



David
AMRAM

Voyages for Solo Violin

Piano Sonata • Violin Sonata

Elmira Darvarova, Violin • Thomas Weaver, Piano



David Amram (b. 1930)

Voyages for Solo Violin • Piano Sonata • Violin Sonata

David Amram, the “Renaissance man of American music” (*The Boston Globe*), and a “musical catalyst and leader on a par with Leonard Bernstein, Pete Seeger and Dizzy Gillespie” (*Minneapolis Star & Tribune*, now *The Minnesota Star Tribune*), has been “multicultural before multiculturalism existed” (*The New York Times*) during his career spanning 70 years as a versatile composer, conductor and multi-instrumentalist in many cross-pollinating genres. This album juxtaposes Amram’s newest composition, *Voyages for Solo Violin* (2024) with two other works both dating from 1960 – the *Piano Sonata* and the *Violin Sonata* – created before Amram’s major recognition as the first-ever New York Philharmonic composer-in-residence, but after he had already soaked up influences from collaborations with Jack Kerouac, the Shakespeare in the Park festival, and major figures of the jazz community.

Voyages for Solo Violin (2024, premiered at Carnegie Hall during the New York Chamber Music Festival) has three movements denoting Amram’s “personal meccas” – Cairo, Lahore, Athens, New Orleans, Kansas City, Mobile, Cork, London, and Quebec.

In the first movement Amram honors “the feeling of ancient times, that still comes through as part of everyday life.” Listening to a traditional violinist in Cairo, he experienced a sense of timelessness and felt transported back 5,000 years: “I understood how music can make the Past and the Present all part of the Now!” Music has lived a thousand lives to reach us from the cradles of civilization, as timeless as the Khyber Pass’ trails, which looked, during Amram’s trip to Lahore, just as they did 23 centuries ago during Alexander the Great’s military campaign. At various “From Cairo to Kerouac” programs Amram performs on the ancient instruments *shnai* and *ney*, which he also played while participating in the John Cage piece *Lecture on the Weather* at the New York Chamber Music Festival. At Radio Lahore, Amram, in a collaboration with local musicians, performed on another ancient instrument – the *dumbek*. Athens was the birthplace of Amram’s mentor Dimitri Mitropoulos, and was also where Amram felt he was “transported back 2,500 years to a stone theatre,” while composing the score for Euripides’ *Medea*. Throughout the first movement, fragments of the *hijaz* mode seamlessly connect the “postcard” vignettes.

The second movement is dedicated to New Orleans, Kansas City and Mobile: “honoring the genius of African American musical styles which were open to including Native American roots music and all the cultures from around the world that were adopted to create new musical languages which continue to develop to this very day.” Kansas City is the birthplace of Amram’s idol Charlie Parker, while New Orleans hosted the world premiere of the flute concerto composed by Amram for Sir James Galway. Mobile held a “David Amram Week” festival where he met one of Duke Ellington’s music partners, the singer Lil Greenwood, and recorded with her the album *Back to My Roots*.

The third movement celebrates, in Amram’s words “the tradition of the fiddler as a keeper of the flame in England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada and all the towns and cities in the USA and around the world.” Amram, as a noted virtuoso of the Irish double pennywhistle, as a composer for numerous Shakespearean works, and as a conductor, is deeply connected to Cork, London and Quebec, having appeared at the Cork Jazz Festival, as well as with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and in trailblazing educational programs in London with lectures on Shakespeare and Kerouac. His reverence of London’s cultural importance to Shakespeare’s legacy is connected to the composer’s extensive *oeuvre* of Shakespeare-associated compositions. Amram described his appearance at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London as “entering into a dream going back more than 400 years in a time machine.” For him, all the experiences he has been part of, are “one great journey, still unfolding.”

Amram’s *Piano Sonata* of 1960 is one of the most jazz-influenced 20th-century piano sonatas. In three movements, this work integrates pure jazz idioms into the conventional Classical form. Amram was thrilled to be commissioned to create a work of absolute music, where he could also incorporate some jazz elements, in terms of polyrhythms and phrasing and harmonies, which, when traditionally performed by jazz masters, are rarely if ever written down in a formal style, but rather improvised on the spot. The classically-conceived, but brimming with blues-scales fragments first movement, *Overture*, is followed by the frankly bluesy second movement *Lullaby*. Seemingly not based on true blues progressions, yet reflecting chromatically much of the atmosphere of the early blues genre origins, the second movement is described by Amram as “using a plaintive simple prayer-like melody with harmonies that came from the African American sanctified church and old Southern folklore.” The third movement, *Theme and Variations*, stems from Amram’s 1957 musical material for a production of *Macbeth* at New York’s Shakespeare in the Park festival. It brings further synthesis of jazz syncopations and improvisatory characteristics within the contrasting moods and motifs of the classically-intended, abstractly-defined, yet encoded with contemporary jazz elements progression and connectivity of the variations. The *Piano Sonata* was first performed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1960, and is currently championed by Thomas Weaver, who has performed it at a number of festivals, including the New York Chamber Music Festival at Carnegie Hall.

Another 1960 work is Amram's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, in three movements. Championing this piece for the last 15 years, I am its leading performer (having presented it on three continents), and I have recorded it three times for three different labels. The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, is in the traditional sonata form, and was inspired by Amram's lifelong dualistic experience in embodying two idioms side by side – the Classical mode alongside jazz elements. Amram shaped the first movement by "hearing the endless creative use of harmonic invention, melodic flights of fancy, and rhythmic clarity, that are a hallmark of the jazz experience." Fluid moments of stretching and relaxing the tempi, alternating verve with poise, bring refreshing rhythmic variety, while the compellingly-expressive musical language amalgamates startling dissonances with instances of serenity. The prolonged final note of the violin lingers over the last bars, interrupted abruptly by the piano's final chord, as if a door suddenly slams, cutting you off from a dreamily-enigmatic world. The second movement, *Andante espressivo*, in the composer's words, is "like a prayer as we hear in traditional Jewish music, sung as a *Niggun* or song without words, similar in spirit to the old African American spirituals, Irish airs and Portuguese *fados*." Its central section utilizes a piercing high E, held for an excruciatingly long time, during which the violinist's finger reaches the bleeding point. (In Amram's memoir *Vibrations* he describes writing an eerie high E for the violinist in the score for Arthur Miller's play *After the Fall*, and how it was mistakenly perceived by the sound technician as a "tone signal," until he explained that it was not a defect.) In the third movement, *Theme and Variations*, Amram uses as a theme "a brief eight-bar fragment which utilizes one note, harmonized with a circle of fifths and the third voice in contrary motion serving as the melody." When he played that same eight-bar thematic segment in 1958 for Jack Kerouac, the writer liked it so much that in 1959 Amram used it as a second theme for the film *Pull My Daisy*, which Kerouac and Amram did together. "You should use that in a classical composition some day," Kerouac suggested. "In 1960 I did use it, in the *Violin Sonata's* third movement, and the series of variations reflect all the different genres of music which are still part of the rich mosaic of musical cultures that continue to thrive today in New York City, seventy five years after the Sonata was written," said Amram.

Elmira Darvarova



David Amram with Elmira Darvarova and Thomas Weaver

Photo: Howard Wall

Elmira Darvarova



A GRAMMY-nominated recording artist, a concert violinist since age four and an award-winning performer (2017 and 2018 Gold Medal at the Global Music Awards), Elmira Darvarova caused a sensation when she became the first ever female concertmaster of The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, where she performed with eminent conductors including Carlos Kleiber. A student of Yfrah Neaman, Josef Gingold and Henryk Szeryng, and hailed by *American Record Guide* for her world premiere recording of Vernon Duke's *Violin Concerto* with the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (Urlicht Audiovisual), she has appeared on five continents – including at Carnegie Hall, as a soloist with orchestra – and has recorded albums with Gary Karr, Pascal Rogé, Octavio Brunetti, Fernando Otero and Vassily Lobanov. Her album based on Indian Ragas debuted at No. 3 on the *Billboard* chart. Darvarova has garnered critical acclaim in *The Strad* for her 'intoxicating tonal beauty', and she was also featured with an interview in *Gramophone*.

www.elmiradarvarova.com

Thomas Weaver



Photo: Stratton McCrady

Thomas Weaver is a pianist and composer currently on faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music and Boston University Tanglewood Institute. His active solo and chamber career has included performances in concert halls throughout the United States, Germany and Japan, in addition to appearances at Tanglewood Music Festival, New York Chamber Music Festival and Red Rocks Music Festival. Weaver has performed with a number of eminent musicians including Jess Gillam, Elmira Darvarova, Howard Wall, Brittany Lasch, Kenneth Radnofsky, Jennifer Frautschi and Gene Pokorny, in addition to members of major orchestras. A champion of new music, Weaver has performed world premieres by composers including David Amram, Reena Esmail and Anthony Plog. He is currently a member of the Amram Ensemble and his playing can be heard on multiple albums on Affetto Records. An award-winning composer, his music has been performed throughout the United States, Germany, Austria, Japan and Australia.

www.thomaseweaver.com

David
AMRAM
(b. 1930)

Voyages for Solo Violin (2024)* 20:41

- 1 No. 1. Allegro assai “Cairo, Lahore and Athens” 6:06
- 2 No. 2. Andante doloroso
“New Orleans, Kansas City and Mobile” 9:42
- 3 No. 3. Giocoso con energia “Cork, London and Quebec” 4:53

Piano Sonata (1960) 18:52

- 4 I. Overture 4:26
- 5 II. Lullaby 6:19
- 6 III. Theme and Variations 8:07

Violin Sonata (1960) 16:58

- 7 I. Allegro moderato 5:43
- 8 II. Andante espressivo 5:56
- 9 III. Theme and Variations 5:19

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Elmira Darvarova, Violin 1–3 7–9

Thomas Weaver, Piano 4–9

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Cover: David Amram in Philadelphia, 1960

Photo by Henry Grossman (1936–2022), courtesy of David Amram



AMERICAN CLASSICS

David Amram’s career as a versatile composer, conductor and multi-instrumentalist has spanned more than 70 years. Recorded here in its world premiere, *Voyages for Solo Violin* in three movements evokes ancient Egypt, Native American and African roots music and, in the words of the composer, “the tradition of the fiddler as a keeper of the flame.” Ranging from prayer-like melodies to blues and polyrhythms, the *Piano Sonata* is one of the most jazz-influenced of any 20th-century work in this genre, while the *Violin Sonata* brings classical and jazz idioms together in music that inspired a collaboration with the writer Jack Kerouac.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
57:04