

IMAGE AND SOUND:
THE VISUAL STRATEGIES OF ECM RECORDS

by

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Abstract

Commercial recordings – CDs, LPs – are familiar objects. However, discussion about them has often attempted to conceal the fact that, as communicating objects, recordings pose special problems due to the fact that they unite text, image, and sound in a material commodity. This thesis examines the role of the visual in the production, circulation and use of recordings. The album cover is the primary category of study, with an emphasis on its functioning in relation to the recording as a sonic and material commodity. The label ECM, a German company which has been producing recordings since 1969, provides the main focus in this analysis.

The basis of this investigation lies in the questioning of the assumptions and categories that have historically guided the activity of cover design and the discourse about it. Traditionally, recordings have been understandably seen primarily as sound-carriers; their visual aspects, even when celebrated, are most often relegated to a peripheral status, despite the fact that in certain contexts the importance of the visual can overwhelm that of sound. The usual hierarchical opposition between these elements is here questioned through an examination of both the marketing of recordings and their circulation and use.

ECM provides a pertinent case through which such questions can be elaborated. Its visual marketing strategies can be characterised in terms of a desire for difference. ECM's attempt to set itself apart has resulted in a "look" which rejects many conventions. It has also resulted in a complex, conceptual group of visual strategies. In its particular use of landscape photography, blank space, and gestural markings, ECM constructs ideas of space which relate to the potential for performativity and creativity. Through the combination of these strategies, the label deemphasises creative personality of the musical performer and emphasises the space occupied by the looker/listener. In doing this, it also questions the traditional boundaries between music and the visual. ECM's covers cause these categories to become indistinct and allow new conceptions of the recording as a material commodity to emerge.

One effect of this is a construction of the apprehender's subjectivity that fails to fit within the marketplace's traditional categories. The thesis considers how the visual has been implicated in more concrete processes such as the negotiation of taste and practices of consumption and use. The niche that ECM attempts to carve out for itself is considered in relation to the tension in the marketplace between the desire for distinction and the recording as a mass-produced commodity.

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*Don't you wonder sometimes
About sound and vision?*

David Bowie
"Sound and Vision"
1977

1: Introduction

Time of day and weather are both uncertain; the image apparently depicts a beach, the watery horizon not clearly distinguishable from the grey sky (fig. 1). A pole of uncertain function occupies the middle ground. Nearer are some white patches that might be snow. At first glance, with its low contrast and seemingly unremarkable subject matter, this photograph seems to be interested in disinterestedness. It does not look much like an advertising photograph, nor does it explicitly bear the traits of conventional depictions of landscape (majesty, unspoiledness, a search for the sublime), and its lack of definition resists close scrutiny of details. This is an image which does not give much away.

There is more to this image, however. A horizontal grey band, similar in tone to the earth at the bottom of the photograph, is the background for the "caption" of the photograph, which reads "Bobo Stenson Trio - War Orphans". Again, the relationship between these two elements does not appear generous in terms of immediate meaning. The phrase "War Orphans" is strongly connotative, even violent, but it seems as though none of the violence of the text can be easily found within the image that illustrates it. Or, in this case, does the text illustrate the image?

What is the relationship between these two elements? The difficulty in

interpreting this apparent disjuncture is heightened with the realisation that this relationship is attached to yet another dimension of signification. The image and the text occupy the front of a recording of wordless, instrumental music. The music of a contemporary jazz trio bears far fewer concrete referents than either the image or the text. In fact, one might go so far as to say that its only true referent is other music. However, in this package all three are bound together and forced to interact in varying ways.

What sort of object are we dealing with? Recordings are familiar, but they are also strange. While their primary purpose is usually and understandably thought to be the transmission of sound, their particular status as *visual* (and material) commodities remains largely unexamined critically, despite the very significant role that these dimensions play in their production and in their use. Many people, to varying degrees, organise parts of their lives and their living spaces around the purchase and use of recordings. Increasingly over the past 30 years, recordings have come to be primary signifiers of taste and distinction within almost all socioeconomic groups, especially when organised in individual collections; in this climate, the “record collection” becomes less a library of works and more a reflection of its owner's taste and personality. Pierre Bourdieu speaks of “appropriation” at the service of personality:¹ owned goods are, by general assumption, enjoyed and used, and this enjoyment and use of objects alone and in combinations is taken to speak of the quality of the individual's personality as much as the qualities of the goods themselves. As goods, however, recordings must negotiate between the desire for difference and distinction on the one hand,

and the fact and practice of mass production on the other. In other words, since (new) recordings all cost about the same amount of money, difference and distinction must be constructed and aimed for through means which have little to do with economic status. Similarly, an onus is put on the user of recordings to construct individual taste and personality within this level economic arena. This is certainly not to say that everyone has equal access to recordings, but merely to suggest that debate about taste and preference in music and recordings happens within and between widely varying groups, and is not limited to "connoisseurs".

The purpose of this thesis is to address some of the problems and questions that arise from the recognition that recordings, as well as carrying sound, are also physical commodities whose visual elements are highly implicated in their production, marketing, and use. The argument will proceed through the raising of basic questions, such as the problem of how to characterise recordings in terms of the ways in which they signify and communicate: how can the relationship between the visual and sound in recordings be characterised in terms of thought and debate about signification? How has this relationship been treated in writing and discourse about recordings? In what ways does this relationship connect with and/or deviate from ideas about the relationship between text and image? The address of these issues will lead on to more specific problems dealing with the visual's role in the economic, cultural, and "lifestyle" functions of recordings. More specifically, the role of the recording in contemporary consumption, the construction of taste, and the idea of self-realisation through consumption will be addressed.

An examination of the products of the record label ECM, of which *War Orphans* is one example, will enable me to consider how the visual aspect of recordings can be framed within debates and ideas about taste, difference, use and consumerism in the field of recordings. Of course, the idea that “image”, in the public relations sense of the term, is crucial to the marketing of recordings is nothing new; mechanisms of media external to recordings, such as video, press, and advertising are constantly employed by the recording industry to “build up a context around the record... [making] the potential buyer feel that it is important”.² Perhaps the most common practice of this kind is that of emphasising the creative personality, public persona, and even extra-musical activities of the performer.³ The products of ECM, on the other hand, are atypical in this regard and seem to contravene many of the “rules” and conventions of record production. For these reasons, they provide us with one way into the critical questioning of marketing. I will argue that, largely through visual means, ECM shifts emphasis away from the performer and toward the consumer, and it will thus be possible to propose that through its (anti-) marketing strategies it allows the potential of the visual in recordings to be critically reexamined. ECM participates in a market, but it also attempts to appear as though it is not fully complicit in the functioning of that market; its products thus dramatise the tension that exists in the field of recordings between ideas of distinction or difference and the reality of recordings as mass-produced, exchangeable goods. The examination of recordings such as *War Orphans* will serve to expand and complexify ideas about the ways in which recordings function, with a consistent

emphasis on the visual.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band is one of the most immediately recognisable record covers ever produced (fig. 2). While the bulk of this discussion will deal with much lesser-known examples, a brief look at this famous work will serve the preliminary purpose of outlining the potential functions of recordings within the visual field, and to differentiate them from other, seemingly similar modes of communication. In particular, an examination of *Sgt. Pepper's* status within this field will illustrate the extensive "visual respect" that recordings often inspire – that is, the degree to which a specific visual image becomes indissolubly and inextricably tied to a particular sound recording. This idea will be contrasted with the ways in which the visual is employed and perceived in relation to other types of cultural object - most notably the book, to which the record is often compared both visually and conceptually.

The broader and more important issue at hand in this consideration is the status of the recording as a mass-produced commodity. Many of the recording industry's practices, especially when reissuing older or "classic" recordings, have involved strategies designed to minimise the connotations of mass-production by counteracting them with constructions of "authenticity" or the idea of the collector's edition. Since the sonic material of reissued recordings usually remains the same, packaging and the visual have been particularly instrumental in the negotiation of this conflict. In this regard, albums by The Beatles provide extreme but instructive cases of how packaging and the visual have been used in this process.

The cover of *Sgt. Pepper* is literally packed to its outer edges with visual information. Direct references are made to people, photographic conventions, styles of music and the visual conventions which go along with them (in terms of clothing and paraphernalia). This is an image whose potential for study seems endless, so replete is it with seemingly disparate visual information. Its complexity has, in part, made it one of the most celebrated and discussed album covers in the history of recordings. Furthermore, this is a recording whose cover is just as famous and recognisable as its music.

For a category of object for which the visual is usually considered secondary, records are unique in the visual respect that they command, and *Sgt. Pepper* is perhaps the most notable example of this phenomenon. This is one of the key areas in which recordings differ from books. While the respected “classics” of the canon of literature, even those first published relatively recently, are continually reissued and repackaged using changing visual materials, it is difficult to imagine a recording such as *Sgt. Pepper* being issued in anything but its original cover. The visual aspect of recordings is often treated as absolutely integral to the object.

The transition from vinyl LP to CD as the standard format for recordings has exacerbated this phenomenon. Faced with the economic need to reissue older recordings in the newer format, their producers often attempt to get as close to the “authentic” visual material as is possible. The CD reissue of *Sgt. Pepper* takes this “visual respect” to great heights (fig. 3). In its accompanying booklet, there is almost as much space devoted to designer Peter Blake’s

commentary about the cover as there is to producer George Martin's commentary about the music. There is a numbered diagram identifying each person and object whose image appears in the photograph, as well as preliminary sketches by Blake and behind-the-scenes photographs of the cover's production. This results in an interesting inversion of the relative "importance" of sound and the visual: instead of being supplemented with extra musical material, this reissue is accompanied by extra visual material.

Another Beatles recording takes the idea of authenticity and truth to original materials even further - the 1998 CD reissue of *The Beatles* (the white album) reproduces the LP version in miniature, with a cardboard sleeve, paper liner bags, and smaller versions of the photographs and poster which accompanied the original vinyl pressings. This sort of obsessive reissuing and repackaging has become more and more commonplace since CDs became the standard format for audio - and for absolute purists, smaller record labels produce facsimile vinyl editions of older recordings. This practice indicates the degree to which recordings, whose purpose is usually considered to be primarily or solely sound-related, are tied to the visual in a way and to a degree that other so-called "non-visual" media are not. It also highlights the tension in the marketplace between the practice of mass-production and the desire to produce "authentic" reproductions which will satisfy collectors.

It is clear that the visual aspect of recordings is often accorded great respect both by producers and by consumers, and that visual material is often seen as essential to the integrity of the product. In short, the visual plays a role in

this field that seems slightly out of step with the idea of the recording as primarily a sound-carrying medium. There is a further aspect to this consideration, however. Recordings are not simple meeting grounds of sound and image; they are commodities which take up physical space in different venues as they live out their useful lives. Will Straw, in one of the rare academic works devoted to the material culture of records,⁴ examines the ways in which recordings - specifically, those which have become culturally functionally obsolete, or no longer wanted by various parties - are circulated and recirculated through the channels of urban commerce. Today, even amid the much-hyped threat to the recording industry posed by mp3s and the free sharing of digital music, recordings continue to be produced in higher volumes than ever before. Chain-store outlets fall over themselves to have the biggest repositories and widest selections of recordings. Because it seems somehow disrespectful to dispose of no-longer-wanted recordings with other types of waste, they are recirculated through used-record stores, charity shops, or garage sales; alternately, because they are compact, easily stolen and easily resold, they function as a sort of currency in urban areas. Recordings are displayed in homes, not only for easy access, but also for the sense of connoisseurship or display of individual taste they give to their owners. All of these practices rely on the recording's status as a material, visually apprehensible commodity.

On the other hand, it must be recognised that the recording is a "poachable" medium par excellence, to borrow a term that Michel de Certeau uses in relation to practices of reading.⁵ This is due to the fact that the use of

recordings does *not* demand visual focus, thus opening up the possible contexts of their use in conjunction with varying visual and physical practices. In the past thirty years, developing technology has amplified this characteristic of recordings. Home taping allowed people to create customised compilations; the Walkman served to open up the world outside the home as a context for the experience of recordings; and the shuffle function of multi-CD players allows tracks from different recordings to be juxtaposed randomly. The role of the album cover within these practices is not fixed and is constantly in flux. These factors must be acknowledged in any conceptualisation of the relationship between sound and the visual in recordings.

Investigation of this relationship must begin with a few basic observations about the nature of recordings. Recorded sound has always had a close and inevitable relationship with the material and the visual. Quite simply, recordings cannot exist without some sort of physical support, whether in the form of wax cylinders, vinyl records, CDs, etc. The sonic, which is immaterial,⁶ is consistently “burdened” with this physicality, and producers of recordings have dealt with this fact in varying ways.

Recordings, in their commercially marketable form, are not “sonic objects”. The very idea of a sonic object is oxymoronic because of the immaterial nature of sound, which must be amplified or decoded from the physical support through the use of external machinery. However, recordings clearly cannot be designated as visual objects, either. Such a conception would seem to deny the fact that most recordings are bought and used primarily because of the sound that can be

extracted from them. Strictly speaking, though, recordings spend much more time during their existence taking up space or occupying visual fields than being listened to. These facts are essential to the understanding of the recording as a commodity and its relationship to the visual.

How, then, to characterise the recording in terms of the ways in which it communicates? Jacques Derrida's notion of the "undecidable"⁷ is useful in conceptualising recordings, and in dealing with the ways in which they are usually approached and discussed. Generally speaking, the undecidable is that which threatens or destabilises binary oppositions through its indistinct nature. Western thought and philosophy have often operated according to such oppositions – the distinction between mind and body being perhaps the most obvious example – and the usual way of dealing with the undecidable has been to neutralise its threat to this paradigm by forcing it to be perceived in the accepted terms of duality. Recordings are undecidables in that they defy easy classification due to their continuous fluctuation between the two main elements of their hybrid status. When looked at in this way, the nature of recordings can be seen to pose a threat to ideals held by those who produce them; *if*, in the eyes of producers, the "purpose" of recordings is to carry sound, then all other elements of their existence must be subjugated to that aspect. In other words, the widely-held idea that the visual and materiality are *always* secondary to sound in the recording constitutes an attempt to neutralise these contradictions and secure the unique status of the recording as medium. The bulk of what has been written about record covers has participated in this attempt to return the undecidable

nature of the recording to binary visual/sonic order. Furthermore, this body of literature has largely neglected the material dimension of records. An examination of some of these texts, along with the consideration of who controls the circulating discourse about album covers, will serve to illustrate some of the prevalent attitudes toward them and to show how the idea of the "album cover" is generally conceived of in published works.

The number of publications devoted to the design of record covers has steadily increased since the first examples thirty years ago. While these books are often useful sources of visual and historical information, close examination of them reveals the limitations inherent in popular and critical conceptions of the ways in which records function visually and as objects. Typically, these are large-format books of images, most often prefaced by a short introductory text.

The first of these, from 1969,⁸ lumps record covers together with book jackets, guided by the assumption that the function of both is to reflect (and above all, to sell) the product that they envelop - the first sentence of the introduction to this work is "It's the package that sells". The text ends by citing the increasing "artistic level" of record cover design throughout the 1960s, the tacit, dual message being that we are about to see the most accomplished works, and therefore the most effective in terms of advertising. This celebration of the "best" in design set the stage for future publications, though the approach of subsequent publications would change somewhat.

More and more, discourse about the design of record covers would come to be controlled by designers themselves, and many subsequent publications can

be read as self-congratulatory works, bestowing esteem on the designers who coordinate the books as well as their peers in this profession. In effect, they promote the idea that the idea of excellence in design exists according to rigid parameters. The best example of this approach can be found in the series of *Album Cover Albums*,⁹ begun in 1977 by the British designer Roger Dean, whose most famous design work was for the band Yes during the 1970s. These publications had more text than their predecessors, and took an increased focus on individual figures (including Dean himself and his various co-authors, many of whom were also designers). In the visual portions of the books, the fronts of albums are reproduced in grid patterns, accompanied by musicians' names, titles, dates and designers' names. In terms of selection of materials, the emphasis is on images based in detailed illustration or photo-manipulation; in other words, images which have been worked over skillfully and carefully by their creators. Only the most "outstanding" are chosen.

This tendency reached its peak recently with the publication of *The 100 Best Album Covers*,¹⁰ by Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell (the co-founders of the British design house Hipgnosis; Thorgerson had previously been involved in the *Album Cover Albums*). Here, detailed historical and anecdotal information is provided for each of the album covers designated as among the best, even further emphasising the roles of individual designers in record production and one-upping previous publications by actually designating the selections as superior. Here, each page has one of the albums as its centrepiece, and these are surrounded by smaller photographs, details, and text. In 2001, the British

music magazine Q published the similarly-titled special issue "The 100 Best Record Covers of All Time",¹¹ taking a very similar approach, but seeming to make its selections not in terms of "best", but more in terms of "most iconic", "most famous", or "most influential". Here, in the music magazine's vision of the recording, the emphasis is on what record covers can tell us about the surrounding musical world.

Some recent publications have, however, shifted the approach slightly. Books such as *The Album Cover Art of Soundtracks*¹² take a more genre-based tack, whereas *Album Covers from the Vinyl Junkyard*¹³ compiles images from those records, forgotten by most, that wind up in charity shops and garage sales. Taschen's *1000 Record Covers*,¹⁴ while its selections are limited to the collection of its author Michael Ochs, cuts across a broad spectrum of cover designs, many of which would not be seen as fit for inclusion in "best" publications. Even its title points to its self-conscious attempt at a broader, more representative approach. The very brief text, however, focuses almost exclusively on the history of post-war music - in this case, read Rock 'n' Roll - and, oddly, has little to say about the record covers themselves.

A recent series of two books entitled *Sampler*¹⁵ attempt first to align the best in record cover design with "Art", beginning with a litany of recognised artists who designed for records (Peter Blake, Andy Warhol, etc.) and lining this list up alongside another litany of the "best" graphic designers who have worked in the medium. Again, however, the intention is clear - to celebrate the designer as a figure. The authors of *Sampler* suggest that design for recordings is currently one

of the only places within commerce where visual innovation is encouraged; they also argue that the most important design comes from outside big business, from small labels with limited budgets but relative freedom. The two volumes of *Sampler*, produced by the design house Intro, also aspire to the level of the objects they celebrate - whereas other publications normally place the front covers of records on blank fields, *Sampler* freely alters scale, crops images, and shows back covers and inner booklets overlapping. *Sampler* is thus a celebration of the designer in both textual and visual intent and execution.

These works abstract the visual from the recording as object in much the same way that writing about music often abstracts sound. However, in their construction of the album cover as an illustration of sound, they have the effect not of upsetting the hierarchy between music and the visual, but rather of reinforcing it through their consistent emphasis on sound as “essential” and the visual as peripheral and secondary. Even as design is celebrated, it is marginalised in its function.

Publications such as these attempt to answer the unanswerable question: “what differentiates a good album cover from a bad one?” while only superficially addressing, with an emphasis on commerce and advertising, the question of how album covers function visually. They tend to suppress the fact that album covers travel into new contexts once removed from the marketplace and placed in individuals' homes. A number of assumptions underlie this general category of work. The most pervasive is the idea that some designers do their jobs better than others, and that those who succeed do so by creating images that

accurately reflect (and advertise) the music contained in recordings. The tacit propositions here are: a) that the visual aspect of records is always subordinate to the sonic aspect; and b) that the visual aspect of records can successfully illustrate, correspond to, or somehow convey information directly about the sonic aspect. Another entry in the genre of record cover books goes so far as to call itself *Visible Music*,¹⁶ giving explicit voice to the widespread belief in the idea of correspondence.

There are many methods that have been employed by producers and designers in attempts to neutralise the contradictory nature of the project of album cover design. By far the most common is to feature images of musicians on record covers, thus creating a link between both image and sound and the individual creative personality of the musician. Another strategy has been to feature images from a broader cultural world in which the music and the musicians of the recording are participants - *Cheap Thrills* by Big Brother and the Holding Company and its cover by Robert Crumb, or covers of Grateful Dead records which relate to contemporary design strategies in poster production (figs. 4 and 5).

These, however, are only conventions. At a basic level, any idea of strict "correspondence" between image and sound is necessarily an illusion. The fact that many record cover designers conceive of their profession in terms of this correspondence or illustration demonstrates the extent to which the marketplace demands that clear meanings and relationships be constructed however possible. Another way of looking at this is to compare the record cover to

advertising - the better a cover is able to "sell" the recording it is attached to, the more successful it is, even - as argued by *Sampler* - in the case of recordings which are not commercially successful. The conventions which have been employed in record cover design have served largely to conceal the inevitable lack of fit between the recording's modes of communication.

Many theorists and writers have examined and analysed the relationships which occur when different modes of signification are tied together and forced to interact. These debates have often focused on the linguistic and the visual, examining the differences between speech and writing, or between text and image. In these contexts, the idea of equivalency or correspondence has been challenged or effectively overturned.

Roland Barthes' essay "The Photographic Message"¹⁷ is particularly pertinent to the current discussion because it addresses the ideas of illustration and hierarchy which have so often guided discourse about recordings and their visuality. Discussing the press photograph, Barthes attempts to theorise the situation which occurs when text and image are tied together. He likens the relationship to that of a parasite and a host, in which one element feeds off the other. Either the text projects its connotations into the image (the press photograph and its caption) or the image is included in order to illustrate or elucidate the connotations of the text (the illustration accompanying a narrative). In both cases, one element is present in order to provide stress or to narrow the connotative possibilities in the other. It might be said that Barthes maintains an idea of hierarchy between interacting modes of signification; this is certainly

implied by his metaphor of the parasite and the host. Crucially, however, he allows for the fluidity of this relationship, not locking text and image into predetermined roles. The effects of one element delimit the effects of the other, but in individual cases either element can take the more influential role. This is a model that acknowledges the non-equivalence of text and image and the fact that neither category is essentially dominant over the other.

Consideration of Barthes' essay is helpful in moving toward an idea of the recording as a communicating object. Can similar relationships, based on the ideas of parasitism and stress, be conceived of in relation to the recording? The problem with recordings lies in the extra dimension they add to established formulations of signification. In the case of most recordings, text and image do coexist; but both are further tied to sound, and all of these elements are bound up in the recording's materiality. Furthermore, the status of the recording is constantly in flux - the activities of reading, looking at, listening to, and physically apprehending records can occur in any combination and independently of each other. Recordings thus communicate in multiple ways at different times depending both on these combinations and on context; that is, they signify in different ways when circulating in the marketplace than they do after they have been bought and stored in private collections. The simplest solution to this problem would be to say that both text and image play parasites to sound's host - after all, one might say, the primary function of recordings is to carry sound. Their sonic function, however, is actually quite frequently subjugated to their visual function.

Roger Chartier, theorising historical practices of reading, insists that the material and visual form that is given to text plays a decisive role in the way that publications are experienced: “[It] is essential to remember that no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read; any comprehension of a writing, no matter what kind it is, depends upon the forms in which it reaches its reader.”¹⁸ Because of the strict division which is often imposed between music and the visual, recordings are almost never approached with these sorts of ideas in mind. The musical aspect of recordings is written about by commentators about music, and the visual aspect is written about by designers. Evan Eisenberg, in *The Recording Angel*¹⁹, has made a case for “phonography” as a genre distinct from live musical performance, and for the recognition that recordings are physical objects. However, his work emphasises the physicality of the support itself (the vinyl record) and the difference between studio recording and live performance, largely without examination of record packaging and its materials.

The output of the German record label ECM provides a useful case study for the examination and rethinking of the conventions and assumptions which have guided both the activity of design and the discourse about it (of quantifiably “successful” design, of marketing, etc.), precisely because of its atypicality. I argue that rather than attempting to cover over the contradictions inherent in record production, ECM's recordings knowingly manipulate them and bring them into focus. This body of work provides one avenue through which the recording's function as commodity and as personal object can be approached from a

different perspective. This discussion will argue that the ECM's oeuvre, through its particular design practice, marks itself out as different within the field of recordings by shifting the marketing emphasis of its products off of the creative personalities of its musical performers and onto the personality and experience of the user of recordings. The visual is just as highly implicated in the process as is the musical, and the way these two elements interact in ECM's products constructs an idea of taste and difference which proceeds via an intervention into the space (literally and metaphorically) of the consumer. Analysis of these characteristics will lead to a wider discussion of the recording as a commodity and its role in defining individualism and taste during the last half-century. This analysis does not aim to provide a history of the label, nor does it pretend to be a comprehensive study of its output. It also does not attempt to suggest that ECM is absolutely unique in its potential for this kind of questioning, or that the arguments being suggested are equally applicable to all of ECM's recordings. Rather, it is a case study which aims to use some of the specific products and the general approach of a particularly pertinent body of work in order to discuss wider issues.

2: ECM and Strategies of Difference within the Marketplace

Based in Munich, ECM has been in operation since 1969 and has issued approximately 700 recordings to date. Though its products have been distributed by various larger corporations, including Warner Bros. and BMG, it technically remains an independent label with a small staff (reportedly employing fewer than

ten people²⁰). Its original mandate was to issue recordings of music based in improvisation, such as jazz. Beginning in 1984, with the release of Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, the label expanded its range into different genres including contemporary classical music; medieval, Renaissance, and baroque music; and certain types of folk music. Its recordings often tread the grey areas between these genres, and one of the label's hallmarks is its groupings of musicians from seemingly unrelated fields of music; the most famous example of this tendency is *Officium* (1994), a recording featuring the early-music vocal group The Hilliard Ensemble and Norwegian jazz saxophonist Jan Garbarek.

The label was founded by Manfred Eicher, who remains its head and has produced nearly all of its recordings to date. He has also served as a sort of uncredited art director for most of its releases, overseeing and influencing the label's designers. Throughout its thirty-two year history, most of ECM's covers have been designed by only three individuals employed by the label: Barbara Wojirsch, Dieter Rehm, and Sascha Kleis. While no photographers actually work for the label, the work of a relatively small number of photographers has been used in ECM's cover designs. Usually, photographs are not specifically made or commissioned for ECM; rather, they are chosen from the existing work of this small group.

From the time of its founding, ECM attempted to mark itself out as different from the wider field of record production. In 1969, jazz was largely out of favour with the record buying public, especially in North America - in Europe, the situation was more forgiving, and many North American musicians (including

many who appeared on ECM's early recordings) were forced to relocate in order to make a living. In North America, young people who grew up with the rise of rock 'n' roll, the dominance of which was secured by the popularity of The Beatles, were buying most of the records, and these commodities became key elements in youth cultures. An oft-cited landmark in the decline of jazz's popularity is *Bitches Brew* (1969), in which one of the biggest stars in jazz, Miles Davis, attempted to fuse jazz with rock.

In ECM's case, the visual was at least as important as the sonic in this attempt at difference. In the late 1960s, with psychedelia at its peak and with the growing tendency toward extra record packaging begun with *Sgt. Pepper's* gatefold sleeve and accompanying cutouts, both the graphics and the materials of packaging were becoming generally more elaborate and detailed. The trend was continued by albums such as The Small Faces' *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake* (fig. 6), which came in a circular sleeve designed to resemble a tin of tobacco, and The Rolling Stones' *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (which featured a plastic, illusionistic 3-D image of the band) (fig. 7) and *Sticky Fingers*, the first pressing of which had a real zipper on the cover (fig. 8). ECM, though its visual approach was somewhat more varied during its early days than it was after becoming fully established during the 1970s, took a seemingly opposite route, using areas of blank space and simple typography, and using subtler packaging variations such as different grades of paper and cardboard.

These ideas of difference can be further explored by looking at the way that ECM participates in the record market, with an emphasis on the visual. After

all, in the marketplace, the recording's visual status is at least as important as its musical contents. In record stores, it is the norm to experience one recording aurally (which is being played on the store's sound system) while apprehending tens or hundreds of recordings physically and visually, at once or in succession. This type of difference within the marketplace connotes not only a desire for distinction within the general field of recordings, but also for a certain prestige. Those who have commented on ECM, including those internal to the company, have celebrated the way in which the label has resisted visual and musical trends and remained somehow "uncommercial". That the label has remained "independent" and thus relatively immune to the selling tactics of larger corporations is cited in favour of this proposition.

The Hilliard Ensemble's recording of Perotin's music (fig. 9) is one of a number of covers that seem to subvert ideas about marketing. In a field wherein products compete for attention, the extremely low contrast between text and background in this cover deny the traditional idea that a record ought to be as eye-catching as possible. Likewise, the spines of Keith Jarrett's *Vienna Concert* and Ketil Bjørnstad's *The Sea II* are virtually unreadable except from very close up (fig. 10). Various other practices contravene the unwritten rules of selling records, such as placing titles near the bottom where they are less visible to customers flipping through bins of products.

The cover of a recording of cello music by Thomas Demenga is confounding not in terms of the text, but in terms of the image (fig. 11). At first glance, it appears to be a photograph of a geometrical painting or similar work,

with nine black triangles arranged in a regular pattern on a more textural ground. Closer inspection, however, reveals that this is a photograph of a wall, or a floor - the triangles are perforated and set into the surface, and there is a crack in the building material near the top left corner of the image. Not only is there a lack of clarity in communication, it is initially uncertain through what sort of representational system the limited and ambiguous information in this image is being presented.

One result of ECM's increasingly defined and self-restricted visual approach is that its recordings convey ideas both individually and as a group. Visual brand identity is certainly not foreign to record labels, especially those dealing in "specialised" genres such as classical music. The classical label Deutsche Grammophon, to name one example, has used the same yellow logo on virtually all of its recordings. ECM, however, has constructed its own very recognisable brand identity not through the recurrence of specific logos or formats, but through the consistent and repeated application of various photographic, typographic, and general design strategies.

A glance at two recordings separated by twenty-five years gives an idea of ECM's visual consistency. *Diary* by Ralph Towner was produced in 1974, and contains guitar music from the time of its production (fig. 12); the recording of the English Renaissance composer John Dowland's music dates from 1999 (fig. 13). This admittedly extreme example is provided not only to show how similar and consistent visual tropes are applied to different recordings separated by many years (and whose music is separated by centuries), but also to return to the idea

of possible correspondence between image and sound and how this trope can be questioned using an analysis of ECM.

A number of ECM's characteristics, both musically and visually, make it an apt location for such questioning to take place. First of all, most of the label's musical output is instrumental; when vocal music appears, it is usually sung in a language unavailable to most listeners (such as Estonian or Latin) and based in previously existing texts (such as folk songs or religious texts). While recordings of vocal music do not by their nature place limits on the range of visual options available to designers, their descriptive textual basis certainly provides a number of easy or obvious routes which can be either followed or rejected. Instrumental music, especially the contemporary music without clear historical baggage that comprises much of ECM's output, provides fewer obvious options. Furthermore, the familiar device of picturing musicians on record covers is almost never employed by the label.

Most important of all, however, is the fact that many of the label's visual and musical strategies exist as part of its entire production and are obviously not fully rooted in individual recordings. The result is that similar or virtually identical visual material is often associated with varied types of music. While individual decisions are of course still made by designers, these normally fall into loosely defined tropes which already exist in the label's production. The previous example, the pairing of recordings by Ralph Towner and of the music of John Dowland, are partially illustrative of this phenomenon; even more similar, however, are a trio of recordings from 1995 and 1996 which use nearly identical

typography and layout (figs. 14, 15, and 16). Here, ECM breaks strict links between the cover and the music while constructing links visually between the recordings as objects. The idea of illustration or correspondence is called into question not only by the sparseness of the covers, but further by using identical design strategies for different recordings, which in this case can only be loosely grouped together musically under the rubric of “religious music”. These recordings can, of course, still function individually, but their collective function and existence as part of a set serve to alter this functioning.

These are some of the basic ways in which ECM has attempted to mark out a sense of difference and individual character within the marketplace. This idea of “difference” becomes more complex when these products are considered within the context of ownership and use. The next section attempts to push past the context of the marketplace to consider ECM’s strategies of difference in relation to more specific visual strategies. The label’s visual materials will be approached in terms of their treatment of conceptual and physical space, and how these ideas of space are linked to performance and creativity. In doing this, the relationship between image and sound will be further explored and analysed.

3: Landscapes, Voids, and Gestures: Spatial Strategies

A certain type of photographic imagery has been central to the definition of ECM’s visual approach. It is here that more detailed analysis of ECM’s connotative possibilities can begin to take place, guided by the general structure of a desire for difference. Difference in terms of geographic marginality can be

read in these images, most of them in black and white and depicting landscapes. There are many examples of this tendency; it might be said that this is the label's most frequently used, most recognisable, and most pervasive visual motif.

A typical example is the photograph on the cover of a recording of Thomas Tallis' *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* (fig. 17). The photograph depicts a small patch of land at the edge of a cliff, with the sea and the sky above it. The line of the land is broken by a small abutment just right of centre. Until one closely examines the patterns and blades of grass on the ground, scale is uncertain. Similar to the image on the cover of *War Orphans*, this is an image which contains little immediately obvious meaning in relation to the recording as a whole.

Let us run through a scenario for the explanation of the presence of this photograph on this specific recording: Tallis was an English composer, and so ECM has chosen a photograph (of the North Sea, perhaps) taken from the English coast. While this explanation is possible, it fails in its attempt to link this specific photograph to the music - if the image is to be related to Tallis as a person, why not choose an image produced during Tallis' time (the sixteenth century)? Perhaps there is a proposition that England is timeless, and its culture arises from its raw geography and geology. If this were the case, would it not be more appropriate to choose an image which more affirmatively connoted an idea of "Englishness" (such as a painting by Turner)? This reasoning also fails to link the image with the subject matter of the music's text - while the composer was English, the music is based in standard Latin religious texts. Still further

questions are raised when examining groups of ECM records: why do similar, one might even say functionally identical, photographs appear on recordings of music from vastly different geographical and temporal locations?

The interest of these photographs is not specific depiction. There is no way for the onlooker to locate them within exact geography. Their connotative power lies not in the ability to call up a specific time or place, but in their collective function as images of geographical marginality. This is at least partially rooted in a certain conception of the idea of "north". This idea is certainly not the only concept connoted, nor need it be the dominant one; however, it is certainly present and its examination will aid in realising the connotative range of these images.²¹

Images of landscape have long played a primary role in constructing ideas about the north. The predominance of this type of image was perhaps most firmly cemented during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the depiction of landscape was taken up by visual artists from Scandinavia who celebrated the uniqueness and unspoiledness of the northern landscape as a way of marking out nationalistic difference and identity. In this conception, and in the visual work which gave it expression, nature and landscape were infused with symbolic and nationalistic rhetoric which transformed the unspoiled landscape into a defining regional characteristic. Furthermore, the fact that Scandinavian countries had "lagged behind" the rest of Europe in terms of industrial development came to be seen as a positive regional trait rather than as the mark of backward provincialism.²² The north and its landscape were thus constructed

as a foil for the more modernised, industrial countries of Europe to the south. The tying together of landscape and national identity was, at this time, part of a political and intellectual project which attempted to locate the uniqueness of the north in its natural characteristics.

The concept of the north as characterised by landscape and nature, most forcefully expressed during this period of visual production, remains a prevalent way of thinking about the north as a site. A number of exhibitions of Scandinavian painting in the 1980s and 90s have taken this period and its focus on landscape as their primary focus, examining the visual projects that cast the north as mystical and untainted.²³ *The Mystic North*, for example, was accompanied by a catalogue²⁴ with extensive text, and demonstrates a tension between the examination of northern art in terms of its participation in political projects on the one hand, and the repetition of the rhetoric of these political projects on the other. The text of this catalogue addresses work from both Scandinavia and Canada, using the genre category of Symbolism to examine the ways in which ideas about the north were expressed in landscape painting during the period 1890-1940. While the publication does, to an extent, attempt to place the works it discusses within the context of nationalism and politics, it also reinscribes and recirculates a number of assumptions about the north which circulated during the period it discusses. This is evinced by the very nature of the exhibition, and indeed by its title; by uniting work from Europe and North America, any politicisation of the paintings that occurs is counteracted by a reiteration of the north as a site of the "universal". The text of the catalogue

begins with a quotation from the Canadian painter J.E.H. MacDonald and a discussion of the incident which inspired his words, both of which stress this tendency: upon first contact with the work of the Swedish painter Gustav Fjaestad, MacDonald speaks of "that mystic north round which we all revolve".²⁵ The tone set by these words, and the fact that the exhibition takes its title from this quotation, indicates the desire to locate the idea of north, at least in part, outside of local political and social spheres. Individual works *are* often discussed within their specific contexts; however, an overall effect of the exhibition is to propose, again, the possibility that the north is a site of natural mysticism on which culture and politics have limited bearing. The specifically political is further deemphasised when one considers that the exhibition's focus on the landscape – the "natural" – excludes many other types of visual production which participated in nationalistic discourse of the time, including work based explicitly on local literature or cultural tradition. *The Mystic North*, being one of the largest and most wide-ranging exhibitions of northern painting, is indicative of a still-powerful tendency to imagine the north in terms of the raw, unspoiled landscape and of the still-pervasive influence of seemingly "non-political" ideas which arose and circulated for very political purposes at a particular time.

Furthermore, a look at recent official tourist literature produced by the Scandinavian countries confirms that many of the ideas developed visually by turn of the century artists still constitute a powerful and prevalent way of conceiving and promoting the north. These recent attempts to portray the north as "natural" and opposed to the tribulations of the social world bear explicit

connections with earlier nationalistic works. This idea of the north in Europe is further amplified by twentieth century perceptions of Scandinavia as politically neutral, each nation having declared neutrality during the World Wars. While this is certainly not the only way in which the characteristics of these nations are conceived and constructed, the attempt to oppose “nature” (the landscape) with the social and political world remains a widespread strategy for imagining the north. While this imagining is of course always political, there still exists a desire to construct the north as a site of raw nature and mysticism.

While I do contend that ECM’s visual imagery engages with representational tropes that connote the north, and that the label’s non-visual practice (its musicians and recording locations) tend to strengthen this connotation, its use of “northern” imagery also confounds attempts to explain it in terms of these traditions. A brief comparison with some other representations of the northern landscape, initiated through examination of contemporary record covers from another label, reveal how this communication differs from standard or familiar representations. Consider some products of Finlandia, a record label dealing largely in classical music by Scandinavian composers. The label ties itself to specific geography through its very name, and *Finlandia* is also the title of Finnish nationalist composer Jan Sibelius’ most famous orchestral work. Through these avenues, the label ties itself to a particular tradition. This relationship is also established visually.

Like ECM, Finlandia normally utilises modern photographs in its cover designs. Here, the connotation of north is almost unmistakable. This is not only

due to the nature of the music and the recognisable names of northern composers, but also to the fact that Finlandia's photographs are firmly rooted in a tradition of northern representation. Consider a recent Finlandia release of Sibelius' works for piano (fig. 18). In this example and in each of the four other volumes' covers, Sibelius' name dominantly sits atop a colour photograph of a panoramic landscape. These images have direct precedents in the work of such late-nineteenth century Finnish landscape painters as Akseli Gallen-Kallela (fig. 19) and Pekka Halonen (fig. 20), whose work was, like Sibelius' music, involved in that time's Finnish cultural nationalism. Another Finlandia release, of the Danish composer Carl Nielsen's symphonies, bears a cover that is strongly reminiscent of the tendency to look north to find the sublime or the spiritual - compare a work of the Danish painter Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (figs. 21 and 22). In both the album covers and the visual traditions to which they explicitly refer, the conventions of panoramic views, high placement of the viewer, and "otherworldly" rays of light shining through the clear air are employed. These comparisons should not be taken too far, but are useful in their demonstration of how ideas of north can be firmly tied to tradition. Each Finlandia release attempts to be a closed package, with the concept of northernness and the traditions which go along with that concept suffusing every aspect of the recording. These products, though they utilise modern design and imagery, activate the connotations of a tradition which is also tied to the music that they bear.

ECM's idea of the north is more difficult territory to navigate: given the correct conditions, many of its photographs might have been taken, say, near the

equator or at the tip of South America. Likewise, they appear not only on recordings by "northern" musicians but are equally tied to music from the rest of the world. They also largely fail to connote the north according to existing representational tropes. For symbolist landscapists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in Scandinavia and North America, depiction of the north carried with it specific allegorical and nationalistic programmes. The north in this type of representation has often been associated with ideals of unspoiled nature, mysticism, and spirituality. These qualities and traits are difficult to read into most of the monochromatic, low-contrast images employed by ECM which, while certainly not random or haphazard, seem to display an interest in flatness and in being unremarkable. This is emphasised by the horizontality of the images - rarely are they broken by significant vertical lines, though they do often suggest forward paths. The panoramic vistas and dramatic lighting which have traditionally been used to convey metaphorical concepts are here absent. In the case of ECM, the north is connoted through more general stereotypes of barrenness, ubiquitous grey skies and low clouds, and lack of vegetation (as in both the Tallis and the Stenson recordings).

How, then, can we account for the frequent appearance of such images on ECM's covers? The concept of north conveyed by these images cannot be fully explained in terms of direct representation; both on their own and in relation to text and music, they confound notions of specific geography as well as attempts to fully locate them within existing northern visual tropes. Other avenues must be explored in order to deal with these images adequately. To begin to

explain their presence, we must attempt to read them, and the recordings as objects, in a more conceptually spatial way.

Again, while they can function individually, ECM recordings that bear this type of imagery also work as part of a set. The function of landscape imagery on ECM's covers can be further complicated through comparison with covers which feature no photography at all. On many of ECM's covers, the area sometimes occupied by a photograph slips into the complete denial of pictorial representation, as in the trio of recordings seen earlier (those of Pärt, Messiaen, and The Hilliard Ensemble) or in Ketil Bjørnstad and David Darling's *Epigraphs* (fig. 23). In comparing these two tendencies, it is arguable that the photographs and empty spaces perform similar communicative functions. It is with knowledge and consideration of these voids that ECM's photographic strategies can be further conceptualised. It is also here that the relationship between the visual and sound in recordings, and how these dimensions signify, can be reconsidered.

Much of the musical and visual output of ECM can be conceived of spatially. This manifests itself in a number of ways in ECM's approach to recording and production. The label frequently uses recording techniques which spatialise sound in a way which could not be duplicated in live performance. While it is true that this spatialisation is already a defining factor in all stereo recordings, ECM often pushes this practice to extremes, "placing" the listener in positions which would never be occupied when listening from an audience. The recording of an accordion on a recent release²⁶ is a case in point: here, the low notes tend very strongly toward the right stereo channel, and the high notes very

strongly toward the left. The sound of the accordion is spatialised much more noticeably even than on a typical stereo recording of piano music, despite the fact that the accordion is a much smaller instrument. This is to say that ECM disregards the idea that a recording ought to mimic live performance, and freely utilises the technologies of the studio and of stereo recording to make this disregard evident and to bring ideas of aural space to the fore.

Spatial conceptions of musical performance, and especially improvisation, have been articulated explicitly by ECM's musicians. The pianist Keith Jarrett, one of the label's most prolific and popular musicians, and one whose musical approach has influenced the label virtually since its inception, conceives of his method of solo improvisation in a way which engages directly with the creative potential of empty space: "I found out that it was only a matter of making sure that there was some free space for the music",²⁷ he said in a 1974 interview. This idea is elaborated in the liner notes to his 1973 recording *Solo-Concerts, Bremen/Lausanne*: "The meaning for me is the truth involved in this: one artist creating spontaneously something which is governed by the atmosphere, the audience, the place (both the room and the geographical location), the instrument".²⁸ The importance of space and place in this practice is emphasised by the fact that Jarrett's live solo recordings are always named after the space in which they were recorded: *The Köln Concert*, *Paris Concert*, *Vienna Concert*, *La Scala*, et cetera. Jarrett emphasises that rather than concentrating on what he is going to play (as all of these works are completely improvised), he attempts to empty his mind and to let the atmosphere of his surroundings dictate the

direction the music takes. Space, in this conception, becomes as important as the creativity of the performer. Inspiration comes from the continual emptying of mental musical space, and the external space of the studio or of the concert hall allow the fruits of this process to be heard and recorded.²⁹

Whether we take Jarrett at his word or not, we can see spatial strategies working in different ways but toward similar conceptual ends in ECM's visuals. Whether manifested as negative space around typographical elements or in terms of the photographic landscape, we can conceive of many of the label's visual strategies in terms of this potential of empty space. The landscape, or the blank area of paper, are not only sources of inspiration, but are also *tabula rasas* on which the results of thought and contemplation can be written. This, however, is not a question of strict correspondence between the two dimensions of communication; rather, it is a question of sound and the visual working in different ways (and perhaps at different times) to communicate a set of ideas about creativity and thought.

In order to elaborate on this idea in terms of the visual, I would like to examine a recording of Arvo Pärt's music. *Te Deum* emphasises both the physical space in which the recording occurred (a church in Finland) and the conceptual space of the north, as has been discussed. The front cover of this recording depicts uncertain subject matter; leafless tree branches are immediately recognisable, but they are seemingly superimposed or laid over a pattern of unclear origin (fig. 24). The cover of the small book accompanying the recording makes it clear that the pattern derives from the roof-tiles of the church

in which the music was recorded (fig. 25). Comparison of the two images suggests that the front cover of the package is a composite photograph, with an image from nature fused with an image of the place of musical production. Already, through imagery, conceptual and physical space are tied to musical production.

This process is continued within the book, in which a series of twenty-three photographs is found. Of the twenty-two of these taken within the church during the recording session, a number serve to document the recording; musicians, composer, and conductor are seen in the process of discussing and performing. An almost equal number of photographs, however, have the interior of the church itself as their primary or exclusive subject matter (fig. 26). The majority of these interior photographs are taken with a relatively wide angle, emphasising the vaulted ceilings and the “empty space” of the interior. There are two photographs, taken from low angles, which depict microphones on tall stands against the walls and ceiling of the church; here, the instruments of recording are seemingly aimed not at musicians but at the space itself (figs. 27 and 28). Photographs of individual performers are normally framed vertically, with the figures dominated by the architecture by being placed toward the bottom of the composition (fig. 29). Though this series of photographs does document the recording session, its emphasis is quite clearly equally on the space as much as the process of recording. A later recording of Pärt’s music takes this even further by featuring photographs of a church’s interior but none of the figures involved in the recording (fig. 30).

This stress on the space in which performance takes place becomes more evident when one thinks of the recording venue. While acoustics and the religious nature of the music were probably factors in the decision to record in a church in Finland rather than in a recording studio, one impression is that the venue may have been chosen at least partly because of its spatial potential (both musically and visually). The concluding image in the series of photographs is not of the church at all, but of a snowy field bordered by trees (fig. 31). Presumably this photograph was taken somewhere near the church, but it is impossible to be sure; again, the image is of the type often employed in front cover designs. Like the front cover of the package, then, with its fusion of architecture and nature, the photographic series leads from the specific circumstances of recording back to the abstracted space of the north.

A similar process, relating ideas of creativity to space and landscape, occurs in an ECM product which is not a recording at all. *A Winter Journey to the Sea* is a book of photographs by Jan Jedlička,³⁰ published by ECM in 1996. Jedlička's work had previously appeared on many ECM covers, and the photograph on the cover of *War Orphans* is taken from this publication. The fact that this book exists as part of the label's corpus should give a further sense of how important the visual is to ECM's self-conception. The series of photographs in this book was taken during the course of a train journey from Basel to The Hague over the course of three days. Many of the photographs have clearly been taken from the moving train (figs. 32 and 33). Two of them, taken on a platform and appearing on facing pages, appear to be absolutely identical. The journey

takes us past homes, industrial structures, churches, landscapes, mainly depicted in motion-blurred or slightly out of focus images, until the final arrival, very abruptly, at the sea (fig. 34).

After the series of photographs, there is a short text by their photographer explaining the process of their creation. The process is described as one of a sort of photographic improvisation. "I brought along a Nikon AF automatic camera and a roll of black and white film. I was interested in exploring my own cursory ways of seeing during the journey, and the role played by the camera. The images in this series are printed chronologically and no selection has been made."³¹ There is a clear parallel here with Keith Jarrett's self-professed method of improvisation: the attempt to empty the creator of intention, allowing place and space to dictate production.

The final photographs in the series serve to place landscape outside of the concrete world of the train journey: "The last three seascapes are from a roll of colour film I started in the Hague... [they] just happened to be on a film that was still in the camera for a different project."³² While the majority of the journey is readable chronologically, the final seascapes are temporally and conceptually dislocated from the rest of the series. Again, the depiction of landscape is not so much related to "place" as it is to a space of ideas. In *A Winter Journey to the Sea*, this idea is contrasted with the perpetual motion of the train journey. In other words, the book compares the linearity of the "real" world with the label's conceptualisation of the landscape. Even more explicitly than in the *Te Deum* series of photographs, the idea of travel is taken up by showing a journey

through the real space of performance and improvisation. The eventual destination of this journey is again the conceptual, dislocated space of the landscape as locus of a more nebulous idea of creativity.

In these images, ideas about individuality and creativity are beginning to emerge within more general notions of space. The discussion of these concepts has thus far focused on the label's construction of these ideas through photographic strategies. The next step will be to introduce a further group of the label's visual practices in order to examine the possible interventions made by ECM's products in the space of the user of recordings, and to begin to analyse ECM's ideas about performance and creativity as they relate to the listening and looking practices of the consumer.

Thus far, we have examined some of the visual strategies ECM has used to construct ideas of performance and creativity. Frequently, through the deployment of other visual and material techniques, I argue that ECM brings such ideas into play with the space of the user. This process involves an emphasis on corporeality and on the recording as a material object. In this proposition, the concepts of improvisation and performance which can be located in the label's work are configured largely in terms of the listener/looker rather than strictly in terms of the musician/designer.

An early example from the label's oeuvre, a recording by Keith Jarrett and Jan Garbarek, provides a point of entry into these concepts (fig. 35). The cover is white, with the names of the performers printed in green and centred within the square. Further textual information is, however, present; the title of the album

and the roles of the performers are shallowly embossed directly into the white surface. Since they are not printed in a tone which differentiates them from the background, their presence is visual only in relation to their tactility and dependence upon surrounding space; that is to say, they can only be viewed under proper lighting conditions. The visibility of this cover is thus dependent on the conditions of the space surrounding it, the space of the looker/listener. The circumstances of use are emphasised in importance. Here, the text is just as apprehensible (though perhaps not as comprehensible) through the sense of touch as through the sense of sight.

This is a relatively straightforward example, but ECM often augments its design conventions through reference to human scale and human intervention in more complex ways. The usual rigidity and careful geometry of ECM's cover layouts are here disrupted by the presence of spontaneous, gestural marks or evidence of physical, human intervention. This tendency variously affects design, typography, and photography, and it is in consideration of these covers that the label's spatial strategies and interventions find their most forceful and synthesised expression.

The cover of a recording of music by the Argentinian bandoneon player Dino Saluzzi is laid out similarly to many other ECM covers in its combination of text and photograph, but here the structure is altered through the presence of three coloured lines above the photograph which have apparently been drawn onto the composition (fig. 36). Gary Peacock's *Guamba* is similarly affected by splatters of ink or watercolour paint (fig. 37). In these instances, evidence of

seemingly spontaneous (“improvised”?) human gestures are contrasted with the more rigid placements of image and text. The “space of creativity” between text, image and music is laid over with the fruits of creative action. This sort of effect can even occur when printed text is the principal focus; the letters on the cover of *Acoustic Quartet* are laid out such that they seem to have been inserted improperly or inexactly into a printing machine (fig. 38). The cover of *Matinale* goes one step further, making movable type itself the primary communicator (fig. 39). Even typography, in contemporary practice usually set using computers, can directly bear the marks of bodily manipulation.

In some cases, the scribbles and loose handwriting of designer Barbara Wojirsch become the main focus, as on a recording of the music of Walter Frye (fig. 40). The cover is laid out similarly to *Epigraphs*, but here the “void” is occupied by jagged blue and black scribbles. Comparing the examples of the recordings of Tallis and Frye, and *Epigraphs*, it can be argued that an equivalency is being proposed between the landscape, empty space, and human gesture. More striking is a recording of Friedrich Hölderlin’s poetry, in which the source material of the sonic (the printed word) is just visible through an overlay of these gestural marks (fig. 41).

In more recent releases, this tendency has led to a blurring of the boundaries between photography and drawing, or at least to the realisation of the photograph as a tactile and manipulable object. This idea is observable in the cover of Steve Tibbetts’ *Northern Song*, in which the surface of a photograph has been picked away to reveal the white surface beneath and then rephotographed

(fig. 42). The sense here is not that the photograph has been accidentally damaged - the quality of the intact parts of it suggest that this is a photograph which has been deliberately scratched and picked at.

The effect is even more pronounced in more recent examples. In the Hilliard Ensemble's recording of the music of Orlande de Lassus, evidence of recognisable photography can be glimpsed at the left edge of the cover, but the rest of the image appears to be scratched out or otherwise overlaid with marks (fig. 43). The cover of a recording by Ensemble Belcanto bears a photograph which, with its uncertain subject matter, is much more characterised by the marks which have been made on the surface than anything conventionally photographic (fig. 44). In this type of cover, the relationship between the photograph (which now only barely connotes an idea of landscape) is fused with the sort of spontaneous gestures imprinted on the covers of the Frye or Hölderlin recordings. Jan Jedlička, in *A Winter Journey to the Sea*, relates ideas of improvisation to photography - here, the evidence of "improvised" acts are visually evident in a more pronounced way.

This recent tendency in ECM's cover designs constitutes the most synthesised presentation of all the concepts which have been presented in this discussion. Moving through the motifs of the landscape, the void, and the gestural, I have attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which ideas about creativity and performance can be read visually in ECM's products. The question of how to explain this group of ideas both in terms of its communicative effects and in the broader context of contemporary thought and consumerism remains.

This can begin to happen through discussion of ECM's products in relation to ideas about individuality and through their place within a broader range of products and ideals.

4: ECM's Negotiation of Taste / The Embodied Recording

What is ECM selling? When one buys a record, one also buys (and potentially buys into) a set of ideas. For a label such as ECM, whose products receive limited radio airplay and relatively little promotion or advertising, the visual nature of the recording is a particularly important dimension to manipulate. In the previous sections we have examined some of the label's visual tendencies as they relate both the recording as a whole and to various ideas and concepts; but what is the collective effect of these tendencies and how does it aid in the marketing of commodities? In short, why have these products been successful enough to sustain an independent record label for over thirty years?

Let us begin by synthesising the discussion thus far, and relating it back to ideas of space. One of the principal effects of ECM's visual strategies has been to emphasise the space of the listener/looker as much as the space of the creator/performer. By utilising simple photographs and typography and by largely refusing to include images of musicians on its covers, the recording as material object has the added potential to become just as attached to the individuality of the apprehender as to that of the producer(s). The inclusion of seemingly spontaneous and expressionistic gestural marks within this space of individuality proposes the idea that creativity is everywhere and available to all. One thinks

again of Keith Jarrett's statements to the effect that the performer of the music has the same amount to do with creation as do various types of surrounding space, one of which constitutes the same space as is occupied by the audience.

Therefore, one of the principal ideas sold by ECM is that ownership of its products, in and of itself, constitutes a type of creativity which distinguishes its owner from the run-of-the-mill record consumer. This idea has a relationship with other ideas of "good taste", and with traditions of marking out difference through alternative constructions of usership, but it is also different in a number of ways.

A brief return to the marketing strategies of the label will help to flesh out its potential to confer distinction. The desire for an elevated status is evident even in the label's name, which stands for "Edition of Contemporary Music". Rather than buying a "jazz record" or a "classical CD", the purchaser of ECM's products buys an "edition". While it is more subtle due to the fact that the actual products only bear the abbreviation and knowledge of what this stands for must come from elsewhere, this practice is somewhat similar to The Folio Society's marketing of classic books in elaborate editions. Occasionally, ECM plays up this connotation of the "edition" by issuing lavish sets. The first of these was the ten-LP set of Keith Jarrett concerts, released in 1978; a more recent example is a five-CD set comprising the soundtrack to Jean-Luc Godard's video series *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, accompanied by four slipcased hardcover books (fig. 45). The distinctiveness of the label is also played up by certain retailers; sometimes, ECM's recordings are filed in their own section rather than with the rest of the jazz and classical CDs. However, this practice is also related to the fact that

many of these recordings are difficult to classify according to musical genre.

More often, however, the world of recordings is a relatively level playing field in terms of price. While ECM has increasingly used such extra packaging as slipcases and extra booklets, the prices of these more common releases are comparable to most other recordings on the market. Unlike books, or furniture, or artwork, recordings are relatively constant in the amount of economic capital needed to obtain them but largely variant in the amount of perceived cultural capital they can confer. Recordings pose special problems within debates about the construction of taste.

During the time that ECM has been producing recordings, patterns of conspicuous consumption moved away from price as an indicator of social status and toward ideas of prestige based upon style, brand, and appearance as indicators of cultural status.³³ In other words, the display of status in terms of the ownership of goods has partly moved away from emphasis on economic capital and toward emphasis on cultural capital. Of course, some practices of listening to music still mark out social difference; having box-seat season tickets to the opera, for instance, remain indicators of a wealth of both economic and cultural capital. However, practices of listening which actually depend on the ownership of goods rather than on participation in activities are largely limited to the relatively economically level field of recordings.³⁴ Because difference in price is not a significant factor between individual recordings, taste within this field has had to be constructed by both producers and users largely according to style. As recordings came to be seen as “works” in and of themselves, and not as pale

imitations of live musical performances, they acquired a unique status among cultural products – lavish books of art reproductions, of the type seen on countless coffee tables in such status-celebrating arenas as *Architectural Digest*, still referred undeniably and primarily to cultural products extrinsic to them. Recordings, on the other hand, have attained the somewhat paradoxical status of being both “unique” and mass-produced.

Of the label's actual visual approach, one might argue that the displayed qualities of sparseness or minimalism have often, especially during the time that the label has been operative, been markers of advanced “good taste”. This idea was at its peak during the label's early years, when less was still more in terms of, say, the most up-to-date interior design. This idea is based at least in part on the myth of objectivity. As Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*, traditionally the faculty of elevated aesthetic appreciation is dependent upon the detachment of the apprehender, the ability to distance oneself and to appreciate pure form and artistry from an “objective” point of view. This allows people not only to appreciate the “finer things”, but also to appreciate all cultural products in a more self-conscious way which elevates them above the common consumer.³⁵ I would argue that ECM's products actively resist being “appreciated” in such a way through their treatment of the subjective and physical space of the apprehender. Some of the connotations of minimal design are undeniably present, but the ideal of the detached observer is actively subverted.

This apparent rejection of bourgeois detachment does not occur in isolation or without reference to previous visual strategies in other fields. Adrian

Shaughnessy, the co-author of the *Sampler* books discussed earlier, has commented that “[ECM’s] packaging exhibits the finest characteristics of the European Modernist tradition: minimalist sans serif typography fused with dreamlike black and white photography”.³⁶ This comment is instructive: while one might assume that Shaughnessy is referring primarily to an idea of modernism based in design, and that his intention is to celebrate the label’s style through linkage to this tradition, it also provides us with a point of reference which will be useful in analysing the strategies by which ECM constructs its ideal consumer. “Modernism” is referred to in ECM’s products not only through the design traits mentioned by Shaughnessy, but also through its general methods of constructing ideas of “viewership” (for lack of a better term) and taste.

Throughout this discussion, we have seen the ways in which ECM, from early on in its production, has rejected the broad referentiality of the general field of album cover design; here, we are seeing the ways in which it also rejects the principles which guide the most culturally consecrated recordings. By attempting to place itself outside both of these arenas, it would seem that ECM wants to stake out a place for itself, and to gather an audience, based on the idea of being “challenging” and demanding the creative participation of the consumer. Strategies of modernism are also apparent in the label’s emphasis on individuality. This is especially true of those cover designs which incorporate gestural, expressionistic marks; explicit links have been drawn by the label’s literature between designer Barbara Wojirsch’s scribbles and the work of abstract expressionists.³⁷ However, in ECM’s case, the idea of the individual which has

been constructed historically around the work of an artist such as Jackson Pollock is decentred: it should be clear that it is not as easy to name the “author” of a recording as it is to name the author of a painting – and, of course, when people attempt to name the author of a recording they will invariably choose the musician over the designer. Visually, these covers construct a general, open-ended notion of individuality and creativity.

These references are again very much related to strategies of difference, of a desire for existence outside the perceived categories of both the “bourgeois” and the “popular”. As we shall see, however, these references to tradition are forced to participate in a marketplace which displays a tension between a need to construct an idea of connoisseurship and a need to sell recordings. Any “modernist” elements which are deployed, therefore, are used quietly and cleanly, not with an avant-garde intent to “shock” or disquiet but with an intent to attract a public that recognises the references and that understands the sort of participation that they have traditionally demanded.

One of the most prevalent ideas “sold” by ECM, then, is an idea of creativity and creative potential which uses ideas of performance and improvisation to emphasise the space and potential of the listener/looker as much as those of the performer. One result of this is the construction of taste which is not based in “aesthetic detachment” but in the encouragement of “active” participation. As I have attempted to show, this set of ideas is communicated by treating the recording as a whole object which is not governed by strict hierarchical relationships between sound, the visual, and the material.

At least since the nineteenth century, musicology and the discourse around “art” or “classical” music have elevated music that is seen as ripe for detached and cerebral appreciation, while denigrating that which “affects” the body, such as music meant for dancing. More recent thought, however, has recognised that sound and music affect the body in a way that the visual and the textual do not; unlike light waves, sound waves vibrate slowly enough that they can be perceived not only through the ears, but in the rest of the body.³⁸ Under such a construct, the distinctions which have traditionally been made in music discourse between music of the mind and music of the body are no longer feasible. This is not to suggest that music has access to some sort of primal, pre-cultural effectiveness, since the organisation of sound and the way it is reacted to are always part of various social constructs; it is to suggest that sound affects the body in a quantifiably different way than other forms of communication. This realisation suggests that the very nature of recordings works against an ideal of purely cerebral contemplation.

One of the ways in which these ideas can be read in ECM is through an emphasis on the body as a site of creativity. Musically, such an idea is most blatantly expressed in the solo recordings of Keith Jarrett. As I have argued, these recordings and the discourse surrounding them serve to place an emphasis on the particular space and moment of performance and improvisation. Already, these performances resist detached appreciation due to the fact that they do not exist (as scores, as pieces of music) outside of the particular context of the recording. On top of this, however, they also emphasise these musical

activities as corporeal. Jarrett's recordings are full of prominent grunts, groans and other vocalisations which cement the creative act of improvisation as embodied, of the moment, and unique.

Visually, ECM's covers move this idea of undetached, active potential creativity into the space of the listener through the various photographic and design strategies that I have discussed. Thus, the locus of meaning in these objects lies not primarily in the sonic or in the visually representational, but somewhere between these two categories in the *object* of the recording. The visual aspect of ECM's products, through the denial of strict representation, moves an idea of the materiality of sound and performance into the dimension of the visual. Following from this, the signifiatory potential of ECM can be said to lie in the dissolution of hierarchical pairs. The pair "sound/the visual", which has been almost universally invoked in discourse about record covers, is questioned through the revelation of the potential for meaning to lie in the physical use of the object rather than in a strictly ordered pattern between these two "abstract" elements. Perhaps more importantly, ECM questions the distinction between the ideal and the material by pushing away from both detached aesthetic appreciation (through the spontaneous and embodied act of improvisation and through an emphasis on the space of the looker/listener) and strict representation. In other words, the potential for meaning and signification in ECM's products lies not in the visual, nor in the sonic, nor in the relationship between these two elements, but in the way these elements combine with the material to communicate information. To borrow terms from Judith Butler, the

distinction between the ideal and the material is dissolved in the performativity of the recording. In ECM's case, this performativity lies not solely with the "performer", but also within the user's activity of apprehending the recording. Both the sonic and the visual are pulled toward each other and away from their proper "duties".

5: Conclusion / Epilogue: Recordings and Consumption as Self-Realisation

Based on the foregoing arguments, how does ECM fit within the wider field of recordings? The marketplace for recordings largely demands that all products be placed into categories according to musical genre. In ECM's case, categorisation has often been difficult. *Officium*, a recording mentioned earlier and one of ECM's best-sellers, can be variously found in the classical, jazz, and new age sections of record stores (and often in different sections within the same store). In other cases, the category of "world music" is also added to the list of choices. However, I would argue that these problems in categorisation arise not only from the problem of genre, but also from anxiety over the *purposes* of recordings.

Some recordings are marketed with explicit purposes in mind: music for dancing, music for relaxation, etc. On the other hand, within the more culturally sanctified and rarefied genres such as classical music (and jazz, since the 1960s), purposelessness has become a virtue. In the context of *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that bourgeois taste in music tends to demand that music "[negate]... the social world"³⁹ in order to demonstrate that its amateurs have the time, energy and intelligence to appreciate it strictly on its own terms. Within

certain circles, music which has a declared purpose is still denigrated in favour of an imaginary ideal of music for contemplation/thought/enlightenment.⁴⁰ As I have shown, this distinction is an illusion, but it still plays a large part in the ways in which recordings are categorised and used.

Visually and musically, ECM declares a purpose for its recordings which does not fit neatly into established categories, and the anxiety this causes is reflected in the varying ways in which the label is approached. Sometimes it is celebrated using the language and concepts of “aesthetic distancing”. In other contexts, it is “denigrated” by being placed in the completely unsanctified and off-derided genre of new age music.⁴¹

I do not wish to pass judgement on any of these genres, nor will I try to settle the confusion by placing ECM into one of them. I merely wish to point out the anxiety that is caused both in the marketplace and in the discourse about recordings by the fact ECM’s products do not seem to fit within one of the accepted “purposes” of recordings. It must be said that writing and discussion about the label usually operates according to the conventions of categorisation, and that it has largely attempted to fit ECM into one of these established “purposes”. However, the vast differences between these evaluations testify to the difficulty that the label poses within the marketplace and in discussion.

This analysis has attempted to locate in ECM characteristics which contradict the conventions and categories of the field of recordings. Through its basic questioning of the relationship between sound and the visual, the label has also raised issues surrounding taste, marketing, and difference. Furthermore, it

has troubled the boundaries of the distinctions which normally guide evaluation and the construction of taste within this field. The deconstruction of oppositions between producer and user, between the material and the ideal, and between "functional" and "purposeless" recordings have served to create a type of object whose status within the field is highly debatable. This makes the label's products difficult to locate in terms of conventional ideas of taste or within established categories. Because of the characteristics I have discussed, ECM's products cannot be read as "purposeless" in the traditional sense. Then again, the lack of clarity as regards their purpose has allowed them to be subsumed under widely varied categories and strategies of use.

The idea that individuals within capitalism largely achieve self-realisation through the purchase and use of goods - the notion that the objects that one buys and displays (in the home or otherwise) constitute markers of self-expression - is nothing new, and not unique to the world of recordings. Most recordings cost the same amount of money, but are widely varied in the amount of perceived cultural capital that they confer. Because of the effective economic democracy of the medium, taste in recordings must be largely constructed through style. Musical style is, of course, important in this process, but the visual can and often does play an equal role. In ECM's case, the roles played by these two dimensions are not fully distinguishable from each other.

How does the world of ideas communicated by ECM's products participate in the idea of consumption as self-expression? Departing from the traditional ideal of detached appreciation, I would argue that ECM markets an idea of

creativity to the consumer. If we can say that the tacit statement “you must be educated to appreciate this” has often been attached to recordings within the sanctified genre of classical music, we might say that through its particular contraventions of the norms of the field, ECM attaches the tacit statement “you must be creative to appreciate this” to its recordings. The label’s marketing strategies and questioning of conventions result in an ideal of taste and consumerism that is based not on “enjoyment” or “appreciation”, but on the idea of the consumer as a fully active participant.

In terms of conspicuous consumption, then, the principal idea marketed by ECM is not one of appreciation, but one of creative activity. I would not argue that ECM is the inventor of this idea – as we have seen, its visual strategies have partially drawn upon other visual practices in which similar notions of “active participation” had previously been established. Nor would I argue that its recordings are the only ones that construct such concepts of consumerism and subjectivity. However, the label’s deployment of this idea and the strategies through which this takes place have resulted in a singular body of work which questions the traditional assumptions and conventions of record production and whose circulation and use demonstrate the problems that arise in the marketplace and in use from non-adherence to established ideas. The connotations of this “activity”, residing somewhere between detached aestheticism and purposeful functionality, do much to explain the subtle anxiety that the label has caused in the marketplace and to account for the wide variance in cultural evaluation bestowed upon its products.

At the root of the possibilities and practices brought to the fore by ECM lies the label's treatment of the basic issue through which this thesis was initiated: the relationship between sound and the visual. The question of how to treat this relationship has guided the practice of album cover design and the discourse about recordings since the first album covers appeared, and the various "answers" which have been proposed have taken myriad visual forms. Producers of recordings – musicians, designers, record labels – have often treated this relationship as a conflict which must be hidden or minimised. Attempts to resolve the "problem" of making different modes of signification work together have resulted in a field of products that generally casts sound and the visual in strictly defined hierarchical roles. ECM, rather than seeing the "conflict" between sound and the visual as a problem to be solved, has treated it as an opportunity to be taken advantage of and manipulated in the label's attempts to differentiate itself within a wider field. Largely through its quiet subversions of record production's visual conventions, ECM has built an audience; however, its particular brand of unobtrusive resistance has also freely and knowingly allowed its products to be subsumed under a wide variety of categories and uses beyond its control. Thus, through all the strategies and uses we have discussed, and through ECM's construction of the recording as an object not bound by hierarchical categories of communication, the label has proved a singular and apt location for the study of the central tensions of record production and its use of the visual - the need to create identity and taste within a field of level-priced, exchangeable goods. As we have seen, ECM's attempts to negotiate this tension

have resulted in a body of work which brings its contradictions into focus. Yet, outside of the label's influence, the circulation and use of this work has served to further highlight the visual's role in the wider field of recordings as elements in consumerism and in everyday life.

Endnotes

- ¹ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. 281.
- ² Wicke, Peter. "On the Economics of Popular Music". *Music, Culture and Society: A Reader*. Ed. Derek B. Scott. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 206.
- ³ For example, musicians such as David Bowie and Madonna have been particularly adept at shifting their extra-musical personae, and in creating contexts of personality around their recordings.
- ⁴ Straw, Will. "Exhausted Commodities: The Material Culture of Music." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 25, no. 1, Winter 2000. 175-185.
- ⁵ de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 165-176.
- ⁶ Later in this discussion, I will argue that the nature of sound is that it is actually *more* material than the visual. In the present context, however, I am simply stating that the recording as an object can be seen and touched, but it cannot be heard in itself without the use of other technology.
- ⁷ Derrida, Jacques, and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997. 137-138; Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'." *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Ed. Drucilla Cornell, et al. New York: Routledge, 1992. The latter text uses the idea of the undecidable in relation to judgement and the possibility of "decisiveness" (esp. 23-26). The former provides a summary of this use as well as a broader view of the concept and its role in deconstruction.
- ⁸ Weidemann, Kurt, ed. *Book Jackets and Record Covers: An International Survey*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969.
- ⁹ Dean, Roger and David Howells. *The Ultimate Album Cover Album*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1987; Dean, Roger, et al. *Album Cover Album 5*. New York: Billboard Books, 1989.
- ¹⁰ Thorgerson, Storm and Aubrey Powell. *100 Best Album Covers*. Firefly Books, 1999.
- ¹¹ *The 100 Best Album Covers of All Time*. Special, undated edition of Q magazine, 2001.
- ¹² Jastfelder, Frank and Stefan Kassel. *The Album Cover Art of Soundtracks*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1997.
- ¹³ *Album Covers from the Vinyl Junkyard*. London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1997.
- ¹⁴ Ochs, Michael. *1000 Record Covers*. Köln: Taschen, 1996.
- ¹⁵ Shaughnessy, Adrian and Julian House, eds. *Sampler: Contemporary Music Graphics*. New York: Universe Publishing, 1999; Shaughnessy, Adrian and Julian House, eds. *Sampler 2: Art, Pop, and Contemporary Music Graphics*. New York: Universe Publishing, 2000.
- ¹⁶ *Visible Music: CD Jacket Graphics*. Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2000.

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- ¹⁷ Barthes, Roland. "The Photographic Message." *Image - Music - Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 15-31. 25-27.
- ¹⁸ Chartier, Roger. "Texts, Printings, Readings." *The New Cultural History*. Ed. Lynn Hunt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. 154-175. 161.
- ¹⁹ Eisenberg, Evan. *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987.
- ²⁰ Kulak, Steve. "Sharp Focus." *New Internationalist*, no. 322, Apr. 2000. 31-33. 31.
- ²¹ The communication of an idea of the north is strengthened by, but not dependent upon, the knowledge that ECM releases recordings by many Scandinavian and Baltic musicians. Other practices of the label also tend toward internationalism; although based in Germany, the label has released almost no recordings by German musicians. Furthermore, it has done relatively little of its recording in Germany; the most frequent recording location is Oslo. The primary printed language of ECM's recordings is English.
- ²² Varnedoe, Kirk. *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. 23.
- ²³ These exhibitions include: *Northern Light* (The Brooklyn Museum, 1982); *The Mystic North* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984); *Dreams of a Summer Night* (Hayward Gallery, 1986); *Lumière du Monde, Lumière du Ciel* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998).
- ²⁴ Nasgaard, Roald. *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, 4
- ²⁶ Gianluigi Trovesi (clarinets) and Gianni Coscia (accordion), *In Cerca di Cibo*, 2000.
- ²⁷ Rüedi, Peter. "The Audible Landscape." Müller, Lars, ed. *ECM Sleeves of Desire: A Cover Story*. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 1996. 27-34. 29.
- ²⁸ Jarrett, Keith. *Solo-Concerts, Bremen/Lausanne*. LP. ECM, 1973.
- ²⁹ A similar correlation between performance and space is found in Paul Giger's recording *Chartres*. Here, the influence and atmosphere of architectural space is taken to extremes. The album consists of five violin improvisations, each performed in and named after different parts of Chartres cathedral ("Crypt", "Crossing", etc.).
- ³⁰ Jedlička, Jan. *Eine Winterreise ans Meer / A Winter Journey to the Sea*. Munich: ECM New Series, 1996.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, unpaginated.
- ³² *ibid.*, unpaginated.
- ³³ Mason, Roger. *The Economics of Conspicuous Consumption*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998.

³⁴ This said, it must be recognised that economic status can be demonstrated by users of recordings in any number of different ways – the size of one’s collection, ownership of rare and expensive old recordings, ownership of expensive stereo equipment, etc., but participation in the field does not depend upon these factors.

³⁵ Bourdieu, 34.

³⁶ Quoted on the back cover of Müller.

³⁷ Lake, Steve. “Looking at the Cover.” Müller. 261-262.

³⁸ Gilbert, Jeremy and Ewan Pearson. *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound*. London: Routledge, 1999. 44-47.

³⁹ Bourdieu, 19.

⁴⁰ Gilbert and Pearson, 41-44.

⁴¹ One colleague, upon hearing that I was writing about ECM, said disdainfully: “You know that that label spawned new age music, don’t you?”

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fig. 1
Bobo Stenson Trio
War Orphans
Design: Sascha Kleis
Photo: Jan Jedlička
ECM
1998



fig. 2
The Beatles
Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band
Design: MC Productions and The Apple
staged by Peter Blake and Jann Haworth
Photo: Michael Cooper
Parlophone
1967
CD reissue: 1987



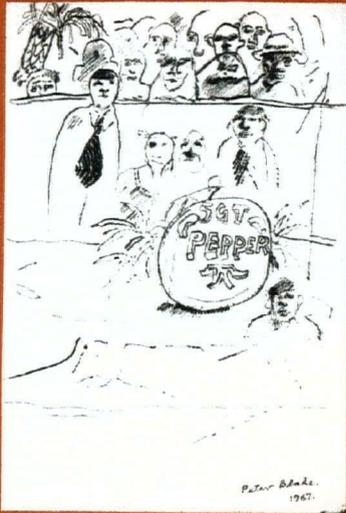
fig. 3
 Pages from the booklet of the CD reissue of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*
 1987



The location: Chelsea Manor Studios, Flood Street, London.
 The date: Thursday, March 18, 1967. The crowd assembled...

- 1 Sgt. Yakkowar (Gin garr)
- 2 Axlone Gower (cabbie in sea, drags and rags)
- 3 Max West (actor)
- 4 Lesley Brier (comic)
- 5 Katharina Stockhausen (composer)
- 6 P. C. (William Cress; Pank's comic)
- 7 Carl Gustav Jung (psychologist)
- 8 Edgar Allan Poe (writer)
- 9 Fred Astaire (actor)
- 10 Richard Merkin (artist)
- 11 The Varga Girl (by artist Alberto Vargas)
- 12 Les Gorey (actor)
- 13 Hansi Hall (actor, with Les Gorey, one of the Beany Boys)
- 14 Simon Buda (owner of Water Towers)
- 15 Bob Dylan (musician)
- 16 Aubrey Beardsley (illustrator)
- 17 Sir Robert Peel
- 18 Aldous Huxley (writer)
- 19 Dylan Thomas (poet)
- 20 Terry Southern (writer)
- 21 Dion (di Ruzic) (singer)
- 22 Tony Curtis (actor)
- 23 Wallace Bevan (actor)
- 24 Tommie Handley (comic)
- 25 Marilyn Monroe (actress)
- 26 William Barragath (writer)
- 27 Sri Mahavara Babai (guru)
- 28 Sam Laerd (comic)
- 29 Richard Lindner (artist)
- 30 Oliver Hardy (comic)
- 31 Karl Marx (philosopher/socialist)
- 32 I. G. (Herbert George) Wells (writer)
- 33 Sri Paramahansa Yogananda (guru)
- 34 Anonymous (was hairdressers' dummy)
- 35 Stuart Sutcliffe (artist/former Beatle)
- 36 Anonymous (was hairdressers' dummy)
- 37 Max Klinger (comic)
- 38 The Perry Girl (by artist George Perry)
- 39 Maxine Brande (actor)
- 40 Tom Mix (actor)
- 41 Oscar Wilde (writer)
- 42 Tyrone Power (actor)
- 43 Larry Bell (artist)
- 44 Dr. David Livingstone (missionary/explorer)
- 45 Johnny Weismuller (swimmer/actor)
- 46 Stephen Crane (writer)
- 47 Jay Boon (comic)
- 48 George Bernard Shaw (writer)
- 49 I. C. (Herace Clifford) Westerman (sculptor)
- 50 Albert Scubbin (sweet player)
- 51 Sri Lahir Mahavara (guru)
- 52 Lewis Carroll (writer)
- 53 T. E. (Thomas Edward) Lawrence (soldier, a/k/a Lawrence of Arabia)
- 54 Sonny Liston (boxer)
- 55 The Perry Girl (by artist George Perry)
- 56 Wax model of George Harrison
- 57 Wax model of John Lennon
- 58 Shirley Temple (child actress)
- 59 Wax model of Ringo Starr
- 60 Wax model of Paul McCartney
- 61 Albert Einstein (physicist)
- 62 John Lennon, holding a Peace sign
- 63 Ringo Starr, holding a trumpet
- 64 Paul McCartney, holding a car engine
- 65 George Harrison, holding a flute
- 66 Bobby Breen (singer)
- 67 Marlene Dietrich (actress)
- 68 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Indian leader)
- 69 Legionnaire from the Order of the Buffalo
- 70 Diana Dora (actress)
- 71 Shirley Temple (child actress)
- 72 Cloth grandmother-figure by Jan Haworth
- 73 Cloth figure of Shirley Temple (child actress) by Jan Haworth
- 74 Mexican candlestick
- 75 Television set
- 76 Stone figure of girl
- 77 Stone figure
- 78 Statue from John Lennon's house
- 79 Trophy
- 80 Four-armed Indian doll
- 81 Dream-shin, designed by Joe Epiphany
- 82 Hookah (water tobacco-pipe)
- 83 Velvet snake
- 84 Japanese stone figure
- 85 Stone figure of Snow White
- 86 Garden gnome
- 87 Tube

* Painted out because he requested a fee.
 # Painted out at the request of EMI.
 † Also used by Peter Blake as the basis for the cut-out of Sgt. Pepper



Above: Final adjustments.
 Ringo checks his buttons while Paul and John chat with Robert Fraser.
 Left: Peter Blake's original rough outline of the cover.



Almost ready for action... some Hilfe on the sidelines.
 See inside of front cover for key to characters.

fig. 5
Grateful Dead
Grateful Dead
Collage: Kelly
Photo: Herb Greene
Warner Bros.
1967

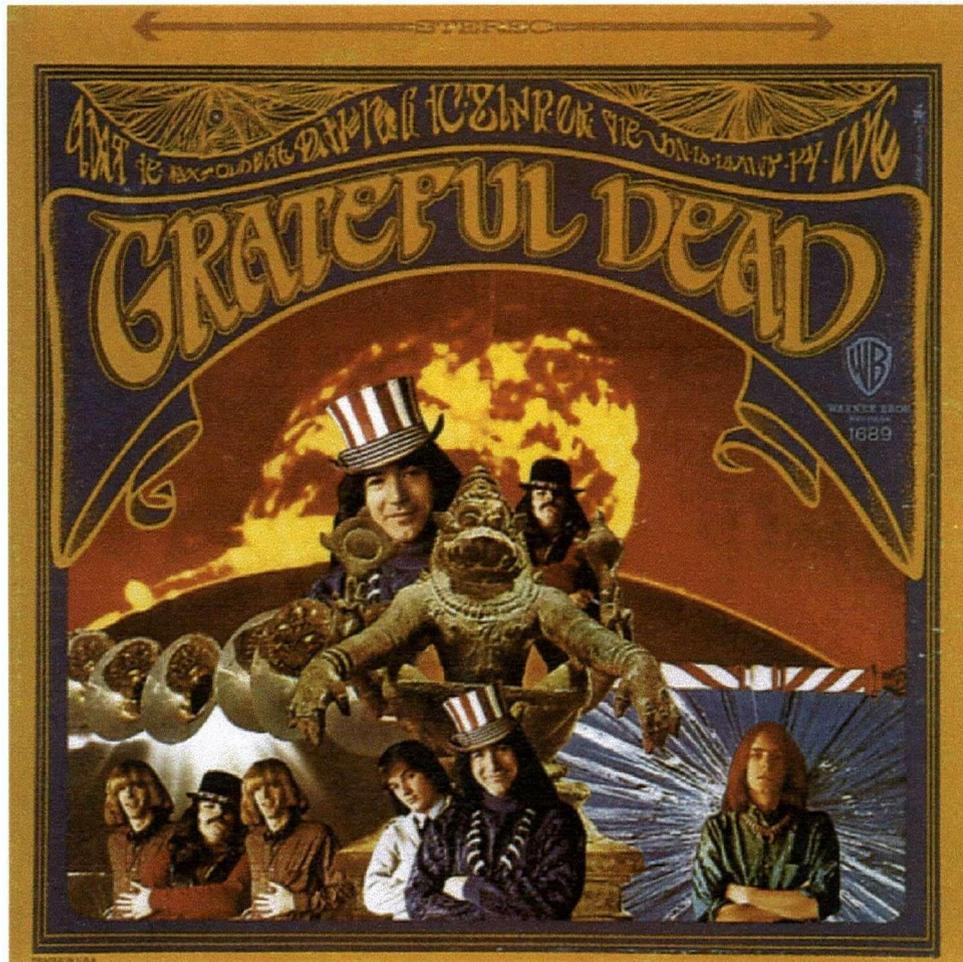


fig. 6
The Small Faces
Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake
Immediate
1968

circular sleeve, folded out



fig. 7
The Rolling Stones
Their Satanic Majesties Request
Design: Michael Cooper
ABKCO Records/London
1967



fig. 8
The Rolling Stones
Sticky Fingers
Design: Craig Braun, Inc.
Concept & Photo: Andy Warhol
Rolling Stones
1971



fig. 9
The Hilliard Ensemble
Perotin
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1989

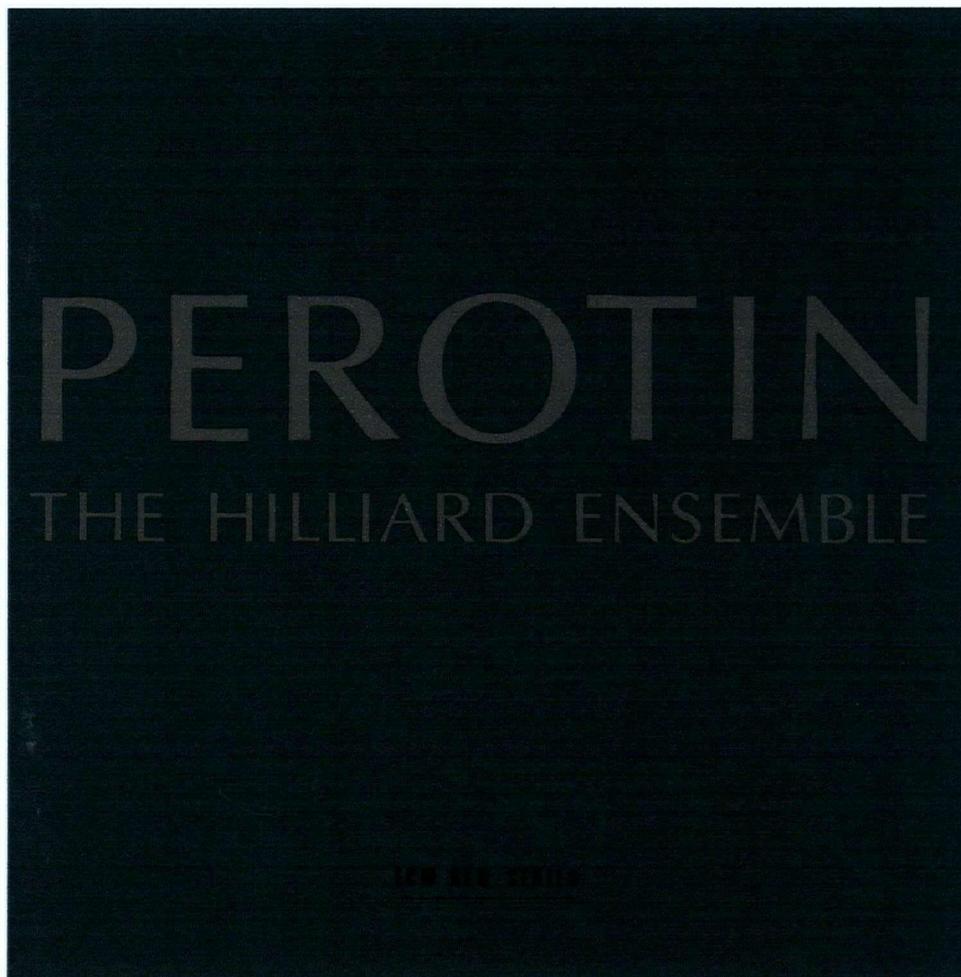


fig. 10

Side views of:

Keith Jarrett
Vienna Concert
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM
1992

Ketil Bjørnstad
The Sea II
Design: Sascha Kleis
ECM
1998



fig. 11
Thomas Demenga
J.S. Bach/B.A. Zimmermann
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
Photo: Kent O. Höglund
ECM New Series
1996

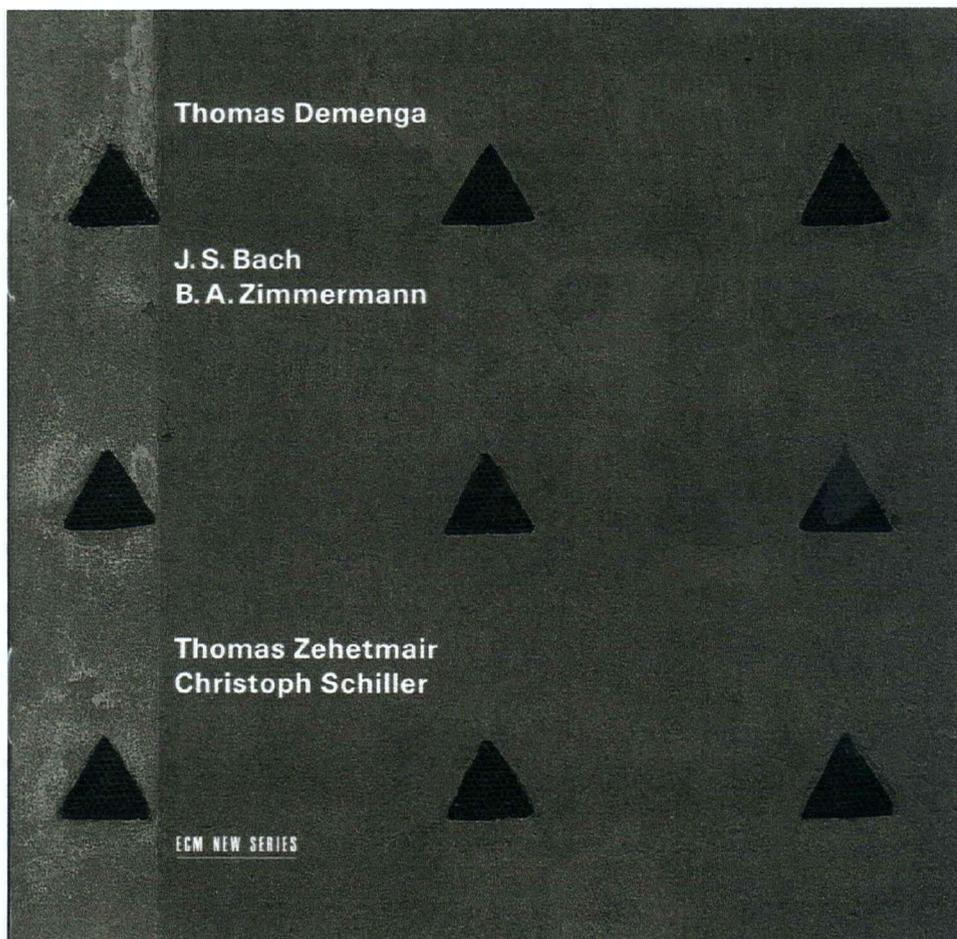


fig. 12
Ralph Towner
Diary
Design: B&B Wojirsch
ECM
1974



fig. 13
John Dowland
In Darkness Let Me Dwell
Design: Sascha Kleis
Photo: Jim Bengston
ECM New Series
1999

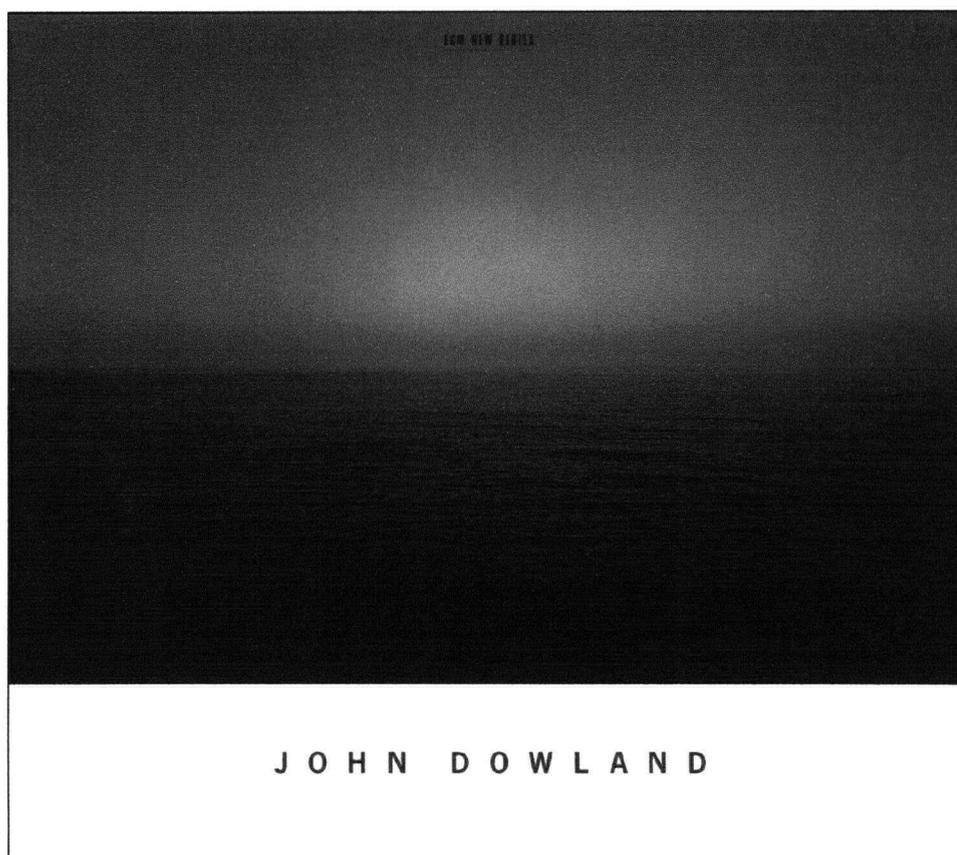


fig. 14
Olivier Messiaen
Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1995

OLIVIER MESSIAEN
MÉDITATIONS
SUR LE MYSTÈRE DE
LA SAINTE TRINITÉ
CHRISTOPHER
BOWERS-BROADBENT

ECM NEW SERIES

fig. 15
Arvo Pärt
Litany
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1996

ARVO PÄRT
—
LITANY

ECM NEW SERIES

fig. 16
The Hilliard Ensemble
Codex Speciálník
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1995

THE
HILLIARD
ENSEMBLE

CODEX
SPECIÁLNIK

ECM NEW SERIES

fig. 17
Thomas Tallis
The Lamentations of Jeremiah
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
Photo: Werner Hannappel
ECM New Series
1987

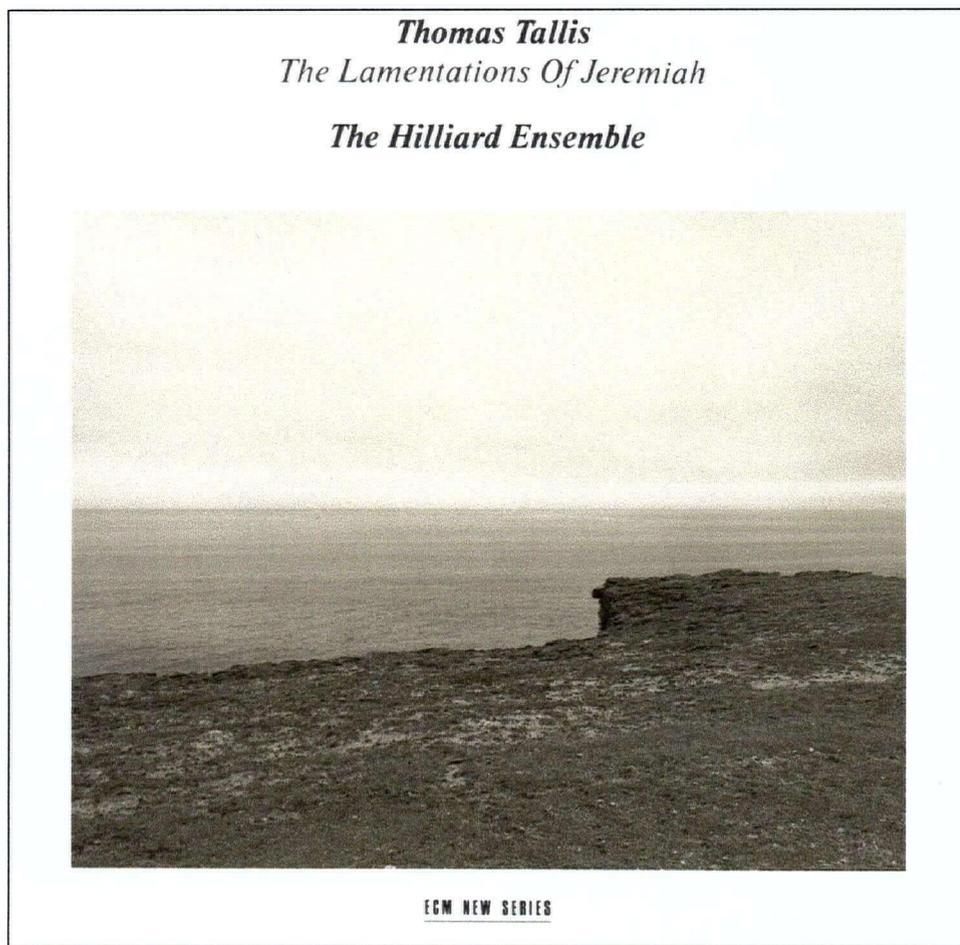


fig. 18
Jean Sibelius
Published Original Works for Piano, vol. 3
Finlandia
c. 2000

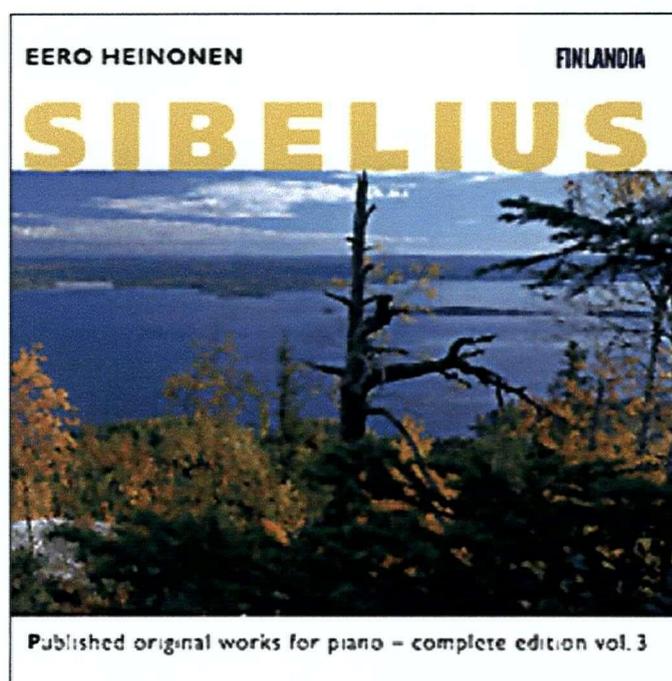


fig. 19
Akseli Gallen-Kallela
Great Black Woodpecker
gouache on paper
144 x 89 cm
1893

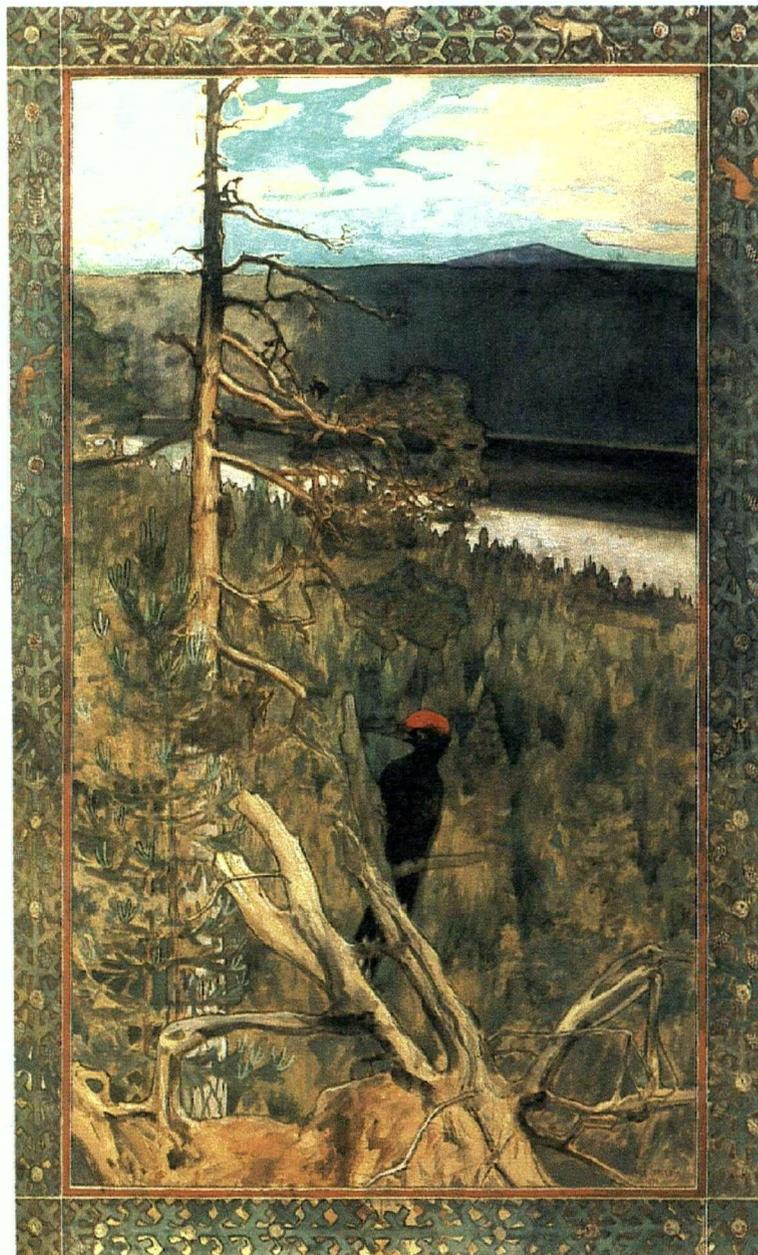


fig. 20
Pekka Halonen
Wilderness
oil on canvas
110 x 55.5 cm
1899

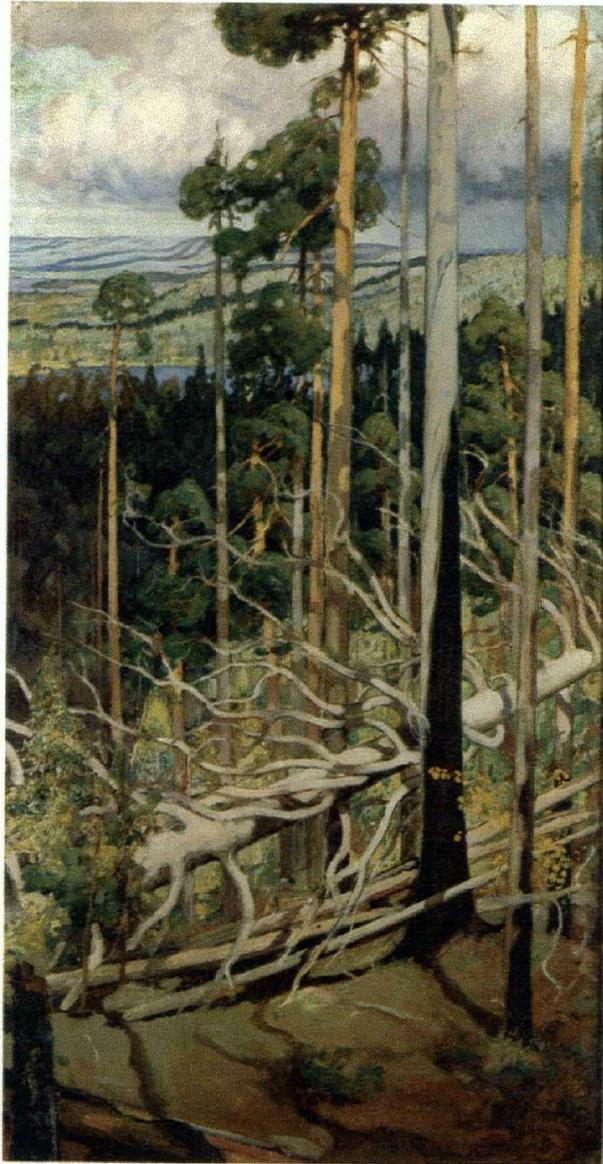


fig. 21
Carl Nielsen
Symphonies 4 & 5
Finlandia
1998

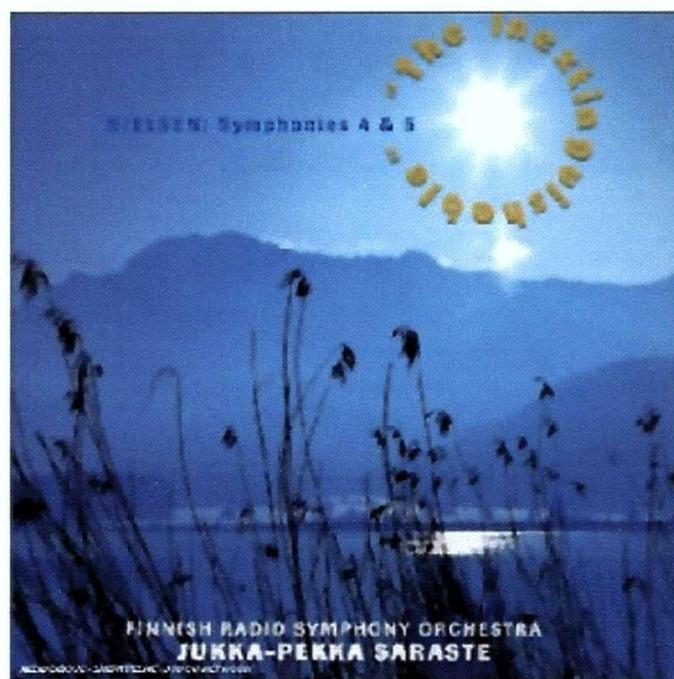


fig. 22
Jens Ferdinand Willumsen
Mountains Under the Southern Sun
oil on canvas
209 x 208 cm
1902

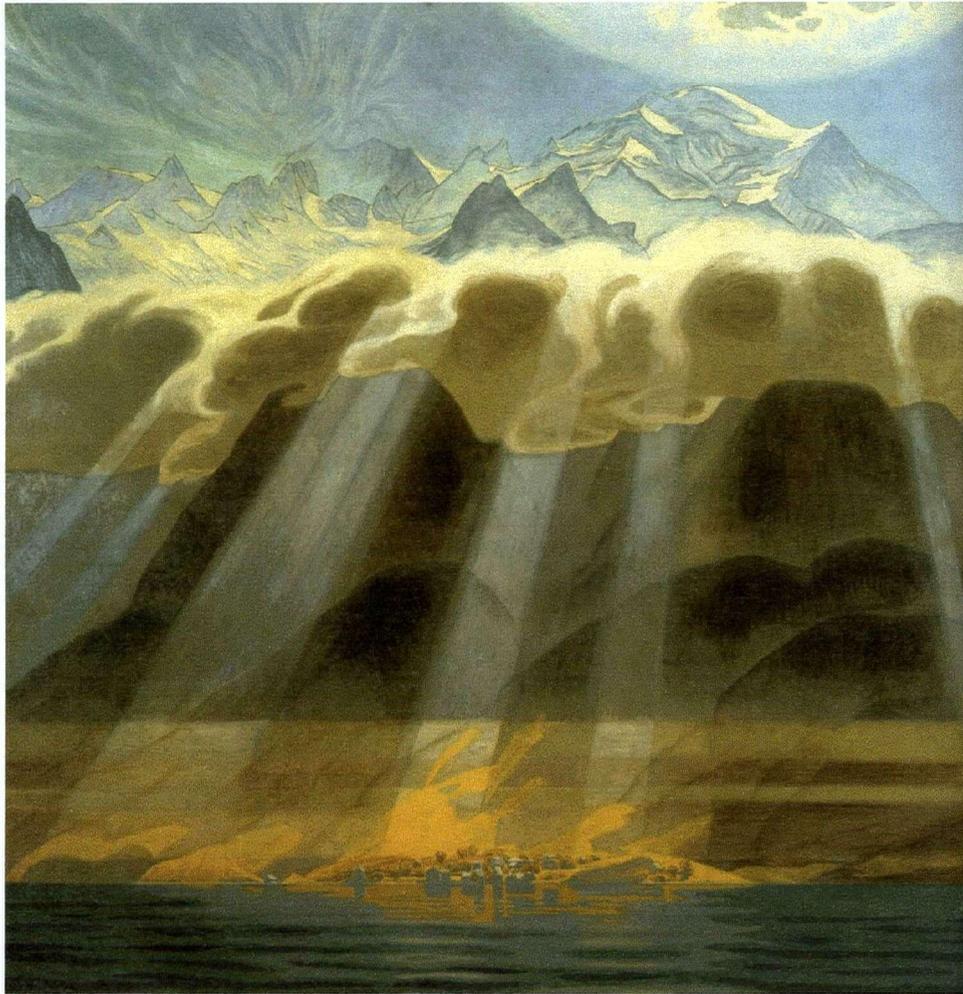


fig. 23
Ketil Bjørnstad
Epigraphs
Design: Sascha Kleis
ECM
2000

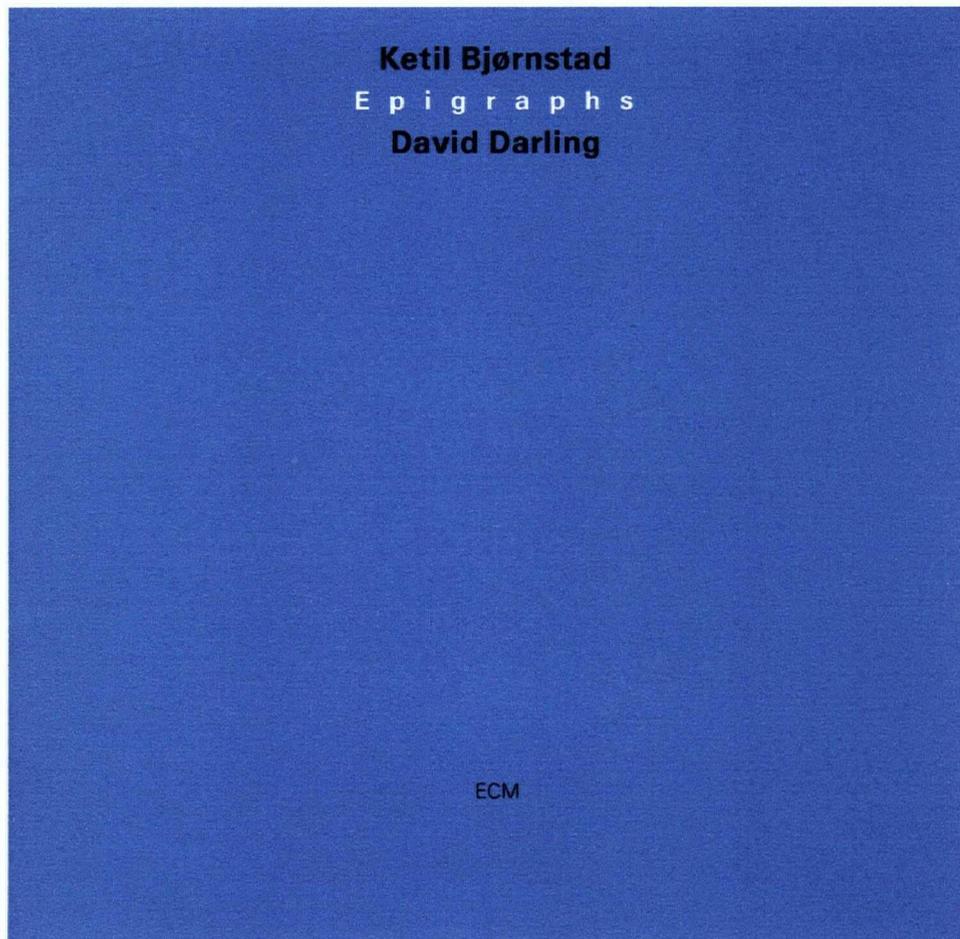


fig. 24
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Layout: Barbara Wojirsch
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

front cover

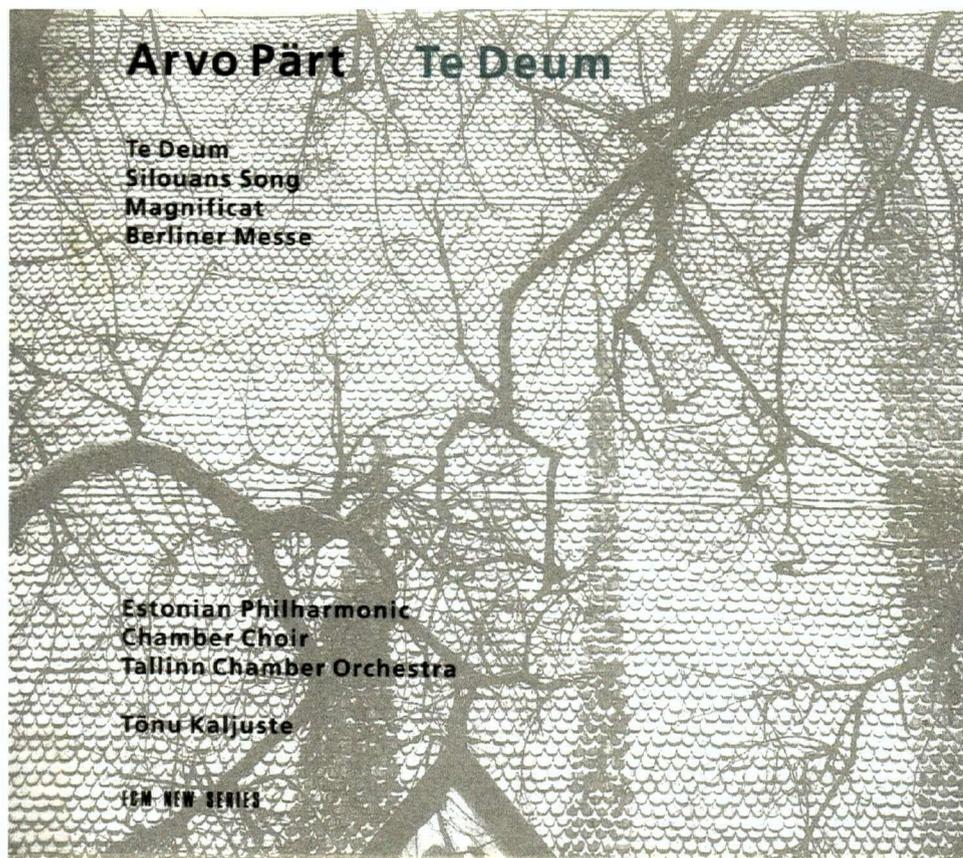


fig. 25
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Layout: Barbara Wojirsch
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet cover

Arvo Pärt *Te Deum*

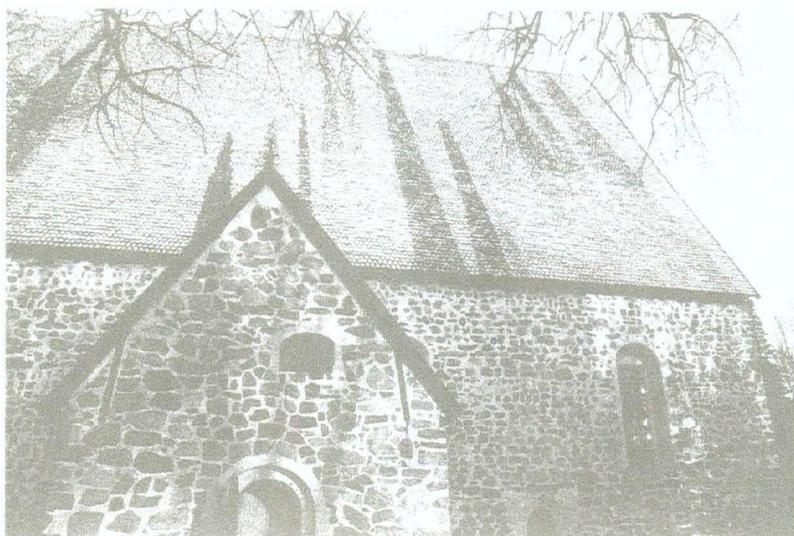


fig. 26
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet photograph

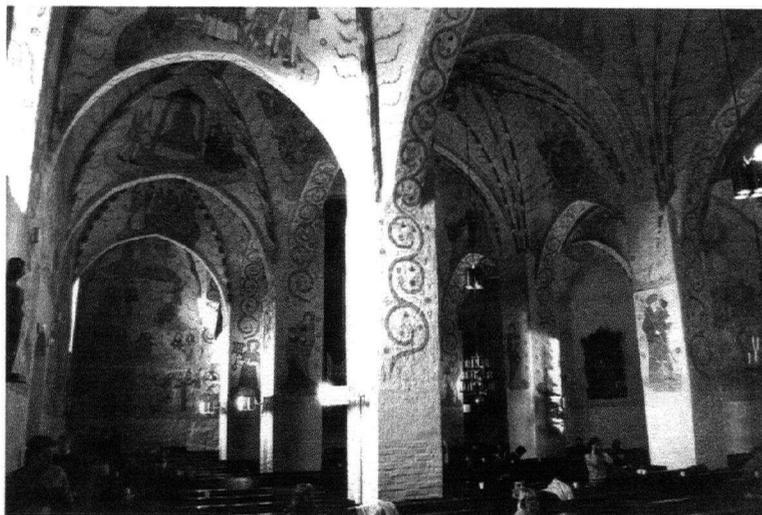


fig. 27
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet photograph

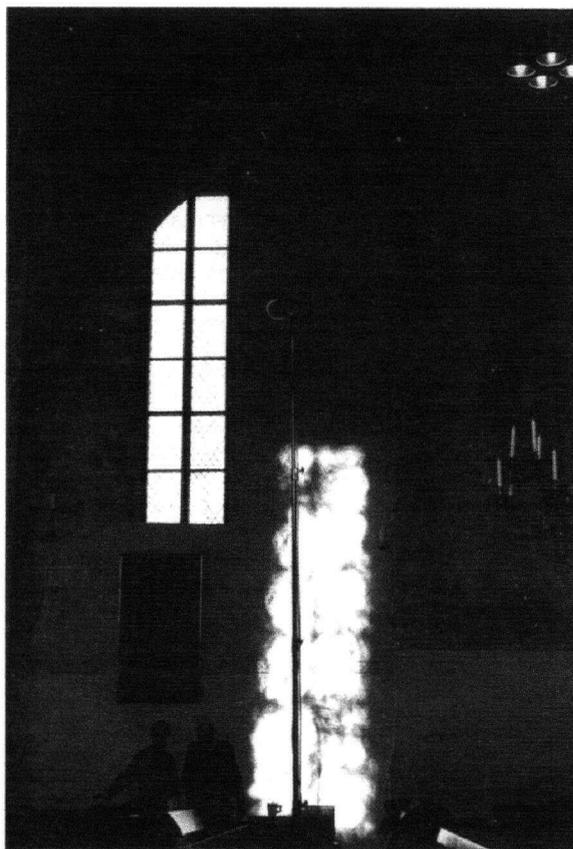


fig. 28
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet photograph

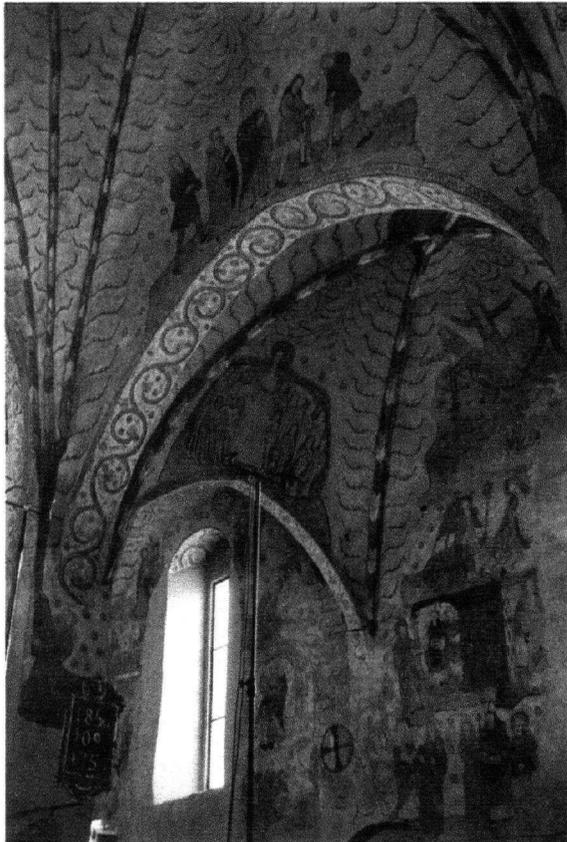


fig. 29
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet photograph



fig. 30
Arvo Pärt
Kanon Pokajanen
Photos: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1998

two pages from booklet

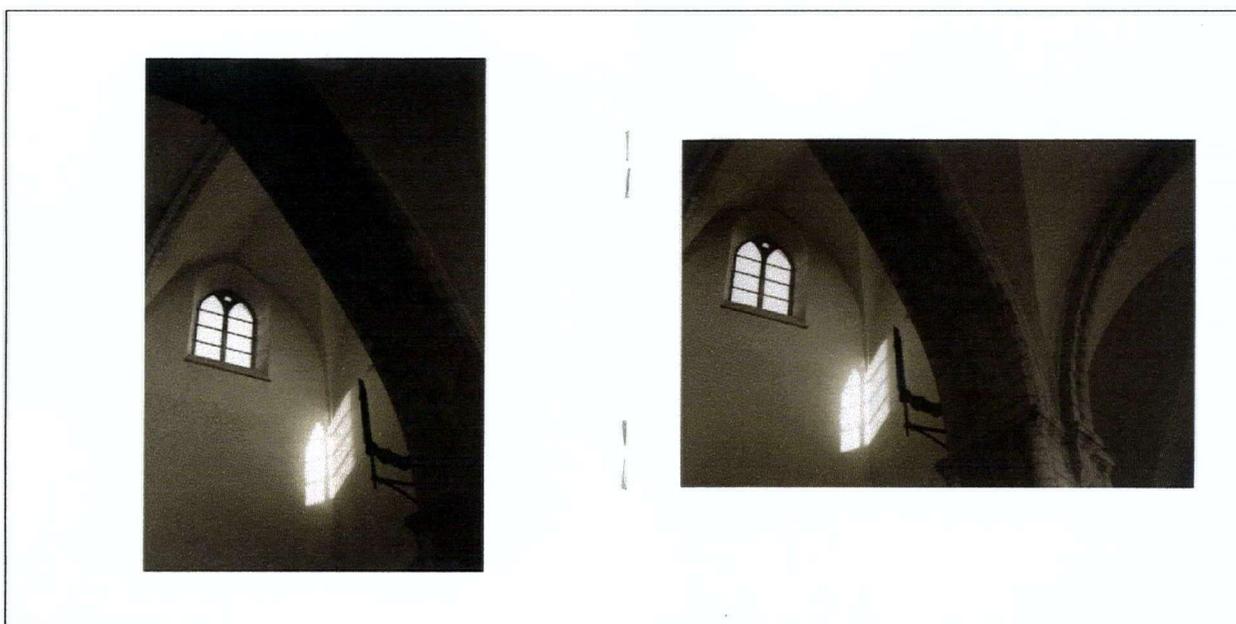


fig. 31
Arvo Pärt
Te Deum
Photo: Tõnu Tormis
ECM New Series
1993

booklet photograph



fig. 32
Jan Jedlička
Photograph from the book *Eine Winterreise ans Meer/A Winter Journey to the Sea*
ECM New Series
1996



fig. 33
Jan Jedlička
Photograph from the book *Eine Winterreise ans Meer/A Winter Journey to the Sea*
ECM New Series
1996



fig. 34
Jan Jedlička
Photograph from the book *Eine Winterreise ans Meer/A Winter Journey to the Sea*
ECM New Series
1996



fig. 35
Keith Jarrett and Jan Garbarek
Luminessence
Design: B&B Wojirsch
ECM
1975

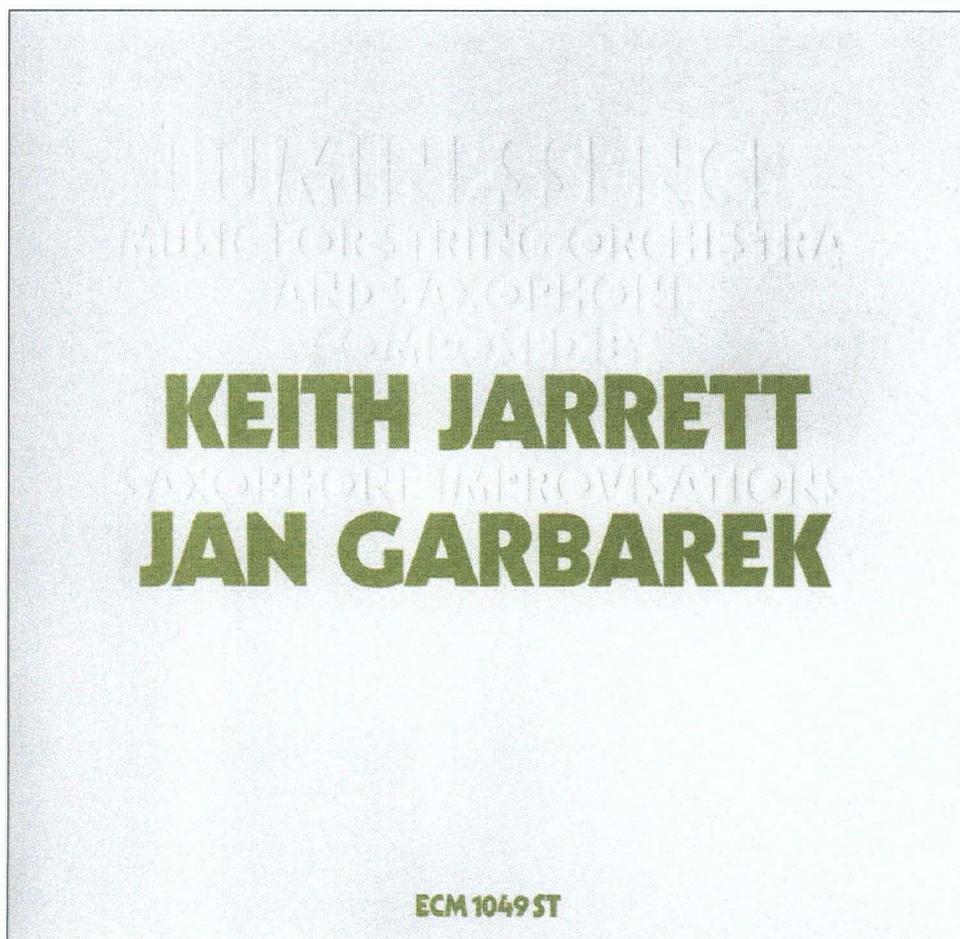


fig. 36
Dino Saluzzi
Once Upon a Time - Far Away in the South
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
Photo: Werner Hannappel
ECM
1986



fig. 37
Gary Peacock
Guamba
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM
1987

back cover

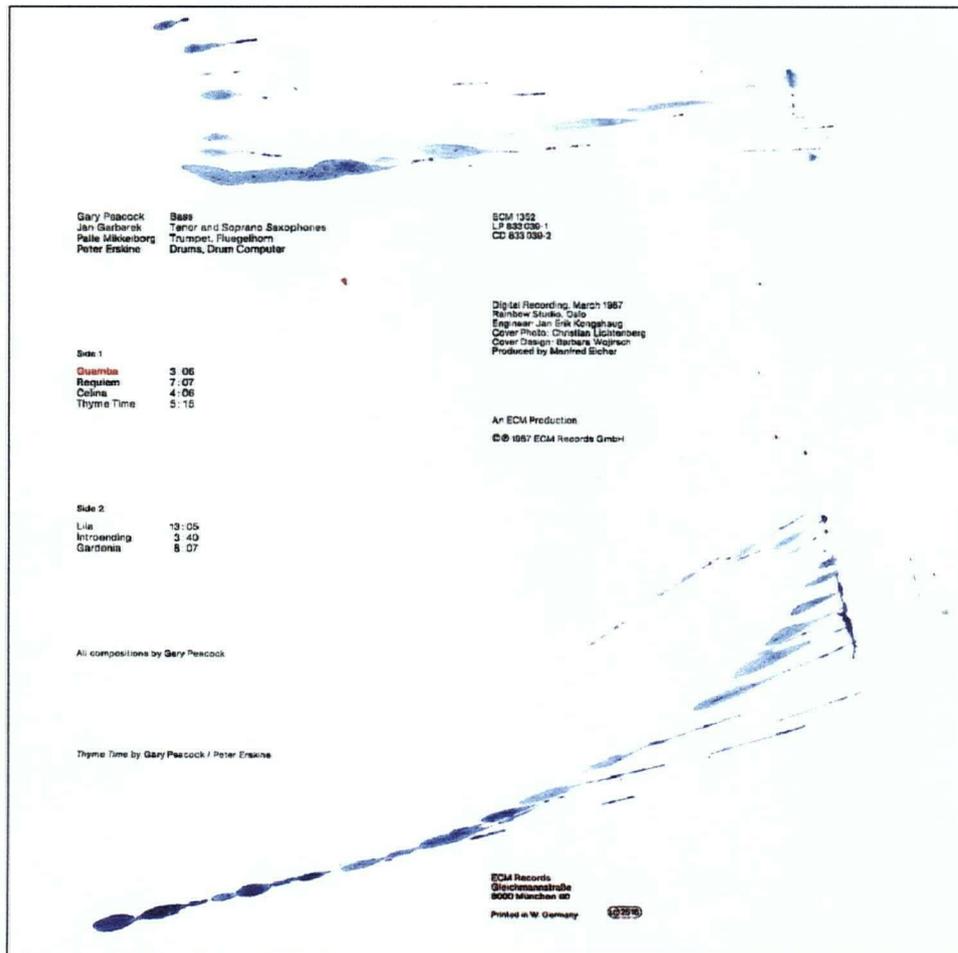


fig. 38
Louis Sclavis
Acoustic Quartet
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM
1994



fig. 39
Krakatau
Matinale
Design and Photo: Dieter Rehm
ECM
1994

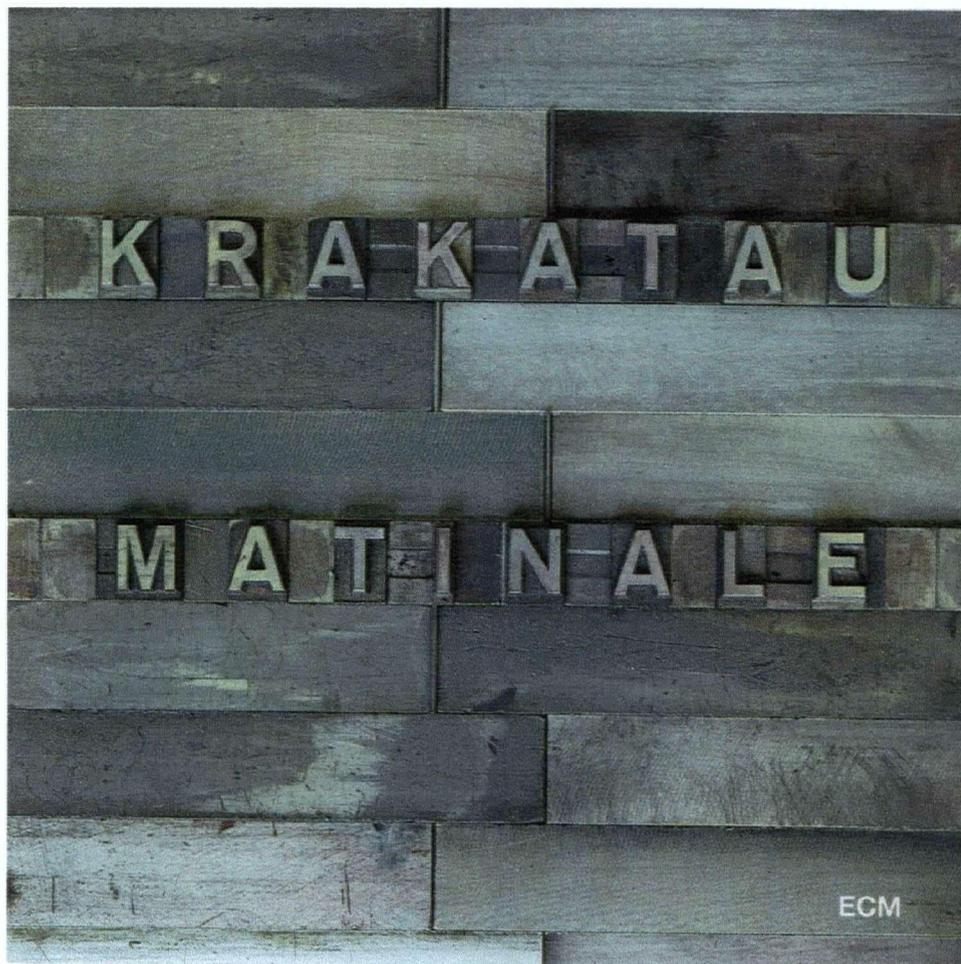


fig. 40
The Hilliard Ensemble
Walter Frye
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1993

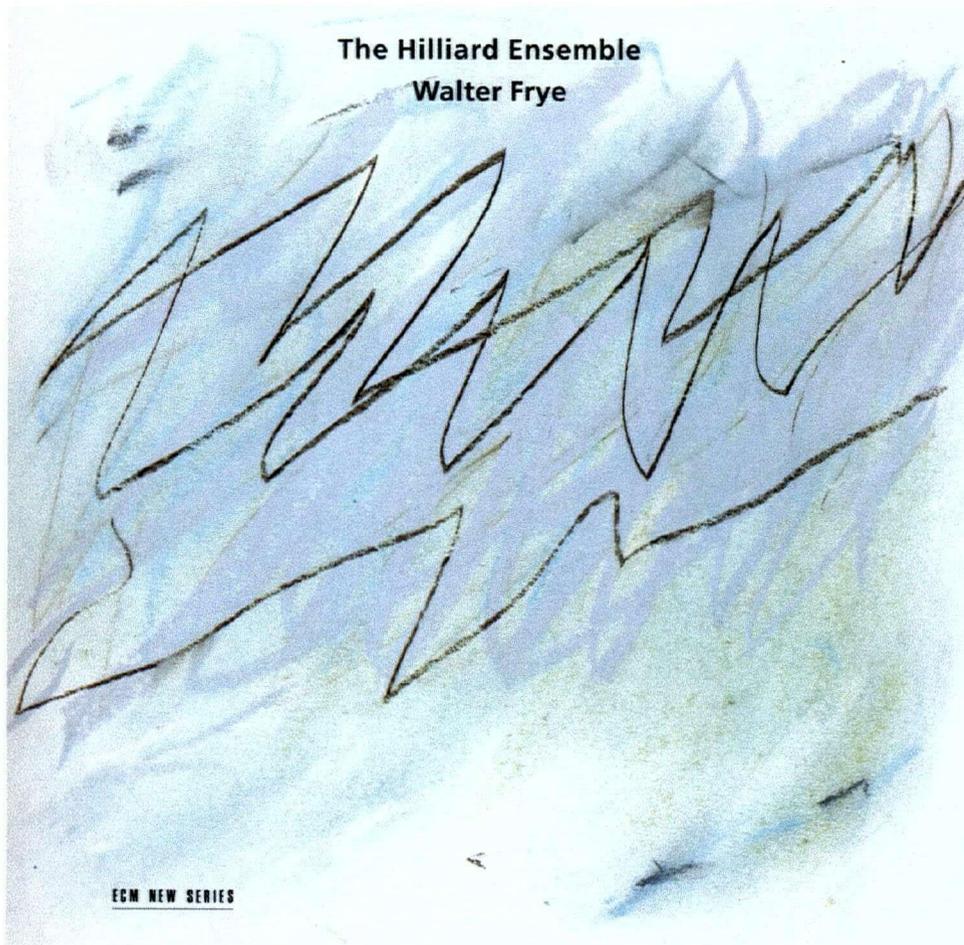


fig. 41
Hölderlin
Gedichte
Design: Barbara Wojirsch
ECM New Series
1984

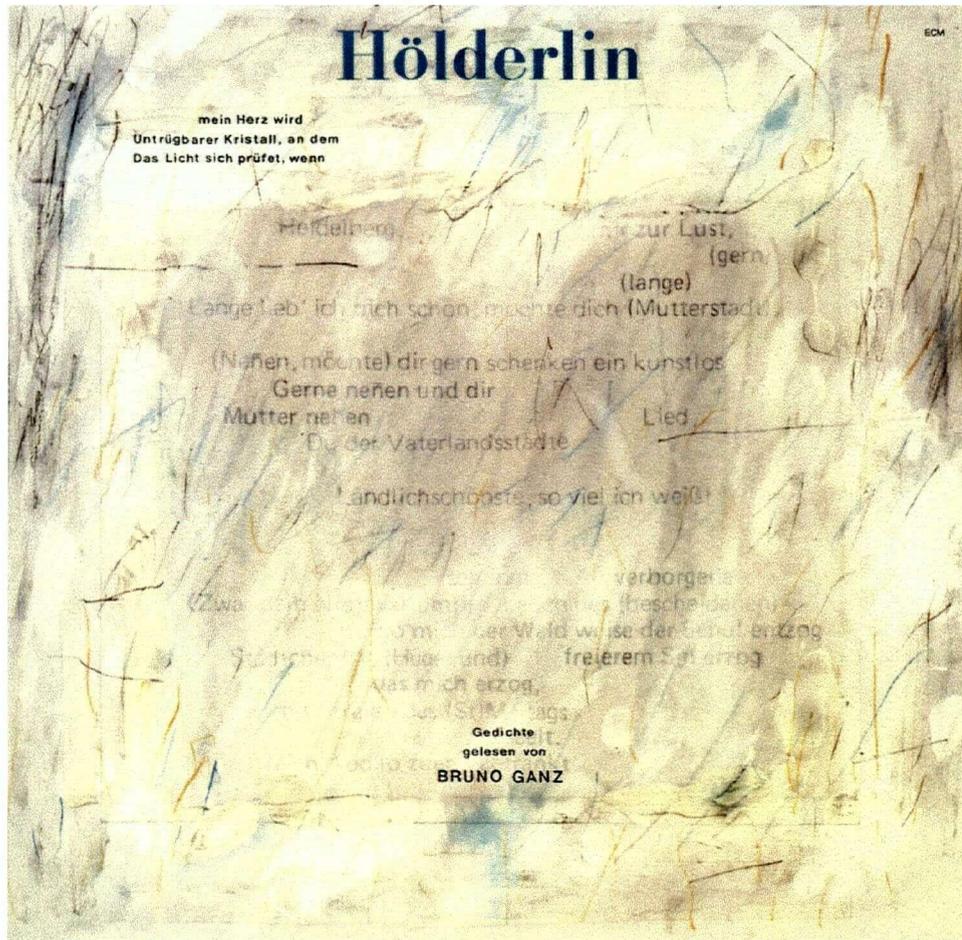


fig. 42
Steve Tibbetts
Northern Song
Design and Photo: Dieter Rehm
ECM
1982

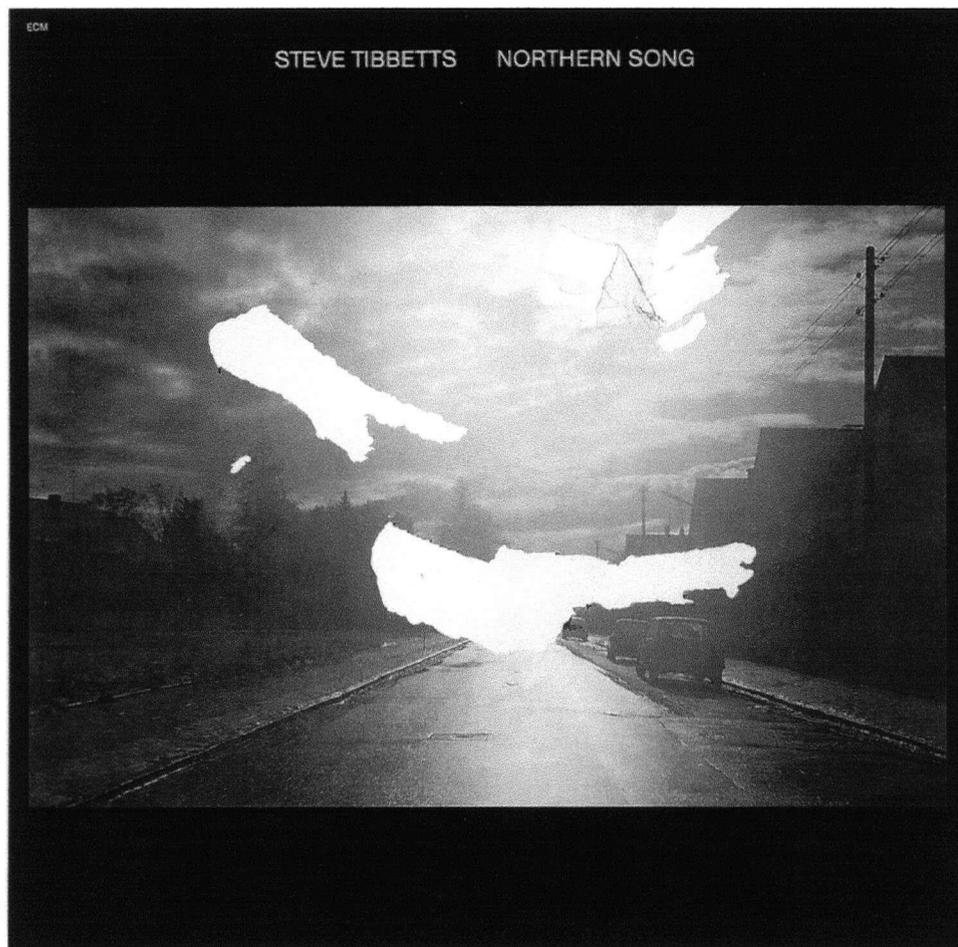


fig. 43
The Hilliard Ensemble
Lassus
Design: Michael Hofstetter
Photo: Wolfgang Wiese
ECM New Series
1998

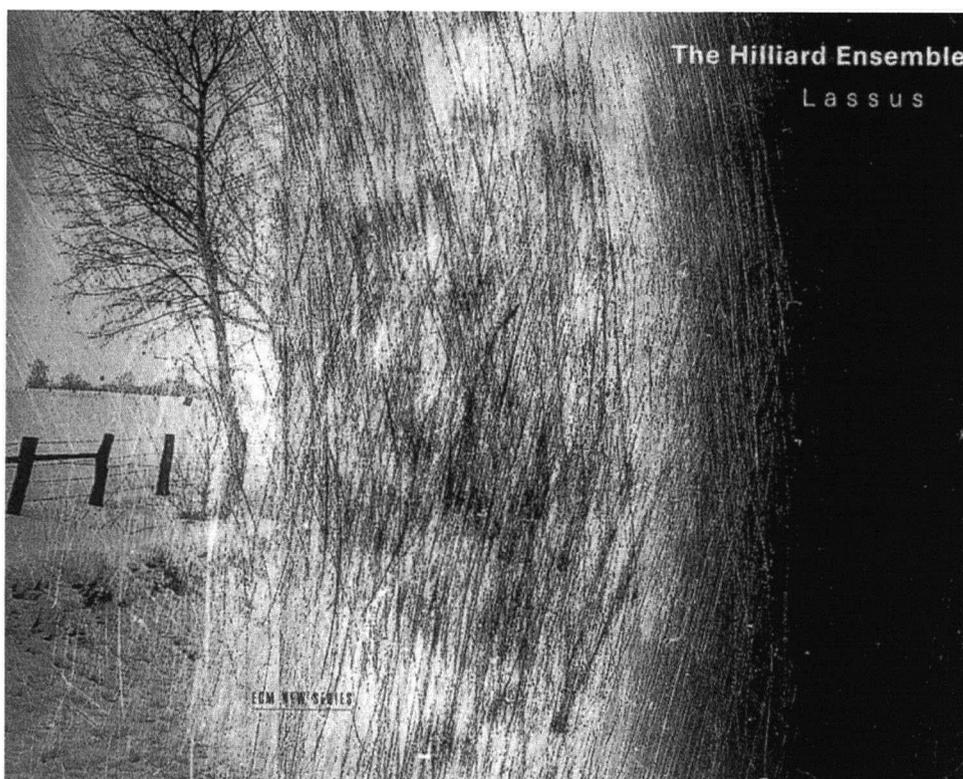


fig. 44
Ensemble Belcanto
Come un'ombra di Luna
ECM New Series
2001

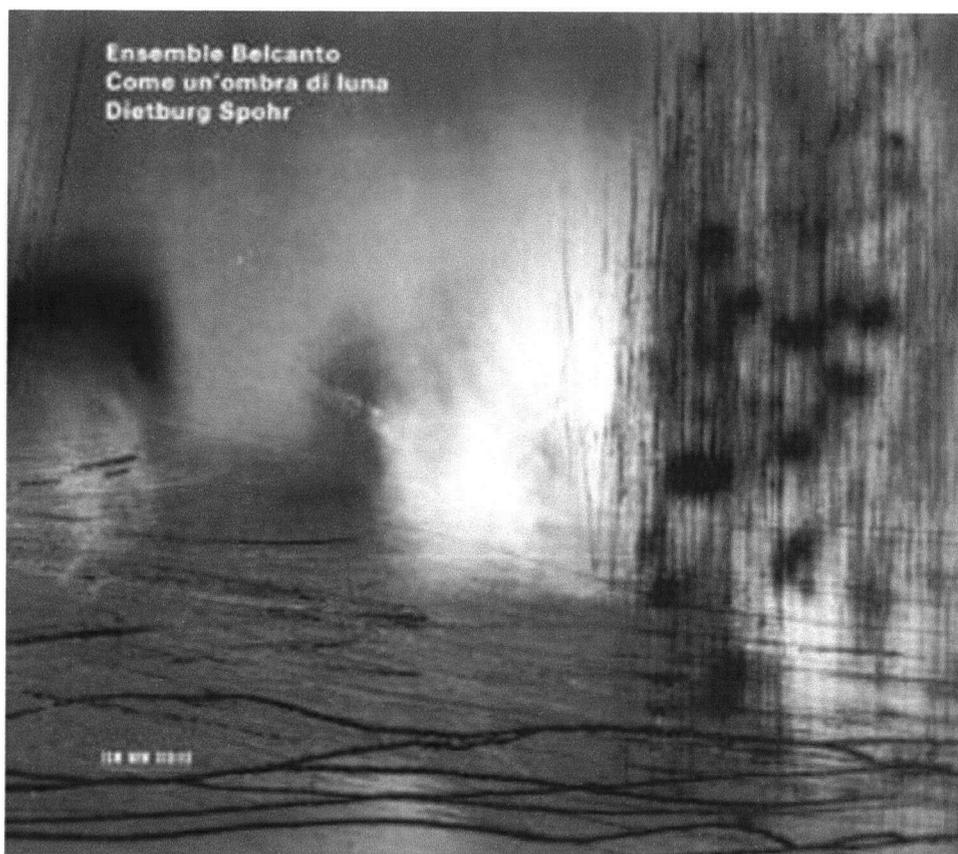


fig. 45
Jean-Luc Godard
Histoire(s) du Cinéma
ECM New Series
1999

