



Uncommon Time
Janice Misurell-
Mitchell

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Uncommon Time is a collection of compositions by the multi-talented artist Janet Misurell-Mitchell. A flutist, composer, and performance artist, she

also serves on the faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and as a member of CUBE Contemporary Chamber Ensemble in Chicago. She has been commissioned by the NFA on multiple occasions and was even named "Chicagoan of the Year" in classical music in 2002.

* When I saw that this music was for flute and voice, I imagined the more traditional pairing of a flutist and a classically trained singer, but this was not the case: In several tracks, the flutist is actually more spoken word poet than flutist.

In "Profaning the Sacred II" and "Bloozy Man/Poet Woman" the flutist (Misurell-Mitchell) begins by reading text derived from different sources by Allen Ginsberg. Eventually, flute notes punctuate this reading, but the speaking itself continues through these notes for an acrobatic feat that makes Robert Dick's sing-and-play moments sound like elementary school

work. These pieces require comfort with theatrical reading, and some text is almost sung (*Sprechstimme*). Misurell-Mitchell does it very convincingly, but these pieces are not for the faint of heart. "Everything Changes," for flute/piccolo/voice and percussion, could be described similarly.

Along the same vein, "Are You Ready?" is purely a sound poem and begins with an explanation of its construction by the composer. The piece was recorded live, and it is helpful to hear the composer's thoughts to help guide listening. Misurell-Mitchell's vocal technique is impressive—her clarity of diction in fast technical passages is amazing, actually—but for all of these spoken word tracks, I feel as though the visual element of a live performance is missing. It would be wonderful to join her at the Green Mill in Chicago and experience the audience's reaction (such an integral part of any performance) as well. But merely listening to the aural element on my stereo while sitting on my couch did not draw me in enough. My experience of these tunes as recordings was a bit too removed.

"Mamiwata" for solo marimba is comprised of atmospheric melodic fragments strung together by delicate beads of sound. It is lovely and abstract, but it maintains a pretty steady pace that becomes slightly taxing by the end of its almost 10 minutes.

"Uncommon Time" for flute and frame drum improvisation is a breath of fresh air—rhythmically tantalizing, tuneful, and a great utilization of some of the flute's many extended

CDs

techniques. Mary Stolper plays the flute part beautifully, with a positive energy that makes me want to learn the piece myself. This composition can keep both performer and audience satisfied, and I loved every short, precious minute of it. A solo flute version of this piece was commissioned by the NFA in 1991 for the High School Soloist Competition.

"Una voce perduta: in memoriam, Ted Shen" for solo alto flute is more free flowing than "Uncommon Time" and lovely in its own way. Another avant garde piece with extended techniques (both are quite heavy on the flutter tongue and also employ double stops, sing-and-play, key clicks, and other standard techniques), the compositional style here reminds me of Takamitsu. Sound and space are mingled to create a kind of wordless haiku that is simple and straightforward.

"A Silent Woman" for voice (a separate singer this time), voice/flute (more of the speeched flute playing), clarinet, and piano, borrows its introduction from 12th-century musical

quotations but soon develops into a completely different, abstract collection of sounds that float in and out of existence and to my ear (and without a score in my hand) rarely interacting with one another. I would file this one under the "esoteric" category, and given its distinct aesthetic and demands placed in individuals, it may be uncommon to hear on stage.

As evidenced in her playing and composing, Misurell-Mitchell is an immensely multi-talented woman. She and her colleagues on this recording deliver flawless performances. Misurell-Mitchell's aesthetic is rather experimental (with the exception of "Uncommon Time" and perhaps "Una voce perduta: in memoriam, Ted Shen"), and she imagines new ways of involving the flute in performance. It is a very specific style but it is done incredibly well. Kudos to her for engaging such talented artists for this recording project and for the creative work she has undertaken.

—Nicole Riner