



fade

dan becker



- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| 1. | Gridlock
The Common Sense Ensemble | 6:40 |
| 2. | RelInvention 1a (from Five RelInventions)
Solo Disklavier piano | 2:59 |
| 3. | Fade
The New Millennium Ensemble | 9:09 |
| 4. | RelInvention 3F | 2:16 |
| 5. | RelInvention 4f | 3:25 |
| 6. | Keeping Time; Mvt. I | 4:43 |
| 7. | Keeping Time; Mvt. II
The New Millennium Ensemble | 6:51 |
| 8. | RelInvention 5d | 2:08 |
| 9. | RelInvention 2c | 2:05 |
| 10. | A Dream of Waking
The New Millennium Ensemble | 12:33 |
| | | —52:46— |

© Dan Becker. All Rights Reserved, 2014.
 innova® Recordings is the label of the
 American Composers Forum.
www.innova.mu www.danbecker.org





Dan Becker loves to compose music (recent commissions include a work for Kronos), study music (he received his DMA from Yale), teach music (by way of the SF Conservatory of Music), organize music (as founder of the Common Sense Composers' Collective and thru other projects), and serve the cause of new music (he's done time on the boards of such organizations as the American Music Center.)

Becker confesses to an obsession with “process” in all its forms. Not just musical ones, but sociological, mathematical, and natural processes as well. He fancies he can almost “see” them unfolding and whirling around him; all whizzing by, colliding, merging, often intersecting. He finds great delight in this and believes that music is an excellent vehicle to give voice (and possible meaning) to these phenomena.

He lives in SF with his wife (and fellow Common Sense comrade) Belinda Reynolds and his 10-year old daughter Eleanor, who never ceases to amaze. He also takes special delight in watching his former students, unique delinquents all, go on to do great things.

Clearing a Path, Lighting the Way: The Musical Communities of Dan Becker

By John Halle

Most of us have a mind's eye image of the LA where Dan Becker's family moved to from Cleveland in the mid 60s: an American eden of cloudless skies, movie stars and endless possibility.

But that did not mean that Becker's circumstances were easy for the person he seemed, in a freak of socio-cultural genetics, predestined to become.

For the particular LA which Becker was raised in had its share of the noir underside of the dream, a world of hyper-acquisitive male egos in the shark-tank of studio executives, their lawyers, lobbyists, and a few bankable stars. In these circles, musicians were seen as lowly content providers for "the industry"-- on the menu, rather than at the table.

But like so many before and since, Becker followed the muse, not Mammon, by a young age becoming impressively proficient on the piano and clarinet. Having composed prolifically within the musical comedy genre in high school, receiving praise from Steven Sondheim, Becker slowly made the transition to contemporary classical music. Journeying through several styles, he eventually arrived at an aesthetic much inspired by the then cutting edge, left leaning minimalism of Louis Andriessen and the late Steve Martland.

If his decision to become an artist constituted a rebellion, the way in which he would pursue it was even more so, albeit subtly. For Becker's relationship to the musical world was not of carving out a ruggedly individual path to the top. Again and again he has shown that composers and performers succeed artistically not through Randian self-centeredness, but by being brought together. These alliances have at their root the unique power of music to create communities, which Becker would probably designate as spiritual communities, between audiences and performers, composers and performers, performers and composers.

The Common Sense Composers Collective was the first beneficiary of Becker's catalytic advocacy, founded when Becker was still at Yale in the early 1990s and which continues to this day, having

produced a substantial and distinguished body of work for numerous collaborative ensembles. Upon moving to San Francisco, Becker instituted the Opus 415 festival which for more than a few shining moments, demonstrated that the threads of a balkanized Bay Area music scene could be woven together for a single remarkable marathon concert. Finally, as the head of the composition program at the SF Conservatory, he has fostered collaborations to include under one roof the most traditionally “classical” of musicians alongside those defining themselves by challenging its most fundamental premises. His influence has been passed on to generations of students who are now building their own communities on the foundations which Becker has provided.



While Becker’s advocacy for music, musicians, and audiences has been multifaceted, coursing underneath it has been a series of remarkable works articulating a single clear vision, one which is consistent with, and communicates an equivalently passionate idealism that new, shared worlds of musical experience are possible. This is perhaps most evident in what are the most placid works, pieces like *Fade* and the first movement of *Keeping Time* which lose the listener in their perfect repose, the inevitability of their melodic logic and sonic richness providing a refuge from the quotidian blare of commercialized hype and its easy, corrosive, certainties.

Placidity, a constant theme in Becker’s music, however, doesn’t equate to passivity. What is perhaps most characteristic of Becker’s work is its fiercely kinetic surface. Equally characteristic is a remarkable perceptual trompe l’oreille effect whereby the musical flow is momentarily frozen: the fence posts in the foreground blurring together, one finds in the distance a gorgeous landscape—a bass line, inner voice or harmonic progression, imperceptibly receding from or proceeding into conscious awareness. One experiences the passage of time as simultaneously fast and slow, immobilized and hurtling forward; time passes, but is also suspended.

This trick is perhaps most conspicuous in the *ReInventions* where Becker imposes a formidable post-minimal superstructure onto a Bachian base, each developing according to its own self-contained logic, both composerly miracles of perfection playing out as they please, at their own pace and in their own time.

Gridlock, the opener, achieves the same effect, though its first impression is of a virtuoso showpiece—a post minimalist concerto for micro-orchestra. Becker’s most performed work, a predictable favorite with musicians and audiences alike, an acquaintance with the score reveals layers of intrigue: Fibonacci sequences recalling the numerological codes of medieval scholasticism. Its deceptively big-band popish surface is subverted by a monastic obsession for rationalized order, constituting a rebellion of its own: a ringing endorsement of formalist artistic independence.

The second movement of *Keeping Time* revisits some of the same ideas at a remove of some years. Older but wiser, simultaneously more austere and more romantic in its determination to carry through the logic of its premise, in its minor key heroic mode, looking over Becker’s shoulder is the spirit of one of Becker’s compositional mentors, with Becker reposing his iconic question “muss es sein?” Becker, donning the weighty Viennese mantle, provides a 21st century response: an affirmation, a “yes, it must be” for the postmodern era.

Closing the CD, *A Dream of Waking* transfers both onto a broader temporal canvas while paring down the ensemble to a dialog of two equals. Whereas the former break off interrogatively, here provisional answers are proposed, friendly amendments are offered, tentative conclusions are reached, a plan of action is decided on. All this, and the CD as whole, offers a window on to what those of us who have known Becker for years have admired in his relationships with his colleagues, students and mentors, and in his consummate awareness of how to order, present and bring to life his musical material: a mirror of what Becker has offered all members of the musical communities he has brought into being and continues to serve.

*John Halle is a composer
who teaches Music Theory at the
Bard College Conservatory.*

New Millennium Ensemble is a mixed sextet of winds, strings, piano and percussion. Winners of the 1995 Walter W. Naumburg chamber music award and a CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, the ensemble has earned praise for its dynamic performances and wide-ranging repertoire. They have premiered over fifty new works, and appeared at Merkin Hall, Miller Theatre, the Ethical Culture Society, Weill Recital Hall, and at Harvard, Columbia and Princeton Universities. Past performances include appearances at the Radio León Festival in Monterrey, Mexico, the American Academy in Rome, the Eastman School of Music, Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society, and Alice Tully Hall.

The ten-piece **Common Sense Ensemble** was formed in 1993 to premiere and then record the eight compositions that resulted from the Common Sense Composers' Collective's first collaborative project.

A **Disklavier** is essentially a modern piano that uses electromechanical solenoid and optical sensors connected to LEDs allowing them to play notes and use the pedals independently of any human operator. [From Wikipedia]



FADE

Album produced by Dan Becker
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis

1. **Gridlock** (1994)

The Common Sense Ensemble:

Patti Monson, flutes; Libby Van Cleve, oboe; Michael Lowenstern, clarinet; Neil Mueller, trumpet; Julie Josephson, trombone; Dave Spies, tuba; Sara Laimon, piano; Gregor Kitzis, violin; Robert Black, double bass; Danny Tunick, percussion; Bradley Lubman, conductor

Commissioned by Common Sense Composers' Collective

Produced, engineered, edited, and mixed by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistance by Jeanne Velonis

Recorded January 14, 1996 at the Performing Arts Center, Recital Hall C, SUNY Purchase, NY

Originally released on CRI's Emergency Music 731

Remastered by Patrick Muller for Trace Label (Post Minimalism, Trace 024)

Used with kind permission

2. **ReInvention 1a** (from **Five ReInventions**; 1993)

Solo Disklavier piano

Produced, engineered and mixed by Chris Kubick; mastered by Jeanne Velonis

Recorded September 26, 2011 at 4348 Studios, San Francisco, CA

3. **Fade** (2003)

The New Millennium Ensemble:

Tara Helen O'Connor, flute; Margaret Kampmeier, piano;

Gregory Hesselink, cello; John Ferrari, vibes

Commissioned by Essential Music and the Spoleto Music Festival

Produced, engineered, edited, and mixed by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistance by Jeanne Velonis

Recorded May 27, 2009 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, NYC, NY

4. **ReInvention 3F**

5. **ReInvention 4f**

6. **Keeping Time; Mvt. I** (2008)

7. **Keeping Time; Mvt. II**

The New Millennium Ensemble:

Sunghae Anna Lim, violin; Margaret Kampmeier, piano;

Alan Kay, bass clarinet; Gregory Hesselink, cello; John Ferrari, vibes

Commissioned by Other Minds

Produced, engineered, edited, and mixed by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistance by Jeanne Velonis

Recorded May 28, 2009 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, NYC, NY

8. **ReInvention 5d**

9. **ReInvention 2c**

10. **A Dream of Waking** (2003)

The New Millennium Ensemble:

Sunghae Anna Lim; violin; Margaret Kampmeier; piano

Commissioned by CAPMT and the Music Teachers National Association

Produced, engineered, edited, and mixed by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistance by Jeanne Velonis

Recorded May 28, 2009 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, NYC, NY



Special Thanks to:

Belinda Reynolds, Philip Blackburn, Jeanne Velonis, Judy Sherman, Chris Kubick, Peggy Kampmeier, Carolyn Yarnell, Hervé Zénouda, New World Records, and all the wonderful performers that helped to create this disc.



Dedicated to:

Eleanor Becker, previously a star in the sky; currently visiting

Cover photo: "July 4, 2009"; Eleanor Becker, Coalinga, CA, taken by the composer
innova is supported by an endowment from the McKnight Foundation.

Philip Blackburn, director, design

Chris Campbell, operations manager

Steve McPherson, publicist

www.innova.mu