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## Eric Chasalow

LEFT TO HIS OWN DEVICES

New World 80601-2

*by Dan Warburton*

New Jersey-born Chasalow is Professor of Music at Brandeis University, so unsurprisingly the nine works presented on this varied and satisfying album reference a diverse range of influences and styles, from the post-modern reworkings of Beethoven and Brahms idioms (1998's string trio "Yes, I Really Did") to Jerome Kern ("Crossing Boundaries"), Dizzy Gillespie ("Out of Joint"), Eric Dolphy ("In A Manner of Speaking") and the doyen of American academia Milton Babbitt. Indeed, "Left To His Own Devices" would have been the title of Babbitt's last work for the fabled RCA synthesizer if the studio hadn't been burgled and the machine damaged; for his homage to Babbitt, Chasalow recreates a "virtual" RCA synth himself and uses it to play not only fragments of Babbitt's own music but also extracts of his speaking voice. No fewer than seven of these works feature electronic tape, which Chasalow handles with the painstaking precision typical of composers who can afford to take the time to master the medium. Most impressive is "Dream Songs", a song cycle setting five of John Berryman's poems of the same name, brilliantly interpreted by tenor William Hite and coordinated with the forces of the Boston Modern Orchestra with exemplary precision. Elsewhere, "Crossing Boundaries" collages fragments of speech (by fellow electronic composers as well as the composer's family and friends) and music into a fast-moving, highly inventive and accomplished nine-minute retrospective of just about everything worth listening to in twentieth century music. This album gives the lie once and for all to the old Downtown vs. Uptown myth (i.e. the hip and happening are no longer to be found in the dusty set theory textbooks of university music faculties); there's more life, energy and creativity in any one of these fine pieces than the dreary stodge Philip Glass is turning out by the diskful every week.