



SEAN HICKEY
CURSIVE
piano and chamber works

SEAN HICKEY CURSIVE

1. Cursive (11:00)
2. Ampersand (9:15)
3. Dolmen (5:16)
- 4-6. Ostinato Grosso (19:38)
7. Pied-a-terre (7:30)
8. Reckoning (2:17)
9. Hill Music: A Breton Ramble (6:04)
10. The Birds of Barclay Street (2:53)

Total Playing Time: 64:05

Philip Edward Fisher, piano
Julia Sakharova, violin
Brandon Patrick George, flute
Anne Lanzilotti, viola
Meredith Clark, harp



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SEAN HICKEY - CURSIVE

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|---|---------|
| 1. <i>Cursive</i> (2009)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (11:00) |
| 2. <i>Ampersand</i> (2006)
Julia Sakharova, violin • Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (9:15) |
| 3. <i>Dolmen</i> (1998)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (5:16) |
| <i>Ostinato Grosso</i> (2004) | (19:38) |
| 4. I (4:33) | |
| 5. II (6:30) | |
| 6. III (8:07)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | |
| 7. <i>Pied-a-terre</i> (2007)
Brandon Patrick George, flute • Anne Lanzilotti, viola
Meredith Clark, harp | (7:30) |
| 8. <i>Reckoning</i> (2012)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (2:17) |
| 9. <i>Hill Music: A Breton Ramble</i> (2002)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (6:04) |
| 10. <i>The Birds of Barclay Street</i> (2001)
Philip Edward Fisher, piano | (2:53) |
| Total Playing Time: 64:05 | |

...behind this scaffolding is a very personal artistic response to the huge breadth of music that was created in the 20th century when every tradition was challenged. In its reconciliation of these seeming polarities, it is very much music of our own time.

– New Music Box

Hickey is for real and the music offers much to the symphonic enthusiast. Give this one your ears!

– Gapplegate Reviews

A stunning audiophile recording.

– Gramophone

Praise from all quarters has greeted Sean Hickey's first orchestral recording, on Delos, featuring his concertos for clarinet and cello. Born in Detroit, Michigan, Sean began his music education at age 12 with an electric guitar, a Peavey amp, and a stack of Van Halen records, the early ones of course. He studied jazz guitar

at Oakland University, later graduating with a degree in composition and theory from Wayne State University. His primary instructors were James Hartway, James Lentini and Leslie Bassett.

After moving to New York, Sean pursued further studies with Justin Dello Joio and others. His works include a symphony (*Olympus Mons*), concertos for clarinet, cello and mandolin, two string trios, a string quartet, a flute sonata, a woodwind quintet and trio, numerous pieces for solo instruments, choral, church, theater and orchestral music. Sean is also active as an arranger, contributing arrangements for various artists and ensembles in the pop and jazz music spheres. In 2004, Hickey was awarded a grant from the New York Department of Cultural Affairs as well as a Composer Assistance Grant from the American Music Center to mount concerts of his work. More recently, he has fulfilled com-



missions for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the St. Petersburg Symphony, The Fine Arts Quartet, New York's One World Symphony and North/South Consonance, the Adesso Choral Society in Connecticut, the Spain-based piano/accordion duo An-Tifon, 60x60, and the Gringolts-Weiss-Fiterstein Trio. His disc of chamber and orchestral works for Naxos American Classics, *Left at the Fork in the Road*, released in November 2005, and his Delos debut of concertos – released in 2013 – each broke the Billboard Top 100 Classical Chart upon release.

Other commissions include works for cellist Dmitry Kouzov, pianist Xiayin Wang, clarinetist David Gould, violinist Ilya Gringolts, flutist Stefan Hoskuldsson, clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein, mandolinist Avi Avital, violinist Yulia Sakharova, and for the ensemble Ars Futura. He is a recipient of eleven consecutive ASCAP awards and was named

a semi-finalist in the Auros 2001-2002 Composition Competition, also winning second prize in the 1990 State Awards in the former Yugoslavia. Recent years have seen numerous performances in New York, San Francisco, Detroit, Washington, Russia, Spain, Portugal, England, Ireland, Indonesia and Brazil. Festival appearances and residencies include Cabrillo, the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival and the New York Chamber Music Festival, in the last of which he was part of the 10th anniversary remembrances of September 11th, 2001 with the memorial piece, *The Birds of Barclay Street*. He is an ASCAP member and was composer-in-residence with the Metro Chamber Orchestra in New York. His works are published by Cantabile Publishing and Wolfhead Music, and Muzyka in Russia. He also regularly lectures on his music, new media, and entrepreneurship for composers and musicians.

Sean is the National Sales and Business Development Manager of Naxos of America, the largest classical music label and distributor in the world. Several of his recording and concert reviews may be found in the pages of the *New Music Connoisseur*, *21st Century Music*, *Modern Dance* and numerous other publications. He is also a principal contributor to the *Omnibus Guide to Classical Music on CD*, has contributed liner notes to dozens of classical recordings and is a voting member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. His travel and adventure pieces have appeared in *Transitions Abroad*, the *Burlington Free Press*, *Trailworks*, *Trailsource*, *Orlando Weekly*, *ITN*, *Babylon Travel* and elsewhere. *Otra Dia*, a book of the writer's travels in Peru, was published by Cantabile Press.

www.seanhickey.com

Cursive was commissioned by Xiayin Wang in 2008 and premiered by her at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 2009. Though she's certainly deserving of showpieces, I wanted to avoid creating a work that was simply a vehicle for her – or anyone's – virtuosity. It had been a few years since I had composed an original work for solo piano. Many of my more recent works have tended to be less rhapsodic and more chordal and deconstructed, often displaying a disjointed cubist perspective, much as a smashed timepiece can still retain its beauty. In this work, I wanted to concentrate on, and elevate, that which I enjoy most in the rich piano literature, namely that of the Baroque and Classical eras: a strong sense of line.

The piece begins with a seven-note ostinato in the right hand which serves as a fixed idea throughout the entire work. But the nature of this falling pattern is such that it immediately spawns other related figures, both ex-

panding ostinati at different pitch levels and yielding chords that emanate from the same figure. In this manner I tried to create a long, mostly-unbroken line from beginning to end, much as a calligrapher would only lift his pen between words in fashioning an elegant script. Despite the grace notes that punctuate each page, all is not curlicue and filigree. Engaging narrative requires more than a few bumps along the way – and a semi-regular changing meter, offbeat accents and a mid-section perhaps evocative of Messaien, advance the drama. Following is a more flowing contrasting section that sounds Japanese to me, with a melody in octaves and ornamentation in the middle of the keyboard. The piece concludes with a flurry of arpeggiation and hand over hand runs, as if this were the denouement of an agitated story, written in a florid prose. Pianist Philip Edward Fisher has since performed the piece several times; Klara Min gave the UK premiere at London's Wigmore Hall in April 2013.

Ampersand, for violin & piano, was commissioned by violinist Julia Sakharova with generous funding from the Musician's Club of New York, and has gone on to receive several performances after its Steinway Hall premiere. She has championed the work throughout her concerts. The piece attempts to emphasize the dual nature of the two parts and the implication of one to the other. Much of what is stated in the violin is expanded, reduced or transformed by the piano – and vice versa. It opens with a five-note figure that anchors much of the subsequent material, including the somewhat Slavic-sounding scale employed in several parts. *Ampersand* is in a rough ABABC form with a coda that displays the virtuosity of both musicians, while briefly reintroducing several themes that seem to parade past the listener in a sort of thematic summing-up. I orchestrated the work in 2009, scored for solo violin and orchestra.



Dolmen, a short, suggestive work for solo piano, was written in 1998 and was inspired by the playing of Rosemary Catanese, a proponent of my music in Detroit. The title refers to the ancient megalithic burial sites found throughout Europe, particularly prevalent in the western fringes of present-day Ireland and Scotland. Most are marked by a T-shaped post-and-lintel arrangement of stones that may or may not indicate a door into the afterlife through which the deceased walk. *Dolmen* suggests merely a door into a Celtic world of mystery, marked by a ghostly mood and a rich harmonic language. With several

dozen performances in numerous countries, it has become one of my most performed works.

Ostinato Grosso, in three movements, is the most extended work here. In it, I wanted to explore what was – for me at least – a new approach to writing for the piano. I’ve long been fascinated with the ostinato, repeated line patterns usually found in the bass. Many of the 1970’s riff-rock music on which I was weaned might be said to contain guitar ostinati. My attempt was to create an extended composition built upon a framework of repeated ostinato, but with nods to baroque and classical forms, as well as conventions from those eras: terraced textures and dynamics, chordal melodies in diatonic thirds, etc.

The first movement is a toccata that springs entirely from the first two widely-spread chords, and spread across constantly changing meters. Classical gestures, such

as the Alberti bass, can be heard throughout the movement. The second movement is constructed above a slow bass pattern in 7/4, a passacaglia-like form whose melody turns chordal and gently settles back into the pattern. The final movement is thunderous tour-de-force where the spirit of the piano sonatas of Alberto Ginastera is never far. Loud, percussive chords blast through the work at a breakneck tempo. The pianist is asked to navigate some tricky ostinati in all registers, many of which yield to dense chords in the bass. After a climactic section, the piano comes to an uncertain rest on a final chord, exhausted.

Pied-a-terre was composed in 2007 for the instrumentation of flute, viola and harp, often called the “Debussy trio” because of that composer’s famous work. The piece is in one short movement and marked “enigmatically.” Gradually, the enigma lessens and a more direct, melod-

ic nature predominates, marked by the unique warmth of the instrumentation. The piece is dedicated to the memory of Peggy Atkinson, a well-known singer and teacher and a very close friend to our family who passed away in 2007. We have the pleasure of taking care of and enjoying her pied-a-terre – a second home – for several years on the Long Island North Fork. For my family, Peggy will always have a “foot on earth,” a literal translation of the work’s title. The work was premiered in New York in 2007.

The suggestion for *Hill Music: A Breton Ramble* came from Eleonor Bindman with an idea that I write a faster, perhaps less introspective piece that might incorporate Irish melody and gesture – a more concise concert piece than my recent toccata-like *Ostinato Grosso*. The initial inspiration for it came from a trip I made to Nova Scotia’s remote Cape Breton Island in 2002. Breton is known for its music-making, in many ways regarded

as the purest form of the Scottish/Irish tradition of instrumental music, blowing as it did across the North Atlantic with the people. Its subtitle, *A Breton Ramble*, is exactly that, somewhat evoking the extrovert flights of fancy of Percy Grainger, another composer/traveler of note who took inspiration from his many wanderings. As such, this work has no real program and is centered round an originally-composed jig theme. *Hill Music* begins with four sonorous chords and a left-hand bass motive that reappears throughout the piece. After this initial statement, the material goes through some quick transformation; a *ritard* leads to a strange statement of the jig theme, a deconstructed version with several notes missing, underpinned by shifting harmonies. This explores deeper harmonic territory until coming to a somewhat abrupt dominant statement (more than a bit reminiscent of Dave Brubeck's jazz classic, *Blue Rondo A la Turk*), which then heralds the sunny jig theme itself:

a bouncing melody thrown off balance by a single bar of 7/8. A minor key statement of the theme is developed more extensively, the alternating 6/8 and 7/8 bars perhaps conjuring a fiddler after one too many pints. The theme attempts a restart but crashes and burns in a small cascade of "wrong" notes. But the minor key music reasserts itself, expanding and again quoting other bits and bobs. (One may hear a fragment of Harold Faltermeyer's silly theme to *Beverly Hills Cop*.) A crescendo leads again to the jig music, repeated twice and slightly reharmonized the second time. Driving chords and right hand arpeggios bring the piece to an exuberant conclusion. *Hill Music* was premiered by Ms. Bindman at Weill Hall in January, 2003.

Reckoning is dedicated to the memory of one my dearest friends, Peter Moss, who was tragically killed in a Marrakesh bombing in 2011, where he had traveled to recover

from a heart attack. A humorist and comic *par excellence*, writer, world traveler, and so much more, Peter did more before 8AM than most people do in a week. We met on, of all places, Peru's Inca Trail. He was, among all of my friends, the greatest and most supportive fan of my work, even appearing unannounced at Lincoln Center all the way from London, for the premiere of *Cursive*. *Reckoning* has never been publicly performed, but given to Lucy and Gideon, Peter's children, in honor of their father. Philip Fisher sight-read the score from my laptop exactly one time, and that is what you hear here.

The Birds of Barclay Street is the one piece I've written for which I can affix an exact date of composition: it was written in the span of about one hour on September 12th, 2001 after witnessing the horrors, and following 36 hours of constant, soul-numbing news coverage of disaster reports in the wake of the attacks. Though it has

become my most performed work, I have virtually no recollection of composing it. The title comes from a home video, played endlessly on all news stations in those first days, of two pigeons fleeing their perch atop a street sign when the first plane hit the towers. *Birds* was commended by former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and is dedicated to all those who lost their lives on the 11th of September.

I would like to give thanks to all those who made and make it possible for this project to reach its potential, particularly Carol Rosenberger of Delos and Kira Williams, as well as all of my colleagues and friends at Naxos. Big time thanks to Ben Bierman and John Baker, each of whom selflessly gave so much to get this project done. Special citation is due to the help and support from William Schwartz, my parents and family, Catherine and Shannon. And lastly, my sincerest thanks to all of the

musicians who lent their time and passion to my project, traveling to Princeton from distances far beyond Penn Station.

– Sean Hickey

Pianist **Philip Edward Fisher** is widely recognized as a unique performer of refined style and exceptional versatility. International tours as a prolific soloist and ensemble musician have taken Mr. Fisher across his native United Kingdom to Italy, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Kenya, Zimbabwe, the Ukraine, and United States. 2002 marked his New York debut at Alice Tully Hall, performing Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto under the baton of Maestro Larry Rachleff. Mr. Fisher has also appeared in-concert at Merkin Hall and Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center, and his United Kingdom credits include performances at the Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall, Barbican Centre and

Royal Festival Hall in London, Usher Hall in Edinburgh, the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, and Symphony Hall in Birmingham. He has performed with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Copenhagen Philharmonic, the Tampere Philharmonic, the Toledo Symphony and the Juilliard Symphony, working with Conductors Hannu Lintu, John Axelrod, James Lowe, Larry Rachleff and Giordano Bellincampi. As chamber musician, he has worked with renowned performers and ensembles such as The Brodsky Quartet, tenor Robert White, pianist Sara Buechner, and violinists Elmar Oliviera, Philippe Graffin and Augustin Hadelich.

Mr. Fisher studied at the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School. In 2001, he received the prestigious Julius Isserlis Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society of London. His debut solo disc with the NAXOS label, Handel's Keyboard Suites Vol. 1, was released in

early 2010 to great critical acclaim and hit the US Classical Billboard Charts within its first week. His recent release on the Chandos label, Piano Works by the Mighty Handful, was featured on Classic FM as John Suchet's "Album of the Week", as "Classical Album of the Week" in The Telegraph, and has been nominated in the "Best Solo Instrumental Album" category of the International Classical Music Awards 2012.

Brandon Patrick George has appeared as a flute soloist and chamber artist throughout France, Italy, North and South America. He has performed as a recitalist at the Kennedy Center (DC), Cité de la Musique (Paris), Bargemusic (NYC), and has appeared at Carnegie Hall. As a chamber collaborator, Brandon has performed with the members of Ensemble InterContemporain, Jasper Quartet, the New York Philharmonic, and has performed with the Dayton Philharmonic, and the International Con-

temporary Ensemble (ICE). Brandon is a graduate of Oberlin, and the Manhattan School of Music, where he was winner of the concerto competition. He lives in New York City.

A fierce advocate of contemporary music, violist **Anne Lanzilotti** has premiered solo and chamber music works across Europe and the United States. Lanzilotti has performed with new music ensembles such as Alarm Will Sound, the Lucerne Festival Ensemble, and ensemble interface, as well as with computer music engineers from IRCAM Paris on works involving live electronics. A Brooklyn-based performer, she collaborates frequently with members of *Sleeping Giant*. For a complete bio, visit: annelanzilotti.com

Harpist **Meredith Clark** has performed throughout the United States, Europe and Asia as a soloist and chamber musician. In demand as an orchestral harpist, Ms. Clark

has performed as guest principal with the San Francisco Symphony as well as many other top orchestras in the Bay Area. Ms. Clark was the principal harpist, as well as a featured soloist in Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto at the Lake Tahoe Summerfest alongside members of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and other top orchestras across the country. Other concerto performances include the Ginastera Harp Concerto at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Germany, as well as performances in Houston, Texas and in Cleveland, Ohio. Passionate about sharing her love for music, Ms. Clark plays in a trio of flute, French horn and harp for the San Francisco Symphony's educational outreach program 'Adventures in Music,' which gives elementary school children access to classical music. Ms. Clark earned her Bachelor of Music degree at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and her Master of Music degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Russian-born American violinist **Julia Sakharova** has had an active career as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestra player. She is currently a member of the nationally acclaimed Arianna String Quartet in residence at the University of Missouri St. Louis where she also serves as Assistant Professor of Violin. Among her numerous accomplishments are the top prizes at the Olga Koussevitzky Award for Strings, the Montreal International Competition and the Juilliard Concerto Competition. Her performances have taken her to Asia, Europe, South and North America. Ms. Sakharova has been featured on WCLV classical music station in Cleveland Ohio, WQXR New York and WKMU St. Louis. She received her Bachelor of Music degree at the Oberlin Conservatory, holds a Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School, and earned a Professional Certificate in Professional studies at the Manhattan School of Music. Ms. Sakharova plays an 1819 Raffaele and Antonio Gagliano.

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