



JENNIE OH BROWN
LOOKING BACK

Flute Music of
JOSEPH SCHWANTNER

- 1 Black Anemones 4:34
- 2 Looking Back: Scurry About... 6:11
- 3 Looking Back: Remembering...(Ricordando) 5:27
- 4 Looking Back: Just Follow... 6:46
- 5 Soaring 1:35
- 6 Silver Halo: Processional 8:24
- 7 Silver Halo: Moto Perpetuo 4:35
- 8 Silver Halo: Clockworks 5:31

DURATION: 43:02

Musicians

Jeffrey Panko, *piano*

Karin Ursin, *flute and piccolo*

Janice MacDonald, *flute and alto flute*

Susan Saylor, *flute and bass flute*

Jennie Oh Brown Plays Music of Joseph Schwantner

Notes by Cynthia Folio, *Professor of Music at Temple University*

Joseph Schwantner, who admits to having a special affinity for the flute, recently wrote: “The flute’s virtuosic and expressive possibilities have long captured my imagination providing a potent stimulus for many of my musical ideas.” Though he is probably best known for his orchestral works (such as *Aftertones of Infinity*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1979), he has composed much stunning chamber music including solo and ensemble works that feature the flute and that have become part of the standard repertoire. The two large-scale works on this CD were both commissioned by flutists for special occasions. *Silver Halo* (2007) was commissioned by *Flute Force* for their Gala 25th Anniversary Concert. *Looking Back* (2009) was commissioned as a memorial to flutist/teacher Samuel Baron by a consortium of his former students. The title is apt not only as an allusion to the memory of Baron, but also as a kind of capstone work for the composer, who recalls looking back to his earlier flute works. In his notes in the score, he writes, “Often when beginning a new project, I start by ‘looking back’ at my earlier music.” He also states that “[r]evisiting these [flute] pieces became a fruitful catalyst for new ideas as I reconsidered the sonic worlds they inhabit.” His fondness for the flute is eloquently expressed in his notes to *Silver Halo*: “I find the flute’s mercurial voice, its extraordinary dynamic, expressive and technical prowess, endlessly compelling.”

The dramatic apex of *Looking Back* is surely the middle movement,

“Remembering,” for unaccompanied flute, which begins with the flutist chanting *ricordando* (“remembering”) “in a ghostly manner” across the embouchure hole. This is followed by a kind of *idée fixe*—an evenly-spaced five-note idea that recurs using other haunting effects, such as singing while playing, whistle tones, and intense spit attacks.

Looking Back’s outer movements are highly virtuosic, with unrelenting rhythmic drive, many meter changes and slowly-shifting pitch centers. The first chord in the first movement, “Scurry about...,” evokes Schwantner’s past; it is one of several variations of what he calls his “bell chord,” used in many of his earlier works. The root/bass of this opening chord forms a tritone with the repeated notes in the right hand—prefiguring the eerie prominence of this interval in the middle movement. The opening of the third movement, “Just Follow...,” features rising lines in the piano and flute over a single repeated chord that lasts for twelve bars. The flute line actually “descends” in pitch-classes—D^b, C, B^b, A^b, G, F, E^b, D^b, etc.—while the gestures gradually ascend in register because of octave displacement, creating a kind of aural illusion. The movement ends with a brief return—or “remembering”—of the end of the first movement.

Silver Halo requires doubling: 2nd flute/piccolo; 3rd flute/alto flute; and 4th flute/bass flute. The first two flutes also play energy chimes in the first movement, “Processional, Incantation and Chase” as accompaniment to a cadenza-like dialogue

between the alto and bass flutes. The texture gradually thickens as the flute and piccolo enter. By the end of the first part, the chimes have disappeared and the texture becomes a double dialogue between low flutes and high flutes. The section that follows recalls a unique texture that occurs in many of Schwantner’s works—a technique that he calls “shared monody”: the flutes essentially play a single melodic line in unisons and/or octaves, but certain flutes sustain some of the pitches while the line continues in at least one of the others. This creates harmony out of a single melody. According to Schwantner, the inspiration for creating this distinctive texture came from his background as a guitarist, where notes literally “hang in the air.”

The flowing, folksong-like middle movement, “moto perpetuo,” returns to a more diatonic language reminiscent of *Black Anemones*. The final movement, “Clockworks,” begins and ends with a driving duple rhythm and percussive key slaps—creating a kind of “tick-tock” with accents on the “tock”! The middle part, marked *energico*, again features a “shared monody” texture.

The two shorter (and earlier) works on this CD make great complementary companions. *Black Anemones* (1991)—a transcription for flute and piano of a song originally published in *Two Poems of Agueda Pizarro* (1980)—explores the lyrical side of the flute, with lovely diatonic passages, harmonies saturated with fifths and often progressing through third relationships, and supple and subtle

polyrhythms. *Soaring* (1986)—written for flutist Carol Wincenc—is more virtuosic and features dissonant, but clearly delineated harmonic/melodic cells. While *Soaring* is not a twelve-tone work, it is reminiscent of Schwantner’s earlier serial writing, where melody, harmony, and even overall structure are governed by a few tight-knit pitch-class collections. This work also features many coloristic effects, including special pedal techniques in the piano and spit attacks in the flute.

The four pieces on this CD were written over a span of three decades and, as Schwantner remarks, “highlight my continuing fascination with the flute’s ever engaging world. Flutist Jennie Oh Brown and her brilliant musicians present exciting and compelling performances that display a virtuosity marked by deep musical insight and intelligence.” Whether you are hearing his flute music for the first time, or are already familiar, you will enjoy the “sonic worlds” that he has created for the listener.

Schwantner’s series of flute works include: 1. **Modus Caelestis** (1972) 12 flutes, 12 strings, keyboards and percussion, 2. **Canticle of the Evening Bells** (1976) flute and chamber ensemble, 3. **Black Anemones** (1980) flute and piano, 4. **Soaring** (1986) flute and piano, 5. **A Play of Shadows** (1990) flute and chamber orchestra, 6. **Silver Halo** (2007) flute quartet, 7. **Looking Back** (2009) for flute and piano, and 8. **Taking Charge...** (2012) flute/piccolo, piano and percussion.



Joseph Schwantner
COMPOSER



Jennie Oh Brown
FLUTE



Jeffrey Panko
PIANO



Karin Ursin
FLUTE & PICCOLO



Janice MacDonald
FLUTE & ALTO FLUTE



Susan Saylor
FLUTE & BASS FLUTE

About Joseph Schwantner Known for his dramatic and unique style and as a gifted orchestral colorist, Joseph Schwantner is one of the most prominent American composers today. He received his musical and academic training at the Chicago Conservatory and Northwestern University and has served on the faculties of The Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, and the Yale School of Music. Schwantner's compositional career has been marked by many awards, grants, and fellowships, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for his orchestral composition *Aftertones of Infinity* and several Grammy nominations. Schwantner is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and his music is published exclusively by Schott Helicon Music Corporation. www.schwantner.net

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