnick and Serge Tcherepnin, he attended California Institute of the Arts, where he received an MFA in 1971 and then stayed to teach courses in electronic music and text-sound composition. In an interview for Yale University's Oral History of American Music archive, Marshall recalled that period:

¹ excerpted and adapted from *The Sacred Books of China*, translated by James Legge. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891.

I loved it. First of all the school was a tabula rasa—no one knew exactly how they were going to run things. So graduate students (of which I was one and Charlemagne Palestine another) had a free hand to do what we wanted. In fact, we helped to develop curriculum. We were in charge of teaching the nuts and bolts to undergraduates: how to make tape recorders really do what you wanted them to do. Instead of doing the formalized class followed by a studio session and spreading it out over the semester, we said, “Let’s have these all-night sessions and learn as much as we can in as short a time as possible.” And the students loved it. We were all young then, of course. We didn’t mind staying up all night. So the first few weeks, all the people involved in electronic music simply met in these all-night sessions. Within a few weeks, everyone knew what they were doing, as best they could. There wasn’t much more to teach them. So we were all free to do our own work.

The most profound thing that happened to me at Cal Arts had nothing to do with electronic music—it was Indonesian music. They had a Javanese gamelan there and a couple of Indonesian musicians, primarily a man named Ki Wasitodipura, or “Pak Chokro,” as we called him. He had a big effect on me musically. He was very wise, one of these gurus. I looked up to him. He was ageless. He seemed a little bit older than he really was at the time because of his sage ways. We all loved him. The first year of working with him and learning about the gamelan just went into my interior being. I lost interest in electronic music for a little while. I wanted to do Javanese music. So in 1971 I did go to Indonesia for about four months and heard a lot and studied a lot. That really turned my thinking around. I realized that the “zip and zap, bleep and blap” kind of formally organized electronic music I had been trying to do simply wasn’t my way and that I needed to find a slower, deeper way of approaching electronic music. I think the Javanese sense of time being slowed down had a lot to do with it.

I also appreciated the beautiful quality of the music itself. I instinctively always went for that, but sometimes a rational side of me said, “No that’s not enough. You’ve got to make some kind of structure here that’s going to override that.” Structure’s very important, but I came more to trust my own instincts about going for the dark and the beautiful and the endless. The Indonesian music helped me a lot with that.

The word “beautiful” is hard to define, but in some way it’s always in the back of my mind when I’m writing. I do go for some sense of the lovely or the beautiful or the gorgeous, the sensuous: something that grabs, that’s palpable, and is not on the surface disagreeable. I really think that a musical experience should be enveloping, and the success of a piece could be based on really involving the listener, almost in a narcotic way—not to be zoned out or in a trance, exactly, but to be really wrought up in it.

When Marshall returned to the United States in 1971, he continued to work in electronic music, but with a new approach colored by his experiences in Indonesia. He experimented with live electronics and tape delays, developed *The Fragility Cycles*, and performed the piece widely. In 1973, he moved to the San Francisco Bay area where he worked in a variety of capacities in the lively Bay Area new-music scene. He became friends with the composer John Adams, who conducted the premiere performance of one of Marshall’s best-known pieces, *Fog Tropes*, in 1981. In the same year, Marshall wrote *Woodstone*, his only gamelan piece.

In the late 1980s, after nearly twenty years of living on the West Coast, Marshall moved with his family to Connecticut, where he currently resides. He continues to combine electronic processing with instruments and has particularly concentrated on works for large ensembles. Various monikers have been used to describe Marshall's music, including California Minimalist, New Romantic, and Post-Modernist, but the only term the composer himself endorses is Expressivist.

Ingram Marshall described *September Canons* as a lamentation on the events of September 11, 2001. Commissioned in 2002 by Marshall's lifelong friend and collaborator, the photographer Jim Bengston, the work is not so much a tone painting as a musical reflection of the anguish surrounding that dreadful day and its aftermath. Scored for amplified violin, digital delay, and other electronic processing, *September Canons* was written in close collaboration with the violinist Todd Reynolds. Marshall had previously worked with Reynolds and felt that his soulful playing and natural affinity with electronics were well suited to this piece. It was premiered at Joe's Pub in New York City in December 2002 and later recorded at Reynolds's private studio.

The musical material subtly evokes themes of death, sorrow, and mourning. Descending figures dominate the melodies: Sometimes we hear a sigh; sometimes we're reminded of falling, collapsing, plummeting objects. Marshall quotes one of his previous works, *Gradual Requiem*, referencing the Catholic Mass for the repose of the souls of the dead. At another point we hear fragments of Bach's famous *Chaconne in D minor* for solo violin. In writing this work, Bach quoted the chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (Christ lay in Death's Bonds). Another familiar melody comes at the end of the piece: *In the Sweet Bye and Bye*. Marshall intended this as an homage to Charles Ives whose piece, *From Hanover Square North, at the End of a Tragic Day, the Voice of the People Again Arose* incorporates this hymn. This movement from Ives's second orchestral suite, memorializes an event he witnessed on May 7, 1915 in New York City. On hearing the news of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, workers and riders waiting for the elevated train spontaneously sang this popular hymn.

The influence of Ives abounds in an earlier work, *Peaceable Kingdom*, which combines the sounds of a Yugoslavian funeral procession, church bells recorded in Bellagio, Italy, and chamber ensemble. Commissioned by new-music patron Betty Freeman, the composition had its premiere performance in 1990 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group as part of the Green Umbrella Series. Marshall discussed the elements that made up this piece:

In 1987, my family and I were visiting the island of Korčula in Yugoslavia, part of Dalmatia. We went to a funeral with my wife's cousin, Jacov. The whole town went. In these small villages a funeral is not a private affair. After the procession was over and we'd gone back to his house, Jacov asked me to write a new funeral march for the village band because he was getting tired of hearing the same one year after year. I agreed to do it. Somehow I think this piece was my way of dealing with that promise.

The title refers to the meaning of the music only in an oblique way. It really has more to do with the place where I composed much of the music in the summer of 1989—an old farm in northern Vermont known to its inhabitants as "The Peaceable Kingdom," which must be a reference to the famous paintings by Edward Hicks. It was very peaceable, and I was thinking of that imagery of heaven: a place where everyone gets along. It's the opposite of war. Even though the piece I wrote was not about war, I had a very strong feeling when I was visiting Yugoslavia of the history of violence and war in that country.

Marshall described the compositional structure:

The first thing you hear in the piece is the distant sound of a village band playing a funeral dirge. It gets louder as it comes down the hill and turns into a shuffling of passing feet, people's voices, a baby's cry, and the nasal voice of an intoning priest. Over this the instruments gradually join in. The bells of St. Giacomo chime in and become the pulsating heart of the music, the ensemble floating over and under. Eventually, the band reappears and is processed into a repeating parody of itself at different tempi and pitches. The ensemble plays both with and against the recorded band, sometimes resembling a cat-and-mouse game. The band makes a final rude announcement of itself and fades away, leaving only the ensemble to more or less reminisce. The final section is announced by the re-entry of the bells, which are quite out front at first but gradually take on a quieter role. The piece ends with remnants of the sounds of the funeral procession, the intoning priest and the baby's cries.

The combination of seemingly disparate elements also characterizes *Woodstone*, a gamelan fantasia on a theme from Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata. With support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Dan Schmidt, director of the Berkeley Gamelan, commissioned Marshall in 1981. The ensemble consisted of homemade aluminum instruments with traditional Javanese tuning but extended range. Marshall lived in Berkeley when he wrote this piece and had ample opportunity to work with the instruments and performers. He commented:

I combined the two opposing scales or modes. There is a juxtaposition between the *pelog*, which has a dark, almost haunting quality to it, and the *slendro*, which has a very sweet sound. These two modes are kept apart most of the time—always in Javanese gamelan music—but in my piece they sometimes mix. I started blending the two modes and came up with something approximating a Western scale. And then I realized one day that you could play the theme of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata on the gamelan. That's why the piece is called *Woodstone*. So the whole second part of the piece is a variation of that theme. It's all written out in cipher notation, numbers. There's no Western notation at all. Despite my long-time interest in Javanese music, this has been my only attempt to compose for an actual gamelan.

The ethereal sounds and pacing of Indonesian music provided inspiration for sections of *The Fragility Cycles*, the live electronic piece that Marshall developed and performed between 1976 and 1981. He featured the gambuh, a long bamboo Balinese flute, in music that recurred through the piece (titled, simply *Gambuh*). It was interspersed with several original tape compositions (some of which were released on *IKON*, New World Records 80577). Two performances from Charlemagne Palestine's New York loft in 1977 were the source for a self-produced LP in which Marshall commented, "The title refers to the delicacy or fragility of much of my music, especially *Gambuh*, known to me for some time. Rather than consider it as a weakness or danger, it is considered as something with which to work." He later elaborated, "I realized that the way I put my pieces together—they are very fragilely constructed. It's like when I'm building something I've forgotten to put an underpinning beforehand to make it really strong—but I'm going to keep going because I know I'm on the right track. Rather than go back and fix it up, I just keep going and hope the structure holds. Somehow, miraculously, it does. That's the way I compose. I sometimes think I'm not approaching it from the ground up. I'm starting it up in the air. So maybe structurally my music is always a little fragile."

It was upon his return from Indonesia to CalArts in 1971 that Marshall began experimenting with the combination of instruments and tape delay. He remembered:

I became enamored of tape delay because it spun out the sound into space. I'd play the gambuh through a microphone and it'd go through a tape delay. I had a series of pitches on the synthesizer that were based on indigenous melodic material from the gambuh. In those days, one of the few things you could do with an analog synthesizer to make it interesting was to apply randomness to a series of selected notes or pitches or rhythms or durations. The amplified flute triggers a filter, and that creates these cascades of harmonics that float around. You can control them by the dynamics of the flute playing, so it's a very tactile kind of thing.

I evolved this piece that basically went through a set of lush chords. That was the structure of the piece. I would play certain melodic riffs that would echo through the tape delay. I did a whole series of quasi-improvised pieces based on that. It eventually evolved into a fairly set piece that became the center of *The Fragility Cycles*.

Marshall noted the contrasting elements that comprise *Gambuh*: "The soft human element of the flute vs. the hard machine-like element of the synthesizer. The flute's ability to bend pitches vs. the relative immutability of the synthesizer."

Each performance of *The Fragility Cycles* resulted in a recording: The tape delay system accumulated all the sonic material in four-channel format. Thus, Marshall has numerous documentations of performances. The recording used for this CD was made from a 1980 broadcast at the Swedish Radio in Stockholm.

The works on this CD can be thought of as an archeological dig, flowing in reverse chronological order from a recent work to one of the composer's earliest. They range from the dramatic and gripping 2002 work relating to a horrible event in New York City to a timeless ethereal 1976 piece relating to an idyllic period in Indonesia. Along with these dynamic contrasts, there's surprising consistency: Marshall's lifelong efforts to combine electronics with instruments and to render them with warmth and expressivity; but moreover, his extraordinary ability to capture profound human feeling and create works of poignancy and depth.

—*Libby Van Cleve*

Libby Van Cleve is an oboist, scholar, and author with a specialization in contemporary music. As Associate Director of the Oral History of American Music Project at Yale University, she has conducted numerous interviews with American composers.

Most quotations are from interviews conducted by Libby Van Cleve for Yale University's Oral History of American Music archive and were supplemented by program and liner notes by Ingram Marshall.

Ingram Marshall, composer, lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1973 to 1985 and in Washington State, where he taught at Evergreen State College, until 1989. He studied at Columbia University and California Institute of the Arts, where he received an M.F.A., and has been a student of Indonesian gamelan music. In the mid-seventies he developed a series of “live electronic” pieces such as *The Fragility Cycles*, *Gradual Requiem*, and *Alcatraz* in which he blended tape collages, extended vocal techniques, Indonesian flutes, and keyboards. He performed widely in the United States and Europe with these works. In recent years he has concentrated on music combining tape and electronic processing with ensembles and soloists. His music has been performed by ensembles and orchestras such as the Theater of Voices, Kronos Quartet, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, and American Composers Orchestra. He has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Rockefeller Foundation, Fromm Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Since 2005, Marshall has been a Visiting Lecturer at the Yale School of Music.

Todd Reynolds is perhaps best known for his work with the string group ETHEL. He is also recognized as a composer, electronic musician, conductor and improviser across style and genre. With roots in the Bang on a Can, post-minimal scene, Reynolds counts among his many notable collaborations work with The Steve Reich Ensemble, The Silk Road Project, Bang on a Can, and indie sensations The Books. Today, he continues in both the acoustic and electronic worlds and is currently collaborating with Meredith Monk on her *Songs of Ascension*. His own *Still Life with Microphone*, a site-specific, laptop-driven concert theater piece, currently tours with artist Luke DuBois and film of Bill Morrison, and his teaching residencies at universities across the nation include creativity conversations, traditional and non-traditional master classes, composer forums and software integration. Reynolds uses a laptop as a constant second instrument, employing commercially available software (Ableton Live), along with his traditional violin, creating a hybrid “digital fiddle” to realize his and others’ compositions in real time. <http://toddreynolds.wordpress.com>

Peaceable Kingdom

Members of the Yale Philharmonia

Julian Pellicano, conductor

Sabatino Scirri, flute; Yoobin Son, flute (piccolo)

Michelle Farah, Jennifer Shark, oboe

Xiaoting Ma, Sergiy Dvornichenko, clarinet

Micahla Cohen, Ellen Connors, bassoon

Juan Carlos Fernando-Nieto, keyboard

Joshua Peckins, Michelle Abraham, Dawn Wohn, Jae-In Shin, violin

Daniel S. Lee, Jesus Rodriguez Gonzalez, viola

Alvin Yan Ming Wong, Ying-Chi Tang, cello

Samuel Adams, double bass

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Alcatraz. New Albion NA040.
Dark Waters. New Albion NA112.
Evensongs. New Albion NA092.
Fog Tropes. New Albion NA002.
The Fragility Cycles. Ibu 101. (LP)
Gradual Requiem. New Albion NA002.
Hidden Voices. Nonesuch 9 79227-2.
Ikon and Other Early Works. New World Records 80577-2.
Kingdom Come. Nonesuch 79613-2.
Savage Altars. New Albion NA130.

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For a complete bio, articles and reviews, see Marshall's website: www.ingrammarshall.com.

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Engineer: Jason Robins (*Peaceable Kingdom*); Todd Reynolds (*September Canons*)

Editing and mixing: Jason Robinson (*Peaceable Kingdom*); Todd Reynolds (*September Canons*)

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SEPTEMBER CANONS
80704-2

1. *September Canons* (2002) 13:13
Todd Reynolds, violin, with electronic processing

2. *Peaceable Kingdom* (1990) 17:53
Members of the Yale Philharmonia, Julian Pellicano, conductor, with tape

3. *Woodstone* (1981) 17:28
The Berkeley Gamelan, Daniel Schmidt, director

4. *The Fragility Cycles ("Gambuh")* (1976) 14:59
Ingram Marshall, gambuh (Balinese flute), Serge synthesizer, live electronic processing

All works published by Peer-Southern Productions, Inc. (BMI)

TT: 63:42

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