

“WHIRLED CHAMBER MUSIC” TRACK NOTES



INTRODUCTION

Quartet San Francisco offers this collection of contemporary pieces to the world of chamber music. We embrace the tradition and carry it forward in our own unique way while acknowledging its roots. Without the history and tradition of chamber music, this material would never exist in this form. Every piece on this CD was arranged or composed out of the sheer passion for playing it. We bare our souls and give all we have to the performance of it. We do hope you enjoy listening to it as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to you in this form.

RAYMOND SCOTT COMPOSITIONS

I was introduced to Raymond Scott by a stagehand pushing a broom. The year was 1995, the house was the Theatre on the Square in San Francisco (now known as the Post Street Theatre), and I was the lead violinist for a 22-month run of *Forever Tango*. The stagehand was Peter Palermo, now the director of the Hettenhausen Center for the Arts in

Lebanon, IL. Peter brought me a Scott CD called *Reckless Nights and Turkish Twilights*. It set off in me a Raymond Scott fever that still burns! I couldn't have known then that twelve years later I would be sitting in a Manhattan restaurant with Irwin Chusid, who produced that CD, discussing Scott's upcoming centenary. And here it is—2008 marks the 100th anniversary of Raymond Scott's birth. We have dedicated a large portion of *Whirled* to this brilliant composer, inventor, bandleader, and pioneer of electronic music.

Scott's whimsical melodies and swinging rhythms are ideally suited to string players with appetites for color and character. **POWERHOUSE** (TRACK 1) is perhaps Raymond Scott's most famous composition because of its recognizable middle section which accompanies a determined Elmer Fudd in pursuit of Bugs Bunny in the old Warner Brothers cartoons. A recent addition to the QSF repertoire, **BOY SCOUT IN SWITZERLAND** (TRACK 6) has musical images of echoes and yodeling in the Swiss Alps. It was arranged for us by my college pal and early musical mentor, Bob Gilmore. It was while working with Bob that my musical horizons began to shift away from a purely classical posture to a more eclectic path. In the mid-1970s we listened together to Jethro Tull, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Gentle Giant and involved ourselves with producing rock operas at Sonoma State U. in California. Years later we reconnected and I asked Bob if he would arrange a Raymond Scott tune for our CD. Thanks, Bob!

PETER TAMBOURINE (TRACK 7) seamlessly interfaces two vastly different styles suggesting a dual personality—both, in this case, with delightful character. As Scott archivist and expert Irwin Chusid notes, Raymond Scott never wrote a single piece of music for the purpose of accompanying animation. But MGM's "Merrie Melodies" and "Looney Tunes" and, more recently, the "Ren & Stimpy Show" have used Scott creations including **THE PENGUIN** (TRACK 12) in their soundtracks because of their unmistakable character. In this arrangement of "Penguin" I used the rhythm effect known as "chicharra" for the quackish sounds. This is achieved by drawing the bow over the wrapping on the string behind the bridge and close to the tailpiece of the violin. Otherwise, our violist, Emily, plays the role of our web-footed hero throughout the piece.

Scott started out as an engineer although his brother urged him to pursue his musical interests. His descriptive titles were frequently clues to the effects written into the music. Another recent addition to the quartet's play list, **CELEBRATION ON THE PLANET MARS** (TRACK 13) is odd and even a tad spooky at times. The introductory bars, with their minor key and daring intervals, create a feeling of suspense and mystery. One of the more commercially successful songs of Raymond Scott, **THE TOY TRUMPET** (TRACK 15) was used for commercials and arranged into many forms although few people know of it today. I gave the high trumpet line at the end of the piece to our cellist, Joel, who plays way up in the stratosphere on his instrument suggesting that "toy trumpet" tone. Lastly, **SIBERIAN SLEIGHRIDE** (TRACK 17) takes us on a joyful and nostalgic winter adventure through the snow. Each of these Raymond Scott works seems to have a life of its own, inviting us to delve in and enjoy the ride with each performance. Quartet San Francisco blows the horn loudly for Raymond Scott—to the next one hundred years!

SPAIN (TRACK 2): This composition by one of the most celebrated jazz musicians in history has such strong lyricism and harmonic texture that it translates well to the string quartet form. Pianist and composer Chick Corea's musicality and style speak with great clarity in **SPAIN** and the quartet has taken this piece on with great energy and enthusiasm. It has quickly become a favorite and essential part of our repertoire. Thanks, Chick!

THE MOOCHE (TRACK 3): Written in 1928 by Duke Ellington and Irving Mills, **THE MOOCHE** has a bluesy New Orleans character. Its melodic lines and cascading harmonies give such a brilliant animation that we find ourselves feeling cozy and bluesy every time we play it.

PICK UP THE PIECES (TRACK 4): I grew up in the '70s and we danced to this tune in high school. This arrangement of **PICK UP THE PIECES** is all about bringing a funk groove to the string quartet genre and making it “pop” in the style of the original. Strings are not often enough thought of as funky and rhythmic. We ask the question ... why NOT more funky string playing?

TANGUORI (TRACK 5): I wrote this piece as a wedding gift for my wife, Andrea. The title is a combination of her last name and the word “tango.” We were on the heels of our last CD which was all Latin and I still had a tango or two left in me from that time period. Although tango typically has a sad or tragic undertone in its language, I felt compelled to give a happier feel to the end of the piece. Since it was a wedding gift and all, I offered a major chord in the last bar. Looking ahead to a bright future!

I HEAR MUSIC (TRACK 8): Arranged by Cory Combs, bassist extraordinaire and husband of violinist Kayo Miki, this piece tours a variety of styles from Bebop to Django. It was commissioned for the quartet by violist Emily Onderdonk who had fallen in love with the version by female vocalist Chris Connor. Our Combs arrangement has both composed parts and improvised solos making it a true example of the “crossover” genre.

HARLEM NOCTURNE (TRACK 9) is perhaps the most famous song about New York’s famous uptown neighborhood. Its composer, Earle Hagen, was a writer known for his film and television work in Hollywood. I had the distinct pleasure of working with him for one year on the soundtrack of the *Dukes of Hazzard* television show in the 1980s. Earle was perhaps most famous for being the composer and whistler of the famous opening of the *The Andy Griffith Show*. He wrote episode music for many TV series spanning the 1950s through the ‘80s, including *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *I Spy*.

DAWG’S BULL (TRACK 10): David Grisman, a pioneer of contemporary American acoustic music, has operated his David Grisman Quintet for the last 30-plus years. I saw them perform in 1975 at one of their very first gigs in California and have been a fan ever since. David’s compositions speak in colors and moods. As a musician I admire him for carving new territory in acoustic music and staying on his path, one that so many have been inspired to follow. I love this piece and wrote this arrangement because it should enter the string quartet literature. I hope it presents David’s music to a whole new audience.

Sholom Secunda wrote **BEI MIR BIST DU SCHOEN** (TRACK 11) for Yiddish theater in New York. The show went up and down but the song surfaced many years later, sung in Yiddish by an African-American man at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Some producers heard and liked it so they bought it from Secunda for thirty dollars (half of which went to Secunda’s lyricist). They gave it some English lyrics, recorded it with the Andrews Sisters, and the rest is history. At long last, a string quartet version!

GEE OFFICER KRUPKE (TRACK 14) by the great Leonard Bernstein is a follow-up to “Cool” which we recorded on *Látigo* (arranged by David Balakrishnan of the great Turtle Island Quartet). I arranged this piece keeping the image of the scene in *West Side Story* close to my ear. We go places in this arrangement which much of our training and background has told us was not OK. However, in this arrangement ugly is good! Character trumps tone and pitch. “We’re no good,” exclaim the boys to the neighborhood cop, and we go for this in a big way in the last few bars.

UNDER THE SEA (TRACK 16): OK, let’s do some math. My sons Zach and Gabe are now both over twenty years old. This means we watched Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* about a thousand times AND we hit rewind and sang along with “Under the Sea” another thousand times. And you know what? I still love this song. Good arrangements of wonderful calypso songs for string players are rare indeed so I wrote this arrangement so children of all ages could connect with the string quartet. “Under the sea we off the hook, we got no troubles, life is the bubbles, under the sea.”

WHAT IS HIP? (TRACK 18): Oakland-born and -bred—can’t deny it, never will. Tower of Power makes me musically proud to claim Oakland as my hometown. The funk fuel that this band has provided over the years puts them at the pinnacle of urban music. I have always wanted to express this style in the chamber music context and we are so happy to bring our favorite local band into our world of strings. Special thanks to drummer David Garibaldi who lent his encouragement. Strings unite and get funky!

—Jeremy Cohen