

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

GRAND
PIANO

N. BORENSTEIN
KANGDING QINGGE ÉTUDE

TRA NGUYEN

NIMROD BORENSTEIN (b. 1969)

KANGDING QINGGE ÉTUDE, OP. 66, NO. 5 (2019)

TRA NGUYEN, *piano*

Catalogue Number: GP935DR

Recording Date: 4 February 2023

Recording Venue: Wyastone Concert Hall, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, UK

Producer and Recording Engineer: Michael Ponder

Editor: Adaq Khan

Piano: Steinway, Model D

Piano Technician: Philip Kennedy

Booklet Notes: Nimrod Borenstein

Publisher: Donemus

Composer Photograph: Sonia Fitoussi

Artist Photograph: Jack Hui

Cover Art: Alec Borenstein: *Femmes XXXVI* (2000)

The artist wishes to thank Wesley Gryk for his generous contribution to this project.

NIMROD BORENSTEIN (b. 1969)

The past few years have seen a great number of Nimrod Borenstein's works being commissioned, recorded and premiered at the most prestigious venues and festivals across the globe, from the Royal Festival Hall and Royal Opera House in London to the Salle Gaveau in Paris, Carnegie Hall in New York, and Hong Kong City Hall. His music is performed regularly throughout Europe, Canada, Australia, the Far East, Israel, South America, Russia and the USA. In recent years, he has been commissioned to write the obligatory performance pieces for the Hong Kong International Piano Competition (2019) and the International Jeunesses Musicales Competition for violoncello (2020). Among his high-profile champions, Vladimir Ashkenazy has conducted several of Borenstein's compositions, culminating in the recording of an album of his orchestral works for Chandos (named a *BBC Music Magazine* 'Choice'). Other leading artists to have performed Borenstein's music include: Roberto Prosseda, Pascal Rogé, Dmitry Sitkovetsky, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic, the Oxford Philharmonic and Israel Camerata. His recent string quartet, *Cieli d'Italia*, was commissioned by the Quartetto di Cremona, who feature it on their latest album. Nimrod Borenstein is a Laureate of the Cziffra Foundation and an Associate of London's Royal Academy of Music. His substantial catalogue continues to develop and currently numbers more than 90 works, including orchestral and chamber music as well as vocal and solo instrumental pieces. He also composed the score for a ballet, *Suspended*, which has received more than 250 performances around the world. Increasingly in demand on the podium, Borenstein has various conducting projects underway, which currently encompass orchestras in the UK, Germany and Israel.

www.nimrod-borenstein.com
facebook.com/NimrodBorensteincomposer

KANGDING QINGGE ÉTUDE, OP. 66, NO. 5 (2019)

I have always found writing for the piano inspiring. One of the reasons for my great interest in writing for the instrument is that, in my music, I love to layer many melodies simultaneously, and the piano is one of very few instruments with the ability to do that on its own. I also love the scope of colours the instrument can provide, and its uniqueness in its great span of over seven octaves (compared to a maximum of three octaves for the woodwind or four octaves for the strings), from the depths of the very low sounds to the extremely high, ethereal sounds.

Novelty has always been very important to me. From the time I started composing when I was six years old to now, I have always tried to write something different from all the music already in existence, whilst at the same time being inspired by great masters of the past, be it Bach, Mozart, Beethoven or, closer to our time, Debussy, Prokofiev or Stravinsky. In the case of my *Études* for piano solo, it is my great admiration for the *Études, Op. 10* and *Op. 25* by Chopin that inspired me to write my own.

It all began with a single étude written in 2014, the *Ostinato Étude*. I immediately thought that I should write a few more to make a small set. The idea seemed popular, and many pianists asked me to write one for them, as did the Hong Kong International Piano Competition, which commissioned my sixth étude (the *Méphisto Étude*) as the obligatory composition for its semi-final. I really enjoyed the challenge and eventually came up with the ambitious project of emulating Chopin by writing a cycle of 24 études. In my case, these 24 études will be four sets of six.

Such a large-scale project brought many challenges. First, I needed to make sure that every étude would be inspired and magical. Another problem was making sure that each étude would sound completely different from the others, evoking a unique world and atmosphere. Finally, I wanted to expand the piano technique and find new, virtuosic ways to write for the king of instruments. Because of all these ambitions, I decided that it would be helpful to compose them over a long period of time. Like this, in between writing the études I could write other pieces for completely different instruments (full orchestra, concertos, string quartets, etc.) and so

could be happy to return to the piano, refreshed every time. I had imagined that it could be a ten-to-fifteen-year project and, to date, I have written fifteen in eight years, so well within the plan!

Being études, all the pieces are obviously challenging to play, however they have different sources of inspiration. Some études concentrate on a specific virtuosic aspect such as staccato and legato, hand crossing and arpeggios, while others originated from the desire to explore a musical aspect – ostinato, toccata form and melodic counterpoint, to name a few. In some études, my starting point was a culture, country or myth. In this category you can find the *Kangding Qingge Étude* which was inspired by a very well-known Chinese folk tune and so is a study of how to incorporate it into my own music.

What all these études have in common is my personal use of polyrhythm (different rhythms simultaneously). Polyrhythms can be found in my music in general – as I like how they help me make melodies float and glide above each other or direct them toward a point as if attracted by it – but they are particularly difficult to achieve on the piano (as it is only one person and one brain having to process all these elements at the same time!) and make these études an interesting challenge for the performer.

Nimrod Borenstein

TRA NGUYEN



© Jack Hui

British-Vietnamese pianist Tra Nguyen made her debut appearance with the Hanoi Conservatory Orchestra performing Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major, K. 488*. She has since appeared at venues worldwide, including Queen Elizabeth Hall, Cadogan Hall, Wigmore Hall, Tokyo Opera City, Hong Kong City Hall Recital Hall and Ho Chi Minh City Opera House. Her imaginative and acclaimed programming balances core repertoire with lesser-known works, with her recent concert repertoire exploring Schubert's complete piano sonatas, Liszt's *Grandes études, S.137* and a large number of piano concertos. Her discography, which has received airplay on major classical music radio networks around the world, also includes many world première recordings of neglected pieces. Her series of recordings of Raff's piano music, released on Grand Piano, has garnered wide critical acclaim, and was named 'Album of the Week' by *The Independent*. She is currently working with British-French-Israeli composer Nimrod Borenstein on solo recordings and performances of his works. Nguyen has also given live

broadcasts on BBC Radio 3, Hong Kong Radio 4 and Vietnam Television. As a chamber musician, she has collaborated with baritone Benjamin Appl and clarinettist Sabine Grofmeier. Nguyen studied with Lev Naumov at the Moscow Conservatory and Christopher Elton at the Royal Academy of Music, where she received the highest award for her final recital. She was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2013.

www.tranguyen.org
facebook.com/tranguyenpianist



NIMROD BORENSTEIN
© *Sonia Fitoussi*