

The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner. It consists of the word "NAXOS" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, positioned above a stylized graphic of a classical building facade with columns.

NAXOS

The background of the entire cover is a close-up, textured image of the American flag. The stars and stripes are visible, but a prominent, jagged crack runs diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right, splitting the flag's pattern.

William BOLCOM

Trio for Horn,
Violin and Piano
Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin

Steven Gross, Horn
Philip Ficsor, Violin
Constantine Finehouse, Piano

William Bolcom (b. 1938)

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano • Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin

"As a composer I feel extremely gratified by the excellence and emotional commitment I hear in these recordings. The Trio, brilliantly played in my estimation, is profoundly marked by the dark times we are living in. My hope here is for emotional catharsis. As a nation I sense we are beginning to move past the oblivious optimism America so often has fallen into; we are forced to face sobering realities perhaps we don't feel ready for but must do. I pray this Trio might help here, even if a slight amount."

"My solo Suite No. 2 sounds particularly like I'd imagine I'd improvise on violin were I able. It is a joyful piece."

"Both works are performed beautifully and well recorded. Bravi tutti!"

– William Bolcom

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (2017)

Johannes Brahms' *Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano Op. 40* stands as a towering monument over the horn chamber music literature. Brahms composed the four-movement work in 1865 for the natural horn, and the instrument's lyricism and noble beauty radiates throughout this magnificent piece. Its profundity and depth of feeling have inspired generations of musicians.

Thinking it would be fitting if one of the most prominent contemporary composers were to write for the underrepresented horn trio, I (Steven Gross) commissioned the eminent American composer William Bolcom (b. 1938) to create a response to Brahms' *Trio*. In his *Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano*, composed in 2017, Bolcom seamlessly incorporates multiple styles into a substantial yet accessible composition. The plaintive-sounding solo horn passage in the third movement, *As if from far away; misterioso*, evokes the lonely, beautiful sound of the early instrument resonating in a medieval forest. While stretching the technical abilities of the horn

player, the part emphasises the instrument's tonal richness and emotive power.

The players on this album – violinist Philip Ficsor and pianist Constantine Finehouse of the duo American Double, and horn player Steven Gross – have performed Bolcom's *Trio* in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Belgium, Russia and the United States. Ficsor is also an established Bolcom scholar. Both works on this album, the *Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano* and *Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin*, are world premiere recordings and our recording venue was the elegant and richly resonant Bohuslav Martinů Hall in Prague.

The *Trio* commission fulfils all the criteria we as instrumentalists had hoped for. The work is dramatic in effect and direct in its musical expression, reasonably accessible in terms of its technical requirements, and is of a length to completely engage the audience. Bolcom wrote the piece during the 2016 United States presidential election, and the music bears witness to his sense of desperation at the vitriolic discourse that emerged. However, the piece transcends this occasion and stands as a soaring statement about resilience in times of adversity.

The composer writes: 'The *Trio for Horn, Violin, and Piano* is occasioned – I don't want to write "inspired" – by the era we're living in. So many of us feel desperation from the constant, gratuitous endangerment of our country and the world; I wrote the *Trio* to express this, hoping listeners might possibly feel less alone.

'The heavy, plodding rhythms of the first movement are supplanted by a hectic second, a portrait of our misfortune's principal agent. The following slow movement contains a short moment of respite toward its end – a brief breakthrough of tonal sunshine in C major – and the Finale is a resolute march of resistance.'

I: Plodding, implacably controlled

The first movement's 'heavy, plodding rhythms' are set by the piano at the opening. A dark heaviness pervades this march, which persists through the first section. The horn

and violin enter and there is a feeling of uphill struggle. Once the summit is reached, a sense of melancholic relief prevails, conveyed by descending violin passages. The movement's middle section is initiated by a *pizzicato* passage that is reminiscent of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Violin and muted horn intertwine their respective musical gestures, the piano providing a *staccato* undercurrent of malevolence. A violent chord is heard in the piano, a repeat from the first section, with the horn and violin paired. All seems destined for a tremendous clash until suddenly the vitriol clears and serenity takes over and the movement closes with a sense of tenuous hope.

II: Headlong, brutal

The coiled aggression of the second movement's opening passage in the piano expresses vehemence and domination. The horn and violin enter with ascending scales, accents, dissonance and wide registral spacings. Unpredictability makes the opening section truly unsettling; each instrument seems to get stuck in its own vicious cycle of indeterminate length before breaking free with wrenching chords. There is a brief lull in the maelstrom when the violin enters – a rare melodic moment of repose – before it is engulfed by the gale force winds of the opening material. The movement closes with a ghostly *staccatissimo* in the horn and violin.

III: As if from far away; misterio

The horn is given an extended opening soliloquy: hauntingly beautiful, evocative and technically challenging. It is a welcome relief from the struggle and strife of the previous movements. The piano, then the violin, enter quietly. The movement progresses towards 'a short moment of respite toward its end – a brief breakthrough of tonal sunshine in C major.' The horn and violin are showcased as individual instruments rather than as a duo. A sense of foreboding re-emerges at the end of the movement, presaging the return of the march from the previous movement.

IV: Quick March. Very controlled and resolute

The violin begins with a 'march of resistance' characterised by ever-widening intervals. The jaunty, chin-thrust-forward quality of the march is controlled mainly by the rhythmic pulse in the piano, propelling the music forward. The movement is reminiscent of a *rondo*, characterised by a repeated theme with episodes in between. There is a sense throughout of the music cresting to higher ground, then descending back into a valley, only to rise back up again. Just as this pattern seems destined to repeat itself, the music returns to the more serene moments from previous movements. However, these moments are pushed aside in the final ascent before two thunderous chords close both the movement and the *Trio*.

Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin (2011)

William Bolcom writes of his *Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin*: 'The solo suite I wrote for Gil Shaham is very different in mood from the *First Suite*, [which is] lyrical and playful by turns. Distantly referencing the Baroque dance suite form, *Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin* comprises nine movements. The first, *Morning Music*, is a short rhapsodic prelude leading to the lively *Dancing in Place* featuring 'fingerboard notes' (drumming the left-hand fingers on the strings and fingerboard). *Northern Nigun* is a gentle lament, and *Lenny in Spats* describes a fanciful image of Leonard Bernstein dressed as Fred Astaire or Jack Buchanan in tuxedo, white spats covering his patent-leather uppers and dancing with a cane. *Tempo di gavotte* is, despite its title, not in the Baroque gavotte form; *Barcarolle*, in 12/8 and 6/8 time, portrays a leisurely afternoon on the water. A two-voiced *Fuga malinconica* adds a tragic mood to the suite, while the *Tarantella* that follows recalls in frenzied fashion the legendary centuries-old belief that wild dancing can neutralise a tarantula's poisonous bite. The concluding *Evening Music* recalls the suite's opening phrase and ends with 'duettini' in double stops, pairing different sets of strings for a peaceful close.'

Steven Gross and Philip Ficsor

Steven Gross



Photo: Brad Elliott

Steven Gross is a former member of the Atlanta Symphony, National Symphony, Santa Fe Opera Orchestra, and was for 24 years principal horn of the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra. As a concert soloist he has appeared on numerous stages at home and internationally and has given masterclasses throughout the USA, Europe, China and South Africa. He is currently professor of horn and head of the wind, brass and percussion area at the beachside campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Gross is the recipient of the Stich-Punto Commemorative Plaque awarded by the Czech Horn Society for outstanding devotion to Czech horn music. He is only the second American to receive this award. He has released six solo recordings, five with orchestra and one with piano and organ, with *Gramophone* praising his playing for its "subtle flair and vibrant character" as well as its "suave and poetic conversation." He is currently executive director of the International Horn Competition of America. His summers include performing as principal horn of the Oregon Coast Music Festival Orchestra.

stevengrosshorn.com



William Bolcom

Photo: Katryn Conlin



The Martinů Hall
at Liechtenstein Palace, Prague

Philip Ficsor



Photo: Mark Skovorodko

Violinist Philip Ficsor is a passionate advocate for the music of contemporary American composers. As a member of the ensemble American Double, he recorded the complete works for violin and piano by William Bolcom for Albany Records. *The Strad* described his performance of Bolcom's *Suite No. 1 for Solo Violin* as "beautifully managed and well-prepared." He has also collaborated with renowned composer Emma Lou Diemer, releasing two recordings of her works with Diemer on the keyboard and premiering her *Violin Concerto* in 2012. Alongside his international performing career, Ficsor is a strong believer in the value of educational outreach and has presented to 1,500 school-age children from the stage of Boston Symphony Hall, in a co-presentation with William Bolcom on the eve of the premiere of Bolcom's *Eighth Symphony* by James Levine and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He is an editorial advisor for publication through E.B. Marks/Hal Leonard Corporation for Bolcom's works for violin and piano.

www.philipficsorviolinist.com

Constantine Finehouse



Photo: Saulius Kerikas

Praised by *Allgemeine Zeitung* for his "interpretations of depth and maturity," pianist Constantine Finehouse has performed extensively in the USA and internationally. *Backwards Glance*, his first solo album, intersperses music by Brahms and American composer Richard Beaudoin (b. 1975). *The Bolcom Project* on Albany Records, featuring the complete works for violin and piano by William Bolcom, performed by Finehouse and his American Double partner, violinist Philip Ficsor, was praised by *Fanfare* as "indispensable to any serious collector with an interest in later 20th-century duo repertoire for violin and piano." He has also recorded Bolcom's solo piano works for Naxos (8.559832-34). As a chamber musician, Finehouse has partnered with cellist Sebastian Baverstam and violinist Daniel Kurganov, both in concert and in the recording studio. Finehouse holds degrees from Juilliard and Yale and teaches at New England Conservatory in Boston.

www.facebook.com/ConstantineFinehousePianist

Photo: Brad Elliott



Recipient of the National Medal of Arts, Pulitzer Prize, and a GRAMMY Award, William Bolcom is one of America's most senior and internationally acclaimed composers. Commissioned to expand upon the under-represented horn trio repertoire, Bolcom has written a modern counterpart to Brahms' *Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano, Op. 40*, in which he incorporates multiple styles into a substantial composition. The *Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin* is by turns frenzied, melancholic and light-hearted. Bolcom states, "Both works are performed beautifully and well recorded. Bravi tutti!"

William **BOLCOM** (b. 1938)

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (2017)		Suite No. 2 for Solo Violin (2011)	
	15:29		24:53
1 I. Plodding, implacably controlled	4:35	5 I. Morning Music	3:40
2 II. Headlong, brutal	2:27	6 II. Dancing in Place	1:36
3 III. As if from far away; misterioso	4:21	7 III. Northern Nigun	3:46
4 IV. Quick March. Very controlled and resolute	3:59	8 IV. Lenny in Spats	0:46
		9 V. Tempo di gavotte	2:29
		10 VI. Barcarolle	4:36
		11 VII. Fuga malinconica	2:01
		12 VIII. Tarantella	2:05
		13 IX. Finale: Evening Music	3:31

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Steven Gross, Horn 1–4

Philip Ficsor, Violin • Constantine Finehouse, Piano 1–4

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