

Thomas DeLio Selected Compositions (1991-2013)

Belle-Isle I-IV (2003)

transients / images (2006)

...transients (2011)

Though (1993)

XXXIII - XXVII (2007)

as though (1994)

as though / of (1999)

between (1991)

z,rb (2000)

Center (1999;)

Center / s (2000)


Than (1991)

,c,elf (2001)

that light (1989/2009)

Song: "aengus" (2013)

Zilahn (2004)

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Thomas DeLio

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Let us read

and digest; the surface
glistens, only the surface.
Dig in - and you have

a nothing, surrounded by
a surface,

Paterson (Book III)
William Carlos Williams¹

As William Carlos Williams once said of Gertrude Stein: "Stein has gone systematically to work smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean."² I too admire Stein for this reason and, following in the footsteps of those who have tried to do the same for sound, would like to move away from gesture and process and get sound back "clean." My approach to composition, to which I came quite subconsciously, involves reducing the music's surface to just a few sound events separated – pushed apart – by large quantities of silence; sound events pushed into isolation. Often writers and scholars comment that my music is about silence. However, it is actually about sound. I use silence, among other things, to frame sound so we may experience it in new ways, highlighting qualities of sound perhaps otherwise lost. Typically, my compositions are constructed from discrete segments of music which, though they coexist as a group, never become fixed with respect to one another through hierarchical relationships; in this respect my pieces are never organic. I strive for this condition

in order to avoid as much as possible the expression of subjective priorities from which such hierarchies are engendered. In addition, I always try to avoid constructing transitions linking individual events, anything that might convey a sense of continuity and connection. I want everything to feel segmented, halted, separated. Only the direct perception of the moment seems important to me. Thus, I find myself less and less interested in creating states of order or disorder. Rather, I am more interested in reconstructing the gray area that separates them. I try to achieve these goals in different ways in each composition.

This is a plot in continual series of actions. The writing of events is not a representation of these events; actions are not submitted to be made peaceful by doctrine or interpretation, that is, in a fake manner, but *artificially*, by finding their own movement and a dual balance in an impermanence of the structure.³

Three instrumental compositions included on this CD – *between* (1991), *Than* (1991), *Though* (1993), – and five electronic compositions – *z,rb* (2000), *,c,el,f* (2001), *Belle-Isle I-IV* (2003), *Zilahn* (2004), *XXXIII - XXVII* (2007) – though very short, are neither sketches nor miniatures in any sense. Rather, each is a full-scale work which consists of a few highly compressed sound events surrounded by a silence which both activates those events and is, in turn, activated by those events.

that light (1989/2009) is a composition for solo soprano based on four very short poems by Cid Corman. This piece was begun in 1989 and was originally planned for soprano and percussion ensemble. Dissatisfied at that time with its rather conventional text setting, I abandoned the work and moved on to other projects. In 2009 soprano Stacey Mastrian asked me to write a piece for

unaccompanied voice. I thought about this unfinished work from two decades earlier and felt that I now had a better grasp of what I wanted to do with these texts and with text setting in general. I transformed my earlier sketches into this new work for a solo soprano, who occasionally accompanies herself with a few percussion instruments. In these settings I have tried to project words on multiple sonic levels simultaneously; to have the various elements of the words of each poem interpenetrate and find new meaning. Thus, the soprano not only sings but also articulates consonants vocally, and then amplifies the noises of those consonants through the sounds of various percussion instruments. The result is a rather prismatic refraction of words into multiple layers of sound. Text *becomes* music.

Four poems by Cid Corman

1.
Only an egret
wading waiting bending white
neck to the stream bed.

2.
Branches
veining
night mist.

From this
window
that light.

3.
Pine branch and
plum blossom.

How little
spring is

ever. The
trembling mutes

and bamboo
bends the wind.

4.
Small rain, mist
vanishing
into this.

Nos. 1 and 2 from *Of* by Cid Corman, The Lapis Press, 1990.

Nos 3 and 4 from *for granted* by Cid Corman, Elizabethe Press, 1967.

Song: "aengus" (2013) is a setting of a text by the poet P. Inman with whom I have collaborated on many occasions. It is a short composition derived from materials used in a much longer piece entitled "*aengus*", an installation/opera for multichannel electronics. Both of these works consist primarily of moments and surfaces, devoid, as much as possible, of the old rhetoric of linear text setting. In this work I have tried to capture the nature of Inman's poetry and vivify the depth of his radical transformation of language.

“aengus”

P. Inman

a.
noft.
bluff.

pith.

n'owl.

vowel.
soddbble.

laced.

_____ief.

neapl.

croft.

veteen.

length.

anisetete.

pages.

ocean.

inents.
evasp.

a.
quo.

The remaining compositions on this CD constitute examples of what I have labeled *deconstructions*. In each case, I have written an electronic composition based upon a recorded performance of one of my own earlier instrumental works. I have included three examples of such works as well as recordings of the performances from which they were derived.

The first deconstruction, *...transients* (2011; tape), is based upon *transients / images* (2006; percussion, piano). The opposition of the original and transformed versions is readily apparent between 36” and 52” of *...transients* where we hear the same passage from *transients / images* twice, first transformed electronically then in its original acoustic form. For me, in this new context the original acoustic sonorities seem more concrete; they appear as purely physical entities fusing with the sonorities surrounding them, rather than as the by-product of compositional/performance rhetoric. My goal in each of these deconstructions is to recapture the purely physical qualities of instrumental sonorities; to project those sonorities not as the products of actions or gestures – the products of purpose – but as purely physical realities.⁴

The second deconstruction presented on this CD, *as though / of* (1999; tape), is based upon *as though* (1994; percussion solo). Among other things, in this work I was very interested in drawing attention to the distinction between non-pitched and pitched sound. Toward this end, I introduced only one pitch into the composition, near the end – one very peculiar type of sound framed by the more complex sounds of the un-pitched percussion employed throughout the piece. My purpose was to try to return pitch to its place as “sound”; to strip it of its function as a mere element of language (melodic or harmonic, tonal or atonal).

The third deconstruction, *Center / s* (2000; tape), is based upon *Center* (1999; solo voice), a set of three songs for solo soprano (once again, accompanying herself with a few small percussion instruments) based on texts by the American poet A. R. Ammons. In *Center* the singer traverses an arc stretching from pitched to non-pitched sonorities, following the arc of the text. The first song mixes pitched

and un-pitched sounds; the second song moves almost entirely into the world of simple pitched sounds; in the last song only un-pitched sounds are heard.

Three poems by A. R. Ammons

Center

A bird fills up the
streamside bush
with wasteful song,
capsizes waterfall,
mill run, and
superhighway
to
song's improvident
center
lost in the green
bush green
answering bush:
wind varies:
the noon sun casts
mesh refractions
on the stream's amber
bottom
and nothing at all gets,
nothing gets
caught at all.

Transfer

When the bee lands the
morning glory bloom
dips some and weaves:
the coming true of
weight
from weightless wing-held
air
seems at the touch
implausible.

Making

In wingbar light
the mockingbird
takes the day into
making
takes the clouds still
shipping stars
takes the spring trees'
black small leaves
and with staid motions
and many threads
brings into
view
lightens

and when morning
shows sings
not a whit more beautifully
because it has been dark.

1. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New Directions; 1995). In *Paterson* Williams rejects the organic; he rejects the processes which link and connect (and this, I believe, is the key to reading *Paterson*). Instead he juxtaposes objects (physical, linguistic, temporal/historical): "No ideas but in things" - again the concrete. There is no meaning to be revealed, hidden beneath the surface. Meaning is the surface.
2. William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions), p. 163.
3. Leslie Scalapino, *The Front Mater, Dead Souls*, (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 1-2.
4. Several years ago, at the request of percussionist Tracy Wiggins, I created a short solo for vibraphone entitled *Transparent Wave VI* (2003). Later, I expanded that solo into a larger work for percussion entitled *transients / waves* (2006). In this piece the original vibraphone solo is repeated almost verbatim while other percussion instruments are added to it, surrounding it and bathing it in a new sonic context. Eventually, I repeated this process several more times, in each instance adding more instruments to the mix. Ultimately, I expanded the original vibraphone solo into a series of five new works, each building upon its predecessor. As mentioned, in *transients / waves* the original vibraphone solo is surrounded by other percussion instruments. In *transients / images* (2006) – the work heard on this CD – *transients / waves* is repeated but with an additional piano part. Then, in *transients / resonances* (2006), string and wind instruments are added to *transients / images*. This process continues with *transients / interferences* (2010) for mixed chamber ensemble, and *transients / refractions* (2011) for orchestra. The titles for these works refer to basic aspects of sound that are central to all music: attack transients, sound waves, and resonance.

THOMAS DELIO (b. 1951) is a composer and theorist. He has written music for a variety of solo instruments, chamber ensembles and orchestra, and is especially noted for his work in computer music. His compositions have been performed worldwide and are recorded on numerous labels including Wergo (Germany), 3D Classics (France), Neuma, Centaur, Capstone, ERMMedia and Spectrum. He has published over thirty essays in such journals as *Perspectives of New Music*, *The Journal of Music Theory*, *Interface*, *Sonus*, *Artforum*, *Contemporary Music Review* (London), *Revue d'Esthetique* (Paris), and *MusikText* (Cologne).

A number of these essays have been anthologized and translated into German, French and Italian. He has also published numerous books about contemporary music, most notably *Circumscribing the Open Universe* (University Press of America; Italian translation, Editore Semar, Rome), *The Music of Morton Feldman* (Greenwood Press), and *The Amores of John Cage* (Pendragon Press). The book *Essays on the Music and Theoretical Writings of Thomas DeLio*, Thomas Licata, ed. (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008) contains essays by leading composers and scholars from Europe and the United States. His *Collected Essays, Volume 1 (1980-2000)* is forthcoming from the same press. In 2012 The University of Maryland Special Collections Division established a new archive, *The Thomas DeLio Papers*. This archive holds sketches and manuscripts for his music, books and essays; tapes from numerous recording sessions; correspondence with such composers, poets and artists as Iannis Xenakis, John Cage, Alvin Lucier, Morton Feldman, Elliott Carter, Sol LeWitt, and P. Inman, among others. Eventually, all his teaching materials will be placed in this collection.

A. R. AMMONS was a distinguished and influential American poet. He was the recipient of many awards and citations and was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1978.

CID CORMAN was an American poet, translator and editor who founded the influential journal of American poetry, *Origin*. Corman published more than one hundred books and pamphlets. Since 1990 three volumes of his selected poems, *OF*, have been published. .

P. INMAN was born in 1947 in Bronxville and grew up on Long Island, NY. He has been a practicing poet since the 1970's. His work has been published in Canada, France, Great Britain, Spain and the U.S. His books include: *Ocker* (Tuumba, 1982), *Platin* (Sun and Moon, 1979), *Uneven Development* (Jimmy's House of Knowledge, 1984), *Red Shift* (Roof Books, 1988), *Vel* (O Books, 1995), *Criss Cross* (Roof Books, 1994), *amounts. to.* (Potes & Poets Press, 2000), *ad finitum* (if p then q, 2008), *per se* (Burning Deck, 2012) and *written (collected works)* (if p then q, forthcoming). In addition, his work has appeared in such anthologies as *In the American Tree* (National Poetry Foundation) and "*Language*" *Poetries* (New Directions).

PAULA CHIPMAN, soprano, is a contemporary music specialist in Washington, DC where she has premiered works of many area composers. Chipman has performed with the Vienna

Chamber Opera, The Vienna State Opera, the Arnold Schoenberg Choir, and the Austrian Radio Chorus. Her portrayal of the title role in Luciano Chailly's *The Bald Soprano* was deemed "outstanding" by *Opern Welt*. Currently she is on the music faculty at Frederick Community College in Frederick, Maryland.

JEFFREY GRAM, percussionist, is a performer and advocate of new music. He has performed with several new music ensembles across the United States, an appearance at the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and premier performances of percussion works by Thomas DeLio, Roger Zahab, and Stuart Saunders Smith. Jeffrey earned degrees in percussion performance from Northwestern University and the University of Akron and taught percussion at the University of Pittsburgh and Muskingum College. He has since earned his Juris Doctor degree, practices law, and continues to support new music as a volunteer board member and guest musician for emerging and established new music ensembles in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area.

JACQUES LINDER, piano, received his Master's degree at the University of Illinois and subsequently studied with Harriet Shirvan and Gabriel Chodos, chair of the piano department of the New England Conservatory of Music. He has presented solo recitals at such institutions as The Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France), French National Television, Luxembourg City, The University of Maryland at College Park, Colgate University, Hamilton College, The Worcester Art Museum, The Dali Museum (St. Petersburg, FLA), Clark University and the University of South Florida, among many others. He has been a featured soloist in festivals of contemporary music throughout Europe and the US. He taught piano at Clark University in Worcester, MA from 1974-1990 and at the University of South Florida Community Music Division from 1990-2000. Jacques Linder has recorded for Neuma Records, 3-D Classics (Paris) and Capstone Recordings.

STACEY MASTRIAN (www.staceymastrian.com), soprano, is a Fulbright Grantee, Beebe Fellow, and Richard F. Gold Career Grant recipient. Her repertoire extends from Monteverdi to the 21st century. She has sung with the Konzerthaus Orchestra (Berlin), Nova Amadeus Orchestra (Rome), and at such venues as the Fondazione Cini (Venice), Chapelle historique du Bon-Pasteur (Montréal), Teatro La Fenice (Venice), St. Peter's (Vatican City), and, in collaboration with Nuria Schoenberg Nono, at the Conservatorio di Musica Respighi (Latina). In the US she has performed with The Bay Players Experimental Music Collective, the Vocal

Arts Society, Opera Lafayette (Kennedy Center) and Rose Hall-Jazz (Lincoln Center). *The New York Times* has praised her for “intensity, focus, and a warm, passionate sound,” and the *Berliner Zeitung* has hailed her singing as “very impressive...tremendous ease and beauty.” She is currently on the faculty of the Sunderman Conservatory of Gettysburg College.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE, Christopher Shultis, Director (Tadeu Coelho, flute; Steven Block, piano; John Bartlit, Steve Hearn, Brett Reed, percussion; Christopher Shultis, conductor). Tadeu Coelho is an avid proponent of new music and the music of the Americas. He has performed with the Santa Fe Symphony, Hofer Symphoniker (Germany), the Spoleto Festival Orchestra (Italy), and the Boston Symphony, among others. He currently teaches at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

THE HOFFMAN/GOLDSTEIN DUO (Paul Hoffman, piano and Tom Goldstein, percussion) has presented numerous concerts in the U.S. and Europe, often premiering works written expressly for them. The Duo released its first CD *Crossfade* on Capstone records (2001). Paul Hoffmann has concertized extensively in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia. He has made over twenty recordings of solo piano and chamber music for the Innova, Capstone, Orion, CRI, Northeastern, Composers Guild of New Jersey, Contemporary Record Society, O.O. Discs, Spectrum, and Vienna Modern Masters labels. He is currently Professor of Music at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. Tom Goldstein has performed with such ensembles as the Orchestra of St. Luke’s and the Brooklyn Philharmonic. He has premiered many solo and chamber works written expressly for him. He has published articles in *Perspectives of New Music*, and *Percussive Notes*, and has recorded on the Neuma, Vanguard, Polydor, Opus 1, O.O. Discs, CD Tech, Capstone, Innova and CRI labels.

PHILHARMONIA BULGARICA (also known as Sofia Metropolitan Orchestra) has worked with many renowned soloists, composers and conductors. Most notable among these was **ROBERT IAN WINSTIN**, a tireless supporter of new American music and Music Director of the recording series Masterworks of the New Era.

This CD was mastered by **Antonino d’Urzo**, Opusrite Studios, Riverdale, Maryland. All other compositions were mastered by the composer in his studio in Washington, DC.

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