

CELESTIAL FIRES
Mary Jane Leach
(CD, X1107 1993) Experimental Intermedia
Foundation, 224 Centre Street, NY 10013

by Helen Hall

Mary Jane Leach's recent CD, *Celestial Fires*, is an arrangement of six pieces of music that flow together to create an iridescent, lingering sense of suspended time. The music is continuous, and yet it breathes very deeply. Leach's concern as a composer is with the physicality of sound, and specifically with combination, difference and interference tones. She explores this fascination mostly with multiples of the same instrument. *Celestial Fires* includes pieces both for multiple voices and multiple bassoons.

The music is arranged in an arch form, a sort of A-B-A-A-C-A, with sections determined mostly by colour and texture. There are subtle shifts in colour, register and density within a single, sustained gesture. The CD begins and ends with pieces for eight sopranos, recorded by the New York Treble Singers. *Brückstück* draws out a ten-measure section of Brückner's Eighth Symphony into a single, sustained harmonic environment. *Feu de Joie*, written for bassoonist Shanon Peet, combines a live bassoon as soloist with six pre-recorded bassoons as accompaniment. All the parts are based on the natural acoustic qualities of the bassoon. *Trio for Duo*, a piece for both live and pre-recorded voice and alto flute, performed by Mary Jean Leach and Barbara Held, explores the timbral similarities between voice and alto flute, with alternating low, breathy notes and glissandi passed from voice to instrument within a narrow frequency range. The last piece, *Ariel's Song*, is antiphonal, with voices moving in opposite directions with the same melodic patterns.

This is music that crosses the boundary of concert and installation—creating a multi-dimensional cathedral-like environment that surrounds the listener in swirling sound.

Helen Hall is a composer, and regular contributor to Musicworks, who is based in Montréal.