Howard Karp

CONCERT RECORDINGS (1962-2007)

MOZART : SCHUMANN : LISZT : SCHUBERT : CHOPIN : BEETHOVEN : COPLAND : KIRCHNER : BACH

Albany RECORDS

The Program

Howard Karp

CONCERT RECORDINGS (1962-2007)

CD1

Robert Schumann

Fantasie, Op. 17

1 Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen [12:30]
2 Mäßig, Durchaus energisch [7:05]
3 Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten [10:32]

Sonata in f minor (Concerto Without Orchestra), Op. 14

4 Allegro brilliante [7:42]
5 Scherzo: Molto comodo [6:05]
6 Quasi Variazioni: Andantino de Clara Wieck [8:17]
7 Prestissimo possible [6:49]

Franz Liszt

8 *Ballade No. 2 in b minor* [18:20]

Total Time = 77:21

CD2

Franz Schubert

Sonata in c minor, D.958

1 Allegro [11:10]
2 Adagio [7:29]
3 Menuetto: Allegro [3:31]
4 Allegro [9:33]

Sonata in B Flat Major, D.960

5 Molto moderato [15:13]
6 Andante sostenuto [10:20]
7 Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza [3:51]
8 Allegro, ma non troppo [8:23]

9 *Impromptu, Op. 142 (D.935), No. 4* [6:23]

Total Time = 75:55

CD3

Frédéric Chopin

Sonata in b minor, Op. 58

1 Allegro maestoso [9:21]
2 Scherzo: Molto vivace [3:02]
3 Largo [9:49]
4 Finale: Presto non tanto [5:11]

5 Mazurka, Op. 56, No. 3 [7:24]

Franz Liszt

Années de Pèlerinage

6 Chapelle de Guillaume Tell [6:47]
7 Au bord d'une source [3:56]
8 Vallée d'Obermann [14:05]
9 Au lac de Wallenstadt [3:51]
10 Les cloches de Genève [6:10]
11 Les jeux d'eaux à la Ville d'Este [8:17]

Total Time = 77:55

CD4

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata in B Flat Major, Op. 106 (Hammerklavier)

1 Allegro [10:34]
2 Scherzo: Assai vivace-Presto-Prestissimo-Tempo 1 [2:36]
3 Adagio sostenuto (appasionato e con molto sentimento) [17:26]
4 Largo-Allegro risoluto [11:22]

Sonata in c minor, Op. 111

5 Maestoso-Allegro con brio ed appassionato [8:22]
6 Arietta: Adagio (molto semplice e cantabile) [18:08]

Sonata in A Major, Op. 2, No. 2 (fourth movement)

7 Rondo: Grazioso [6:09]

Total Time = 74:39

CD5

J.S. Bach

Goldberg Variations

1 Aria [2:21]
2 Variation 1 [1:02]
3 Variation 2 [1:02]
4 Variation 3: Canone all'Unisuono [1:26]
5 Variation 4 [1:13]
6 Variation 5 [:47]
7 Variation 6: Canone alla Seconda [:54]
8 Variation 7: al tempo di Giga [:57]
9 Variation 8 [:58]
10 Variation 9: Canone alla Terza [1:12]
11 Variation 10: Fughetta [1:42]
12 Variation 11 [:59]
13 Variation 12: Canone alla Quarta [1:47]
14 Variation 13 [2:17]
15 Variation 14 [1:04]
16 Variation 15: Canone alla Quinta [2:42]
17 Variation 16: Ouverture [2:16]
18 Variation 17 [1:01]
19 Variation 18: Canone alla Sesta [:42]
20 Variation 19 [1:10]
21 Variation 20 [:58]
22 Variation 21: Canone alla Settima [2:05]
23 Variation 22: Alla breve [:44]
24 Variation 23 [1:04]
25 Variation 24: Canone all'Ottava [1:41]
26 Variation 25: Adagio [4:19]
27 Variation 26 [:58]
28 Variation 27: Canone alla Nona [:52]
29 Variation 28 [1;07]
30 Variation 29 [1:07]
31 Variation 30: Quodlibet [1:52]
32 Aria [2:35]

W.A. Mozart

Sonata in D Major, K.576

33 Allegro [5:07]
34 Adagio [6:01]
35 Allegretto [4:43]

Franz Schubert

Sonata in G Major, Op. 78 (D.894) (third movement)

36 Menuetto: Allegro moderato [4:44]

Total Time = 67:29

CD6

Aaron Copland

1 *Piano Variations* [10:26]

Leon Kirchner

Sonata (1948)

2 Lento, doppio movemento [7:26]
3 Adagio [5:34]
4 Allegro risoluto [3:40]

J.S. Bach

Partita No. 4 in D Major, BWV828

5 Ouverture [7:18]
6 Allemande [6:07]
7 Courante [3:41]
8 Aria [2:23]
9 Sarabande [4;57]
10 Menuet [1:38]
11 Gigue [3:56]

Franz Schubert

Sonata in D Major, Op. 53 (D.850)
(fourth movement)

12 Rondo: Allegro moderato [7:31]

Total Time = 64:38

Howard Karp

After early musical training in his native Chicago with Isador Buchhalter and Felix Borowski, Howard Karp studied with Jack Radunsky at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Rosina Lhevinne at the Juilliard School of Music. Further study took him to Vienna for work at the Akademie für Musik as a Fulbright scholar, and to Positano for Beethoven studies with Wilhelm Kempff. After a teaching career of more than 45 years (the span of the recordings here) at the Universities of Kentucky, Illinois and Wisconsin, he became Emeritus Professor of Music at the latter institution in 2000. A master teacher, he has former students on the faculties of numerous colleges and universities throughout North America and Asia. As a performer, Howard Karp has won acclaim for solo and chamber music recitals throughout United States and Europe. Concerto partners have included the Minnesota Orchestra, the Amsterdam Philharmonic and the Hague Philharmonic. His recording with the Pro Arte String Quartet of the piano quintets of Ernest Bloch (Laurel Records) received high critical praise. Other recordings of note include a previous 2 CD set of solo concert recordings, a 4 CD set of concert recordings of music for two pianos and piano four-hands with Frances Karp, *Late Romantic Music for Cello and Piano* with Parry Karp (all, University of Wisconsin Press) and, with the Karp Trio, the piano trios of Joel Hoffman (Albany Records).

The Music

Disc 1

Robert Schumann's (1810-1856) *Fantasie* in C Major, opus 17, and Sonata in f minor, opus 14 (*Concerto without Orchestra*), were both composed primarily in 1836. Early that year, Schumann had composed a piece called *Ruines*, a stormy meditation on the anguish of his eighteen-month separation from his beloved, Clara Wieck. Schumann later decided to include *Ruines* as part of a three-movement work he would write as his contribution to a funding campaign for a monument to Beethoven in Bonn. Schumann originally intended to call the work *Ruinen, Trophaen, Palmen* (*Ruins, Trophies and Palms*) —*Grosse Sonate f.d. Pianoforte für Beethoven's Denkmal.* Schumann completed work on the piece as 1836 drew to a close after an uncharacteristically long gestation period of nearly a year. He offered the work to a number of publishers before Breitkopf and Härtel finally published the work, now stripped of the poetic movement titles and re-named *Fantasie*, in 1839. On the title page of the work, Schumann included a motto by the poet Friedrich Schlegel, "*Durch alle Töne tönet / im bunten Erdentraum / ein leiser Ton gezogen / für den der heimlich lauschet*" ("Resounding through all the notes / In the earth's colorful dream / There sounds a faint long-drawn note / For the one who listens in secret").

His painful separation from Clara in the summer of 1836 lay at the heart of Schumann's inspiration for the piece, as he told her in a letter some years later. "…You can only understand the *Fantasie* if you imagine yourself in the unhappy summer of 1836, when I gave you up." The most touching gesture to Clara is a quotation near the end of the first movement from Beethoven's song-cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Immortal Beloved), wherein Beethoven sets the text "take them then, these songs." Schumann described this movement to Clara as "possibly the most passionate movement I have ever composed—it is a deep lament for you." Almost ten years later, Schumann would use this same quotation in the apotheosis of his Second Symphony, a work many have seen as Schumann's expression of gratitude to Clara for sustaining him through a terrible illness in 1844-5. In the end, Clara did not perform the *Fantasie* until 1866, 20 years after Schumann's death, and Schumann actually dedicated the work to Liszt. At the time of its publication, the *Fantasie* was widely considered impossibly difficult, and many considered Liszt the only living pianist capable of coping with its uncommonly virtuosic demands, notably the simultaneous leaps in opposite directions at the end of the second movement. Although Liszt learned the work and played it for Schumann at home, and later taught it, he never

performed it in public, but returned the honor of Schumann's dedication by dedicating his own Sonata in b minor to his friend.

Indeed, says Howard Karp, "the leaps on the last page of the stirringly grand second movement have often given me grief in performance, but I never found Schumann more genuinely awkward than most of the great Romantics. In general, I would consider Chopin more challenging to "keep in finger," after many years of playing."

Schumann had begun work on his second piano sonata in 1835, and Clara played selections from the work for Felix Mendelssohn at her sixteenth birthday in September of that year. He returned to the work in 1836, completing the piece that summer. The history of the publication of Schumann's music throughout his career is a vexing one, in which irregularities of order of composition versus publication, and changes of title, have created endless confusion. Where Schumann had originally titled his opus 17 as a *Grand Sonate* only to have the title changed to *Fantasie* by his publishers, his opus 14 went through many more changes of form and title.

Schumann completed the work in 1836 as a piece in five movements, with two scherzos framing the central set of variations on a theme of his future wife, Clara Wieck. Schumann dedicated the work to Ignatz Moscheles. When the sonata was first published by Haslinger, the publisher omitted both scherzos and affixed the title *Concert sans Orchestre* in the hopes that the novelty of the title would increase the curiosity of the public. In the end, it annoyed both Moscheles, the work's dedicatee, and Liszt, then Schumann's most influential pianistic champion. Liszt himself was effusive about the quality of the new work, writing "But our criticism shall be confined to this German error; for the work in itself, considered as a sonata, is rich and powerful. The beginning and the melody of the first allegro are magnificent; in their treatment we find the same qualities of style, which we have already admired elsewhere. The finale especially, a sort of toccata in 6/16, is extremely interesting from its harmonic combinations, whose novelty might shock the ear were it not for the great rapidity of the movement…" For his part, Moscheles wrote, "One wonders what may have prompted the title. It presents rather the characteristics of a big sonata than the requirements of a concerto, a big sonata of the kind we associate with Beethoven and Weber. In concertos, unfortunately, we are accustomed to expect some concessions to brilliant virtuosity or flirtatious elegance of execution. No such concessions could have been made in this work without compromising your conceptual intention. The predominant earnestness and passion are incompatible with the expectations of a contemporary concert audience, which does

not want to be deeply moved and has neither the capacity nor the sense of consecration required to grasp and comprehend such harmonies and ingenious obscurities."

Moscheles' fears for the work's reception have proved sadly prescient. Schumann revised the still unperformed opus 14 as his Sonata in f minor in 1853, restoring the second of the two scherzos and shortening the variations. The work was then published as his Sonata no. 3, even though the work and its opus number both pre-date his so-called Sonata no. 2 in g minor, opus 22. In the end, it fell to Johannes Brahms to premiere the work in 1862, six years after Schumann's death. Even as curious a pianophile as the young Howard Karp encountered the work only in fragments as a young musician. "I first heard Horowitz play just the beautiful third movement [the Variations on the theme of Clara Wieck], and only many years later heard Rudolf Serkin play the entire work. I was just amazed that such a huge piece of explosive musical fervor could be so neglected. The inspiration of that performance led to my desire to learn the sonata."

While Schumann is widely considered to be the most literary-minded composer of the 19th century, Franz Liszt was also known to find inspiration in the written word. Liszt's *Ballade* no. 2 in b minor is believed to have been modeled on Gottfried Bürger's ballad *Lenore.* It was written in 1853, by which point his relationship with the Schumann's had cooled quite a lot (he and Clara were keen rivals as pianists, and his aesthetic was moving more and more towards that of Richard Wagner, who had already done his utmost to ensure the failure of Schumann's opera, Genoveva). Written on a more elaborate scale than the first *Ballade*, the work is a fine example of the best qualities of Liszt's mature music —a gift for the supple transformation of themes, a uniquely well-judged sense of the relationship of drama to structure, and a very bold harmonic imagination. Karp's astonishing performance of this monumental work was recorded in 2007, fully forty years after the performance of the Schumann sonata that precedes it.

Disc 2

"I recall a talk on Schubert given by Benjamin Britten, later published in the *Saturday Review* in August 1964," says Howard Karp. "Britten said, "It is arguable that the richest and most productive 18 months in music history was the time when Beethoven had just died, when the 19th century giants Wagner, Verdi and Brahms had not yet begun; I mean the period in which Schubert wrote *Die Winterreise*, the great C Major symphony, his last three piano sonatas, the C Major String Quintet, as

well as at least a dozen other glorious pieces. The very creation of these works in that space of time hardly seems credible, but the standard of inspiration, of magic, is miraculous and past all explanation."

Schubert's last three sonatas were written between the spring of 1928 and September, during which time he also completed the String Quintet in C Major and his *Schwanengesang* song cycle. In the early months of that year, Schubert had enjoyed some of the first significant public acclaim for his music, and had had a number of works published. Around the time he completed the last three piano sonatas in September, his health fell into crisis, and he died on November 31st, 1828. Debate has raged for years over the extent to which Schubert's last works represent a confrontation with the hard fact of his approaching mortality, or simply a brave step forward for an artist whose career seemed, at last, to be making rapid progress. It is possible it was both —it seems that in the few months since Beethoven's death in March of 1827, Schubert had already begun to be recognized as possibly Vienna's greatest living composer, and it certainly seems likely that he saw himself as Beethoven's successor. In any case, the "brave step forward" was certainly a reality. One of the many miraculous features of the music of Schubert's last 18 months is the extent to which the major works share a sense of oneness, of unity, and yet are constantly seeking out new and uncharted territory, both music and spiritual.

Schubert was a great admirer of Beethoven, yet even from his own early sonatas, quartets and symphonies, Schubert sought his own path with regard to form and structure. Schubert's music never aspires to the linearity and dramatic directness one encounters in Beethoven, but evolves towards its own, more meditative, ideal. In Schubert we encounter forms that seem to take the listener both forward and backward in time, through longing and reminiscence, where magic is found in the examination of the power of moments, rather than in the cumulative power of music that moves toward a specific goal. In the months after Beethoven's death, Schubert's unique way with four-movement form reaches perfection, and yet the influence of Beethoven remains hugely important in Schubert's music. Take, for instance, the opening theme of the Sonata in c minor, D. 958, which uses almost the exact same pitches as the opening of Beethoven's 32 Variations on an Original Theme in c minor. Musicologists have catalogued a number of other thematic similarities and possible references to Beethoven in Schubert's final sonatas, some of which remain the subject of lively debate. What is telling, however, is the way in which Schubert uses these references to *engage* with Beethoven —to respond, to comment and to stake out his own territory. The first 26 bars of D. 958 could well have been

written by Beethoven himself, but then, with the first pianissimo in the piece, Schubert slips nimbly from the darkness of c minor to the ephemeral light of A-flat Major and opens the door to a world that is uniquely his.

Written in Schubert's favored A-B-A-B-A form, the Adagio which follows opens in that same light of A-flat major, but falls quickly into darkness as it approaches the first "B" section —tunneling through the depths of d-flat minor and e minor, and later, after a return of the music of the opening, to even-darker e-flat minor, before finally returning "home" in the final "A" section. The journey has left us transformed, yet one senses these cycles of light and darkness are destined to continue, and ending in light only points to future darkness ahead.

The Menuet that follows begins more in the mode of a lied, and continues in a dramatic vein; one could be forgiven for not realizing it is a dance movement until the Trio's gentle *Ländler* rhythm clarifies matters. The tarantella rhythms of the Finale are present in Schubert's music from much earlier in his career, and become a particular feature of finales of several late works including this one and the String Quartets in d minor (*Death and the Maiden*) and G Major. What continues to shock across all these movements is the sudden, jarringly extreme shifts of mood that come with Schubert's trademark shifts of mode from major to minor and back. Where Beethoven's music so often takes us on purposeful journeys from darkness to light, Schubert's reminds us that these extremes of experience exist around us simultaneously, and that our fortunes can always change in an instant, however strong our will.

Schubert seems to have worked on all three of these last sonatas simultaneously over the summer of 1828, so his decision to make Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960, the final of the set is probably no mere accident of compositional chronology —it does seem to stand as the crowning achievement of his life's work as a composer for the piano. The opening *Molto moderato* is one of his most moving and original movements, one interesting feature of which is the way in which extended spans of music explore not only a given theme or key area, but a single rhythmic unit. The long opening theme unfolds over a steady stream of even eighth notes, before subsiding into silence via a mysterious low trill, a pattern that repeats before leading into the next episode, a gentle variation on the opening theme, now spun over constant sixteenth notes. When the opening theme returns in seemingly triumphant fashion soon after, it is over a constant stream of triplets. So unfolds the entire movement, with Schubert exploring these tightly organized rhythmic realms with an astounding balance of originality, poetry and rigor, all in service of some of the most haunting and personal music ever written.

Schubert explores the expressive possibility of extremely tight rhythmic organization even more intently in the *Andante sostenuto* which follows: the entire, long "A" section of the movement takes place over an unyielding three-note left-hand ostinato, and the B-section unfolds over alternating duple and triplet sixteenth notes. Finally, in the return of the "A" section, Schubert allows himself one small change to the ostinato, which then proceeds implacably until the last two bars of the movement. Schubert had no-doubt fully grasped the expressive power of Beethoven's focus on tiny motivic cells as a unifying force for large forms. In these two remarkable movements, we see Schubert finding his own version of a kind of discipline just as extreme as that of Beethoven, but one which allowed his melodies to breathe and unfold as he knew they must.

The third movement of the D. 960 is marked Scherzo, unlike the Menuet of D. 958; and for the first time in the work, there seems to be a genuine return of Schubert's puckish humor. The Finale is in some ways cut from the same cloth as Schubert's two famous quintets —the great C Major Cello Quintet and the earlier Trout Quintet. In both cases, as here, Schubert makes much of an opening gesture that never seems to go away. Again, Schubert is rigorous in his exploration of the possibilities of isolated rhythmic units —the first page and a half of the score again shows the music unfolding in eighth notes, with a single attempt to interject some triplets in the right hand quickly interrupted by a return of the opening gesture. The second theme is accompanied only by sixteenths, and the third only by triplets.

"It was in the fall of 1943 that I fell under the spell of Schubert's late sonatas, as played in a memorable recital by Artur Schnabel," recalls Howard Karp. Schnabel's program was limited to four sonatas—two by Schubert, c minor and B-flat Major, with two Mozart sonatas separating them. I was overwhelmed by Schnabel's playing and the power of Schubert, and have remained so to this day. There is no composer whom I revere more." Karp's reverence for Schubert's music has led him to include Schubert's music quite frequently throughout his career, including his 1962 debut at the University of Illinois, from which comes the elegant performance of the Impromptu opus 142 No. 4 that concludes this disc.

Disc 3

Of the many great keyboardist-composers from Bach onwards, there is perhaps no composer whose genius flowered more exclusively through the medium of the keyboard than Chopin. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms and even Rachmaninoff all wrote with equal confidence in other instrumental and vocal genres. Not so with Chopin —the piano was at the heart of virtually everything he wrote. And yet, with his commanding harmonic imagination, his unerring sense of form and narrative, and a gift for counterpoint that grew exponentially through his career, his music stands up to all kinds of scrutiny, appreciation and analysis as "great music for the piano" rather than simply "great piano music."

Chopin's Sonata no. 3 in b minor, his final work in the genre, was written in 1844 during a relatively happy period in his life. His relationship with George Sand, which later broke down, was at a high-water mark, and he found her summer home at Nohant an inspiring and peaceful place to work. In this work, the Second Sonata (which contains the famous *Marche Funebre*) and his final masterpiece, the Cello Sonata, Chopin seems to be making sonata form his own, enriching this most Classical of forms with his own sense of fantasy, chromatic freedom and structural urgency. In the generations immediately after his tragically early death, critics in the German-speaking world saw these innovations as something between indulgences and technical shortcomings. But Chopin was an exceptionally exacting craftsman, and in these late works he built on the foundation of his knowledge of the music of Bach. The first movement of the b minor Sonata shows Chopin keenly integrating what seems like pure virtuoso flourishes with a kind of motivic working-out of ideas that one might expect in a sonata by one of the Classical masters.

The second movement is a quicksilver *Scherzo* of staggering virtuosity that frames a poignant and reflective trio. The *Largo* that follows forms the emotional heart of the score. Written in the parallel major, it wears its modality lightly, and seems to hover in a twilight universe between longing and fulfillment, anticipation and regret. The Finale is one the most ferociously difficult movements in all of Chopin's output, alternating a Rondo theme of tragic power with intervening episodes of a lighter, more quicksilver nature.

This performance by Howard Karp was recorded in 1976 at a recital honoring his teacher, friend and mentor, Jack Radunsky on the occasion of his retirement from Oberlin University. "I had learned how to generate a great deal of somewhat superficial but earnest excitement as a young pianist," remembers Karp, "but Jack made me stick with one work until I really learned to listen to myself, to hear the sound I was making."

After spending his undergraduate years at Oberlin, Karp pursued his graduate studies at the Juilliard School under Rosina Lhevinne, with whom he first studied Chopin's b minor Sonata. "When she illustrated passages from the first movement," remembers Karp, "I felt that if I practiced for 100 years, I would never approach her standard of spontaneity and tonal beauty."

While Chopin's gifts as a master of large forms were debated for many years after his death, his mastery of miniatures and dance forms has never been in question, a gift seen to greatest effect across his Mazurkas, a humble folk dance Chopin raised to the most exalted levels of poetic utterance.

The names of Chopin and Liszt are linked in the minds of many pianophiles as the pre-eminent 19th century composers of virtuoso piano music, but in many ways the two men were opposites. Chopin was frail and reticent, a performer who excelled in the salon and largely avoided the concert platform, a man whose virtuosity made him in many ways his own muse. Liszt was the most public figure in 19th century music: conductor, author, rock star, composer, teacher and celebrity, he was in every way a protean figure, dominating the world of music for over forty years.

Many listeners consider the three volumes of Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* (*Years of Pilgrimage*) the summation of his vast output as a composer for the piano. The collection certainly embraces a huge swath of Liszt's life, language and career, begun in his twenties and completed in his sixties. The earliest works in the cycle began as part of an earlier anthology entitled *Album d'un voyageur*, a collection of musical reminiscences of his travels in Italy and Switzerland from 1835-9, which Liszt published in 1842.

It was as a man in his forties that Liszt returned to these youthful postcards from Switzerland and Italy, bringing a greater spiritual depth and musical youth to the new version of the cycle that was now to be known as *Années de pèlerinage.* Volume One, published 1855, focuses on his travels in Switzerland. *Chapelle de Guillaume Tell* is a noble character portrait of Switzerland's national hero, while *Au bord d'une source (By the side of a spring)* is one of the many "water pieces" in the collection. Liszt prefaces this piece with a quotation from Schiller "In murmuring coolness, begin the games of youthful nature."

The longest tone poem in Volume One is *Vallée d'Obermann*, based on a scene from a novel by Etienne Senancour, in which Liszt depicts the rebellious hero, Obermann, experiencing a transcendental revelation. Liszt's piano writing becomes so orchestral in this work that he asks the pianist at various points to play "quasi cello" and "quasi oboe."

Another of Liszt's water pieces, *Au lac de Wallenstadt*, held particular poignancy for Liszt's mistress, Marie d'Agoult, who described it as "a melancholy harmony, imitative of the sigh of the waves and cadence of oars, which I have never been able to hear without weeping." The tender and mysterious *Les cloches de Genève (The bells of Geneva)* was reportedly one of the tone poems in the cycle closest to Liszt heart.

By the time Liszt returned to work on his *Années de pèlerinage,* he was a much changed man —the traveling super-virtuoso was now a reflective teacher and man of the cloth. The intervening years had been full of challenge and loss, and the music Liszt's last years as heard in Volume 3 is more private, more intimate, and harmonically forward looking than the more heroic style of the first two volumes. *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* (*The fountains of the Villa d'Este*), a musical evocation of the sparkling fountains on the estate where Liszt lived part of each year with the great love of his later life, Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. In this work, we can already hear anticipations of the impressionistic water pieces of Ravel and Debussy. Liszt includes a quote from St. John in the score: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life."

Disc 4

Many pianophiles will have read that Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* (the German word for "pianoforte") Sonata was inspired by the gift of a great Broadwood piano, an instrument whose revolutionary possibilities so excited Beethoven that he composed most of the work while the piano was actually in transit from London. Stirred into action by the *idea* of the new instrument, Beethoven had set to work on a sonata that would put to full use its entire extended keyboard and expanded dynamic range.

Howard Karp had long subscribed to this received wisdom, until he made an interesting discovery while traveling. "During a sabbatical year from the University of Illinois in 1968-69 in Vienna —I spent a few days in Budapest, and I knew that Beethoven's Broadwood piano, the instrument for which I believed he wrote his *Hammerklavier* Sonata, was on display at the National Museum in that city. Knowing that the work had an extended range of 6 1/2 octaves, from the lowest C to the highest F on the modern Steinway, I found, to my amazement, that the instrument had a range of just 6 octaves, from the lowest C to the second highest C. That meant that the first and second movements were written for a different instrument in Vienna. The Broadwood, which was sent to him in Mödling as a gift in the spring of 1818, was used only when he wrote the final two movements."

Beethoven's compositional output between 1800 and 1810 is astonishing in both its quality and its quantity. The year 1806 alone yielded the Violin Concerto, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony and the three *Razumovsky* quartets. By 1812, the year of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, new works were coming more infrequently and only as the result of ever-greater struggles, and by 1813, Beethoven seems to have entered a period of personal and artistic crisis. Even as he was writing this new sonata in 1817 in a long-awaited burst of new creative energy, he confided to his friend the cellist Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz that "as far as I am concerned, I am often in despair and want to end my life. God have mercy on me, I consider myself as good as lost…"

As he struggled with family and financial difficulties, Beethoven was also pushing himself to rethink his entire approach to musical form, an approach that had remained remarkably consistent throughout the previous decade's work. As he reached toward what would finally emerge as his "late" style" we can see how, from the opus 95 String Quartet in f minor (*Serioso*) to the final two Cello Sonatas, opus 102, Beethoven is forcibly challenging and discarding many of the formal processes that had served him so well in the previous decade, experimenting with new ideas and finally searching out, with some difficulty, a new, more flexible approach to sonata form that incorporates a much greater and more original use of fugue and variation technique.

Opus 106 shows Beethoven emerging from this period of intense artistic self-examination with renewed confidence. Although it was to be the longest of all of Beethoven's sonatas, the sheer scale of the work is not in itself new. "Beethoven's scale, time and structure are difficult to pin down," says Howard Karp. "His early sonatas, beginning with opus 2, are not just a continuation of the scale of Haydn or Mozart. They are more symphonic in scope, and all are in 4 movements. Opus 7 is possibly second in length to the *Hammerklavier*. Opus 106 is so huge because of the extended slow movement and the mammoth fugue, with its lengthy introduction. The last 5 sonatas are so contrasting in the use of variations and/or fugues."

The *Hammerklavier* is also remarkable for the way in which the entire vast form is governed to a remarkable degree by the constructive possibilities of a single musical interval —the third. Beethoven uses the third as a *cantus firmus*, exploiting it as the fundamental building block of not only most of the melodic ideas, but also as the spine of the fugue subject in the finale, and, perhaps most originally, he uses it to inform the large-scale tonal scheme of the piece. Amazingly for a work of this time, the most important harmonic changes in this Sonata are not shifts from tonic to dominant and back, but shifts up or down a third.

Just as the *Hammerklavier* shows Beethoven finding a new level of rigor in his approach to form, it also shows him being even more exacting in his demands on performers. In fact, this work was the only one of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas for which the composer provided metronome markings, and they are very fast. "One cannot play the Beethoven metronome markings in opus 106 without taking some chances," says Howard Karp. "Perhaps taking chances is part of playing Beethoven in general. The first time I heard the *Hammerklavier* in a public recital was in my senior year at Oberlin College when Rudolf Serkin included it in a solo recital. The entire recital was overwhelming and the Beethoven was a colossal performance —the fast seemed so fast and the slow so slow. Many years later I heard him play the work again in his last recital at the University of Wisconsin. It was less extreme than in 1951 in both slow and fast tempi. I much preferred the memory, at least, of the earlier performance."

In addition to his studies at Oberlin and Juilliard, Karp highlights the lasting importance of a memorable encounter with one of the 20th century's great Beethovenians. "I had the enormous honor and pleasure of attending Wilhelm Kempff's two week Master Classes at his home in Positano, Italy in the late spring of 1969. In order to be there, along with 5 other pianists, one had to have six sonatas and two concerti at "concert pitch." I felt I was in the presence of a true master musician and great pianist. We went through 30 sonatas, excepting only the two of opus 49. We would play, in chronological order, the solo sonatas; Kempff would comment and illustrate, and then play the entire work through. His playing was so inspiring, spiritual and moving—technique impeccable at age 74. Then we did the same with the concerti, accompanied by Mr. Kempff. Everything he played, whether solo or accompaniment was by memory. It was two weeks of heaven!"

Although Beethoven's health problems would continue to disrupt progress towards finishing the pieces he felt destined to write in his last years, after the completion of the *Hammerklavier*, Beethoven no longer seemed in doubt about what those pieces were meant to be. In 1819, publisher Moritz Schlesinger asked Beethoven for some songs and three new piano sonatas, and, after he reluctantly agreed to Beethoven's demands to maintain publication rights in the United Kingdom, the composer set to work on his final triptych of sonatas, which in many respects seem to have been conceived and created in a single breath. In fact, an attack of jaundice in 1820 necessitated a break between opus 109 and the last two sonatas. Beethoven is remarkably consistent throughout his output in the moods he seems to associate with certain keys, and certainly the c minor of opus 111 is very much the same stormy and tragic key heard in works like the Fifth Symphony, the *Pathetique* Sonata and even his Piano

Trio opus 1 no. 3. For Beethoven, c minor was not just a key —it was a problem. The Fifth Symphony suggests a solution to the "problem" of c minor in the triumphant C Major song of victory that makes up its Finale. While the c minor of opus 111 is not far from that of the Fifth (in fact, Beethoven marks them both *Allegro con brio*, albeit adding *ed appassionato* in opus 111), the C Major the final movement of opus 111 comes from a more rarified and exalted place than the C Major of the Fifth —it is a song of thanksgiving rather than a celebration of victory. Pianist Andras Schiff calls this movement "the most spiritual creation of the most spiritual composer."

This disc concludes with a movement from a sonata Karp had a special affinity for, performed on the same concert as the *Hammerklavier*. The all-Beethoven format was an exception for Karp rather than the rule of his recital programming. "Most of my public playing consisted of programs of more than one composer. Usually, when playing compositions of one composer, it was because of celebrating a "round number," birth year, or commemorating a death year." This Beethoven disc comes from the birth year commemorations of 1970. Karp's passion for this early masterpiece began during his undergraduate days. "My wonderful Oberlin teacher, Jack Radunsky, kept me on Beethoven's opus 2 #2 for two years. I learned so much from him, a born teacher."

Disc 5

Disc five begins with the earliest recorded performance in this collection, from October 1962. Although Karp had only played the *Goldberg Variations* once before in public, his acquaintance with the work went back to his student days. "I first studied the *Goldberg Variations* with Rosina Lhevinne as a graduate student at the Juilliard School of Music. She made it clear to me that she had never previously had a student study the work with her, yet she was able to assist me admirably because of her natural musicality and disciplined mind. I had the feeling that she would have played the work magnificently." Modern research has thrown into serious doubt the veracity of the popular story that Bach wrote the Variations to give comfort to a visiting nobleman suffering from insomnia. Unlike most of Bach's music, the Variations were published in his lifetime, and there is no mention made in the score of a dedication to either Count Kaiserling, whose sleep difficulties were purported to have inspired the work, nor of his long-suffering keyboardist, the now-immortalized Mr. Goldberg.

Bach is known to have always maintained an interest in the evolution of new keyboard instruments throughout his life, and it seems inconceivable that he would not have been amazed and

delighted by the possibilities of the modern Steinway. Nonetheless, Bach was also a composer who knew how to stretch the possibilities of the instruments he had available to him and, throughout the Variations, he makes particular use of the possibilities of the two-manual keyboard in writing parts that cross and even overlap. This means that performance of these works on a single-keyboard piano offers a number of possibilities to expand or refine the textural and coloristic possibilities of the work, but also creates some very specific and very awkward technical challenges which are not a factor when playing the work on an instrument with two keyboards. Karp is absolutely clear on which pianists he feels best handle both the possibilities and the challenges of playing Bach on the piano "The pianist whose playing of Bach I loved above all was Rosalyn Tureck, and I also loved William Kapell's Bach"

Pianists and musicologists have long argued over how far one can go in the direction of exploiting the strengths of the modern piano, particularly its ability to sustain a singing line, without losing the clarity of texture Bach's music demands. Karp's approach to the use of the damper pedal is tellingly more pragmatic than puritanical: "Andras Schiff is also a favorite. I first heard Schiff play Book I of the *Well Tempered Klavier*, and I recall his using the pedal sparingly. Later, I heard his Bach playing at the University of Wisconsin when he used no damper pedal—I admired both performances, yet preferred the first. I also attempt to use pedal sparingly in Bach."

Whatever the origins of the work, the "Keyboard exercise, consisting of an ARIA with diverse variations for harpsichord with two manuals" as Bach titled it is, without doubt, one of his most serious-minded and carefully structured pieces. The absolute rigor of the form is rather belied by the extent to which the rather academic-sounding structure of the piece presents the "connoisseurs" to whom it was offered, not a lesson in development and counterpoint, but, in the words of Bach, "refreshment of their spirits."

The opening Aria is, in fact, a dance movement, a fact often forgotten by modern interpreters. "The tempo of the opening Aria of the Goldberg Variations should simply be in the tempo of an ornamented *Sarabande*," says Karp, adding, "The tempi I chose for the Variations seemed to "play themselves." Karp's nonchalant observation points out an important fact about the structure of the piece—the thirty variations are derived not from the melody of the Aria, but from its bass line, and if that bass line isn't played with direction and shape, the entire piece starts to feel long and aimless. Melodic self-indulgence in the Aria is likely to lead to all sorts of difficulty in making sense of the tempi of the variations to follow.

The variations themselves follow a very strict pattern—nine times in a row two variations of freely chosen character are followed by a canon, and the canons are all built at sequentially increasing intervals, starting with a "*Cannone all'Unisuono*" (canon at the unison) and working up to a "Cannone alla Nona" (canon at the ninth). At the halfway point of the work, there is a "Cannone alla Quinta" followed by a new beginning, in grand French Overture style. It is worth pointing out Bach's genius in his handling of the canons, none of which sound in any way dry or studied, but are as diverse and original in character as all of the other more freely constructed variations. In place of a final "Cannone alla Decimo" Bach offers us a final "Quodlibet." This astounding movement, less than two minutes long in Karp's performance, manages to bring together not only many of the threads of the previous variations, but also to introduce quotations from several German folk themes. As with the cannons, it sounds terribly dry and academic as described, until one realizes that the text of one of those folk songs reads "Cabbage and turnips have driven me away, had my mother cooked meat, I'd have opted to stay". Bach wore his greatness more comfortably than most composers, and part of his unique genius was the ability to make the most learned of musical forms come alive with humor and humanity.

Ten years separate Karp's performance of the Goldberg Variations from that of the Mozart Sonata in D Major that follows it. Believed to be the last of Mozart's sonatas for the piano, the D Major was written in 1789, possibly as one of six "*leichte Klaviersonaten*" or "easy piano sonatas," as Mozart is reported to have described the set to his friend Michael von Puchberg. Certainly, the work's myriad complexities make it anything but easy to play. Sometimes called "The Hunt" for its opening horn call, the work shows Mozart beginning to evolve from the echt-Classical rhetoric of so much of his music to the more contrapuntally conceived language of his final years. Some musicologists have traced this evolution to a trip to Leipzig, home of J.S. Bach, just before this sonata was written. At the time, Bach's music was mostly forgotten, and little of it was published. We can only guess what discoveries Mozart made on his pilgrimage to Leipzig, but the influence of Bach would continue growing in importance throughout the two remaining years of Mozart's tragically short life. Even more tragically short was the life of Franz Schubert, whose music completes this disc. His Sonata in G Major, D 894 was the last of his sonatas to be published during his lifetime, and was hailed by Robert Schumann as the "most perfect in form and conception" of Schubert's sonatas for the piano.

Disc 6

Leonard Bernstein was fond of saying of his friend and mentor that Aaron Copland was almost two composers, almost two men: one the smiling, genial, public composer of *Appalachian Spring* and *Billy the Kid*, and the other, more severe figure, "a cross between Walt Whitman and an Old Testament prophet, bearded and patriarchal." Written in 1930, the *Piano Variations* are very much the work of Copland the severe, Old Testament prophet. "I have to confess," says Howard Karp, "that when I first heard the piece, I didn't like it —I found the language too dissonant and severe." In the end, it was necessity that brought Karp back into contact with the piece. He needed to prepare a short work by an American composer for an audition, and began to look at the score of the Copland. "Gradually," says Karp, "I became more and more fascinated by the piece, and began to think I should learn it. I played it to my wife [the pianist Frances Karp] and asked her what she thought of it. She said she didn't like it at all, but that there was one strangely beautiful chord that attracted her. I asked her to point out the chord for me, and we went through the score together, only to discover that the chord wasn't there at all —I'd been misreading something." By this time, however, Karp had become deeply engaged with the work, and would go on to become one of its leading exponents.

The *Piano Variations* are the product of the earlier of the two "difficult" periods in the composer's output. After some of the jazzier works of the 1920's, notably the Piano Concerto and *Music for the Theatre*, Copland's music quickly became spikier and more dissonant. It was in the mid-to-late 1930's, largely in response to Copland's concern for the welfare and spirits of his countrymen during the Great Depression, that Copland's music began to embody a more accessible, vernacular style, with its touching evocations of Americana. But the Old Testament prophet was always there, and, after World War II, Copland returned to his "difficult" idiom, eventually even adopting his own version of Schönberg's twelve-tone technique. Copland's later experiments with serialism horrified some of his closest friends, not least Leonard Bernstein, who exclaimed; "Of all people, why you —you who are so instinctive, so spontaneous? Why are you bothering with tone rows and with the rules of retrograde and inversion, all that?" Copland's answered simply: "I need more chords. I've run out of chords," leaving Bernstein to lament that "that lasted for four more pieces and then he didn't write any more. How sad for him. How awful for us."

However, Bernstein, who knew the *Piano Variations* as well as anyone, seemed to forget that this early piece already, "shared certain features with Schönbergian serialism, but where Schönberg

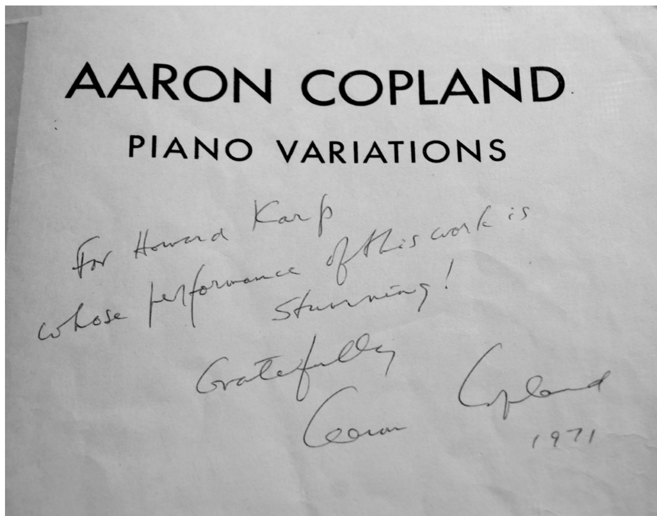
was passionately warm, Copland was passionately cold; where Schönberg's writing was willfully luxuriant, Copland's was painfully lean," according to Copland scholar, Samuel Lipman. Additionally, where Schönberg's rhythmic and gestural language is still rooted in the Romantic world of Brahms and Wagner, Copland's rhythmic vocabulary in the 1930's was, if anything, even more radical and uncompromising than his harmonic language. The work's craggy contours elicited howls of protest from critics, not least Jerome Bohm in the New York Herald Tribune, who declared " Mr. Copland, always a composer of radical tendencies, has in these variations sardonically thumbed his nose at all of those aesthetic attributes which have hitherto been considered essential to the creation of music." However, in spite of its harsh sound world, the piece quickly took hold with many pianists, and within just a few years was considered a major addition to the American piano literature. Copland returned to the work in 1957 at the behest of the Louisville Orchestra, transcribing the piece as *Orchestral Variations*.

Brooklyn-born composer, pianist, conductor and teacher Leon Kirchner found his distinctive and uncompromising musical language after early studies with Arnold Schönberg. Kirchner never adopted Schönberg's "twelve-tone" method, but instead took from his work with the Austrian master something of the older composers capacity for rhapsodic intensity grounded in a highly disciplined approach to motivic development. Never one to be drawn in by fads, trends or "isms" throughout his long career, his music was always both deeply passionate and seriously intellectual, the result of a compositional process that was as intense as the music itself. His former student, the composer John Adams, describes Kirchner's approach to composition as "something akin to self-immolation." In 1961, Kirchner joined the faculty at Harvard University, where he succeeded Walter Piston. In addition to mentoring several generations of young composers throughout his 28 years there, he was also active as the conductor of the Harvard Chamber Orchestra (an orchestra of Boston freelancers based at the University) and was an inspiring and exacting coach of chamber music whose understanding of and passion for the music of all periods found an outlet at Harvard in his famous course, "Music 180: Performance and Analysis," where his students included de Yo-Yo Ma, John Adams and Alan Gilbert. He was, according to Karp, "an awe-inspiring figure."

Kirchner completed the first of his three sonatas for the piano in 1948 when he was in his late twenties. Kirchner was a virtuoso pianist, but although the Sonata makes great technical demands on the player, it is anything but a virtuoso showpiece. In this work, one can see the young Kirchner working out sophisticated strategies for managing to develop large-scale structures using a freely

atonal language. It was just this challenge that led Kirchner's former teacher, Arnold Schönberg, to abandon his one experiments with free atonality in favor of the more disciplined world of the twelve-tone technique. All though Kirchner was by all accounts a man of commanding intellect, his approach to composition was temperamentally unsuited to the rigors of serialism. John Adams described him as ""most intuitive musician I ever encountered." Instead, Kirchner, both here in and in later works, employs a range of techniques and strategies in order to give his freely atonal language a sense of structure and direction, including but not limited to, the use of pedal-points as harmonic reference points, the use of cyclic devices, and strong sense of gesture.

Bach's keyboard Partita's where the product of his early years in Leipzig, where he moved in 1723. Composed between 1726 and 1730, the where the first works which Bach elected to have published as his "opus 1," and were issued as *Clavier-Übung* (*Keyboard Practice*), Volume One. In a brief introductory note, Bach described the pieces as "Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits, by Johann Sebastian Bach."



Copland and Kirchner responses to Karp's performances of these seminal 20th century works are memorialized by their grateful inscriptions in Karp's copies of the scores (reproduced here).

The Partita no. 4 in D Major was written in 1728, when Bach was forty-three. The work opens with an Overture in a grand style, by some measure the longest and most complex movement in the piece, and progresses through the traditional suite of Baroque dance movements, culminating in a Gigue that combines an irresistible rhythmic impulse with an array of contrapuntal fireworks to tax any performer to their limits.

Schubert's Sonata in D Major, D 850, was only the second of his sonatas to be published. It seems fitting that this anthology should end with Karp's elegant, dexterous and nuanced performance of the charming Rondo that finishes this sonata by the composer Karp says he reveres as much as any who ever put pen to paper.

—***Kenneth Woods (***www.kennethwoods.net)

PIANO SONATA

by

Leon Kirchner

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