

**Anthony Braxton
Quartet
(Willisau) 1991
Studio
CD1**



Willisau (Quartet) Studio June 4 & 5, 1991

N.B. Graham Lock's notes for the original release of these CDs in 1992 were in two parts. The first part, in which he traces the evolution of Anthony Braxton's quartet music through its first 25 years, is included as a booklet in hatOLOGY CD 7351.

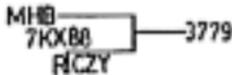


COMPOSITIONS 160 (+ 5) + 40J '1

see two people walking down the street, beautiful trees in the fall, snow, winter coming. They're thinking about their lives, trying to have some hope for the future even though it's always complex.'

Studio CD 1 begins with Braxton's new story piece *Composition 160*, which features him on clarinet, a sighing arco bass solo from Mark Dresser and has Marilyn Crispell weaving parts from *Composition 5* (for solo piano) through the primary territory and a subsequent group improvisation of vivid colours and subtle empathies. Forceful piano, swooshing cymbals and a brief solo clarinet phrase finally signal the move into *Composition 40J*, a principle structure that Braxton likens to 'a small painting', where 'we are drawn to the world of "impressions" and "pointed moments"', the basic impression being of 'a peaceful yet rigid sound universe ... a terrain of sound space that only "touches" on what it could really be'. The

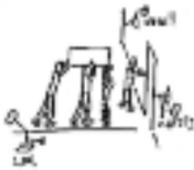
generating principle here is 'to do with the use of a repeating pitch (later just sound) that keeps re-establishing its nature (timbre)'. At first, the principle is voiced by percussion and bass, the timbre changes initially involving hard/soft mallets and arco/pizzicato bass and later being left to the players' invention. By the close, the clarinet is unwinding lazy ribbons of sound over the rhythm's finely-etched 'pointed moments'. A very short piece, which Braxton describes as 'here and gone ... written in a moment - "about a moment"', *40J* is dedicated to his AACM colleague Amina Claudine Myers and was previously recorded in a trio version on *Seven Compositions (Trio)* 1989 (hatOLOGY 658).



COMPOSITIONS 23M (+ 10 + 108D) *Composition 23M* is a material structure dating from 1971, which, says Braxton, is 'designed to generate a post-bebop improvisational continuum as solidified in the Mingus/Coleman continuum of trans-African functionalism'. More specifically, it's a 'unison line structure that is designed to be executed over a conventional rhythm section (with walking bass) for the purpose of establishing terms for solo improvisation'. It is dedicated to Warne Marsh, one of Braxton's saxophone heroes, and a fascination with the 'gravillic weight' of Marsh's solos is almost certainly one of the inspirations behind the piece. 'By gravillic weight I'm talking of the gravity that underlines how a given forming is established in space [i.e. particularly in relation to the metric pulse beneath it - GL]. ... If we break down one of Marsh's solos with respect to the time, we find all kinds of inner gravillic - *pockets!* - completely ametrical, completely outside of the time, which rebalance his phraseology, the nature of his construction, in a unique way.'

So one of the chief operatives in *23M* is the 'use of intervallic phrase construction devices ... having to do with placing very high notes against very low notes - regardless of phrase weight or continuity'. This is what gives the notated line (voiced after a brief improvised prelude) the irresistible, feinting, crazy-dancing feel that carries over into the solos. Braxton, on

alto, is both fierce and reflective at times; beneath him, Marilyn Crispell threads parts from the solo piano *Composition 10* through the pop-like groove of *108D*, a bass/drums pulse track of 'rhythmic shifts and urges'. Mark Dresser's bass solo is a sprightly pizzicato jig, Crispell's builds into a leaping, percussive left-hand/right-hand pitter-patter.



COMPOSITIONS 158 (+ 96) + 40L *Composition 158* is the first example of Braxton's new 'C-class prototypes', the 'C' standing for 'Connector'. (These pieces belong to Braxton's 'synthesis logic strategies', themselves a part of what he terms a 'tri-metric' music-science system that also includes 'solo logics' and 'collective logics'.) C-class prototypes resemble pulse tracks in that they comprise repeating sequences of notated material interspersed by short spaces for improvisation, but otherwise differ in every important particular. In C-class prototypes, each player has an *individual* track of repeating materials, the main distinctions being that a) each player has a separate number of beats for their improvised spaces (and this number remains constant throughout the cycle); and b) each player's notated material is interlinked with that of two other players – i.e., Braxton's track, say, has some notation in common with Crispell's and some in common with Dresser's. Crispell's is linked with Braxton's and Hemingway's, and so on. This is presumably what gives *Composition 158* its dense, urgent, jostling feel, with Braxton's soprano snaking keenly through an apparent maze of sounds.

As *158* falls away, dreamy piano slow-tumbles across the skyline (it's actually the harp part from *Composition 96*) before soprano, scratchy bass and snuffling timbres from contrabass clarinet lead us towards *Composition 40L*, a material structure in six sections that Braxton describes as 'an environment rather than a platform ... an idea that materialized – "so that one can literally walk through the rooms of the music"'. We're escorted through these rooms by some elegantly strolling ensemble interplay (plus the odd hop, skip and jump!) and – on tiptoe now – a delicate percussion solo of whispering cymbals and tapping sticks. Dedicated to Woody Shaw, this is *40L*'s first appearance on record.



COMPOSITION 40A *Composition 40A* is a thematic structure that was originally written in 1974 as a duo for flute and bass and rescored in 1977 for quartet. The opening notes establish a feeling of stillness, after which a 16-note scale pattern provides both the backbone for all the notated material and the thematic basis for improvisation – you can also hear it repeated in various ways by the bassist during the extended solos. This version has, I think, a lovely hushed quality at the outset, then creates a feeling of teasing playfulness through the faster sections (the bassline running up and down stairs in a dignified hurry!) before it closes with a fleet yet equable piano solo. *Composition 40A* was previously recorded in 1981 on *Six Compositions: Quartet* and is dedicated to Cecil McBee.



COMPOSITION 40B *Composition 40B* has long been one of my favourite examples of Braxton's 'post-bebop' works; I love the way all the parts fit together, particularly the contrast between the ticking-over vamp and the surging 4/4 main theme. This version is special for Braxton's alto solo, a wonderfully relaxed and expansive performance that seems to exude pure happiness as the form almost melts away in his slipstream. The rhythm section negotiate the curves at a careering tempo and Crispell's solo adds a dab of turbulent glee before the alto returns to dance in and out of the theme with capricious joy. *Composition 40B* is dedicated to Lou Donaldson and has appeared on record before on *Dortmund (Quartet) 1976* (hatOL-GY 557) and *Six Compositions: Quartet*.

**Anthony Braxton
Quartet (Willisau) 1991
Studio**

Anthony Braxton *alto saxophone, clarinet &
contrabass clarinet, flute
and soprano*

Marilyn Crispell *piano*

Mark Dresser *double bass*

Gerry Hemingway *drums & marimba*

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | No. 160 (+5) + 40J | 11:26 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901548</small> | |
| 2 | No. 23M (+10 + 108D) | 15:03 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901549</small> | |
| 3 | No. 158 (+96) +40L | 17:04 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901550</small> | |
| 4 | No. 40A | 8:24 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901551</small> | |
| 5 | No. 40B | 12:13 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901552</small> | |
| Total Time DDD ²⁴ Bit | | 64:12 |

*All compositions by Anthony Braxton,
Tuhtah Publishing SUISA.*

*Recorded by Peter Pfister June June 4 & 5, 1991 at
Hotel Mohren, Willisau; Liner Notes by Graham Lock;
New CD-master November 2017 by Peter Pfister;
Recording produced by Werner X. Uehlinger; Executive
production by Bernhard "Benne" Vischer, Christian C.
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Special thanks to Ems, Niklaus and Walter Troxler.

2018, 2nd edition remastered

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File under: Jazz/Free Improvisation

**Anthony Braxton
Quartet
(Willisau) 1991
Studio
CD2**



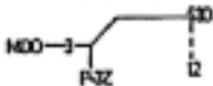
Willisau (Quartet) Studio June 4 & 5, 1991



COMPOSITION 161 Studio CD 2 begins with the second of Braxton's story pieces, the brief *Composition 161*. 'Suddenly you see three guys in the pool room, having fun, talking about their feelings of pessimism for the future. Yet these three guys are very strong and we can still have hope for them.' The dark, pensive air of the music, edged by creaking timbres (Braxton on contrabass clarinet), is lightened by traces of lyricism that gradually assert themselves and open up the space a little. 'I think the studio CDs really bring out the lyrical qualities of this quartet,' Braxton remarks, 'plus the way they blend together so well.' This track, together with, say, *Compositions 160, 40A and 40L*, underlines the point.



COMPOSITION 159 With *Composition 159* we jump straight into a bristling torrent of sounds, the repeating figure rising, mid-phrase, to a cry that on alto sounds at first like a rooster trying to crow Beethoven's Fifth, though Braxton invests it with an unsettling intensity that, with subtle inflexions of phrasing, also seems to alter its character each time it comes around – plaintive, anguished, noble, cheeky. By the close, it's like an enigmatic banner that flutters over the music, its colours changing with each shift of the breeze. This is the second of the C-class prototypes on these CDs and it's not hard to follow the interlinking phrases as they flit from instrument to instrument, each player's track rotating at a different rate, almost like planetary orbits in the solar system. The purpose of the C-class prototypes, adds Braxton, is 'to open up another action field for us as instrumentalists and composers. I'm looking for fresh sound spaces, fresh strategies, fresh ways to negotiate and appreciate sudden changes of environment. It's about all of us being able to realize our potentials to the full.'

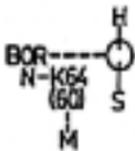


COMPOSITIONS 23C + 32 + 105B (+ 30) The track begins with a free-wheeling improvisation in which Braxton (on flute) and Gerry Hemingway are open, Mark Dresser plays from *Composition 96* and Marilyn Crispell switches (I think) from open to *Composition 10* to open to *Piano Piece 1* for the spacey plink-plonk interlude (flute, bass, marimba, piano) that immediately precedes the primary territory. *Composition 23C* itself is an ‘additive repetition structure’ that was composed in 1973. ‘The work is designed as an extended phrase that is progressively revealed in a series of 21 repeats’ and which, in its second half, also ‘acts as a disintegration factor’ that suddenly turns the piece ‘angular and tonally non-harmonic’. *23C* is unusual among Braxton’s quartet pieces in being neither a platform nor an environment for improvisation, but comprising simply one long line that is played in unison (though the percussionist is free to improvise): its role is to ‘provide group consciousness’ and, by offering an alternative focus within the co-ordinate spectrum, ‘to broaden the whole canvas of the music – both conceptually and dynamically’. *Composition 23C* was first recorded on *New York Fall 1974*; it is dedicated to the athlete Willie Mays.

As *23C* ‘disintegrates’, piano and bass move to *Composition 32*, originally a solo piano piece that is dedicated to Herbie Nichols and, writes Braxton, was ‘conceived as a response to my vision of cloud formations’. In particular, it investigates “‘cloud-like” sounds (that range from “formless”, “smoke-like” sound masses to beautiful chords that seem to float along the space of the music)’. The clouds here pass all too quickly, dispersed by whorls of clarinet, and after a brief passage of piano tinkles and squeaky bass, the group step into *Composition 105B*, a material and principle structure that ‘unfolds as a sound-beam-like world that presents a series of small one-act plays (that are held up for examination – in the light – and then changed)’. A ‘universe of contradictions’, *105B* places ‘long moving phrase grouping statements (in the upper voices)’ on top of ‘short quick-moving sound emphases in the rhythm section’ to create ‘a series of moment flashes ... as the music erupts in spasmodic material occurrences that give the impression of “moving events”’. My more impressionistic response is of Braxton’s lines floating over a jagged rhythm landscape (through which Marilyn Crispell scatters parts from the solo piano *Composition 30*), then quickening, quickening and finally soaring up into flaring peals of clarinet. *Composition 105B*’s only previous appearance on record was on *Quartet (Birmingham) 1985*; it is dedicated to Marilyn Crispell.



COMPOSITIONS 23M (+ 10 + 108D) This version of *Composition 23M* is the earlier of the two takes. Here it’s shorter and moves at a less frantic tempo, which helps to bring out the humour and askew catchiness of its jinking, zig-zag line. Braxton records in his *Composition Notes* that *23M* was ‘visually conceived’ and its notation is based on clarifying ‘extended visual shapes’ rather than on any harmonic or thematic premise. One result is that the notation is ‘written without stems – and without any time signatures’, i.e. as ‘sound-dot-points’. (It’s appropriate that Marilyn Crispell chooses to play *Composition 10* in this territory because *10* – a solo piano piece from 1969, dedicated to Wassily Kandinsky – is notated graphically by means of 68 visual figures that include dots, lines, stars, spirals, squiggles, etc.) *Composition 23M* was first recorded in Tokyo for the *Four Compositions (1973)* LP, but I think it’s this quartet who really find the fun in it – and the swing. To quote Marilyn Crispell, ‘those fast, complicated compositions of Anthony’s, they really swing – you have to *listen* to hear it, but there are all kinds of figures in there, jagged, accented, off-the-beat phrases, that swing like crazy’. The effect is enhanced here, as on the later take, by the addition of *108D*, a bebop-inspired pulse track of ‘dancing sound shapes’ that looks to ‘reawaken the memory’ of 1940s jam sessions.



40M 'In this work I wanted to establish a rhythmic pulse criterion to generate dynamic improvisation,' Braxton writes, later adding that 'Composition 40M is a static and active revolving structure that takes the concept of the vamp as its primary generating basis.' In particular, the vamp pattern is a 'sound anchor' that is 'used to open and close the music', the bassist being able to move from the vamp to either open improvisation or 'a "walking" pattern that gives the illusion of "release" to the music'. Here it opens with a stirring percussion solo before Braxton's mercurial alto rides in, chased later by a swashbuckling piano solo. The alto returns to lead the ensemble into a breakneck, swirling screech of a climax – twice! – before the music gently tails away.

Composition 40M has previously appeared on *Live At Moers Festival and Five Pieces 1975*. 'I like to include some older pieces, just to add a different colour,' Braxton explains. 'I think the early structures still serve the function of allowing creativity to exist and it's a trans-idiomatic music – that is, we're not just repeating New Orleans.' Nor bebop, I might add, though *40M*, like *40B* on CD 1 definitely belongs in the 'post-bebop' zone of Braxton's work – as he writes in his notes to the piece, 'This is a universe rooted in the traditional continuum of trans-African pedagogy.' However, *40M*, like all of Braxton's quartet compositions, was 'conceived as a response to the challenge of tomorrow – having to do with the forward motion of all devices (and things) as a means to re-establish the nature of tradition'. That is, the challenge is to extend the tradition, not merely repeat it. And if, as Ornette said, tomorrow is the question, then I'm certain these CDs will provide some of the answers.

Detailed analyses of these works (up to *Composition 119*) can be found in Anthony Braxton's *Composition Notes, Books A-E*, and his philosophy of music is set out in *Tri-Axium Writings, Vols 1-3*, all of which can be ordered from Frog Peak Music, Box 1052, Lebanon, New Hampshire 03766, USA, . The online Braxton discography, compiled by Jason Guthartz, is available at <http://www.restructures.net/BraxDisco/BraxDisco.htm>

Graham Lock's books on Anthony Braxton include *Forces in Motion: Anthony Braxton and the Meta-Reality of Creative Music, Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* and, as editor, *Mixtery: A Festschrift for Anthony Braxton*. His later writings on Braxton include the online articles "'What I Call a Sound": Anthony Braxton's Synaesthetic Ideal and Notation for Improvisers' in *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, vol.4.1, 2008 (<http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/462/992>) and 'The Early Evolution of Anthony Braxton's Ghost Trance Musics and Trillium Operas: The Fantasy and Mystery Interviews' in *Sound American* 16, 2016 (http://soundamerican.org/sa_archive/sa16/sa16-graham-lock-interviews-anthony-braxton.html)

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| 1 | No. 161 | 5:55 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901553</small> | |
| 2 | No. 159 | 12:46 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901554</small> | |
| 3 | No. 23C + 32 + 105B (+30) | 23:48 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901555</small> | |
| 4 | No. 23M (+10 + 108D) | 10:27 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901556</small> | |
| 5 | No. 40M | 12:02 |
| | <small>ISRC CH 131.1901557</small> | |
| Total Time DDD ²⁴ <i>Bit</i> | | 65:02 |

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