



AMERICAN CLASSICS



# JOHN HARBISON

## Piano Works

Nocturne

Gatsby Etudes

Four More Occasional Pieces

Leonard Stein Anagrams

Piano Sonata No. 1

“In Memoriam  
Roger Sessions”

Se-Hee Jin, Piano

John  
**HARBISON**

(b. 1938)

**Piano Works**

<b>1</b>	<b>Nocturne (2018)</b>	<b>5:49</b>
	<b>Gatsby Etudes (1999)</b>	<b>8:44</b>
<b>2</b>	No. 1. Parlors	2:02
<b>3</b>	No. 2. Parties	2:42
<b>4</b>	No. 3. The Green Light	4:00
	<b>Four More Occasional Pieces (1987–91)</b>	<b>9:23</b>
<b>5</b>	No. 1. Minuet (for Joan Tower)	2:20
<b>6</b>	No. 2. Gavotte (for Harriet Thiele)	1:42
<b>7</b>	No. 3. Anniversary Waltz (to Rose Mary Harbison)	2:12
<b>8</b>	No. 4. Tango, “Seen from ground level” (for Milo Feinberg, also for Alan and Janet)	2:58
	<b>Leonard Stein Anagrams (2009)</b>	<b>15:28</b>
<b>9</b>	I. I’d learn tones	0:30
<b>10</b>	II. Note slid near	2:11
<b>11</b>	III. End tonal rise	1:26
<b>12</b>	IV. Liar, send tone!	1:18
<b>13</b>	V. Listen, a drone (A silent drone)	1:02
<b>14</b>	VI. Learns to dine	0:49
<b>15</b>	VII. LA trend: noise	0:49
<b>16</b>	VIII. Rinse tone, lad!	1:56
<b>17</b>	IX. Linen ear-dots	0:44
<b>18</b>	X. Tender as lion	1:48
<b>19</b>	XI. Rest: no denial	0:45
<b>20</b>	XII. Earns toil-end	0:44
<b>21</b>	XIIA. Done: entrails	1:04
<b>22</b>	<b>Piano Sonata No. 1</b> <b>“In Memoriam Roger Sessions” (1985)</b>	<b>19:35</b>

## John Harbison (b. 1938)

One of the dominant compositional voices of his generation, John Harbison's concert music catalog of more than three hundred works is anchored by three operas, six symphonies, twelve concerti, a ballet, an organ symphony, six string quartets, numerous song cycles and chamber works, and a large body of sacred music that includes cantatas, motets, and the orchestral-choral works *Four Psalms*, *Requiem*, and *Abraham*. He also has a substantial body of jazz compositions and arrangements, and is author of the book *What Do We Make of Bach?* (ARS Nova, LLC, 2018).

Harbison has received commissions from most of America's premiere musical institutions, including The Metropolitan Opera, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

His music is distinguished by its exceptional resourcefulness and expressive range, from the grandest to the most intimate. His style is "original, varied, and absorbing – relatively easy for audiences to grasp, and yet formal and complex enough to hold our interests through repeated hearings ... boasting both lucidity and logic." (*Fanfare*)

Harbison's numerous awards and honors include a MacArthur Fellowship and a Pulitzer Prize. He has been composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh and Los Angeles orchestras, the American Academy in Rome, and numerous festivals including Tanglewood, Aspen, Marlboro, Santa Fe, and SongFest. He is Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), principal guest conductor at Emmanuel Music, and past music director of Cantata Singers. He has served as president of the Aaron Copland Fund For Music and a trustee of the American Academy in Rome. He is currently a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a trustee of the Bogliasco Foundation, and chair emeritus of the composition program at Tanglewood. He and violinist Rose Mary Harbison, the inspiration behind many of his works for violin, have been artistic co-directors of the annual Token Creek Chamber Music Festival since its founding in 1989.

Harbison's recent works include the song cycles *In the Early Evening*, *After Long Silence*, *Four Poems for Robin*, and *Winter Journey*; new chamber works *Nuns Fret Not* (for trumpet sextet), *Incontro* (violin/piano), and a suite for solo violin; choral music *Sleepers*, *Wake* and *Hidden Paths*; and several new keyboard works including *Piano Sonata No. 3*, *Prelude for Organ*, and *Passage*. He is currently working on new chamber pieces and a tuba concerto. A second volume of his pop and jazz songs, and a collection of his a capella arrangements of jazz standards and originals, will both be published in 2023, as will his cadenzas for various Mozart and Beethoven concertos. Harbison's opera *The Great Gatsby* is due for major revival in 2025, an important anniversary year for both Fitzgerald's book and the opera's premiere.

## Piano Works

Se-Hee Jin has been boldly exploring my piano music ever since our first meeting at Tanglewood, decades ago. She is the fearless and insightful interpreter that all composers hope to meet. Her performances and recordings have reminded me why I have returned so often to music for piano solo, the most complete field of command for a single performer. I'm grateful to her for assembling this album, representing works from each decade, 1985 to 2018.

## Nocturne (2018)

In writing a short piano piece to mark Linda Reichert's leadership of Philadelphia's prime new music series, I had two words running through my head: open-mindedness and persistence. It was a true inclusive network. Linda's combination of drive and patience kept it evolving over many years.

Below a serene surface my *Nocturne* strives to find some of these qualities, hard-to-find notes that turn out to belong together, taking their time and looking for a releasing last chord.

## Gatsby Etudes (1999)

My opera *The Great Gatsby* was commissioned by The Metropolitan Opera to honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of James Levine's debut. To assist in its preparation, The Met asked me to suggest a pianist to make a tape, with my participation, of the entire vocal score. My choice was Judith Gordon. Her splendid account of the piece, in addition to its practical value, was a pianistic tour de force.

As a measure of my gratitude, I made her a piece, the details of which she had already practiced. The three *Gatsby Etudes* do not follow the operatic chronology, but instead pursue some of its motivic trains of thought. They are pianistically challenging and fun to play. They connect without pause. They are dedicated, in gratitude and friendship, to Judy Gordon, who gave the first performance in June 2000 at Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

### **Four More Occasional Pieces (1987–91)**

In this second collection, the pieces and their occasions are as follows:

*No. 1. Minuet (for Joan Tower)*: first performed at Joan's fiftieth birthday Da Capo Chamber Players celebration in 1988, in an arrangement for five players that I made for the concert.

*No. 2. Gavotte (for Harriet Thiele)*: Harriet Thiele, manager of the first Token Creek International Chamber Festival, accepted this piece in lieu of payment, and performed it herself in Madison in 1990.

*No. 3. Anniversary Waltz (to Rose Mary Harbison)*: an anniversary waltz (1987) for our twenty-fourth anniversary (an uneven but symmetrical number).

*No. 4. Tango, "Seen from ground level" (for Milo Feinberg, also for Alan and Janet)*: a tango "seen from ground level" to welcome Milo into the world.

Like the first set of occasional pieces it is an odd, accidental collection, deceptively difficult to play, and pursuing trains of thought rather distinct from the larger pieces I was writing at the same time.

### **Leonard Stein Anagrams (2009)**

It was a privilege, melancholic and joyful, to make these *Leonard Stein Anagrams* for Piano Spheres, a chance to reflect on a rich twenty-year friendship.

Leonard Stein, who died in 2004, was a direct link to Schoenberg, and to all of the performers and composers of the Second Viennese School. He was also constantly alert to everything that was happening in concert music, bringing his wit, critical intelligence, passion, and high standards to bear, in his disarmingly informal style. Just his voice on the phone could make the day – when he called to celebrate his mutual birthday with Rose Mary Harbison, or just to report west-coast news, with his unique blend of enthusiasm and scepticism.

During one of his appearances at the Token Creek Festival, Leonard was delighted to discover our tradition of making anagrams from the names of the summer's composers and performers. Leonard Stein (and Arnold Schoenberg) yielded nice results. When I began this piece I found, in Leonard's hand, six of them, based on his name, which he had discovered the old (pre-computer) way, repositioning the letters, crossing out each one he'd used. Naturally I've used all six of his "finds" in the piece. At least four interesting ones didn't go in, held perhaps for another piece.

These short movements, which are inter-related, use no letter to pitch correspondences. They react to the movement titles, assembling fleeting images of Leonard, present and absent.

### **Piano Sonata No. 1 "In memoriam Roger Sessions" (1985)**

*Piano Sonata No. 1* was written for Robert Shannon, Ursula Oppens, and Alan Feinberg on a consortium commission from the National Endowment for the Arts. It was composed at Token Creek, Wisconsin in the summer of 1985. The three performers for whom it was written each brought their own sense of proportion, contrast, and sonority to the piece, which was very much my intention. The *Sonata* invites the performer's play of personality and fantasy.

The work is in four main sections (the two inner sections being faster than the outer ones), but the articulations between them are not emphatic and the piece is conjured up rather than premeditated. Its sixteen-minute span contains very little literal repetition; virtuosic passages erupt quite unexpectedly, and the music retains the shape of its natural occurrence: unformalized. Much variety of touch and tone is required, most obviously in two passages near the end: a whirling elaboration of a big chord that drives the piece momentarily out of its orbit, and later, a strange staccato hallucination that seems to drop in from outside, both delaying and necessitating the ending.

**John Harbison**

## Se-Hee Jin

Pianist Se-Hee Jin has appeared at the Weill Recital Hall (Carnegie Hall), Kaufman Music Center, and Seiji Ozawa Hall. She has participated in the Tanglewood Music Festival as a recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Fellowship and the Banff Summer Arts Festival, Canada. Jin has performed a broad range of repertoire from Baroque to contemporary works, continuing her solo projects on *The Art of Fugue* by J.S. Bach as well as music written by Russian Romantic composers. She has also given collaborative performances with distinguished musicians in the United States and abroad. As a founder and artistic director, Jin has presented two new music concert series – the American Living Composer Series and N (AND) Series, featuring the music of Pulitzer Prize winners and leading composers, including John Harbison, Charles Wuorinen and Louis Karchin. Jin studied at the Eastman School of Music (M.M., D.M.A.) and Ewha Womans University, Seoul (B.M.). She has performed and taught throughout the United States, Canada, Italy, China, and Korea, and currently serves as assistant professor of piano at Texas Tech University.

[www.youtube.com/@SeHeeJin](http://www.youtube.com/@SeHeeJin)



# John HARBISON

(b. 1938)

## Piano Works

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|-------------|--|--------------|
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| <b>2-4</b>  | Gatsby Etudes (1999)   | <b>8:44</b>  |
| <b>5-8</b>  | Four More Occasional Pieces<br>(1987-91)*                    | <b>9:23</b>  |
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**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

## Se-Hee Jin, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 6-7 September 2020 at the Recital Hall, McKnight Center for Performing Arts, Stillwater, Oklahoma **1-4 9-21** and 11-12 May 2022 at the Hemmle Recital Hall, Texas Tech University School of Music, Lubbock, Texas **5-8 22**, USA

Producer: Se-Hee Jin

Engineers: Mark Perry **1-4 9-21**, Hideki Isoda **5-8 22**

Mixing and mastering: Ryan Streber **1-8 22**, Trammell Starks **9-21**

Re-mastering: Ryan Streber **9-21**

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## AMERICAN CLASSICS

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, John Harbison, is recognized as one of the dominant figures of his generation, with commissions from most of America's leading musical institutions as part of a catalog of more than 300 works. Pianist Se-Hee Jin has been exploring Harbison's *oeuvre* with fearless and insightful interpretations ever since their first meeting at Tanglewood many years ago. From the rhapsodic and virtuoso *First Piano Sonata* to the fleeting images of the *Leonard Stein Anagrams* and the playful *Gatsby Etudes*, this program represents works from the 1980s to the present, including several world premiere recordings.

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

Playing  
Time:  
**59:20**