




DREAMING AWAKE
PHILIP GLASS
BRUCE LEVINGSTON

with **ETHAN HAWKE**

A photograph of pianist Bruce Levingston performing on a Steinway piano. He is seated, wearing a dark suit, and looking upwards with his hands on the keys. The piano is a dark, polished model with the Steinway logo visible on the fallboard. The background is dark and out of focus.

Pianist Bruce Levingston has had a long and celebrated association with Philip Glass and his music. In 2004, the composer wrote his musical tribute to the artist Chuck Close especially for Levingston who premiered the work at New York City's Lincoln Center. The following year, Glass joined Levingston in the same venue for a series of piano duos in a concert that also featured Levingston's longtime friend and Chelsea Hotel neighbor actor Ethan Hawke. At that concert, Levingston and Hawke performed Glass's *Wichita Vortex Sutra* that includes a narration of the Allen Ginsberg poem that inspired the work. Glass and Ginsberg had performed and recorded it themselves, but the composer enthusiastically blessed this performance by a new generation of artists. Glass, Hawke and Levingston then together performed the finale of *Einstein on the Beach*. Glass later invited Levingston to join him in premiering his complete *Études* at The Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City in 2014.

Now this extraordinary group of artists is reunited in this Sono Luminus release of Bruce Levingston's new album *Dreaming Awake*. Levingston, an acclaimed concert pianist and recording artist whose last album, *Heavy Sleep* (DSL-92183), was named one the "Best Recordings of the Year" by *The New York Times*, pays tribute to Philip Glass with an exploration of his music that spans the length of the composer's career. This release includes the world premiere recording of *The Illusionist Suite*, ten of the composer's dramatic and deeply moving *Études*, as well as the richly colored tone poems *Dreaming Awake*, *Metamorphosis No. 2*, and *Wichita Vortex Sutra* featuring Ethan Hawke as guest artist performing the Allen Ginsberg poem with Bruce Levingston.

This new 2-disc album radiates with what *The New York Times* calls "Mr. Levingston's mastery of nuance and color" and "his extraordinary gifts as a colorist and performer who can hold attention rapt with the softest playing" (MusicWeb International). It is a very intimate and personal tribute from one of the most sensitive, poetic pianists of our time to one of the most influential and important composers of our era.

ÉTUDES

Philip Glass initially composed his piano Études to help develop his own skills as a pianist. Like Chopin and Debussy, he raised the idea of a mere technical study to a highly expressive art form. In **Étude No. 1**, the series' opening work, Glass, as did Debussy in *his* first Étude, composed a piece that, at first glance, seems like a traditional Czerny Étude. However, as the music progresses, it becomes clear that all types of technical issues are addressed: bright declamatory chords, rapid unisons, Alberti-like accompaniments, scales that alternate between the hands, and broken, repeated octave passages; all of these disparate elements somehow coalesce into a delightful pianistic study that also serves as an engaging prelude to the other works that follow.

The wistful, expansive **Étude No. 2**, with its subtle allusions to Bach and Chopin, quietly unfolds with an exquisitely beautiful narrative that utilizes the entire range of the keyboard. The arresting entrances of the extreme bass and treble notes add an almost operatic element to this deeply touching work.

Étude No. 5 is another of the composer's most intimate and personal compositions. The gently rocking solo opening of the left hand conveys an aching, existential loneliness and this fragile emotional landscape is only intensified by the plaintive, sighing entrance of the melodic octaves in the right. Glass develops two distinct tableaux in the first half of the work, then masterfully unites them in the second, to heartbreaking effect.

Étude No. 6 is a dramatic study in textures and variations. It utilizes a set harmonic accompaniment that continually motors beneath dynamic arpeggios, grand leaps, as well as chords, octaves, scales and repeated notes. This scintillating study sparkles with ear teasing turns and kaleidoscopic changes of color until its surprise "catch" ending brings the action to a sudden, playful close.

The ninth and tenth Études which conclude the first series are written in the pulsating, kinetic style for which the composer first became well known. **Étude No. 9** employs a lively broken octave and chordal ostinato which supports a spirited right hand figuration that subtly shifts harmonies and creates dramatic tension within a limited range of material. The dynamic interlude of the central section provides a brief, bracing contrast in texture and tone before the original material returns, takes an unexpected upward leap in registers, and gently oscillates to its quiet close.

Étude No. 10 is a tour de force in perpetual motion. An unwavering, vibrant figuration in the mid-range of the keyboard sets the work into high gear. It is sometimes executed with the right hand, sometimes with the left, and may even be played by both depending on how the player chooses to handle the technical problem of keeping it going non-stop! Above and below this musical engine are rhythmically snapped chordal figures, brilliant finger passages, ornamented descending scales, and a rumbling, jazzy bass. These charged elements all play out full speed ahead until the manic whirlwind exhausts itself with a diminuendo dash down the keyboard into sudden silence.

Following his concentrated focus on specific technical problems in the first ten *Études*, Glass set out to explore a more openly emotional and expressive style of music which paralleled his evolution away from the restrained minimalism of his earlier works. **Étude No. 11**, a decidedly dramatic and virtuosic work, is almost symphonic in character and reflects the bolder sound and style sought by the composer. Though Glass has often stated that Schubert was a great inspiration upon his work and a “favorite” composer, the epic soaring themes, dark unison passages and predominant C minor tonality of this muscular, passionate *Étude* seem to also reflect the influence of Schubert’s own hero, Ludwig van Beethoven.

Étude No. 12 was composed in 2004 as the second movement of *A Musical Portrait of Chuck Close*, Glass’s loving tribute to the acclaimed American painter. This poignant work abstractly depicts the artist after the tragic occurrence of the spinal aneurysm that caused him to lose his ability to walk and, for a time, paint. Its bittersweet longing, yet defiant, tone conveys what Close has described as a sense of “loss and celebration”, when he lost, and then triumphantly regained, his ability to paint and create art. This is one of Glass’s most deeply expressive and masterfully written piano works in which compositional and instrumental technique are perfectly united to create a musical portrait of profound psychological and spiritual depth.

Philip Glass has long been interested in dance, and his works have inspired countless choreographers and dancers. The seductive, insouciant **Étude No.16** is, indeed, a kind of miniature dance. Its sexy Latin-inspired rhythms and sensual tone play the perfect foils to the coquettish on-again off-again dialogue performed in the right hand. The game heats up in the central *appassionato* section before returning to close with a sly, charming coda.

Étude No. 17 is one of the grandest and most intricate works in the entire series. Its majestic breadth, daring modulations, and autumnal splendor combine to create one of Glass’s most inspired solo works. The music opens with an unsettled theme played in dappled alternating chords. Within this opening material lies the musical DNA of the entire *Étude*. Glass gradually develops these initial ideas into an enthralling musical tapestry in which the material is transformed from a restless, dark realm to one of turbulent passion and, ultimately, into a breathtaking transfiguration of supreme calm and peace. Surprising harmonic turns further underscore the intimacy and tenderness heard in the conclusion. Schubert’s influence may certainly be felt here, where, in addition to the glorious lyricism and delicate play of major and minor chords, there is, to paraphrase Schumann, an impression of “heavenly length”. This superb piece is illustrative of the composer’s finest later works: unhurried, deeply expressive, emotionally uninhibited, spiritually whole.



WICHITA VORTEX SUTRA

Allen Ginsberg wrote *Wichita Vortex Sutra* in 1966 during the turbulent period of the Vietnam War. The work is essentially an anti-war poem that Ginsberg created on a tape recorder while riding through the Midwest. The poet felt that war had been declared without justification or proper authority and so felt he had just as much right to declare an end to it himself. With his unique “Beat” verse and compassionate, humane voice, Ginsberg confers peace upon all nations and peoples. When Philip Glass asked Ginsberg to perform with him in 1988, it was this work that the poet brought to him. In response, Glass wrote an exultant, hymn-like score that is a paean to all peace. Like Ginsberg’s poem, it is joyful, jubilant and celebratory, with a forward motion and natural American optimism that is irresistible. This recording by Bruce Levingston and Ethan Hawke was made in a single session in New York City during which the two artists performed the work together. Their performance captures not only the inspiration and interpretative concept shared by Levingston and Hawke for the work, but also the artists’ deep solidarity with Glass and Ginsberg for their vision and appeal for world peace.



DREAMING AWAKE

Dreaming Awake is a deeply enigmatic, metaphysical study in sonority written in 2003 when the composer was further evolving his compositional technique. It was composed to benefit Jewel Heart, a spiritual, cultural, and humanitarian organization devoted to the ancient teachings of Tibetan Buddhism to which Philip Glass has long been deeply dedicated. A contemporary view of the classic struggle between the sacred and profane, this piece takes the listener on a fascinating journey through varying degrees of spiritual and corporeal awareness utilizing trill-like sequences and swirling arpeggios to evoke a vertiginous, semi-conscious state of sound and mind. The music alternates between peaceful, Zen-like planes of emotion and more earthly moments of ecstasy and passion. Fleeting reveries of tender song and light emerge in the midst of this shadowy dream, only to quickly vanish into the sonic mist and mystery.

THE ILLUSIONIST SUITE

This suite, transcribed by Bruce Levingston, is derived from Glass's evocative score from *The Illusionist*, an enchanting period film set in fin de siècle Vienna. The drama and intrigue of the twisty plot, involving magic, deception, revolution, and love, is heightened by some of Glass's most opulent cinematic music. The suite contains the score's original opening, "The Illusionist", and its finale, "Life in the Mountains", along with the music from two of the film's most important and memorable scenes, "The Locket" and "The Orange Tree". The subtle influence of Richard Strauss's heroic post-Romantic creations may be heard alongside Glass's own formidable dramatic sensibility, alluring harmonic shadings and signature hypnotic rhythms.

METAMORPHOSIS NO. 2

Metamorphosis No. 2 was written in 1988 and derives its name from a play based on the well-known Franz Kafka short story. It is one of the purest examples of the composer's early minimalist style. The recurrent haunting theme of the piece was memorably heard in Glass's moving soundtrack for the Errol Morris film *The Thin Blue Line*. Comprised of seemingly simple figurations — a perpetual undulating accompaniment, unadorned octaves, sequences of rippling arpeggios — this music delivers an unexpectedly profound emotional impact. In many respects, this exquisite work eloquently embodies the uniquely inspiring elements and deeply enduring art of Philip Glass.



BRUCE LEVINGSTON

Bruce Levingston, pianist, is one of today's leading figures in contemporary classical music. Many of the world's most important composers have written works for him, and his Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center world premiere performances have won notable critical acclaim. *The New York Times* has praised his "mastery of color and nuance" and *The Wall Street Journal* extolled performances "graced by Mr. Levingston's sensitive playing." *The New Yorker* has called him "a force for new music" and "a poetic pianist with a gift for inventive—and glamorous—programming."

Levingston's recordings have also received high critical praise. His album *Heavy Sleep* (DSL-92183) was named one of the "Best Classical Recordings of 2015" by *The New York Times* which called the disc "exquisite". England's *The Art's Desk* called the album "sublime" and *Gramophone* declared his playing in his album *Nightbreak* (DSL-92144) "masterly". *The American Record Guide* wrote, "Levingston is a pianist's pianist . . . stunning and highly illuminating performances."

Levingston is founder and artistic director of the music foundation, Premiere Commission, Inc., which has commissioned and premiered over fifty new works. Noted for his creative programming, Levingston has worked with some of the most gifted artists of our time, including painter Chuck Close, composer Philip Glass, author George Plimpton, actor Ethan Hawke, filmmaker Jarred Alterman, dancers Alessandra Ferri and Herman Cornejo, Colin and Eric Jacobsen and the Brooklyn Rider, and choreographers Jorma Elo and Russell Maliphant.

Levingston is the author of the 2015 book, *Bright Fields: The Mastery of Marie Hull*, a comprehensive biography and survey of the work of the prominent Mississippi painter. He has collaborated often with prominent cultural institutions on programs related to art and music including American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of Art; Alliance Française/French Institute; The Aspen Institute and Aspen Music Festival; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Levingston resides in Oxford, MS and New York City.

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ETHAN HAWKE

Ethan Hawke is an acclaimed American actor, director, and novelist. He has appeared in such notable films as *Dead Poets Society*, *Before Sunrise*, *Gattaca*, *Training Day*, *Before Sunset*, *Before Midnight*, *Boyhood* and, most recently, as Chet Baker in *Born to be Blue*. He has also appeared in numerous Broadway and off-Broadway productions including *The Seagull*, *Henry IV*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *Hamlet* and *Mikhail Bakunin*. He directed the Award-winning film *Seymour: An Introduction* and *Chelsea Walls*. Hawke won an Obie Award for his portrayal of an ex-marine contending with his dysfunctional family in *Blood from a Stone* (2011). He has been nominated for two Academy Awards for his acting and earned two more nominations for screenplays he has co-written. In addition, Hawke was the author of the novels *The Hottest State* (1996; film 2006), *Ash Wednesday* (2002), and the epistolary parable *Rules for a Knight* (2015).





Bruce Levingston

Dreaming Awake

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Editing Engineer: Dan Merceruio

Piano Technician: John Veitch

Piano: Steinway Model D #590904 (New York)

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