



ELIESHA NELSON

Permutations





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James Howsmon, Piano

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 69 - Nikolai Kapustin (16:54)

1. I. Allegro - 7:53
2. II. Largo - 4:56
3. III. Vivace - 4:04

Two Pieces for Solo Viola - John McLaughlin Williams (5:37)

4. I. Sarabande - 2:02
5. II. Toccata - 3:34

Second Sonata for Viola and Piano - Ross Lee Finney (18:51)

6. I. Andante teneramente; Allegro animato - 6:30
7. II. Permutations - 2:54
8. III. Largo teneramente - 3:17
9. IV. Allegro con moto; Misterioso - 6:10
10. Wending - Jeffrey Mumford (7:58)

Sonata for Viola and Piano - George Walker (14:21)

11. I. - 5:19
12. II. - 9:02

Total Time - 63:41

American Classical Music and the Viola

This album is comprised of five virtuosic viola pieces that look at aspects of American music. The five different composers on this recording have all created technically challenging works of strikingly disparate character. All of the composers are American with one exception: Russian Nikolai Kapustin, included because he incorporates American jazz elements in his music. In the last twenty years technology has made the world a smaller place in the sense that ideas and art forms can be exchanged much more easily across cultures. It is interesting to observe the manner in which aspects of American music have been incorporated into other musical traditions and compare that with the myriad ways these ideas are understood in the United States.

Nikolai Kapustin was introduced to jazz as a teenager while studying at the Moscow Conservatory, and he masterfully combines it with his deep Russian musical heritage. Many classical composers did incorporate the jazz style and American popular music in their works. For example, American composer William Grant Still's music included spirituals and blues, while George Gershwin and Kurt Weill utilized the Tin Pan Alley and Broadway genres. Kapustin's works allude to a style of jazz that had its apex in the 1940's and 50's. He brilliantly captures the improvisatory nature of jazz even though his works are through-composed.

GRAMMY® winning conductor, composer, pianist and violinist John McLaughlin Williams has always had an affinity for American music and has conducted several recordings under the Naxos label for their "American Classics" series. He was born in Greensboro, N.C., but moved to Washington, D.C. as a young child where he had first rate violin teachers. Williams and I collaborated on my first album, **Quincy Porter Complete Viola Works** (DSL-90911), which received several Grammy nominations, and won for Best Engineering, Classical. The style of his "Two Pieces for Viola" is reminiscent of Fritz Kreisler's violin showpieces. He writes: "The challenge of writing a solo string work is great; one must surmount problems of tonal monotony by writing not just melody, but also real and implied counterpoint and harmony. The deeply burnished tone of the viola was my inspiration for the work, and I also wanted to write a viola piece that was truly virtuosic..." I am honored that Williams chose to write this piece with me in mind.

American composer and concert pianist George Walker is a native of Washington, D.C. His earliest musical influences were classical music and European folk music, and he received thorough training at Oberlin Conservatory and the Curtis Institute of Music. Like pianists Nikolai Medtner, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and York Bowen, Walker is one of the rare successful performing concert pianists who is also known for the rigor of his compositions. Walker has written an autobiography describing his intense musical training, the barriers he faced as an African-American performing concert pianist, and how he managed to rise above it all to have a prolific and successful musical career. Walker writes about this sonata, "The 'Sonata for Viola and Piano', composed in 1989,

is an atonal work in two movements. Unlike other compositions in this form, the second movement utilizes material similar to that in the first movement. A brief introduction by the piano in the first movement leads into a highly chromatic principal theme in the viola. This reappears several times on different pitch levels with intervallic changes and in rhythmic diminution.

The somewhat playful principal theme of the second movement in the piano is reiterated in the viola. A brief transition leads to a lyrical second theme. It is restated later in the movement after several recurrences of the principal theme. Vigorous triple stops in the viola combined with octaves in the piano and a dramatic cadence are followed by a tranquil coda that quotes the first phrase of the fifteenth century popular song, 'L'Homme Arme'. The 'Sonata for Viola and Piano' is dedicated to the composer's father, Dr. George T. Walker." (Copyright George Walker - October 2014)

I've had the privilege of performing several chamber works by Jeffrey Mumford. He is also a native of Washington D.C. and the recipient of numerous honors and awards. His music is always a technical challenge, although it should sound effortless. Mumford says about his piece, "'Wending' is a musical portrait and celebration of the phenomenal and visionary talents of violist Wendy Richman. Much of the basic harmonic material is based on the letters of her name (i.e., wEnDy riCHmAn). As part of the scenario of the work's ongoing development, slower moving material is often interrupted by sharply accented chords or single notes which, in and of themselves, establish an independent layer of activity unto itself. In addition, more rapidly moving passages reveal themselves periodically and eventually transform into tremolos, at which point aspects of the more ethereal material from the opening reassert themselves. The work is prevalingly rhapsodic and is in one movement."

Ross Lee Finney wrote his second viola sonata in 1953 (revised 1955) which makes it the earliest piece on this recording. It implements the 12-tone technique (serialism), a compositional tool from the 20th century created by Arnold Schoenberg, who was a member of the Second Viennese School. The 12 pitches of the chromatic scale are organized in one or more rows, and a note does not repeat until the whole row has been played through. This creates an equality among the pitches which usually negates triadic tonality. However, Finney held onto a romantic and somewhat chromatic sense of tonality (as did Alban Berg, the Austrian composer who introduced him to it). Finney also bends the rule of not replaying a note after it has been presented. His approach is to use the technique as a compositional tool and less as the definition of how a piece is determined, so the musical form of his sonata is still based on more traditional classical forms. The piece takes advantage of the complete viola range, from the lush, mellifluous melody in the first movement to the sprightly triplets in the second and fourth movements. He ends the piece by restating the very first tone row in simple quarter notes and ending on an A Major chord.

ELIESHA NELSON

GRAMMY® nominated violist Eliesha Nelson has a passion for performing and promoting music of neglected composers who wrote masterworks for the viola. She has been critically acclaimed in international publications for her outstanding interpretive abilities. The *L.A. Times* wrote of her, “*She is a marvelous player... a ravishing violist...*”

Eliesha Nelson was born and raised in the interior of Alaska, where she began the violin at the age of six with the Suzuki Method, and piano at age 8. Her first violin teacher, Peggy Swartz, was actually a cellist, but the Suzuki method was new in the interior of Alaska, and Mrs. Swartz was one of the few teachers for beginners. Mrs. Swartz instilled a love of music and learning that began young Eliesha’s journey towards a professional career in music.

She earned her bachelor’s of music at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and an artist’s diploma from the Royal Academy of Music in London through a Fulbright award. It wasn’t until a stint at the University of Texas at Austin that she began exploring a relationship with the viola. She returned to the Cleveland Institute of Music to pursue a master’s in viola performance. Her teachers have included Robert Vernon, Linda Cerone, and György Pauk. Ms. Nelson served as acting principal viola of the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra, and is a member of the Cleveland Orchestra. She has appeared as soloist with orchestras including the Florida Philharmonic, the Ohio Chamber Orchestra, and San Antonio Symphony, to name a few. One of her big passions is chamber music, which she taught for several years at ENCORE School for Strings.

Ms. Nelson’s 2009 debut recording, *Quincy Porter: Complete Viola Works* [DSL-90911], received nominations in four GRAMMY® categories in 2010, and won in “Best Engineered Album, Classical.” She followed this album with her second record *Russian Viola Sonatas* [DSL-92136] with pianist Glen Inanga.

For more information about Eliesha Nelson, please visit www.elieshanelson.com.

JAMES HOWSMON

piano



Pianist JAMES HOWSMON is the NEA Conservatory Professor of Instrumental Accompanying at the Oberlin Conservatory, where he oversees the instrumental collaborative activities of the school’s piano majors. He has played in over 1,000 recitals in North America, Europe, and Japan, and has performed with members of every major American orchestra. In recent seasons he has played in Japan, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. (at the Kennedy Center), Philadelphia, Dallas, Montreal, and Minneapolis. Passionate about the importance of small-ensemble playing in the development of young musicians, he has given guest master classes in accompanying and chamber music at, among others, the Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Interlochen Arts Academy, Arizona State University, the University of Colorado, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Alabama.

NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN



Nikolai Kapustin is a Russian composer and pianist. He was born on November 22, 1937 in Gorlovka Ukraine. At the age of 14 he moved to Moscow and started lessons with Avrelian Rubakh, himself a pupil of Felix Blumenfeld, who also taught Simon Barere and Vladimir Horowitz. Later, he studied with pedagogue professor Alexander Goldenweiser at the Moscow Conservatory, who also told him about Rachmaninov, Medtner, Scriabin and Tchaikovsky, whom Goldenweiser knew personally.

Nikolai Kapustin is an autodidact on composing; he made his first attempt to compose a piano sonata at the age of 13. During his conservatory time he composed and played his Op. 1; a Concertino for piano and orchestra. The Op.1 was a jazz piece and turned out to be his first work performed publicly (1957). He also had his own quintet and was a member of Yuri Saulsky's Big Band.

After graduating in 1961 at the Moscow Conservatory, he became a member of the Oleg Lundstrem Big Band. Several works of his are performed by Oleg Lundstrem, this with Nikolai Kapustin himself on piano. Around 1972, he stopped working with them and started working with the radio orchestra and the cinema orchestra. In the early 80's he started full time as composer.

Nikolai Kapustin turned out to be a classical composer who happens to work in a jazz idiom. He fuses these influences in his compositions, using jazz idioms in formal classical structures.

Several of his works are released with Nikolai Kapustin on piano. Several other recordings exist of Nikolai Kapustin, these are unreleased, but 'rescued' by his son, theoretical physicist Anton Kapustin.

Among his works, 154 compositions to date, are 20 piano sonatas, six piano concertos, piano works for solo piano and 2 pianos, as well for 4 hands, a violin concerto, a concerto for saxophone and orchestra, two cello concertos, piano trios, string quartets, a piano quintet and a significant number of other chamber works, as well as compositions for orchestra and big band.



JOHN MCLAUGHLIN WILLIAMS

Grammy Award-winning conductor John McLaughlin Williams (the first African-American conductor to win a GRAMMY®) has been critically acclaimed for his outstanding interpretive abilities and engaging podium presence. Equally at home with the standard literature and the great romantic and early modern music written by American composers, it was with the release of his acclaimed recordings on the Naxos label that his conducting became familiar to listeners on both sides of the Atlantic. With the National Symphony and Radio Orchestras of Ukraine, Williams has made world-premiere recordings of orchestral works by American composers both well-known and neglected. He has been critically hailed in international publications, among them *Fanfare*, *Gramophone*, *Classic FM*, *International Record Review*, *American Record Guide*, and the French recording journal, *Diapason*.

His recordings appear on numerous labels and his most recent release, *Quincy Porter: Complete Viola Works* [DSL-90911], recorded with Eliesha Nelson, appears on the Sono Luminus label, as will his forthcoming recording of the complete violin works of Karl Weigl.

As comfortable with popular material as he is with the classics, Mr. Williams has conducted for Platypus Theatre and served as music director for R&B superstars Al Jarreau, Brian McKnight, and The Winans for "Christmas Glory 2005," a gospel Christmas concert for the FOX and UPN television networks that was broadcast Christmas Day. Most recently he returned to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and conducted them in classical repertoire as well as in original arrangements for Blues superstar Thornetta Davis.

Williams is an active violin soloist, pianist, and chamber musician. He began violin studies at age 10 in a Washington, D.C. public school. At age 14 he appeared as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Williams studied with Dorothy Delay (teacher of Itzhak Perlman, Gil Shaham, Nigel Kennedy, and Midori, among others) at the New England Conservatory. As violin soloist, Williams has appeared with many orchestras, including the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, South Carolina Philharmonic, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, and the Portland Symphony Orchestra.

ROSS LEE FINNEY

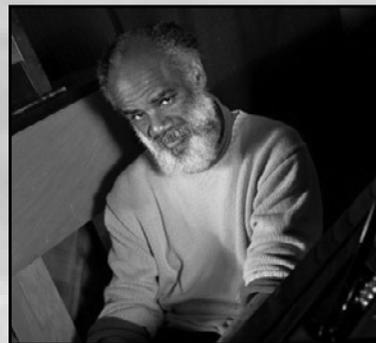


Ross Lee Finney (Dec. 23, 1906 – Feb. 4, 1997) was an American composer and educator who spent most of his career at the University of Michigan. His works fall into three distinct periods: His early compositions are defined by American folk music and circular patterns based on writer Marjorie Hope Nicholson's *Breaking of the Circle*. In the 1940's he delved into serialism, but by the 1960's he became interested in the use of memory as a function in composition.

Finney was born in Wells, Minnesota where his mother began his early musical education by teaching him piano. Music was very important in the household; his two brothers also played instruments. The family moved to North Dakota in 1912, where Finney began cello lessons, and eventually settled in Minneapolis in 1919. Finney entered the University of Minnesota in 1924, studying piano, theory and counterpoint with Donald Ferguson. He then transferred to Carlton College, finishing his BA in 1927. There he joined a college quartet in which his future wife, Gretchen Ludke, an English professor, played violin.

Finney received a Johnson Foundation Scholarship to study composition for a year in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. She encouraged him to continue studying the cello and found a promising young student at the Paris Conservatoire to teach him – Pierre Fournier. In 1929 after returning to the United States, he accepted a position at Smith College.

The *Viola Sonata No. 2* was written in 1953, and later revised in 1955. The original version was premiered on September 1, 1954 at Rackham Lecture Hall, University of Michigan by Robert (viola) and Lydia (piano) Courte, the couple to whom it was dedicated. This piece was written in his middle period where he was first implementing the 12-tone row. His style had become much more chromatic, but the early characteristics of folk melody and circular patterns were still evident. The first movement is the most romantic and sensuous of the four movements in the sonata. The first and second themes are based on the same 12-tone row, but sound like vastly different melodies because of rhythmic and textural differences. The third theme is a quick scale passage based on various hexachords. The three parts return, and the movement ends with the viola stating the original row in a higher register.



JEFFREY MUMFORD

Born in Washington, D.C. in 1955, composer Jeffrey Mumford has received numerous fellowships, grants, awards and commissions.

Awards include the "Academy Award in Music" from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, a Fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, a Fellowship and an ASCAP Aaron Copland Scholarship. He was also the winner of the inaugural National Black Arts Festival/Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Composition Competition. Other grants have been awarded by the Ohio Arts Council, Meet the Composer, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music Inc., the ASCAP Foundation, and the University of California. Mumford's most notable commissions include those from Duo Harpverk (Iceland), the Sphinx Consortium, the Cincinnati Symphony, the VERGE Ensemble /National Gallery of Art/Contemporary Music Forum, the Argento Chamber Ensemble, Ole Bohn, the Haydn Trio Eisenstadt (Vienna), the Network for New Music, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati radio station WGUC, cellist Joshua Gordon, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation, and the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress, and others.

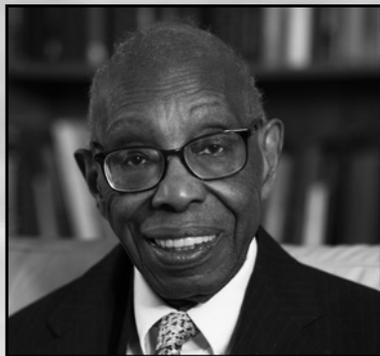
His music has been performed extensively by major orchestras, soloists, and ensembles, both in the United States and abroad, including London, Paris, Helsinki, and Vienna. Recent and forthcoming performances include *a dance into reflected daylight* (commissioned by the Sphinx Consortium) by the New World Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony and the Albany Symphony (GA), and multiple works as part of his recent residency at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

He has held a residency at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (2008) Composer-in Residence at the Alba (Italy) Music Festival and The Chamber Music Conference and Composers Forum of the East (Bennington, VT). Mumford has taught at the Washington Conservatory of Music, served as Artist-in-Residence at Bowling Green State University, and served as assistant professor of composition and Composer-in-Residence at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. He is currently Distinguished Professor at Lorain County Community College in Northern Ohio.

GEORGE WALKER

George Walker has achieved international recognition as a composer and as a pianist. He is “an acknowledged American Master” and is recognized as one of the finest pianists of his generation. An unprecedented tour of seven European countries following an extraordinary New York debut recital and an acclaimed performance of the Piano Concerto No. 3 of Rachmaninoff with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy initiated a career studded with numerous awards. His compositions have been played by every major American orchestra and by orchestras in Europe, England, South America and Canada. He has received commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony and many other organizations. Conductors who have performed his orchestral works include Mehta, Maazel, Muti, Zinman, Alsop, Andrew Davis, Slatkin, Tortelier, de Priest, Eschenbach, Rostropovich and Dutoit. He has published over ninety works for virtually every medium. His Lyric for Strings is the most frequently performed orchestral work by a living American composer and his Trombone Concerto has been deemed the best in its category. The Concerto for Violin and Orchestra premiered in 2009 by his son, Gregory Walker and the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Neeme Jarvi, is “destined to achieve a legendary status”. In 1996 George Walker received the Pulitzer Prize in Music for Lilacs for Voice and Orchestra and in 2012 he was given the Aaron Copland Award by ASCAP.

Dr. Walker has held teaching positions at Smith College, the University of Colorado, Rutgers University (Music Department Chairman and Distinguished Professor), University of Delaware (First Minority Chair) and the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Classical Music Hall of Fame and is the recipient of seven honorary doctorate degrees.



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