



ROBERT CARL

1. SHAKE THE TREE (2005) for piano four-hands 21:37  
Donald Berman and John McDonald, piano

BRAIDED BAGATELLES (2001-02) 18:35  
Moritz Eggert, piano

2. Cadenza 2:26  
3. Marking the Field 2:38  
4. Stretching 3:22  
5. Marching 2:27  
6. Floating 2:40  
7. Flying 4:52

PIANO SONATA NO.2, "THE BIG ROOM" (1993-99) 27:05  
Erberk Eryilmaz, piano

8. Clouds Are Scattering 6:16  
9. The Big Room 9:05  
10. The World Turned Upside Down 11:44  
--67: 04--

SHAKE THE TREE



My piano music is a continuing diary of my growth as a composer. And that's ironic, since I'm a very modest pianist. But starting with my first sonata, "Spiral Dances" (1984), it's been the medium where I can test out ideas big and small, some very spacious and ambitious, others occasional, experimental, and lighter-hearted. The culmination of this approach is **Shake the Tree**, perhaps the most virtuosic and architecturally ambitious work I've ever written. Two of its major predecessors are **Braided Bagatelles**, a bravura evocation of variation form, mixed with elements that verge on Dada, and my **Piano Sonata No. 2, "The Big Room"**, whose three movements represent three very different approaches of how to evoke space musically, and whose last movement became the genesis of a breakthrough eponymous orchestral work.

**Shake the Tree** began as an experiment. It opens with a series of ringing chords, all radiating up from a low A, following overtone patterns which result from that note as a fundamental. I then created a series of "time-molds", each centered on a different pitch, moving up and down the A overtone-series, into which I poured music, spontaneous, but still exploring harmonies that treated each respective "center" as a fundamental. The durations of these "molds" and the patterns of movement through the centers is simultaneously rigorous and arbitrary. This may sound cerebral, but it allowed me to write some of the most exuberant, athletic, and crazy music I've ever produced.

The title comes from the one motivating image of the piece. If you shake the tree, the fruit falls. The opening chords are rolled, shiver, and then begin to yield their harvest over the course of the work.

**Erberk Eryilmaz**, a native of Turkey, is a composer, pianist, and conductor. He completed his undergraduate studies at the Hartt School, University of Hartford, and is currently pursuing graduate studies at Carnegie Mellon University. He is a founder and co-director of the Hartford Independent Chamber Orchestra.

**John McDonald** is a composer who tries to play the piano and a pianist who tries to compose. He is Professor of Music and Department Chair at Tufts University, where he teaches composition, theory, and performance. His output concentrates on vocal, chamber, and solo instrumental works, and includes interdisciplinary experiments.

#### *Acknowledgments:*

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*Braided Bagatelles* is a live concert recording by Matt Girard, in the Extension Works concert series of April 12, 2003 at the Goethe Institute, Boston.

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adventurous organizations who have taken a risk on him. He is chair of composition at the Hartt School, University of Hartford, and constantly learns from his students. In a parallel life he writes extensively on new music, for decades as a critic for *Fanfare* magazine, and is the author of *Terry Riley's In C* (Oxford University Press).

For more information on Robert Carl, go to <http://uhaweb.hartford.edu/CARL/>. All scores are available from American Composers Alliance, [www.composers.com](http://www.composers.com)

**Donald Berman's** recordings include *The Unknown Ives Vols. 1 and 2*, *The Light That Is Felt: Songs of Charles Ives* and *The Uncovered Ruggles* (New World), *Americans in Rome: Music by Fellows of the American Academy in Rome* (Bridge), *Wasting the Night: Songs of Scott Wheeler* and CDs of music by Su Lian Tan (Arsis), Arthur Levering (New World), Martin Boykan (New World), Tamar Diesendruck (Centaur), Christopher Theofanidis (Summit) and Aaron Jay Kernis (Koch).

Composer, pianist, singer, actor, author and conductor **Moritz Eggert** has worked in many different musical genres – his oeuvre includes 11 operas plus several ballets and works for experimental music theatre. His “Bad Blog Of Musick” is the most-read German New Music Blog and has incited many controversial discussions about the state of Contemporary Music today. He also writes regularly for various print publications and is a professor for composition at the Music University of Munich.

**Braided Bagatelles** is a solo piano work that consists of an interlocking chain of variations on a theme, and related dances. The variations and dances alternate, playing off common material between them, creating a flow of constantly mutating ideas. The sections are designed to compress over time, so that the “braid” grows tighter and tighter towards the end. They also group into larger units, which form a series of five movements for the piece, played without pause (any silences are timed).

The work is fanciful and athletic, as its subtitle implies. In its often primal motivic materials, it pays homage to the great variation sets of Beethoven (especially the *32 Variations on an Original Theme in C Minor*), and in its elements of theater and sonic invention, such as the music of the modern German composers Mauricio Kagel and Helmut Lachenmann (in particular near the 12’30” mark, the pianist first plays light glissandi over the black keys with fingernails, then plays on the closed lid, and finally mimes performance above the keys). It also opens with a cadenza improvised by the pianist, designed to encapsulate the piece before it begins. Moritz Eggert (in this live concert recording) does this brilliantly. In fact he gives one the finest live performances I’ve ever been blessed to receive.

My second sonata, **The Big Room**, began as a solo work. The piece which is now the work’s middle movement was written in the Spring of 1993 at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, in a studio overlooking the Mediterranean. The audible rhythms of the sea were a constant stimulus for me, and especially at night, the fullness of the star-dappled sky and the powerful surge of the waves suggested a scale of natural activity far beyond my usual daily



experience. This breadth, deep rhythm, and mystery suffused the piece. I found myself wanting to write music which captured that sense of a vast space, one large enough to accommodate any musical gesture, and large enough for various gestures of past musics to reverberate gently. (It helped that the studio itself was especially spacious and evocatively lit at night, a literal “big room”.)

But I also felt that this piece, while satisfactory as an evocative tone poem, was in fact the seed for a larger work. In October 1999 I found myself at the Aaron Copland House in Cortlandt, New York, on the banks of the Hudson during one of the most glorious autumns of my memory. At this point the structure of the larger piece clarified, and I was able to “frame” the earlier work with two movements.

In the first movement, a space is opened up via the interaction of skittering blocks of music, whose collision create dynamic tension and growth. It is also distinguished by the use of the sostenuto pedal, which allows chordal “ghosts” (related to the harmonies of the second movement) to resonate through the background. Also, to my surprise, the work evolved into a fairly strict sonata form.

The second movement (the original “Big Room”) consists of several strands in recurring cycles. Primary are the isolated sforzandi notes, a “grid” of flashing sounds that exist in icy detachment from all else, like stars. In the “distance” of the space they define, a variety of other musics is heard, faintly. The music is in a circular form, not a linear one.

The organically evolving third movement allows music very explicitly from the past to roar into that space like a tidal wave. Its source is “The World Turned Upside Down”, an English folk tune played at the British surrender at Yorktown. The tune (to lyrics along the lines of “When pigs fly...”) has always seemed emblematic to me of American incongruity—here at a momentous moment, one which is a candidate for the birth of modern history, we have a sweet and quirky little melody, full of irony and good humor. It is hinted at in the introduction, where individual notes are “sampled” from it, and fully revealed only at the end in a reprise of the opening. The sound of this movement feels to me like a blend of American minimalism with a Chopin prelude. As mentioned before, this movement was reworked into my Third Symphony, a work which I regard as a turning point in my work.

I can only say that since I could never perform any of these pieces myself, I am deeply indebted to the extraordinary performers who have given their time, energy, and spirit to bringing this music to life.

—Robert Carl



**Robert Carl's** music is performed throughout the US and internationally, and covers what Kyle Gann has called “the widest range of any composer of his generation”. Recognition has come from such organizations and institutions as the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, Chamber Music America, and the Asian Cultural Council. But he equally values the consideration of virtuoso performers and