

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 33450 STEREO

# McLEAN: ELECTRO-SYMPHONIC LANDSCAPES

Priscilla McLean: Invisible Chariots    Barton McLean: Song of the Nahuatl



COVER DRAWING: SCORE TO "SONG OF THE NAHUATL"

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



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SIDE 1

PRISCILLA McLEAN

INVISIBLE CHARIOTS  
I. Voices of the Invisible 6:25  
II. Archangels 8:40  
III. Chariots 6:25

SIDE 2

BARTON McLEAN

Song of the Nahuatl

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**McLEAN:  
ELECTRO-SYMPHONIC  
LANDSCAPES**

Priscilla McLean: Invisible Chariots  
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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## THE McLEAN MIX

In 1974 Barton and Priscilla McLean formed the McLean Mix, the only husband and wife composing-performing duo of serious electronic music, both tape and live-performed, in the United States. Since then they have toured in most parts of the country, including Indiana, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Kansas, Texas, Colorado, Wisconsin, New York, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Washington, D.C.

For the 1979 season their program consists of Barton's *SONG OF THE NAHUATL* in its original eight-channel version, *AH—SYN!* by Priscilla McLean, a virtuosic work for one performer on two instruments: the autoharp processed through the Arp 2600 Synthesizer, her *INVISIBLE CHARIOTS* in quadraphonic sound, and excerpts from Barton McLean's *MYSTERIES FROM THE ANCIENT NAHUATL*, a large choral-instrumental-electronic-musico-dramatic work based upon ancient Nahuatl (pre-Columbian Central Mexican) poetry, in this version with Barton and Priscilla McLean performing on flutes, percussion, electronic tape, voice as singer and narrator, and prepared piano.

### Thoughts about the McLean Mix by Barton McLean

If the question were asked: "What are your artistic aims?", I suppose we would include an attempt to seek a certain sonic quality, precise control in the performance and compositional domains (which is not to rule out indeterminacy with respect to live performance), subtlety, "virtuosity" (so qualified since no one really understands the meaning of the term in live electronic performance at this early period of its existence). Also we try to establish, in whatever way possible, a feeling of permanence. That is, we write for the future as well as the present, and take an enormous amount of time with any given work—as much as three years in some cases. This is made possible due to our large electronic studio at home.

Along with some of our colleagues, we have confronted two situations intrinsic to live performance of electronic music. One deals with the advisability of playing works already nationally available on recording. We do not view this as being redundant, since the live presentations are in quad and the recorded versions in stereo. In fact, for those listeners who already have become familiar with the stereo versions, the quad becomes more meaningful.

The second and related enigma—what to do while the tape is playing—is solved in several ways (it will never completely reach a solution until audiences are trained to react to the sound as the totality of the experience). Whenever possible, we like to work with the local lighting crew to enhance the overall large structure of the work being played. We have found, however, that in our best works the solution lies in the intrinsic quality of the music itself. If it is of sufficient strength and interest, it can overcome the lack of visual stimulation.

### Notes on INVISIBLE CHARIOTS

On a commission from Indiana University (South Bend), *INVISIBLE CHARIOTS* was begun in the university's elec-

tronic studio in late 1975, completed in late 1977. Priscilla McLean states: "The studio changed much of its equipment around that time, which explains so much use of concrete sounds in the first movement. Halfway through the second movement, we moved to Austin, Texas and assembled our own studio, which took several months. The insecurity of the studio situation and the impending move, traumatic for me, is reflected, I believe, in the intensity and "crying out" of the first movement, the *VOICES OF THE INVISIBLE*."

Priscilla McLean's "sound universe" is strikingly evident in each of the three movements of *INVISIBLE CHARIOTS* (originally in quadraphonic sound, here mixed down to stereo), the first work of hers to use musique concrete material combined and merged with synthesized sonorities. The imago-abstract sound event, described in her article "Fire and Ice: A Query",<sup>1</sup> is described as "a sound which is removed several degrees from any obvious source onto a more abstract level, either by altering the original drastically as to obliterate any direct reference to it or by synthesizing a musical event reminiscent of an environmental sonority but on its own level of abstraction. This imago-abstract sound, often gestural in nature, evokes dual sets of realities. . . ." This concept is applied in the first movement as the "cat-yeowl" microtonal melody, and also in the whole piece as the sometimes identifiable concrete sound sources, and bizarre, "impossible" uses of musical and "non-musical" instruments.

The title *INVISIBLE CHARIOTS* reflects upon Carl Sandburg's famous poem *Isle of Patmos* which begins:

"The invisible chariots  
of the tall sky  
must hold archangels  
themselves invisible,  
I have seen these chariots."<sup>2</sup>

The musical title refers to the intuitive creative force that shaped the work, often in direct conflict with the composer's "external" judgments, which had to be made obeisant to the voice within.

Movement One: *VOICES OF THE INVISIBLE* is the most intuitive, inner-shaped movement. It is a continuous building of drama and tension, aggravated by a long pedal tone and sudden hysterical outbursts from imago-abstract sources. The form is similar in style to Stravinsky's technique of melodies and sound-events occurring and progressing in layers, with brief musical events interrupting each other.

A brief description of the origins of some of the sounds in the first movement is given: For the first sound, the strings of the piano are stroked with a dramatic sweep blended with a synthesizer glissando, melting into an extensively lengthened "echo" of ring-modulated oscillators and the natural resultant piano decay from the stroke. The piano decay chord is elongated by overdubbing on different channels. From 3:40 to 5:36 a complex atmosphere of pulsating percussive rhythms is accomplished through layer-building on the eight-channel tape recorder: two channels of bouncing a metal bar on the low G string of the piano, two channels of complimen-

<sup>1</sup>Priscilla McLean: "Fire and Ice: A Query", *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Fall-Winter 1977, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Sandburg: "Isle of Patmos", *Harvest Poems*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1960, p. 31.



tary synthesizer percussive sounds, one channel of bouncing a steak knife on the violin G string (tuned down to F) and subsequently lowered two octaves on the tape recorder, one-to-two channels of bouncing furious rhythms on low piano strings with tennis balls, and finally, intermittent melodies on the synthesizer in the treble range. This complex combining and layering of rich sonorities characterizes all movements to some extent, but is paramount in the first.

Movement Two: ARCHANGELS is a surrealistic movement, with musical events doing odd things, just out of range of the "rational". The beginning autoharp arpeggiated re-tuned chord rises slightly in volume as it decays; the second arpeggios have decays that rise in pitch as they decrease in volume. Stable block chords have hidden "wandering" notes that slowly glissando at times, creating a feeling of cloud-like, floating bodies. Other unearthly happenings are voicelike murmurs that are reminiscent of other worlds, tonal pitches and chords that are somehow slightly "odd"—the subliminal

world is explored in this haunting, atmospheric, but very musically logical movement.

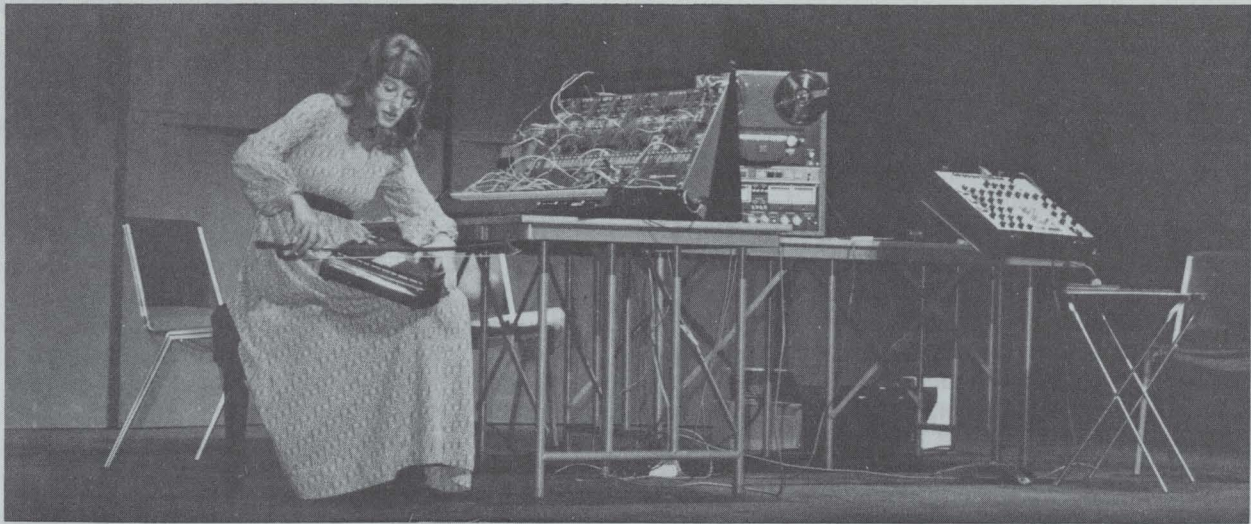
In Movement Three: CHARIOTS, this strident, dance-like movement is linked to the first by two of its three main musical ideas: the bouncy, flute-like (synthesizer) melody found briefly in the first movement, and the thundering, galloping G-pitch (concrete), embedded in movement one's rhythmic climax.

Dense rhythmic polyphony on primitive-sounding "instruments" adds the third main musical idea, and the movement is rondo-like in form. As in the first movement, but without its foreboding, this joyous "dance to life" builds in intensity until near the end, when the rigidly restrictive G-pedal thumps finally expand into a 9th chord, each pitch separately unwinding and bawling out in dramatic release, with the "flute", undisturbed, returning at the end, as with a wink and a sigh.



Bart and Priscilla McLean in home studio.





Priscilla McLean in live performance of "Ah-Syn" for auto harp and synthesizer.

## PRISCILLA McLEAN — BIOGRAPHY

Born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1942, Priscilla McLean had her first writings in prose, poetry, and drama, resulting in a lifelong love of literature, and forming the underlying dramatic "scenarios" and instrumental "characters" for each musical composition she was later to write.

Coming late to the study of music and composition, she was exposed to contemporary developments and the opening of the Indiana University Electronic Studio (1967) under Iannis Xenakis during her years there, receiving her advanced composition degree in 1969. The culmination of this period was her thesis, extensively rewritten in 1975: *VARIATIONS & MOZAIKS ON A THEME OF STRAVINSKY*, which has been recorded on the Louisville Orchestra First Edition Records label, and was performed by them at Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., in 1977.

Settling with her husband Barton in South Bend, Indiana from 1969 to 1976, she taught theory at Indiana University at Kokomo (1971-73), and composition, piano, and theory at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana (1973-76). In 1976 she was appointed Composer-in-Residence at the Indiana University, South Bend, Electronic Music Center.

*INTERPLANES* for two pianos, written in 1970, and subsequently recorded on Advance Recordings (Robert Hamilton, Christine Douberteen, pianists), represents her strongest polyphonic atonal expression before she turned to electronics. From 1970-76 she explored extensively in all media, becoming more concerned with timbral, textural, and layering-of-sound techniques. *DANCE OF DAWN* (CRI Recordings SD 335), her first major electronic work, which has been "performed" extensively in quadraphonic and stereo on national radio and in concerts, explores the meshing of abstract and imageric sound qualities into an "imago-abstract" concept, explained further in her article appearing in *Perspectives of New Music* (1977).

Further extensions of the imago-abstract concept are the amalgamation of musique concrete and synthesizer sounds in *INVISIBLE CHARIOTS* (1975-77), a three-movement expressionistic four-channel electronic work, the altered and extended techniques in *FIRE & ICE* (trombone and piano: keyboard and inside, 1977), and the blending of man-made and animal sounds in the evocative *BENEATH THE HORIZON* (tuba quartet or solo and whale ensemble: tape, 1977-78).

Not being content with "composers locked in their ivory towers," Priscilla McLean has sought to spread interest and awareness of new music in several ways. As composer-performers on electronic instruments, she and her husband Barton formed The McLean Mix in 1974, touring extensively in the United States. She has also performed with John Eaton, David Cope, and Burton Beerman. Since 1976 she has been on the Executive Committee of the American Society of University Composers, as director and script-writer of the nationally awarded ASUC Radio Series, entitled *Radiofest: New American Music*. She is a contributing reviewer of new music for the Music Library Association *Notes Magazine*. Presently she resides in Austin, Texas.

## Song of the Nahuatl By Barton McLean

*Song of the Nahuatl* is an eight-channel sonic landscape utilizing synthesized and concrete electronic sounds, dealing with the philosophical question of Man's role in the natural world and universe.

As H.W. Janson relates in his description of a landscape by William Turner, "...but the tiny figures, lost in the seething violence of nature, suggest the ultimate defeat of all endeavor," so do the musical "figures", characterized by the melodic material in the foreground, grown out of and are finally absorbed back into the womb of the all-pervading continuous nature-sounds.

In the central part of the work, a depiction of man's egocentricity is quite evident, as the melodic framework organically grows and soars (the digital sequencer was an ideal instrument for the breaking up and recombining of small melodic cells into larger and larger units). But always the underlying "nature" forces (which are often sustained, choir-like, or composed of veiled fluctuating chords or ostinati) are present and ultimately prevail.

Perhaps the central idea of the work is most poignantly expressed by an early Nahuatl (pre-Columbian Aztec) poet who shares an honest and penetrating view of his (Man's) relation with his universe:<sup>1</sup>

*We have come only to sleep,  
We have come only to dream.  
It is not true, it is not true  
we have come to live on the earth*



*As at every spring the grass is renewed,  
so do we too acquire form.  
Our heart puts out shoots, grows green;  
our body begets a few flowers,  
and then lies withered.*

*Aztec poem*<sup>1</sup>

*Song of the Nahuatl* was written under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts during the summer of 1976. Originally conceived as a live-generated soundscape through which the audience moved, this version was composed as an eight-channel tape and is currently being performed as such at universities and concert halls by Barton McLean. Four and two channel versions also exist. With eight channels, a highly unusual format only recently made practical, several compositional advantages are realized. As Henry Brant would agree, the use of multichannel material enables the listener to absorb more complexity. And complexity there is, with as many as twenty-four separate lines heard simultaneously at one point near the climax. Eight channels also allows for some spectacular panning effects, as well as the opportunity to create subtle and varied shadings of sound location.

In the stereo version, the complexities of the former version are somewhat mitigated. Otherwise, all of the basic sounds of the eight channel version are present. A basic task in mixing to stereo has been the receding of the background and the advancing of the foreground material. The basic feel and emotional impact of the former version is retained.

A word should be said here about the score to this electronic work, several pages of which are included in the booklet. An electronic score is a rarity in itself, and even more rare an occurrence when not needed for performance. Why, then? McLean and the graphic artist, Gary Pyle, felt a need to explore the subconscious visual domain suggested by the sounds. An attempt was made to preserve the traditional notational elements such as timing, relative high and low pitch areas, relative dynamics, etc., while also reaching an area of artistic excellence beyond the usual performance-oriented score. The listener can easily follow the sound events as they unfold in the score (each page consisting of forty seconds of music), and thereby greatly reinforce his perception of the work. It was prepared under a grant from the University of Texas. The album cover is taken from p. 8 of the score (4:40 into the work). The pages in the booklet are consecutive, (pp. 4-7), and represent 2:00-4:40 of the composition. The reader may wish to follow along with the score.



*Bart McLean in live performance on Synthi 100 synthesizer and related equipment.*

<sup>1</sup>Danial Brinton *Sketches from the Ancient Nahuatl Literature*. Unpub. MS. University of Texas Archives. 1881.



## BARTON McLEAN—BIOGRAPHY

Barton McLean's (b. 1938) study with Henry Cowell (1963-64) and work at Indiana University in the electronic studios under the direction of Iannis Xenakis (1967-68) brought him into contact with contemporary developments. At this time his first significant works were produced (*Trio*, *Brass Quintet*, *The Purging of Hindemith*, and *Metamorphosis for Orchestra*).

Having taught at SUNY, Potsdam (1960-66) and Indiana University, Bloomington (1966-69), Barton McLean assumed directorship of the Composition-Theory department and Electronic Music Center at Indiana University at South Bend from 1969-76. With the Synthi 100 synthesizer and eight track facility at his disposal he produced two massive, complex quadraphonic electronic works, *Genesis* (1973) and *Spirals* (1974).

The years 1973-75 were ones of rapid compositional development for Barton McLean. The works of this period utilize concrete and synthesized electronic techniques, controlled aleatoric procedures, and various new notational concepts. In 1974-75, McLean assumed several new tasks, including an Executive Committee position of the American Society of University Composers, the directorship of its national radio program series, a midwest tour with the "McLean Mix", concerts with other composers and performers, recordings of four major works on CRI and Orion, a premiere with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, a premiere over the BBC Radio Network of his *Dimensions II*, and a coast-to-coast broadcast of *Metamorphosis For Orchestra*, as well as several grants.

In *Dimensions II* for Piano and Tape, Barton McLean developed a unique and haunting sound environment with which the solo piano interacts and recedes. It has been performed all over the U.S., Europe, and Asia by pianists such as David Burge, Richard Bunker, James Avery, Robert Hamilton, Ivar Mishakov, John Perry, and many others. Along with *Dimensions I* (violin and tape) it was published by Broude (USA) and Breitkopf and Hartel (Europe) and featured on two national radio broadcasts (NPR and ASUC) and at least seven nationally prominent festivals of contemporary music, in Europe and the U.S.

During 1975-76 an overall philosophical outlook of an increasing awareness of man's interaction with his environment and with nature permeated McLean's work, producing a series of compositions concerned with this focus. *Identity I: Song of the Nahuatl* (8 channel) and *Identity II: Mysteries of the Ancient Nahuatl* (large choruses, instrumental ensemble,

quad electronic) were begun with this new direction in mind, the former being supported with a NEA grant. This year also saw increased McLean Mix activity and a Composers Forum (NPR) radio series.

In 1976, Barton McLean became director of the Electronic Music Center, teacher of composition, and director of the New Music Ensemble at the University of Texas at Austin. A Composers Forum concert in New York was shared with Karel Husa.

1977-78 included the 8-channel premiere of *Identity I: song of the Nahuatl* at the University of Texas and the subsequent production of the 8 channel version at the national ASUC convention in Miami. A University of Texas grant was obtained for the completion of *Identity II*, and McLean became correspondent and reviewer for Music Library Association publication "Notes" and "Synapse" magazine, the California-based electronic music publication.

## OTHER AVAILABLE RECORDINGS OF PRISCILLA AND BARTON McLEAN:

Priscilla McLean: DANCE OF DAWN and Barton McLean: SPIRALS. CRI (Composers Recordings, Inc.): American Contemporary Electronic Music, CRI SD 335. CRI: 170 W. 74th Street, New York, N.Y. 10023.

Barton McLean: DIMENSIONS II For Piano and Tape, THE SORCERER REVISITED, GENESIS (both electronic works). Orion Records, ORS 75192. Orion: 5840 Busch Drive, Malibu, Calif. 90265.

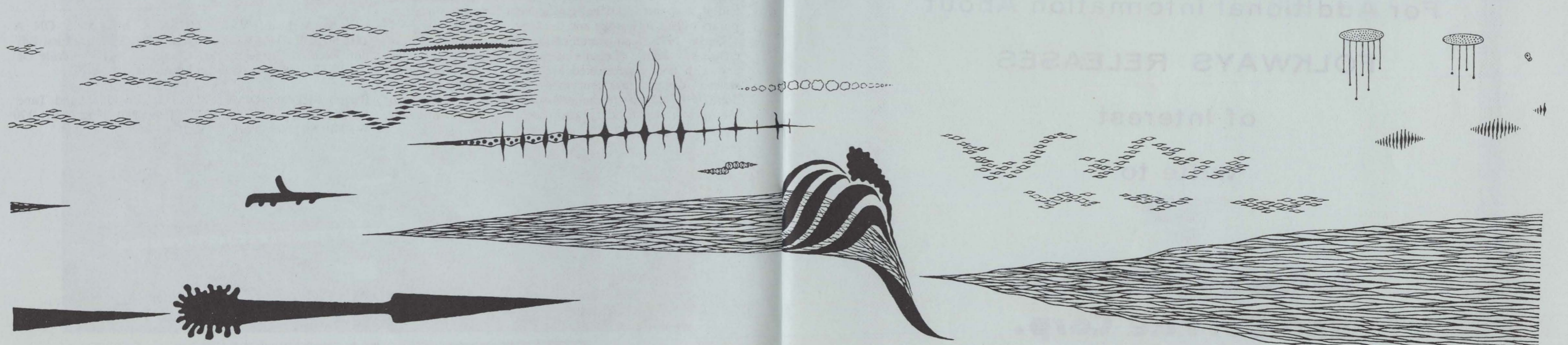
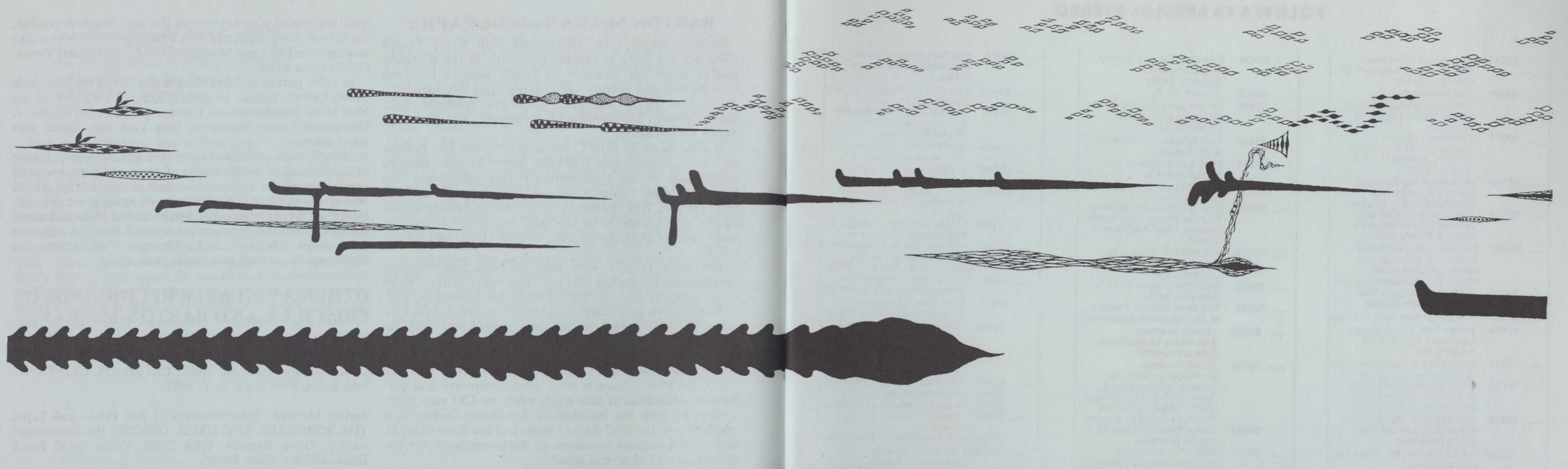
Priscilla McLean: INTERPLANES (two pianos): Advance Recordings, FGR 19-S. American Society of University Composers. Advance: from European-American Publishing Co., 195 Allenwood Rd., Clifton, N.J. 07012.

Barton McLean: DIMENSIONS I for Violin and Tape: Advance Recordings: American Society of University Composers. See above.

Priscilla McLean: VARIATIONS & MOZAIKS ON A THEME OF STRAVINSKY: Louisville Orchestra First Edition Records, Jorge Mester, Cond., LS762. Louisville Orchestra: 333 West Broadway, Louisville, Ky. 40202.

Barton McLean: DIMENSIONS II for Piano and Tape: David Burge, pianist. Composers Recordings, Inc. (CRI). 170 W. 74th St., New York, N.Y. 10023.





The above represents pp. 4-7 of *Song of the Nahuatl*, and the album cover, page 8. In other words, the total visual sampling of the score provided here refers to 2'00" through 5'. The complete 30 page score is available from Barton McLean, 6 Matador Circle, Austin, Texas, 78746.



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|              |  |             |  | ..... Q33951 | To Kill A Sunrise. Electronic Quad.   |

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