

Side 1 (16:44)

Donald Erb

**SPATIAL FANFARE FOR BRASS AND  
PERCUSSION (1:31)**

**CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE AND  
ORCHESTRA**

(I) 3:49

(II) 4:50

(III) 3:31

(IV) 2:47

**Stuart Dempster, trombone  
Louis Lane, conductor**

Side 2 (19:46)

Donald Erb

**CHRISTMASMUSIC**

(I) 3:36

(II) 3:25

**AUTUMNMUSIC**

(I) 4:58

(II) 3:17

(III) 4:20

**Louis Lane, conductor**

**Spatial Fanfare for Brass and Percussion  
Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra  
(1976) Christmasmusic (1967) Au-  
tumnmusic (1973)**

**by Donald Erb**

Called by one reviewer "a composer who will be remembered when the twentieth century is history," Donald Erb is an eclectic author of dozens of works expressed in a vast array of musical media. Born in Youngstown, Ohio, on January 17, 1927, he began his musical studies at the age of eight. After serving in the Navy, he pursued his interest in music as a trumpet player and arranger for dance bands at the end of the big band era. He subsequently received degrees from Kent State University in trumpet, and from the Cleveland Institute of Music and Indiana University in composition.

His serious composing began in 1949, reflecting the major influences of that time, and his study with Marcel Dick gave him a strong background in serial techniques. The composer feels that his own distinct musical personality emerged in 1958, with the completion of *Dialogue for Violin and Piano*. Since then, he has been constantly searching for new sounds and fresh musical ideas, as is evidenced by the challenging material on this recording.

Donald Erb has received numerous fellowships and awards, including those from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Council on the Arts. A Guggenheim Fellowship helped make possible a year of study in electronic music at the Case Institute, and a second Rockefeller Grant enabled the composer to spend a season as Composer-in-Residence with the Dallas Symphony. He is currently Composer-in-Residence at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and lives in Cleveland with his wife and four children.

CHRISTMASMUSIC was commissioned to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Cleveland Orchestra and is dedicated to conductor Louis Lane. It was completed during the fall of 1967 and first heard on December 21 of that year. The eight-minute piece features a variety of novel musical media as outlined by the composer:

Some composers of my generation believe that traditional musical instruments are "washed up" as a source of new sounds, and have turned completely either to electronics or the stage as a source of new material. To me the appeal of "live" music is still irresistible. Musical instruments and musicians offer constant sources of new sounds. Listed here are some of the sounds you will hear:

*Movement I.* Timpani with snare drum brushes  
Glass wind chimes  
Brass players tapping mouthpiece with palm  
Flutes clicking keys  
Wind players humming and making tonguing sounds  
String players rattling fingers against instruments  
A bottle half filled with water used as a percussion instrument

*Movement II.* Piano played with glass on strings  
Trombone played with F slide removed  
Harp strings pulled, played like Japanese koto  
Piano played with xylophone mallets

But the point of CHRISTMASMUSIC goes much deeper than the creation of original sound effects. Erb has developed a miniature philosophical reflection on the dual nature of this peculiarly American phenomenon. This explains the contrasting character of the work's two movements, the first "quiet and mysterious" in the composer's words, the second "energetic and ... earthy."

The festival of Christmas has, it seems to me, two quite opposite aspects to it. Christmas is sacred and secular; it encompasses the service and the office party, the church and the department store, prayers and feasting, the crèche and crass commercialism ... (Yet) CHRISTMASMUSIC is not meant to be taken either as a sermon, or as a satire. It simply attempts to deal, in light of today, with a "tradition" which is constantly changing and rarely examined.

When Louis Lane commissioned the work, he suggested the setting of traditional Christmas material, and Erb obliged by adapting the beautiful chorale melody "O Come Emmanuel." Motivic fragments of the melody are used throughout the first movement, toward the

end of which the basses quote the entire melody. The second movement makes use of the melody's final phrase. "Toward the end of this movement," notes the composer, "the melody becomes gradually more audible until near the close it is quoted in a rather direct and discernible manner."

Louis Lane was also associated with the composition of another short piece by Donald Erb. Lane was to conduct Erb's well-known orchestral piece *The Seventh Trumpet* at a Cleveland Orchestra concert, but felt that some other work should open the evening. The musicians did not get their parts to the SPATIAL FANFARE until the morning of the premiere. The work is literally "spatial" in that it calls for the players to be situated throughout the hall, surrounding the audience with sound. Despite the musical and logistical problems, the highly inventive piece for brass and percussion went beautifully.

Six years after CHRISTMASMUSIC, Erb wrote AUTUMNMUSIC, commissioned by the William Inglis Morse Trust Fund and first played by Frank Brieff and the New Haven Symphony on November 20, 1973. AUTUMNMUSIC uses taped electronic sounds along with the orchestra, and calls on the musicians to use their instruments in new ways. The brass players use their keys, the timpanist plays the bowl and the skin, the bass players use pencils on their strings. What is the point? To give the audience a unique musical experience in the sheer joy of sound. The piece is in three movements and Erb is quite serious when he maintains it is "very much in the classical tradition." The work opens with a mysterious, even frightening atmosphere, as dramatic as the very last leaves of summer falling to earth, leaving a barren tree to face the frozen winter. The movement dies, gradually and inevitably. The second and third movements are played without a break. Erb compares the second to a scherzo-trio, and calls the third a finale.

The CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE AND ORCHESTRA, written a little more than eight years after CHRISTMASMUSIC, may be the composer's best-known work. It was commissioned by trombonist Stuart Dempster with assistance from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music. Completed January 26, 1976, the Concerto was first performed on March 11, 1976 by Mr. Dempster and the St. Louis Symphony conducted by Leonard Slatkin, another important champion of Erb's music. The TROMBONE CONCERTO was also a featured work at the 1980 American Composers Orchestra concert in Lincoln Center and received highly favorable notices. *Musical America's* Joan LaBarbara called it "a worthy task, integrating the extended, experimental sounds of the contemporary trombone into a traditional format. He has succeeded in producing a fine piece of music . . ."

Mr. Erb has kindly provided the following comments on his work:

The concerto is in four movements. The first movement is the most traditional and uses primarily the time-honored lyric qualities of the trombone. The linear quality of this movement draws at least in part on the contributions of jazz. Many of the great trombonists of the twentieth century have been jazz musicians and their influence on the development of the instrument cannot be discounted. Although lyric, the movement is in a medium fast tempo.

The second movement, the only truly slow movement of the concerto, features several other aspects of the instrument. Brass instruments, particularly the trumpet and trombone, are capable of great timbral variety due to the use of many mutes which produce beautiful sounds. Several of these can be employed in a variety of ways and in the concerto the performer is called upon to make subtle changes in their use while playing.

The movement also makes considerable use of the lip trill which is produced by moving from one overtone of the instrument to another. The soloist is asked to play staccato passages of elegant character.

The third movement of the concerto is very similar in character to the scherzo found in most symphonies. In this movement double stops are produced by playing one note and simultaneously singing another. The extreme upper register of the instrument is featured several times in this movement.

The final movement is in many ways the most unusual. Here I drew upon Mr. Dempster's knowledge of the didjeridu, a wind instrument played by the bushmen of Australia and one of the oldest instruments still in use. There are several unique aspects of playing the didjeridu. One is the ability to play continuously due to a technique known as circular breathing. The Aborigines also interpolate animal sounds such as barking through the instrument while the playing continues. I attempted to give the movement a thrust that would enhance the primitive quality involved. It also, hopefully, makes a fitting finale.

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**Notes by Marshall A. Portnoy  
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