

John Patrick Thomas

# MILLENNIA

Music for Harpsichords 1974–2000

Christine Daxelhofer

Irene Müller-Glasewald

Kristian Nyquist



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### **Notes by the Composer**

Why harpsichord? Various reasons. From the practical standpoint, in my career as a countertenor I worked with a number of excellent Early Music harpsichordists who also had a keen interest in New Music. Over the years, a number of these players, beginning with William Christie, liked the music I'd written and asked me to write something for them. I also got to know a number of instrument builders, such as William Dowd and Reinhard von Nagel in Paris, who encouraged me. In this connection, I must say the players on this recording have been particularly faithful advocates of New Music for their instrument. I love the sound of classical harpsichords and am continually amazed at the variety of colors available. Sounds with which we are familiar in certain musical contexts take on a special tension and vitality when we hear them in others. I also like the freedom of maneuver which permits abstract material (as in Pages) as well as material which is more referential in character. Perhaps it's an American thing not to feel threatened by or in competition with the past. In fact, a number of these pieces were conceived as companions for works from the instrument's great repertoire. Frankly, I'm not very interested in historicisms. I think The Music of Our Time is all the music available in our global culture. It's a unique

historical position which I feel no need to resist. On the contrary, I think it's an important part of my life which I hope appears in this music and may give it a sense of vitality and moment. Of course, if I'd had an equivalent access to an electronic studio, I'd have happily written a great deal of music using new media and technologies. But my fate has led me to do something else.

**Small Birds** (1974) was written as a companion piece for related character pieces by Rameau and Francois Couperin. The piece is dedicated to the Parisian harpsichord builder Reinhard von Nagel, Monica Chanler von Nagel, and their six children.

**Pages** (1988), for two harpsichords, consists of very restricted, hard-edged musical material, initially confined to single pages, which spills over into more extended fields of energy. The work was written at the request of Christine Daxelhofer and is dedicated to her and Irene Müller-Glasewald.

**Imaginary Dances** (1997), for solo harpsichord, is a set of pieces drawing on the tradition of the harpsichord suites of stylized dances from the 17th and 18th centuries. The five movements, in no way pastiches, are related to particular places and players which have brought me into contact with the great tradition of harpsichord playing. The work is dedicated to Christine Daxelhofer and is played here by her distinguished student, Kristian Nyquist.

**Millennium Music** (2000) was commissioned by the three players featured in this recording to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the death of J.S. Bach. The work, for three harpsichordists, is a companion piece for the Bach C-major Concerto for three harpsichords and may be viewed as a fan letter to the great composer, full of exuberance and hope at the beginning of a new age. While the music of Bach provides a perspective on the past, another point of departure for the three movements of the piece (anchoring the music in the present and aiming it toward the future) is a set of three photographs taken at different times of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum which Frank Gehry designed for the University of Minnesota.

## Biographies

**John Patrick Thomas** was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1941. He began composing at the age of 12 and became a student of Darius Milhaud at 16. He later studied at the University of California at Berkeley and taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo. In 1971, he began a career in Europe as a countertenor specializing in Early Music as well as being active in the New Music scene. Composers as varied as David Del Tredici, Morton Feldman, Mauricio Kagel, and Krzysztof Penderecki have written music expressly for his voice. Following a generation which attempted to divorce itself from the past, Thomas belongs to a group of composers which he says "is absorbing and reflecting the music 'of everywhere and always.'" He lives in Hamburg where he divides his time between

composing and teaching singing and is currently a visiting professor for voice in the Musical Department of the Folkwang Hochschule in Essen.

**Christine Daxelhofer** studied in Bern and with Huguette Dreyfus in France as well as with Gustav Leonhardt and Kenneth Gilbert. She is active as a soloist, as a partner in the ensemble "For Two to Play", and as a continuo player in various chamber ensembles in Europe and South America; her special interests in New Music have encouraged a number of composers to write for her. She directs the cembalo class and the Studio für Alte Musik at the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe and is often invited to lecture and teach as well as perform in Europe and abroad.

**Irene Müller-Glasewald** began her studies in Mannheim and later studied with Christine Daxelhofer in Switzerland and at the Basel Schola Cantorum. She teaches both at the Conservatory in Biel, Switzerland, and the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe. She has done special research into continuo notation and has special interests in the literature for cembalo duo and New Music.

**Kristian Nyquist** began his studies with violin and piano lessons, and at 15 developed an interest in the harpsichord. He has studied with Christine Daxelhofer in Karlsruhe, with Huguette Dreyfus in Paris, and with Colin Tilney, Bob van Asperen, and Gustav Leonhardt. He currently teaches at the Hochschule für Musik in Mannheim and at that in Karlsruhe, as well as giving workshops in interpretation and performance practice for advanced students.

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- 1** Small Birds (1974) 6:54
- 2** Pages (1988) 9:17
- Imaginary Dances (1997)
- 3** Hamburg Hustle 1:45
- 4** Slow Dancing in Karlsruhe 3:22
- 5** Buffalo Shuffle 1:48
- 6** Thun Tango 4:14
- 7** Berkeley Rocks 2:06
- Millennium Music (2000)
- 8** ♩ = 110 5:47
- 9** ♩ = 60 6:59
- 10** ♩ = 110 6:35

**Harpsichordists**

Christine Daxelhofer (2, 8–10)  
Irene Müller-Glasewald (1, 2, 8–10)  
Kristian Nyquist (3–7, 8–10)