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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Bernstein, Gershwin Novacek, D'Rivera

American Music for Clarinet & Piano

JON MANASSE
JON NAKAMATSU

PRODUCTION **USA**



Jon Manasse & Jon Nakamatsu

American Music for Clarinet & Piano

JOHN NOVACEK (b. 1964)

Four Rags for Two Jons (2006)

	12'24
1 I. Schenectady	3'02
2 II. 4th Street Drag	4'07
3 III. Recuperation	2'44
4 IV. Full Stride Ahead	2'31

PAQUITO D'RIVERA (b. 1948)

The Cape Cod Files (2009)

	22'48
5 Benny @ 100	6'01
6 Bandoneón	5'53
7 Lecuonerías	4'39
8 Chiquita Blues	6'16

LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918-1990)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1942)

	10'44
9 I. Grazioso	4'12
10 II. Andantino – Vivace e leggiero	6'33

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

Three Preludes (1926)

Arr. James Cohn

	7'22
11 I. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso	1'40
12 II. Andante con moto e poco rubato	4'24
13 III. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso	1'19
14 I Got Rhythm (from <i>Girl Crazy</i> , 1930)	2'24
<i>Arr. James Cohn</i>	

Jon Manasse, clarinet Jon Nakamatsu, piano

The clarinet that so entranced and inspired Mozart (relatively new then) and Brahms (well-established by that point), did not always command respect. Ambrose Bierce defined it as ‘an instrument of torture operated by a person with cotton in his ears. There are two instruments that are worse than a clarinet – two clarionets.’ Its adaptability and chameleon-like tonal qualities made it a central instrument in the twentieth century, however, particularly for composers walking the sassy, jazz-inflected side of the crossover street, widened into a broad, multicultural avenue in the new century.

Pianist **John Novacek** (b.1964) is a good example. A stylistically omnivorous performer himself, he writes and arranges a huge range of music, with a particular interest in ragtime. He wrote four rags for violinist Leila Josefowicz, and he recorded an album with his brother, guitarist Steven Novacek, called *Novarags*, which includes the pieces he now calls *Four Rags for Two Jons* (2006) in different arrangements. Anyone familiar with the music of Scott Joplin will feel immediately at home in the merry ‘Schenectady,’ although Novacek’s slyly bent harmony and cross-rhythms might startle traditional expectations. The ‘sauntering’ ‘4th Street Drag’ takes its name from the passages in parallel fourths. Despite its name, the fleet ‘Recuperation’ does not offer much rest for the athletically engaged players. A musical fractured flicker, ‘Full Stride Ahead’ is the most volatile and dramatic rag of the set, reinterpreting genre conventions with manic humor.

Cuban-born clarinetist **Paquito D’Rivera** (b.1948) embodies the history of the instrument. He is a virtuoso in almost every current style, including some he has invented himself. He has performed and recorded across the whole spectrum of music, and he composes with equally eclectic enthusiasm. His most recent piece, *The Cape Cod Files*, is a clarinet sonata celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival, where Jon Manasse and Jon Nakamatsu are Artistic Co-Directors. The first movement, a gently swinging blues, leading to a galvanically charged boogie-woogie, is a celebration of Benny Goodman’s hundredth anniversary. The second movement is a *milonga* evoking the sound of the quintessential tango instrument, the *bandoneón* (a button accordion brought to Argentina from Germany). It is wistful, in the style of Piazzolla’s *tango nuevo*, but with the character of a Chopin/jazz fusion. For a finale, D’Rivera mashes American blues and the Cuban

danzón into a skittishly dancing narrative inspired by a novel based on the life of the diminutive Cuban vaudeville singer Chiquita, famous a century ago.

It is hard to imagine the music of **Leonard Bernstein** (1918-90) without the clarinet, and in fact his first published piece was this Sonata, composed just after he left the Curtis Institute and as he was directing his attention to conducting, studying at Tanglewood with Koussevitsky in the summers. The Sonata was begun in Key West in September 1941 and completed in Boston in February 1942. The first movement is a serious and lyrical one, in which neo-classical elements of texture and form are relevant. Bernstein emphasizes the lowest register of the clarinet in the soft, sweet coda. The second movement is actually two-in-one, a slow movement and a kinetic 5/8 scherzo *cum* finale braided together. There is enough motivic interplay and formal ingenuity to satisfy more Apollonian inclinations, and enough gleeful energy to cheer the Dionysian side.

George Gershwin (1898-1937) gave the crossover clarinet in the twentieth century its signature lick, the slow trill and glissando that launches *Rhapsody in Blue*. (With an assist from his orchestrator, Ferde Grofé.) Two years after *Rhapsody in Blue* made Gershwin internationally famous, he shared a concert in 1926 with the contralto Marguerite d’Alvarez, who included several of his songs on her recital program. Gershwin accompanied her in his own music, and took a solo turn, giving the premiere of five preludes for solo piano. Two of them are now rarely heard, but the present ‘Three Preludes’ have become miniature classics, arranged and adapted for almost every possible musical medium, this artful arrangement by James Cohn dating from 1987. The first is a rhythmically stressed elaboration of the charleston. The middle one is an *ABA* song-form blues, haunted by the distinctive and subtle tolling of the accompaniment under the narrow, lazily gliding melody of the main section. The third is another rhythmic dazzler, playing with winking major-minor shifts.

Ethel Merman made her Broadway debut in 1930 in Gershwin’s musical *Girl Crazy* and became a star on the irresistibly ebullient strength of ‘I’ve Got Rhythm.’ It has become a standard, of course, and Gershwin himself played it often at parties; in 1934 he wrote a set of concert variations on it for piano and orchestra. James Cohn made this sharp, tour-de-force arrangement in 1994.

JOHN HENKEN

The artists

Following its highly acclaimed 2004 debut in Boston, the **MANASSE/NAKAMATSU DUO** immediately became one of today’s most sought-after ensembles. Extensive tours have featured appearances in many of chamber music’s most prestigious series, including recently New York City’s Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center and Washington DC’s National Gallery of Art.

In 2008, *harmonia mundi usa* produced the Duo’s first CD – the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas – to unanimous critical praise. The New York Times subsequently selected the recording as one of its top classical releases of the year. Highlighting the Duo’s interest in expanding the clarinet/piano repertoire, the present CD includes the recording premiere of two of the Duo’s most successful commissions: John Novacek’s *Four Rags for Two Jons* and Paquito D’Rivera’s *The Cape Cod Files*.

Individually, Jon Manasse and Jon Nakamatsu have developed vast repertoires and lengthy discographies. Their hundreds of performances include concerto engagements, solo recitals and chamber music collaborations in music centers worldwide. Jon Manasse has served as the principal clarinetist of The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the orchestra of the American Ballet Theater, the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra at Lincoln Center and New York City’s Orchestra of St. Luke’s. He is currently on the faculty at the Juilliard School, the Eastman School of Music and at Lynn Conservatory. Jon Nakamatsu is the Gold Medalist of the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and maintains a nearly incessant touring schedule. Together, Manasse and Nakamatsu also serve as Artistic Directors of the esteemed Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival (Massachusetts), founded in 1979 by the late pianist Samuel Sanders.