

FRED LERDAHL'S MANIA FOR ORDER

Q2 Music Album of the Week
for the week of June 10, 2013

WQXR :||

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By Daniel Stephen Johnson

On its surface, one might think the history of modern classical music is about chaos: an explosion of styles, a profusion of noise, a sense of radical rule-breaking in every aspect of composing. But in fact, one of the strongest through-lines of the past century has been a mania for order. Strict, overdetermining formulas shape the music of both Milton Babbitt and Arvo Pärt; they just happen to have used very different processes, and those processes happen to manifest themselves in very different ways.

Listening to Volume 4 of Bridge Records's "The Music of Fred Lerdaahl," one hears yet a third — also very different — approach to order taking shape

in Lerdaahl's compositions, over the course of several decades. The earliest piece on this disc is a dense, wild Joyce setting called *Wake*, here nimbly dispatched by soprano **Bethanany Beardslee**, but the more recent works on this disc have titles like *Fantasy Etudes* and *Three Diatonic Studies* that advertise their almost didactic clarity of form.

The *Studies* for piano spin their simple set of pitches through a series of novel, readily audible procedures, while the *Fantasy Etudes*, a sextet presented here in a reissue of the recording by chamber music superstars **eighth blackbird**, explore Lerdaahl's so-called "spiral" form, an expanding structure that gradually builds from simple elements to music of far greater complexity, before

Fred Lerdaahl:
Volume Four



boiling itself back down to basics.

Spirals presents the form in two orchestral movements, their long, continuous arcs almost as formally lucid as a so-called "minimalist" work but, from the outset, open to a much greater range of harmonic complications. The **Argento Chamber Ensemble** performs *Imbrications*, an intricately wrought study in imitative counterpoint for the same forces as the *Fantasy Etudes* — a palate-cleanser of a piece that in under three minutes encapsulates the meticulously elaborate, but nearly translucent formal construction on display in these recordings.

Source: <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/298064-fred-lerdahls-mania-order/>