



Pianist **Christopher Harding** maintains a flourishing international performance career, generating acclaim and impressing audiences and critics alike with his substantive interpretations and pianistic mastery. He has given frequent solo, concerto, and chamber music performances in venues as far flung as the Kennedy Center and Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., Suntory Hall in Tokyo and the National Theater Concert Hall in Taipei, the Jack Singer Concert Hall in Calgary, and halls and festival appearances in Newfoundland, Israel, Romania, and China. His concerto performances have included concerts

with the National Symphony and the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestras, the San Angelo and Santa Barbara Symphonies, and the Tokyo City Philharmonic, working with such conductors as Taijiro Iimori, Gisele Ben-Dor, Fabio Machetti, Randall Craig Fleisher, John DeMain, Ron Spiegelman, Daniel Alcott, and Darryl One, among others. His chamber music and duo collaborations have included internationally renowned artists such as clarinetist Karl Leister, flautist András Adorján, and members of the St. Lawrence and Ying String Quartets, in addition to frequent projects with his distinguished faculty colleagues at the University of Michigan. He has previously recorded two solo CDs and one chamber music CD for the Brevard Classics label. He has additionally taken twenty-five first prizes in national and international competitions, and in 1999 was awarded the special «Mozart Prize» at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, given for the best performance of a composition by Mozart.

As a distinguished professor of piano performance and chamber music, Christopher Harding has presented master classes and lecture recitals in many of the important universities and schools of music across the United States and Asia, as well as in Israel and Canada. He has recorded and edited two editions of Debussy and one of Mozart for the Schirmer Performance Editions series published by Hal Leonard. He is in regular demand as a teacher, having served as visiting professor of piano at Seoul National University, Ewha Womans University, and the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, in addition to holding a position as Chair of Piano at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance.



American Piano Music

Christopher Harding, piano

1. Aaron Copland (1900-1990): *El Salón México*,
transcribed for piano solo by Leonard Bernstein
(*Boosey and Hawkes*) 9:16
- Samuel Barber (1910-1981): *Excursions, Op. 20* (*Schirmer*) 12:29
 2. I. *Un poco allegro* 3:04
 3. II. *In slow blues tempo* 4:01
 4. III. *Allegretto* 3:05
 5. IV. *Allegro molto* 2:19
- George Gershwin (1898-1937): *Preludes for Piano* (*Warner Brothers*) 6:18
 6. I. *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso* 1:26
 7. II. *Andante con moto e poco rubato* 3:42
 8. III. *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso* 1:10
- Samuel Barber (1910-1981): *Sonata for Piano in E-flat Minor, Op. 26*
(*Schirmer*) 20:02
 9. I. *Allegro energico* 7:31
 10. II. *Allegro vivace e leggero* 2:07
 11. III. *Adagio mesto* 5:27
 12. IV. *Allegro con spirito* 4:57
- William Bolcom (born 1938): *from Twelve New Etudes for Piano*
(*Schirmer*) 8:36
 13. *Hi-jinks* 1:51
 14. *Hymne à l'amour* 6:45
- Total Time: 56:41**

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ghostly humor", is intended to achieve dynamic contrast in a range of the piano where that contrast is least achievable. Like the Barber, it makes use of twelve-tone writing more as an effect and for harmonic organization than as a compositional process. "Hymne à l'amour", a hymn to Love, is more traditional in that it makes use of E Major as its key. The incredibly challenging and varied chordal structure of the B sections is highly influenced by the extended chords and colors of jazz, as are the rhythmic gestures of the A sections. The gentle ostinato that flows like a ribbon of lace through the right hand of the A sections may be reminiscent of Love as defined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient, love is kind...Love never ends." This etude brilliantly evokes the sonorities of the orchestra, and was orchestrated as the third movement of Bolcom's Fifth Symphony.

-Christopher Harding

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Christopher Harding plays a Steinway piano

Graphic design, Michael P. Tanner

Barber later joked that if they had paid him more, he would have made the sonata harder. As it is, the fourth movement Fugue has become a tour de force for many pianists around the world who wish to establish themselves as virtuosi in the mold of a Horowitz. Horowitz himself suggested several virtuosic flourishes to Barber during the compositional process, including a cadenza in the fugue which adds to the dramatic power of the movement.

As stated earlier, the sonata opens with an angular motive composed of half-steps presented in dotted rhythms. The very first melodic half-step (C-flat to B-flat) forms a basic feature of the opening motives of all four movements: it is spelled enharmonically as B-natural to A-sharp in the second and third movements. The first movement retains this use of half-steps even in the second and closing themes of the exposition. Twelve-tone writing, used primarily for harmonic organization and color, and not as a strict compositional process, also is a prominent feature of this movement. Use of this twelve-tone organization is even more prominent in the third movement, which opens by presenting a row first in chordal form, and then arpeggiated as an accompaniment in the left hand.

The Fugue of the last movement must be the biggest, toughest, coolest fugue of my experience. The subject and countersubjects are certainly jazzy in their harmonic and rhythmic natures, and the entire movement is a compendium of fugual technique, with the subject and countersubject appearing in augmentation, (diminution would be exceedingly difficult with a subject already written in sixteenth-notes), inversion, and in multiple strettos. Moreover, the form of the movement can be seen to be a sonata form, with an A section functioning as the exposition, a B section (introduced in E major) functioning as a development, with a return to the A section with appropriate key modifications appearing as our recapitulation. A cadenza and a massively difficult coda round out this movement. It is worth noting that the “development”, opening in E major after a C Major transition, is related to the tonic by a half-step: a very nice way to unify the harmonic implications of the melodic half-step which opens the entire piece.

William Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes for Piano* won the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1988. Composed over a period of ten years or so, the études were completed in 1986 and are arranged with English and French titles, a clear reference to the tradition of etude composition as begun and continued by such composers as Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy. Bolcom's études are technical and compositional studies for various aspects of playing the piano: “Hi-jinks”, a playfully mischievous wisp of a piece that is marked to be played with a “strange and

American classical music is fun, exciting, colorful, rhythmically driving, open, honest, and expansive. It makes you want to dance, it embodies a “can-do” optimism, and above all it must look, sound and feel “cool”, which for American culture means that it must look and sound easy, effortless, unrehearsed...but superbly polished. The pieces in this album of American Piano Music form a brilliant example of American cultural values as expressed through its classical music, a music shaped by its European heritage, and by the “American-ness” and independence of its composers.

El Salón México was written by Aaron Copland after a 1932 visit to Mexico City, which at the time boasted a dance hall by that name. Copland wanted to write a musical souvenir, capturing not the music he heard, but rather the spirit of the people at the hall. His work for orchestra was completed in 1936 and received its American debut two years later. Leonard Bernstein arranged it for piano solo in 1939, perhaps to relieve American pianists of the burden of closing their recital programs with Hungarian rhapsodies. The work makes several references to Mexican folksongs, but combines them in a very American way: exciting rhythmic drive, cross rhythms and meter changes; polyharmonic chords which invoke the vastness of North American geography; and an unmistakable air of fun, creating a work of exuberant bombast. It has deservedly become a mainstay of the American classical repertoire, and serves as a fitting opening to our brief excursion into American Piano Music.

Samuel Barber's four Excursions for Piano, Op. 20, are rather in the bagatelle or prelude tradition, presented as four vignettes or postcards from various popular American musical styles. Composed at the urging of Jeanne Behrend, an American pianist who specialized in presenting American music, the Excursions were sketched and completed over the years 1942-44. The first Excursion takes as its rhythmic propulsion an ostinato bass that is fashioned from a boogie-woogie riff: this music was originally meant for non-stop dancing, and the left hand drives us from beginning to end through just three harmonic key areas. The right hand extemporizes virtuosic figurations, reminiscent of the astonishing jazz pianists coming into their own in the middle of the twentieth century. The second in the set, a slow blues, proves particularly problematic for those of us trained in the classical tradition, and who lean heavily on romantic rubato for expressive purposes. Even Horowitz, who gave the New York premiere of the first, second and fourth Excursions, had difficulty with this one; American music does not bend with sentimental rubato, however lush and colorful its harmonies. A virile and driving triplet fuels

the slow blues just as much as its faster cousins are driven by their rhythms; the whiny complaint of the blues singer can be best expressed when supported by a rather insistent rhythmic ostinato.

This same insistence flows throughout the third Excursion, whose melody reminds us of a western tune called “The Streets of Laredo”; the gentle left hand ostinato in eight weaves together with a melody in seven, creating the subtle cross rhythms Barber might have heard from Latin American club ensembles in New York. The piece is a set of progressively virtuosic variations, which come to a gentle close after a rather sincere restatement of the theme. The last Excursion captures the excitement and virtuosity of the best harmonica players, while conjuring the interaction between caller and dancers at a barnyard square dance. Its harmonic monotony is more than amply compensated for by the unbounded exuberance called for in its performance.

George Gershwin is perhaps the most famous of all American composers. His synthesis of the jazz style of the early part of the 20th century with classical forms and instrumentations has influenced all succeeding generations of American composers, and has come to define a great deal of what are considered the distinctive American characteristics of our classical music. The three Preludes for Piano recorded here received their premiere performance by Gershwin himself in December 1926; they were probably composed in the preceding month. Conceived as part of a grand plan to compose a set of twenty-four preludes to be called *The Melting Pot*, they flow organically out of the European prelude tradition, as practiced by Chopin and Debussy, for example, who themselves were following in the footsteps of J. S. Bach. Gershwin unfortunately never completed this project, but chose instead to publish this smaller set in 1927.

The first prelude announces at the outset its bluesy challenge to the formal, correct harmonic language of the European classical tradition: after establishing a B-flat major tonic, Gershwin immediately muddies the waters with a dirty, “blue” A-flat, launching into a strongly marked and energetic dance tempo that drives to the very end of the short piece. The heated battle for supremacy between the “blue” A-flat and the tonic B-flat is not resolved until the final measure, producing a great deal of exhilarating harmonic drama. The second prelude (a “blue” lullaby?) again makes use of the bluesy nature of jazz harmony, with a chromatic line in the left hand that slides through a juxtaposition of the minor and major third scale degrees in our tonic key, C-sharp minor. This ostinato is surmounted by a melody that highlights the clash between the flat seventh and tonic scale degrees, giving this prelude its distinctive lazy and world-weary feeling. The middle section offers excellent opportunity to experiment with swinging eighth notes, and

for the imitation of dance-band instruments like the baritone saxophone, especially if one takes Gershwin’s suggestion of reversing the hands—an added bit of fun and challenge.

Gershwin himself referred to the third prelude as his “Spanish Prelude”, and certainly we can hear the Latin American dance rhythms that drive this pithy and supremely energetic piece. Its harmonic language again highlights the blues penchant for juxtaposition, this time as a struggle between the minor and major thirds in the left hand of every other measure. Gershwin’s performance style was fast, nervous, and “hurled headlong”... this finds its way into his compositions as well, and beautifully exemplifies the fun and rhythmic drive associated with American music.

It might seem that the key of E-flat minor held a certain challenge for American composers: both the last prelude of Gershwin’s set and Samuel Barber’s monumental Piano Sonata share this very unusual key. It is tempting to think that Barber might have decided to pick up where Gershwin had left off, in synthesizing an American musical language with European forms and compositional techniques. Something similar could be said when comparing Barber’s sonata with the last sonatas of both Beethoven and Chopin, the former being the undisputed master of the form, the latter being one of the undisputed masters of piano writing in general. Beethoven’s Op. 111 announces itself with the same rhythmic gestures as the first movement of Barber’s work; moreover, the two movements of the Beethoven (in C minor and C major, respectively) demonstrate the juxtaposition of major and minor third (E-flat to E-natural), a half-step relationship that defines the most fundamental building block of the Barber, both motivically and harmonically. With respect to the Chopin Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58, the parallels are more cosmetic but nonetheless significant: an intense, rigorously constructed first movement that flows uneasily between various thematic ideas; an elegant and mercurial scherzo for a second movement; a third movement that becomes the emotional center of the entire sonata in its expression of grief and deep emotion (although Chopin seems to be farther along in his acceptance of grief); and a last movement of surpassing virtuosity, forming one of the major challenges in the pianistic repertoire.

Written for the pianist Vladimir Horowitz between the years 1947 and 1949, the sonata was commissioned by the American composers Richard Rogers and Irving Berlin as a tribute for the League of Composers, then celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary as an organization devoted to helping and promoting the works of living composers. The commission was a small one;