



a light exists

KAPRÁLOVÁ | BERG
KLEIN | BARBER | CARTER

evan mitchell

Vítězslava KAPRÁLOVÁ (1915–1940)

Dubnová preludia ('April Preludes'), Op. 13 (1937) [9:44]

- [1] I. Allegro ma non troppo [1:47]
- [2] II. Andante [3:43]
- [3] III. Andante semplice [2:25]
- [4] IV. Vivo [1:50]

Alban BERG (1885–1935)

- [5] Piano Sonata in B minor, Op. 1 (1907–08) [13:01]

Gideon KLEIN (1919–1945)

Piano Sonata (1943) [11:09]

- [6] I. Allegro con fuoco [5:04]
- [7] II. Adagio [3:28]
- [8] III. Allegro vivace [2:37]

Samuel BARBER (1910–1981)

- [9] Interlude I (Adagio for Jeanne), Op. post. (1932) [6:22]

Elliott CARTER (1908–2012)

Piano Sonata (1945–46) [24:12]

- [10] I. Maestoso [10:44]
- [11] II. Andante [13:28]

Total Timing: [64:36]

Evan Mitchell, piano

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Produced by **Evan Mitchell** and **Michael Tubbs**

Recorded and edited by **Michael Tubbs**

Mastered by **Winston Goertz-Giffen**

24bit, 96kHz high resolution recording, editing and mastering

A surround sound, spatial audio mix with Dolby Atmos of this recording, by **Wes Jones**,
is also available on streaming services

Piano technician: **Christopher Paschall**

Publishers:

Kaprálová *April Preludes, Op. 13* Hudební Matice © 1938

Klein *Piano Sonata* Schott Music © 1976

Barber *Interlude I* Schirmer © 1993

Carter *Piano Sonata* Theodore Presser © 1982 (revised edition)

Photo of Evan Mitchell by **Jen Bertrand**

Autograph manuscript of Klein's *Piano Sonata* courtesy of the Terezin Memorial

Artwork by **David Murphy** (FHR)

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A Light Exists

*A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period –
When March is scarcely here*

*A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake
But Human Nature feels.*

*It waits upon the Lawn,
It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know
It almost speaks to me.*

*Then as Horizons step
Or Noons report away
Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay –*

*A quality of loss
Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament.*

A Light Exists in Spring by Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

It's impossible to read this poem and not feel a certain emptiness upon reaching its conclusion. This 'light' – fleeting, oblique, instinctual – doesn't convey a clear meaning to the narrator (it only 'almost speaks to me'). And yet without quite fathoming what we have lost, its absence still stings.

So what is the 'light' in question? Youth, perhaps – 'It passes and we stay' – or possibility. Dickinson's elusive spring light inspires this album, all five of whose composers wrote the works included here when they were young. While three went on to lengthy and eminent careers, two died tragically young, their light a mere glimmer on the horizon.

One of these glimmers, albeit a bright one, was Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940). The daughter of musicians, Kaprálová was herself an established composer as well as an aspiring conductor: after graduation from the Brno Conservatory, she continued her studies with composer Bohuslav Martinů and conductor Charles Munch. Her music was championed by such eminent artists as the great pianist Rudolf Firkušný (for whom the *April Preludes* were written), and she appeared as conductor with ensembles including the Czech Philharmonic and BBC Orchestra. All of this was cut startlingly short when Kaprálová succumbed to an illness (possibly typhoid fever) at age 25.

Each of the *April Preludes* is distinctly characterised, progressing from turbulent and wild to brooding and intense, from disarmingly simple to downright boisterous. The first and fourth preludes are idiomatically written for the piano and burst with life, while the middle two are poignant and evocatively colourful. Kaprálová's unique harmonic vocabulary and narrative powers are on full display throughout the set.

Alban Berg (1885–1935) demonstrated even from his earliest works a gift for deploying the tools of the avant-garde in service of deeply powerful, relatively accessible music. Berg, his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, and their compatriot Anton Webern became collectively known as the Second Viennese School (the 'First' referred to Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven). These three composers explored atonality in part as a reaction to the grand (even excessive) late-Romanticism of Bruckner, Mahler, Strauss, and Wagner – and as an alternative to the new Impressionist approach taking hold in France. Even as dodecaphony (or, twelve-tone composition) practically became a dirty word later in the 20th century, several of Berg's masterpieces – namely, the *Violin Concerto* and his operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* – remained ensconced in the repertoire.

When Berg brought his teacher the single movement that would become his first published opus, the young composer said he felt unsure how to proceed with the other intended movements. Wisely, Schoenberg assured his pupil there was no need to add anything: this movement was sufficiently powerful to stand on its own. The *Sonata* is a masterpiece of

Expressionism, evident in its dense chromaticism, brilliant use of thematic transformation, and emotional extremes. Berg saturates the piece with sinewy counterpoint and dissonances that stretch tonality to its outer limits, all the while relying on strikingly few motives. The result is music of almost unbearable tension, its obsessiveness and passion eventually cooling into a shockingly straightforward B minor conclusion.

Unlike the many notable Jewish composers who fled the Continent with the rise of Nazism – Schoenberg, for one, emigrated to the United States – the prospect of exile came too late for Gideon Klein (1919–1945). His studies at the Prague Conservatory and Charles University lasted only until the Nazis closed these institutions in autumn 1939; by the time Klein was offered a spot at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Jews were no longer permitted to leave the country. Klein was deported in late 1941 to Terezín and in 1944 to Auschwitz and its subcamp Fürstengrube, where he perished shortly after his 25th birthday. Many of Klein's compositions (including his *Piano Sonata*) were written at Terezín, where he was active at the piano performing solo works, chamber music, and assisting in rehearsals of larger ensemble presentations. While it undoubtedly helped many in the camp to maintain some small amount of humanity, this creative activity was also exploited by the Nazis to deceive outside observers as to the true nature of their crimes.

The first movement displays a penchant for muscular counterpoint and structural rigour. By turns defiant and

Op. 25/184 Allegro con fuoco ♩ = 112-120 I. Sonata Ser. 52

Handwritten musical score for a piano sonata, first movement, in G major (one sharp). The tempo is marked "Allegro con fuoco" with a metronome indication of 112-120. The score is written on three systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef).

System 1: The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. It features a 4/4 time signature. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The system concludes with a measure marked "sempre f".

System 2: The second system starts with a circled measure number "5". The time signature changes to 5/4. The music continues with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The system ends with a measure marked "6/4".

System 3: The third system begins with a circled measure number "10". The time signature changes to 4/3. The right hand has a more active, melodic role, while the left hand features a marcato (*marc.*) section. The system concludes with a measure marked "sempre f".

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The handwriting is fluid and characteristic of a composer's draft.

plaintive, two main themes interrupt one another before Klein deftly layers them. At the end of its tight sonata-allegro form, Klein ends this fierce movement with a wink: a cadential gesture that seems final... but is stated in the wrong key. After a pregnant pause, Klein restates it even louder at the 'correct' pitch level.

Set in an ABA form (although essentially monothematic), the second movement is in its own way the darkest of the three. Here, there is none of the first movement's wry commentary to lessen the intensity, only grief.

A rollicking array of trills, brilliant unison motives, and thundering bass octaves drive the third movement. It alternately dances, laughs, and sneers, its lilting compound meter perhaps a nod to the lighthearted gigue that typically concludes a Baroque suite.

Not quite a modernist and never an adherent of avant-garde ideals, Samuel Barber (1910–1981) cut a very different artistic figure than others of his generation. While some of his works have their share of dissonance (the *Piano Concerto* and *Piano Sonata*, for instance), Barber found a compositional voice that was at once innovative and yet solidly post-Romantic. The *Violin Concerto* and *Adagio for Strings* owe their lush expressivity to his career-long affinity for the human voice; Barber wrote dozens of art songs for voice and piano, orchestral songs such as *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, and operas (two of which used libretti by his partner Gian Carlo Menotti).

Barber's *Interlude I*, with its ABA form, naked emotionality, and sometimes awkward figurations, is arguably the work on this album most clearly written by a young composer. Dating from his time as a student at Curtis, the piece is dedicated to Barber's classmate Jeanne Behrend, herself a student of pianist Josef Hofmann and composer Rosario Scalero. The lyrical A section is characterised by a melody in large rising intervals and wide registration within the left hand accompanimental pattern. The heroic B section features a melody stated in chords, with frequent turns from minor to major and a grand climax that quickly shifts back toward an atmosphere of minor-key deflation.

The music of Elliott Carter (1908–2012) could hardly be more stylistically different from that of his near-contemporary Barber. A name synonymous with high modernism, Carter cultivated a sharp technical acumen during his studies with luminaries such as Walter Piston, Gustav Holst, and Nadia Boulanger. While Carter's mature works are known for their extreme rhythmic complexity – and arguably, lack of audience accessibility – the *Piano Sonata* dates from a much earlier period. (For perspective, Carter was still writing music nearly 70 years after the *Sonata*, composing more than 20 new works after his 100th birthday.) The *Sonata* hints at the influence of mid-century composers such as Aaron Copland and Paul Hindemith, but a strongly independent creative voice is already present. While often quite dissonant and built more on quartal than triadic sonorities, the *Sonata* is tonal. The large-scale oscillation between B and B flat – a possible allusion to

Beethoven's iconic *Hammerklavier Sonata, Op. 106* – suggests a young composer subtly inviting comparison with a pinnacle of the repertoire.

The first movement is in a fairly standard sonata form plus coda. The introduction consists of bold octaves alternating with quick flourishes, giving the impression of a fanfare or perhaps even the Baroque French Overture. Most of the main theme area is marked *scorrevole* ('flowing', or 'fluent'), and features running 16th notes with no fixed meter. The inventiveness of this material made a strong impression on the composer and critic Virgil Thomson. Notoriously stingy with praise, Thomson wrote of these passages that he had 'never felt the feeling of them before. They are most impressive.' The cantabile secondary theme is long-winded, full of constant eighth-note motion. After an astonishing development section and recapitulation in which Carter cleverly avoids much exact

repetition, the movement concludes in a blistering coda, the furious 16th notes of the two hands phasing in and out of unison.

A simple, almost pious opening belies the excitement to come later in the second movement. Its massive ABA form opens with a chorale that eventually splinters into an impassioned melody set over leaping arpeggiated figures, and culminates in a triumphant restatement of the chorale. The B section is a virtuosic and tumultuous fugue; it builds to a climactic statement in octaves, then bursts into thin air and disappears, firework-like. After a reprise of the chorale comes an ambling coda that patiently unfurls, as if the music itself sighs slowly in relief after its 25 minutes of upheaval. In eschewing a big ending Carter seems to take after Liszt, whose *B Minor Sonata* ends in a hushed moment of transcendence. In view of the greatness of this early masterpiece, Carter is worthy of the comparison.

Evan Mitchell, 2026

Pianist **Evan Mitchell**'s performance highlights include solo engagements in the prestigious Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts series (Chicago), at Merkin Concert Hall and Steinway Hall (NYC), and at several major venues in Shanghai; concerti with the symphony orchestras of Dallas and Fort Worth; and recitals with such major figures as double bassist Gary Karr, flautists Leone Buyse and Jim Walker, and clarinetist Corrado Giuffredi. Mitchell's début solo album *American Century* was released by Centaur Records in 2025, and he can be heard on releases from Red Mark, Sunnyside Records, and more. *A Light Exists* is his first project with FHR. A Steinway Artist, Mitchell has been a repeat performer in concert series including Cliburn at the Modern and Mount Vernon Music (on whose Board he serves as a Trustee). He has given world premières of significant works by composers including Nansi Carroll, Stacy Garrop,

Frank Proto, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. Mitchell currently serves as Assistant Professor of Piano at the University of Florida School of Music. In-demand as a pedagogue and clinician, he has given masterclasses at Baylor University, the University of Memphis, the University of Oregon, the University of Toronto, Virginia Tech, and other institutions. Mitchell has been a featured speaker at national conferences of the Music Teachers National Association and the College Music Society, and has published six volumes of piano repertoire as author-editor with Tom Gerou Music. Evan Mitchell received the DMA degree from Texas Christian University, and MM and BM degrees from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, studying under John Owings, Arnaldo Cohen, and the late José Feghali.

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