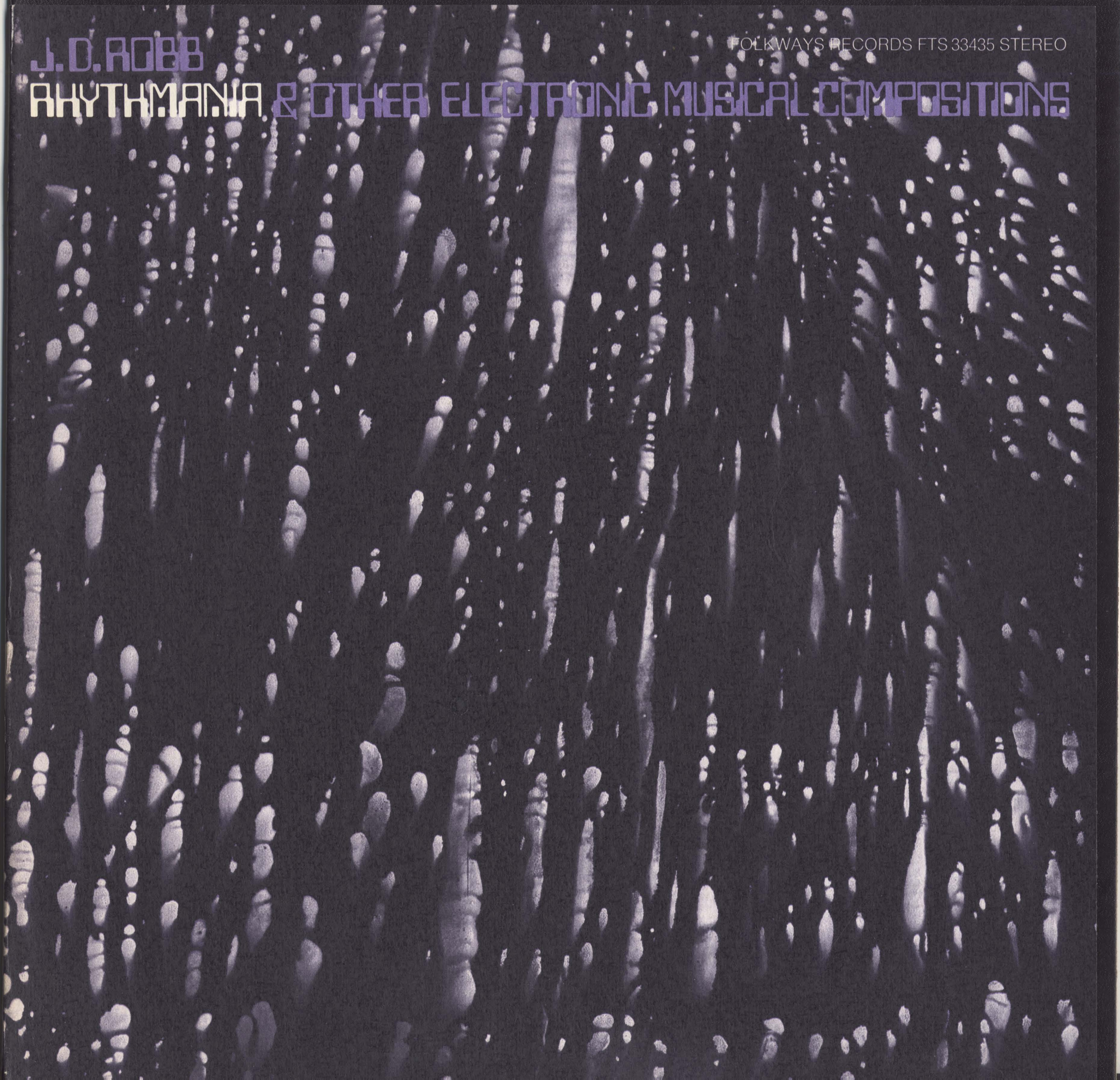
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 33435 STEREO

J. D. ROBB

RHYTHMANIA & OTHER ELECTRONIC MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS



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"Triptyque and Other Electronic Musical Compositions. Produced and Composed by J. D. ROBB with the assistance of Thomas M. McMullan and Richard Reiff.

Side 1

1. Triptyque, 5:00
   First Fugue, 1:27
   Second Fugue, 2:00
   Third Fugue, 1:40
2. Rhythmania, 3:05
3. Cosmic Dance of Shiva, 5:10
4. Soliloquy, 1:05
5. Factory Sounds, 2:15
6. The Beautiful Blue Danube, 4:50

Side 2

7. Hear the Clock, Tick, 2:37
8. Chaconne, 3:55
9. Toccata, 2:59
10. Poem of Summer, 2:02
11. Capricho, 1:30
12. Little Suite, 4:33
    Lonely Wanderer, 1:35
    Imaginary Birds, 1:58
    Little Bells, 1:00
13. Synthi Waltz, 1:50

J.D.ROBB

RHYTHMANIA

& OTHER ELECTRONIC MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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J.D. ROBB — RHYTHMANIA AND OTHER ELECTRONIC MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS — FOLKWAYS FTS 33435

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FTS 33435

TRIPTYQUE & OTHER ELECTRONIC MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS by J.D.ROBB

Electronic music is capable of expressing a very wide range of ideas and, yes, of emotións. Contrary to the concept of some people, there is always a human being in charge. The product reflects the degree of intelligence, sensitivity and idealism of the composer. Parenthetically, it also reflects his ability to manipulate the sometimes intricate electronic devices which he may be using in the process.

In an earlier album (Asch 3438), Electronic Music from Razor Blade to Moog, the album notes had a frankly educational purpose: to outline to composers and others new to electronic music, various techniques explored by the composer which might be helpful to them. Incidentally, five of the selections included in that album, as well as several of those included in the present album, were listed in the historically important 1967 International Electronic Music Catalog, published in French and English, listing the known electronic musical compositions throughout the world at that date. The compiler of this fine work was Hugh Davies.

My comments on the present album will have a different purpose: to present the listener with a few ideas which will simply make the pieces more understandable and enjoyable.

Triptych (1974). These short pieces were actually composed at Mills College in Oakland, California in 1950 when the composer was studying counterpoint with Darius Milhaud. They lay on the composer's shelf until 24 years later he decided to realize them by means of the electronic instruments available in his Rio Grande Electronic Music Laboratory.

Each fugue is in three voices. The upper voice is always that of the Synthi AKS Synthesizer, of British manufacture, the middle voice being that of the Arp Model 2600 Synthesizer and the lowest voice that of the composer's specially assembled Moog Synthesizer.

Each voice was constructed by means of the British made Synthi Sequencer 256 which is actually a digital computer with a pair of built-in converters, a digital to analog converter and an analog to digital converter. The first step was to store the melody in the form of numbers describing the outline of the wave forms while it was si-

multaneously monitored through the appropriate synthesizer. Each melody was then transferred to a separate channel of the laboratory's Ampex AG-440B four channel tape recorder. The synchronization of the three voices was accomplished by a rather elaborate interconnection of the Sequencer 256 and clock track generated by a Lafayette oscillator. All the laboratory interconnections and the actual production of the final half-inch tape were made by Thomas M. McMullan, Laboratory assistant, under the direction of the composer.

Rhythmania. In the opening of this piece a rare if not entirely new, device is employed, to wit: the basic rhythm is heard simultaneously at two different speeds, in what may be called polyrhythmic counterpoint. The same percussive sound material is heard at two speeds, one precisely one-half of the other. It is possible to hear the mathematical symmetry of the two voices as they go their separate ways only to end precisely together as in the Som of Hindu music.

Cosmic Dance of Shiva. In Delhi, India in 1957, we saw, in the National Museum a bronze dancing figure of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and death. Surrounded by a ring of flames representing cosmic energy, Shiva holds a drum, symbol of creation, in one of his four hands and a flame, symbol of destruction, in another. This tape attempts to translate into sound some of the awesome atmosphere which attends the concept of Shiva and his cosmic dance. A small bronze statue of the dancing Shiva, which Mrs. Robb acquired at the time, actually was employed to create some of the sounds used in the composition of this piece, which consists of natural sounds recorded in stereo through microphones.

Soliloquy. Envisage a sort of Andrew Wyeth hillside and a youth in overalls extemporizing on a home-made instrument and you will come close to how the composer feels about Soliloquy. Unlike the following piece it is rural in feeling.

Factory Sounds. It seems to the composer that electronic synthesizers have a special ability to portray the sounds of modern life, particularly those sounds associated with machinery.

The Beautiful Blue Danube. This version of the famous waltz incorporates an electronic obbligato, is an excerpt from a larger piece and was composed for a performance with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. The performance took place in El Paso, Texas on December 3, 1973, under the direction of William Kirschke. The composer played the obbligato, live, with the orchestra, on his specially assembled Moog Synthesizer. The excerpt was realized for this recording in the composer's studio. The piece represents a growing literature in which the electronic synthesizer is employed as a solo instrument with the symphony orchestra.

Hear the Clock Tick is, like the Cosmic Dance of Shiva, composed of natural sounds recorded through a microphone,

as opposed to electronically generated sounds. In the composer's mind it creates a nostalgic sense of the past.

Chaconne is an experiment in mind-stretching, for instead of the well-tempered scale with its familiar chromatic "half-tones," this piece is composed entirely of "three-quarter" tones, each step being fifty per cent larger than the corresponding step of the well-tempered scale. What may sound as "wrong notes" are in fact precisely calculated "right notes," once the ear accepts the fact that the piece is couched in a new and different scale.

Toccata is a series of scales and arpeggios executed at the speed of a virtuoso performance, which is child's play for the electronic sequencer. A strange psychological phenomenon (a limit on usable speeds) emerges from experiments with high speeds. When a musical passage is thus executed at a speed beyond any possibility of human execution, it simultaneously tends to blur into unintelligibility and the sense of order which is the essence of music, is lost in aural chaos. Whether some of these arpeggios could be executed at this pace by any living virtuoso is at least debatable, and this piece is thus close to the border of intelligent perception.

Poem of Summer. Executed during August, 1973, on a Synthi (English) Synthesizer at the Emsa studio in Amherst, Massachusetts, this piece exploits some of the potentialities of a recently developed instrument whose keyboard actually houses a small but efficient computer with its own memory. The piece is intended, among other purposes, to refute the idea that because the composer employs an electronic instrument this precludes the expression of poetic or romantic ideas and emotions.

Capricho. This piece was executed at Raymond Scott's Studio at Farmingdale, Long Island, unfortunately no longer in existence, which the composer rented in order to compose a group of short pieces which he named caprichos after the well known works of that title by the Spanish painter Goya. This piece reflects the fantastic atmosphere of Goya's caprichos.

Little Suite. Like most of the compositions included in this record, this suite was composed at the composer's Rio Grande Electronic Music Laboratory in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The first piece, Lonely Wanderer, speaks for itself, creating in the mind of the composer the mood which the title bespeaks.

The second, Imaginary Birds, resulted from the use of a type of musical wave, which, as seen on an oscilloscope, has the form of a staircase and the further discovery that at high pitches this is an almost perfect portrayal of the language which birds speak. Perhaps some day, knowing this much, some genius may be able to decipher the meanings of the speech of birds.

Little Bells. These bells, however, are created by means of electronic oscillators, filters and envelope shapers and have a character and potentialities different from those of actual bells. They, nevertheless, seem to possess a kind of fairy-like quality.

Synthi Waltz. This piece was composed using the Synthi Sequencer 256, an instrument of English manufacture with a digital computer memory, designed for the production of electronic music. Numbers representing sounds were first stored in the computer memory and then used to control the composer's Moog and Synthi AKS synthesizers (one for the melody and one for the broken chord accompaniment) in the creation of these sounds. The title is, of course, a pun on the trade name of the Sequencer. The composer was advised by the Emsa Studios of Amherst, Massachusetts, through whom it was purchased, that his Sequencer 256 was at the date of purchase one of the first of such instruments purchased for use in the United States.

J. D. Robb
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