

Five Chromatic Fantasies (1985)

Paul Zonn

Paul Martin Zonn (1938–2000) was born in Boston, Massachusetts but spent most of his youth in Miami, Florida. He completed undergraduate study at the University of Miami, during which time he was active as a clarinetist in Miami Beach Clubs. In 1966, he received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Iowa. He then accepted a Rockefeller Grant to the Center for Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo as a composer and clarinetist.

Zonn was highly regarded as an authority on the performance of contemporary music for clarinet. He introduced a number of new works that were written for and dedicated to him. As a classical clarinetist, he appeared at Carnegie Hall, Tanglewood, Ravinia, and with the Lenox String Quartet. His versatile career also included performances with country music great Vince Gill, the Miami Philharmonic, the Nashville Jug Band, and the New Orleans Eagle Band.

Internationally acclaimed as an innovator in composition, Zonn's work covers a very broad musical spectrum from light music to avant-garde. In addition to a number of works for clarinet, his compositions include chamber music and orchestral music. He wrote about his own music: "I view each composition as a unique project and as an attempt to solve specific compositional problems. I try to bind together the many languages of today's music with a common syntax. Often times my jazz background will influence the rhythmic detail of a twelve-tone passage or the melodic partitioning of the set."

Zonn received honors and awards from the Ford Foundation, New York Composers Forum, the Berkshire Music Center, and the Fromm Foundation. In 1998, he was named a Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Miami.

Zonn's career included teaching at the University of Iowa and Grinnell College. From 1970-1977 he taught at the University of Illinois School of Music where he headed the Theory and Composition Division and led the Contemporary Chamber Players.

Zonn died in Nashville, Tennessee after a long illness. His music is available from the American Composers Alliance and Media Press. His papers are deposited at The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois.