

CD Review by [Colin Clarke](#)

ROGER REYNOLDS *Dream Mirror (Sharespace I)*.¹ *Shifting/ Drifting (Sharespace IV)*.² *Here and There*.³ *Sketchbook*⁴ • ²Irvine Arditti (vn); ¹Pablo Gómez Cano (gtr); ⁴Liz Pearse (voc, pn); ³Steven Schick (nar, perc); ^{1,2}Paul Hembree (elec) • NEUMA 128 (2 CDs: 104:30)

I first came across the music of Roger Reynolds at the World Premiere of his *The Red Act Arias* at a Prom concert in 1997 (August 4, to be exact). The work was sandwiched between Mahler's "Blumine" movement and First Symphony; the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Singers were conducted by Leonard Slatkin. This new two-disc set is a treat, then. And luckily, there are plenty of reviews on the *Fanfare Archive* of Reynolds' music to enjoy, too. This release feels special, though. I say "feels" as the presentation is immaculate and luxurious: a properly hard case holding a gatefold for the two discs, plus a separate, lavishly illustrated, full-color 42-page booklet (all in English).

This recording is linked to Kyle Johnson's film on Roger Reynolds, *For a Reason (Far)*, and takes its overall title from that (just dropping the final "Far"). The extended booklet essay by Thomas May, a model of its kind—if only they were all like this—opens imperiously and clearly: "Instead of asking merely to be listened to, the music of Roger Reynolds invites complete submergence." And this is true: This is uncompromising but rewarding music, especially in performances as expert as these.

I do remember a very spatial aspect to *The Red Act Arias* from all that time ago, and this is an important part of Reynolds' aesthetic. The recording for *Dream Mirror* reiterates that, using the sonic soundspace achievable via a recording to fine effect. This is an integral part of the music, of the ongoing argument. Spatial effects are superbly realized. (I wonder what this sounds like in Apple's Spatial Audio?) The conjoining of acoustic instruments and computer sounds (Paul Hembree is listed as "computer musician") is fascinating enough, but when linked with Reynolds' far-reaching imagination the result hits home. Two works here are part of a series of works called "Sharespace," in which a live musician shares a performance space with a computer musician. Dating from 2010, *Dream Mirror* is the first of these, and the idea of the "mirror" continues a thread in Reynolds' work that includes reflections on the idea that mirrors may show the past and future as well as the present (scrying, in other words). Furthering this with the idea that mirrors can also distort (fairground mirrors, for example), Reynolds has created a huge scope for musical meditation on this space, not least because mirrors, for the composer, are related to dreams. The guitar provides the material which is then

“reflected” (transformed) via the computer musician into unrecognizable sound vistas. The result is remarkable, not least because of the beauty of sound, not to mention the virtuosity, of guitarist Pablo Gómez Cano.

It is luxury casting indeed to have Irvine Arditti as violinist in *Shifting/Drifting (Sharespace IV)*. Violinist and composer corresponded closely on the generation of this piece, in which a portrait of Arditti “is interwoven with the composer’s perception of his artistry” (to quote the excellent notes again). The work is quixotic; Arditti’s playing is perhaps predictably superhuman. The two words in the title refer to aspects of Arditti’s playing that are foregrounded and explored here: the assertive as the music and positions shift, and the more ruminative as the music “drifts.” Multiple perspectives on similar objects is another preoccupation of Reynolds, and that is transferred into the musical continuum, too, with the computer algorithm (operated in real time by Hembree) creating brave new worlds that operate as sound scenery in which Arditti can soliloquize or interact. Some of the writing sounds horrifically different: hailstorms of pizzicatos somehow layered with bowed slides, for example. Multi-layering is created by one solo instrument—Bach’s Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas taken to an infinite degree. Later, in the manipulations of Arditti’s flurries, snowstorms of notes become a hailstorm of sonic icicles. Arditti generates his own vortex of excitement through his sheer virtuosity; there is a sense that even that is amplified, multiplied through his sound surroundings.

Another type of virtuosity shines through *Here and There*. This is a 2018 piece for “speaking percussionist” that resulted from the composer’s rapport with a colleague at the University of San Diego, and the performer here, Steven Schick. The text is by Beckett (*Texts for Nothing IX*), possibly typical of him in its recursions but untypical in its eventual freeing of the character. The performance and recording again combine to create miracles. Schick’s sense of timing seems perfect; sounds hang in the air, or silence itself speaks without the ongoing thread evaporating. There is an immediacy to both recording and performance that characterizes everything on this release.

Finally, there comes *Sketchbook (for the Unbearable Lightness of Being)* for “low female voice accompanying herself at the piano” and computer musician of 1985. Liz Pearse is utterly remarkable, finding a sort of Webernian lyricism in Reynolds’ music. Just as Kundra’s “voice” alters within his famous book, so Pearse uses a variety of methods to deliver the text. The emphasis here is on beauty, delicacy, and even ecstasy.

This release has convinced me beyond a doubt that Roger Reynolds is a major compositional voice of our time, not to mention a powerhouse of ideas. Performance, recording, and documentation are beyond criticism.

Colin Clarke

This article originally appeared in Issue 47:2 (Nov/Dec 2023) of *Fanfare Magazine*.