

Barry Schrader, *Lost Atlantis*, Innova 629, 2004

If the FFT's timbral universe has been sloshing away your will to live, you might like to give SEAMUS founder Barry Schrader's *Lost Atlantis* a listen [Innova 629, 2004]. This seminal composer of electro-acoustic music has re-released two works from the 1970's that build generous, enthralling trajectories from fantastic palettes of sound coaxed and commanded from an unapologetically analog Buchla 200. Composer/producer Gary Chang mixed and remastered from four-channel masters to produce the stereo versions heard on the CD. *Lost Atlantis* [the CD] comprises *Trinity* (1976) and *Lost Atlantis* (1977).

*Trinity* is a one movement work in rondo-variation form, playing just over fifteen minutes. Called by Schrader a "musical gestalt," its theme is essentially an envelope opening up—i.e., the shape of a hairpin crescendo. [Note: all text within double quotation marks has been drawn from comprehensive liner notes accompanying the CD.] Over a series of five sections, Schrader operates upon this shape via retrograde, nesting and hybridization procedures, and (once) restates it. Clarity of form illuminates Schrader's prodigious timbral invention. At the same time, all these *slopes* provide a basis for the transformations of timbre that especially occupied him during *Trinity's* composition.

*Lost Atlantis* [the composition] is a work in six parts based on an account of Atlantis found in Plato's *Critias*. The parts have titles, such as "The Temple of Poseidon • The Dance of the Gods" and "The Mystery Rites of Purification," tracing the dialogue's progress. The music is accordingly evocative—but in his notes Schrader articulates a concern with relating "interpretations of impressions" rather than painting specific settings. Again, an exquisite control of timbre is foregrounded; and Schrader employs a syntax more varied than *Trinity's* in the service of a more varied (and less purely abstract) set of ideas. The duration of this work is 39:39.

Both works were made with The Electric Music Box [Buchla 200 Analog Modular Synthesizer], developed in 1970, with four additional modules custom built by Fukushi 'Fortune' Kawakami of Yamaha, who was in residence at CalArts when the music was composed. Most important of these Fortune Modules was the Control Voltage Matrix Gate, which allowed Schrader "to mix and process up to four control voltage sources, and was an important factor in [his] ability to do real-time timbral transformations." [The composer grants us a fair amount of technical information in the liner notes; the interested reader may look there.]

I find timbre to be the most outrageous and wonderful aspect of the music. [Note: In preparing this review, I listened to the music on very big, warm Klipsch home audio speakers, Mackie HR824s and standard studio headphones [Sony MDR-7506]. The music sounded good (and so it *was* good) everywhere; but I would strongly recommend listening on headphones at some point.] When you listen to this music, it is very easily 3:00 AM in the studio, and you are in that punch-drunk but exalted state which only comes around there and then, when you have tweaked and tweaked and tweaked, and you just might have done it this time—in other words, the state that is the most soulful payoff for all of us, and justifies our practice more than anything. For practitioners, then, I believe it may be a thrill to think Schrader's thoughts after him. He manifests a mastery not only of his technological environment, but more importantly of the character and flow of musical information pushed to the listener.

At the same time, in opposition to the warmth of some of the fattest filters the world has known, I hear a music that spends much of its time at quite some distance—fine, glorious, kinetic and rather heroic objects rotating in space several thousand yards from here (though they are yet massive enough to be examined in detail). Both works are highly formal, teleological and coherent, and for composers of our time both positive and negative connotations might attend those qualities. Linear are their narratives. But perhaps a tension between Schrader's 'relational' composition and the mind-boggling, *sine*

sweat *non* immediacy of sound is interesting in itself. There are, as well, plenty of moments that would contest any suggestion that the music is awfully Serious—as the third section of *Lost Atlantis* that spins out a celebratory rhythmic section or, more generally, when the sound is so gorgeous it forces out all other considerations. And anyway [SEAMUS], don't we like abstract, heroic objects rotating in space? Perhaps this is part of what Gary Chang means when he writes that the music is "unapologetically electronic."

One final perspective that occurs to me is that these works, though they have and will likely continue to age very well, sound full of the DNA of a single, virtuosic individual—a Californian in the mid-seventies fresh off muttonchops. Obviously that is very cool. This music is sublime, and it would not be surprising if Barry Schrader hears on this CD today *pretty nearly what he intended to put down*.

Ted Coffey