

FROM THE EARLY 20TH...VOL. 2

WEBERN Variations, Op. 27 | **BERG** Sonata, Op. 1

MOMPOU Trois Variations | **SCRIABIN** Sonata No. 9, Op. 68

sonatinas by **RAVEL**, **SIBELIUS**, **PROKOFIEV** & **BILL EVANS** Turn Out The Stars

andrew rangell, piano



STEINWAY & SONS

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ANTON WEBERN

VARIATIONS, OP. 27 (1936)

1. Sehr mässig 1:46
2. Sehr schnell 0:43
3. Ruhig fliessend 3:24

ALBAN BERG

4. SONATA, OP. 1 (1908 - 1909) 12:25

FEDERICO MOMPOU

TROIS VARIATIONS (1921)

5. Theme 0:28
6. Les soldats 0:51
7. Courtoisie 0:55
8. Nocturne 2:20

ALEXANDER Scriabin

9. SONATA NO. 9, OP. 68
"BLACK MASS" (1912 - 1913) 9:13

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SERGEI PROKOFIEV

10. PASTORAL SONATINA,
OP. 59 NO. 3 (1934) 4:44

JEAN SIBELIUS

SONATINA IN F SHARP MINOR,
OP. 67 NO. 1 (1912)

11. Allegro 2:35
12. Largo 2:25
13. Allegro moderato 1:56

MAURICE RAVEL

SONATINE (1905)

14. I. Modéré 5:54
15. II. Mouvement de menuet 3:31
16. III. Animé 4:34

BILL EVANS

17. TURN OUT THE STARS (1966) 7:18

Playing Time: 64:31

During many months, including those of the ongoing pandemic, this recital grew and took shape alongside a larger pursuit: preparing to record book 2 of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. It was a welcome and necessary change of atmosphere, perfect as a timely retreat from Bach. Some 50 years ago, as a student, I had eschewed Webern and Berg (in favor of Scriabin, Ives, and others). Now I took the opportunity to explore these (and the other non-Scriabin works on this program) with the new perspectives of an old musician. In some cases I subscribe to the precept "better late than EVER."

ANTON WEBERN: *Variations, Op. 27*

This sparse and crystalline composition, Webern's only mature piano work, was created a decade after the introduction of Arnold Schoenberg's method of 12-tone composition, gaining special notoriety as an early exemplar of that system. Somewhat ambiguously titled "Variations," it unfolds as a small suite of three diverse movements, all based on a single row, with only the final, and longest, movement presenting a clear set of variations. The opening movement is in ternary (ABA) form, the second in binary (two parts, each repeated), together serving as a pair of contrasting preludes to the finale. Special symmetries of design appear in these movements: palindromic horizontal phrases in the quietly moving first, a vertical mirror around the axis of a central pitch (A above middle-C) in the brusque and brisk second!

Webern was known to have stressed to performers that his piece (so rigorously constructed) be enfolded by a romantic, even Mahlerian, ethos in performance!



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ALBAN BERG: Sonata, Op. 1

Born in 1885, Berg was not yet 20 when he entered into a lengthy period of study with Schoenberg, and not yet 25 when his single-movement piano sonata was published, as Opus one. Originally intended to be part of a larger work, it was deemed self-sufficient by Schoenberg himself. And indeed, its coda communicates a knowing finality of destination, implicitly discouraging any further continuation. But it is, of course, the sustained intensity of this work which prepares and justifies its moving coda. In the scheme of its sonata form, all expected points can be identified: first, second, and closing theme groups; development; inverted recapitulation, further development of second theme group, closing theme, coda. Yet thematic development and dense polyphony are relentless in this piece (which Peter Hill characterized as “a lava-flow of inspiration”!) posing challenges for the listener. Berg’s harmonic language, though deeply rooted in tonality, presents a central paradox. Bristling with expressive dissonance, it creates phrases and sequences of seductive beauty and sweep. The second theme and its well-placed reiterations offer suspended moments of sheer gorgeousness. Yet throughout the piece, full cadences or any real tonal arrivals are resisted. The work’s three full resolutions – all affirming the key of B minor – appear at the very outset, at the exposition repeat, and at the very end. (It is worth mentioning, I think, that during Berg’s strenuous efforts to create this sonata, Schoenberg was at work on his F-sharp minor string quartet, whose first movement embodies a similar clash of classical strictures and tonal waywardness.)


FEDERICO MOMPOU: *Trois Variations*

These variations – brief, surprising, finally enigmatic – were composed in Paris by the Catalan composer, and dedicated to his father. Apart from their modest scale and intimacy, they inhabit a different world than Webern's. They present to the listener a disarming (and cunning) simplicity of design and language. Something almost innocent. Each variation, however, is felt as a surprise. The theme itself, stated in single notes, is un-barred and almost childishly limited. The three ensuing variations, character pieces with titles, preserve this melody note for note, changing instead the surrounding harmonies and textures – to maximum effect. The final variation, a slightly sinister nocturne, ends ambiguously, having encountered a persistent and troubling new dissonance...! A delicious, moving, bewildering work.

ALEXANDER Scriabin: *Sonata No. 9, Op. 68*

By the time of Scriabin's death, in 1915, at the age of 43, his reputation as a leader in Russia's musical avant-garde extended to European capitals and to America. Only a decade or so earlier, on the strength of dozens of mostly smaller piano works (preludes, studies, mazurkas, a polonaise, a fantasy, etc.) and a lovely early concerto, he had been acclaimed as a sort of latter-day Russian Chopin, writing (brilliantly) in that composer's harmonic language – which, however, was most imaginatively personalized. This represented Scriabin's "early period". A brief (1903-7) middle period, and late period (1907-15) followed – in which the composer's coloristic gifts strayed from its earlier framework of established functional tonality, while new organizational principles were being explored. This trajectory is reflected clearly in the ten



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sonatas Scriabin composed: 1-3 (early), 4-5 (middle), and 6-10 (late). All of the sonatas 5-10 are cast in a single movement.

The Ninth Sonata is labelled “Black Mass”, not by Scriabin, but with his approval. It is the most compact and “purposeful” of the late sonatas (written on the heels of the Eighth, the longest and most discursive).

It seems to depict a ritual journey of corruption and horror, a gradual, inexorable, and increasingly harrowing descent into evil, unto death. To be sure, it is filled with shimmering and seductive sonorities at every step. Colors abound, but established functional tonality has long been abandoned. In this concentrated work, only four motifs are presented in the brief exposition, but their development never ceases, in a process that might be called infernally inspired. Near the movement’s midpoint (and early in the development section) a newly harmonized second theme appears, with the indication (in French) “with a sweetness ever more caressing and empoisoning...” – an inflection point, so to say. The motivic re-workings now become more urgent. We hear a volley of repeated notes (a mysterious murmur when first heard at the opening) leading to the explosive recapitulation, a violent compression of the movement’s somber opening theme. Soon we are launched into a macabre and raucous march, a grotesque new version of the earlier lovely second theme. The shrieking grows until, unsustainable, it vanishes, within the space of four measures, into an abyss. Nothing is left. Only a calm (and chilling!) reiteration of the work’s opening statement, finally punctuated by a very low F, barely audible. Not the tonic. There is none.

SONATINAS BY JEAN SIBELIUS, SERGEI PROKOFIEV, MAURICE RAVEL

The consensus masterpiece of this form is, of course, the Ravel, but the less famous specimens are also distinctive and appealing. Sibelius, like Carl Nielsen, his northern and symphonically distinguished confrere, wrote much piano music, in fact well over one hundred impressionistic character pieces, between 1890 and 1930. The three sonatinas of 1912, tiny bastions of neo-classicism, stand somewhat apart, but remain highly romantic in spirit.


The opening Allegro of the F-sharp minor begins nobly in D major, blurring boundaries and tonal centers as it goes it's merry way, somehow avoiding any arrival in the tonic of F-sharp minor until near the movement's end!

The second movement is a plaintive song, first stated in the middle (viola?) register, later returning in sumptuous chordal garb, with a warm final cadence in F-sharp major.

The finale, wintery in atmosphere, displays an elfin and quicksilver brilliance. Lightly propulsive to the end, its single note (low F-sharp) conclusion seems a vanishing act.

Prokofiev's 1934 *Pastoral Sonatina*, in one movement, is an endearing example of the composer's tonal fluency and pianistic ease within an abridged sonata form. Among many charming shifts of key, a second theme in B-flat (in a piece whose tonic key is C) is noteworthy. Fragments from a closing theme in the exposition appear mischievously in the brief development section. Lastly, the sinuously chromatic ending cadence provides a quietly brilliant touch. A children's piece? Yes, but NO.



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Like his master, Fauré, Ravel was singularly well suited, and well disposed, to endowing established forms with exquisitely controlled harmonies, sonorities, textures, and ingenious counterpoint, the *Sonatine* being a small and shining example. Its three perfectly complementary movements all contribute in the continual development of two motifs from the work's opening theme: a falling fourth, followed by upward stepwise motion. The listener, beguiled at each and every turn, can easily overlook the subtle stratagems of connection. Though very compressed, movement one comprises a complete and vibrant sonata form, its development section cleverly exploiting every salient idea from the exposition.

The second movement, delicate and at times almost trance-like, is in the tempo of a dreamy minuet (verging on a berceuse). The finale, a toccata of sorts, is characterized by shifting moods and textures, guided also by an alternation of 3/4 and 5/4 time signatures. Like the opening movement, this one ends in F-sharp major, but in an exhilarating crescendo!

BILL EVANS: Turn out the Stars

Bill Evans introduced this touching ballad in a 1966 solo recital at New York's Town Hall, playing a trio version on tour for many years afterwards. No, the piece is not of the early 20th century, but has been added nonetheless to this recital. Evans loved Ravel and admired Stravinsky. Echoes of Ravel can certainly be heard here. This performance opens with a short quotation from Stravinsky.

— Andrew Rangell

andrew rangell




Long recognized as among our most eloquent and insightful interpreters of Bach and Beethoven, pianist Andrew Rangell has drawn acclaim for a variety of recordings, ranging from the music of Sweelinck, Farnaby, and Gibbons to that of Janacek, Enescu, Nielsen, Ives, Fartein Valen, Christian Wolff, and many others. A recording of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier, Vol. 2*, projected for release early in 2022, will complete Mr. Rangell's many-year survey of Bach's major keyboard works.

Andrew Rangell made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists' Guild, and has since performed and lectured throughout the United States, and in Europe, Israel, and China.

He has also taught on the faculties of Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Tufts University. In the 1980s, already recognized as a distinctive recitalist and collaborative artist, Mr. Rangell gained national attention – and the award of an Avery Fisher Career Grant – for his vivid traversals of the complete Beethoven sonata-cycle in New York, Boston, Cleveland, Rochester, Denver, and other U.S. Cities. A hand injury sustained in 1991 forced





Mr. Rangell to gradually alter the trajectory of his career, and eventually to place his highest priority on recording. In recent years he has created several DVDs for children – integrating his special talents as author, illustrator, narrator, and pianist. These DVDs are included in his albums, *Bach 4 Kids* and *Beethoven 4 Kids, Volumes 1 and 2*.

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Recorded June 2021 at the Shalin Liu Performance Center, Rockport, Massachusetts.

Producer: Andrew Rangell

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Piano: Steinway Model D #586518 (New York)

Executive Producer: Jon Feidner

Art Direction: Jackie Fugere

Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo

Production Assistant: Renée Oakford

For years I have felt special gratitude for Renée Oakford's generous and indispensable help in the many-faceted task of producing the album design for my recordings. What a blessing!

This disc is for Bobby, Paula, and Nelson - and in memory of our father.

Original art used on the album cover and booklet: Untitled, 1965 by Nadia Gould.

Nadia Gould (1929-2007), a woman of many talents, was a beloved friend of my family for many years.

— *Andrew Rangell*



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