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*Includes* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

**N. BORENSTEIN**

**PIANO WORKS**

12 ÉTUDES FOR PIANO  
REMINISCENCES OF CHILDHOOD  
WATER DROPLETS IN VENICE • LULLABY

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**TRA NGUYEN**

**NIMROD BORENSTEIN (b. 1969)**

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**12 ÉTUDES FOR PIANO • REMINISCENCES OF CHILDHOOD  
WATER DROPLETS IN VENICE • LULLABY**

**TRA NGUYEN, *piano***

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Editor: Adaq Khan

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Piano Technician: Philip Kennedy

Booklet Notes: Nimrod Borenstein

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	<b>ÉTUDES, OP. 66*</b>	<b>20:01</b>
1	No. 1. Ostinato Étude, Op. 66, No. 1 (2014)	03:09
2	No. 2. Half Moon Étude, Op. 66, No. 2 (2016)	03:29
3	No. 3. Tango Étude, Op. 66, No. 3 (2016)	02:14
4	No. 4. Arpeggio Étude, Op. 66, No. 4 (2018)	02:13
5	No. 5. Kangding Qingge Étude, Op. 66, No. 5 (2019)	02:58
6	No. 6. Méphisto Étude, Op. 66, No. 6 (2019)	05:41
	<b>ÉTUDES, OP. 86*</b>	<b>17:25</b>
7	No. 7. Staccato-Legato Étude, Op. 86, No. 1 (2019)	01:54
8	No. 8. Chords Étude, Op. 86, No. 2 (2020)	04:10
9	No. 9. Hidden Melodies Étude, Op. 86, No. 3 (2020)	02:41
10	No. 10. Brazilian Étude, Op. 86, No. 4 (2020)	01:50
11	No. 11. Toccata Étude, Op. 86, No. 5 (2020)	02:49
12	No. 12. Japanese Gardens Étude, Op. 86, No. 6 (2020)	03:47
	<b>REMINISCENCES OF CHILDHOOD, OP. 54 (2012)</b>	<b>11:19</b>
13	No. 1. Lucilla's Beehive	04:13
14	No. 2. Uchti-Tuchti	02:05
15	No. 3. The Melancholic Mobile	04:57
16	<b>WATER DROPLETS IN VENICE, OP. 75, NO. 2 (2019)*</b>	<b>02:41</b>
17	<b>LULLABY, OP. 81a (2018)*</b>	<b>04:47</b>

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**WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING**

**TOTAL TIME: 56:25**

## NIMROD BORENSTEIN (b. 1969)

### PIANO WORKS

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.

The ethereal sounds of the piano bring me, naturally, to the first composition in this album, *Reminiscences of Childhood, Op. 54*, a set of three contrasted pieces. Back in 2011, my friend, Lucilla Baj, told me that a new website for her nursery in London ('The Beehive') was being built and that she wanted it to be really special and different. She said that, as she loved my music, she wished to commission a short piece that she could use on this new website. I liked the idea of composing a work focusing on the innocence and beauty of early childhood, so accepted the idea on the condition that it would also be a concert piano piece which would have a life of its own, beyond the website. This is the story behind the enigmatic title of the first piece in *Reminiscences of Childhood, Lucilla's Beehive!*

*Lucilla's Beehive* was written and recorded for the website, closely followed by performances, as several pianists really liked it. In one of these concerts, *Lucilla's beehive* was performed alongside Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, and it gave me the idea that it would be interesting to compose a further two pieces to make a cycle. *Uchti-Tuchti*, the fast, scherzo-like second piece, is about playfulness, and we end with the highly dramatic *Melancholic mobile* (the type you hang over a crib to entertain the baby), written as if we were looking at childhood in our old age, with regret and sorrow, but also peace and acceptance.

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, Op. 66* and *Op. 86* 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 études.

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, as in the *Arpeggio Étude* (an arpeggio is when the notes of a musical chord are played one after another instead of together), *Half Moon Étude* (an étude wherein the left hand constantly goes over the right hand – painting a half moon shape in the air), *Chords Étude* (musical notes played at the same time) or *Staccato-Legato Étude* (staccato notes are short and separate notes whilst legato notes are notes played in a smooth, continuous way). Other études originated from the desire to explore a musical aspect, as in the *Ostinato Étude* (an ostinato is a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm), *Toccata Étude* (giving my own interpretation of the Toccata form) or *Hidden Melodies Étude* (melodies coming out from inside a multitude of notes or within the middle voices).

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), *Méphisto Étude* (by chance, the opus number came as Op. 66 No. 6, the devil's number 666), *Tango Étude* (the exploration of the feel of Tango), *Brazilian Étude* (having a look at many Brazilian dances and making them my own) or *Japanese Gardens Étude* (being inspired both by the Japanese art and literature of the past but also playing with the Japanese scales).

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.

My piece, *The Dream* (Op. 75, No. 1), was premiered in 2016 and I immediately thought that it would be interesting to compose a companion piece to the opus. The thought remained in the back of my mind for a few years, and it is when my friend, Anna Marra, moved back from London to Venice that the inspiration came to me; and so, *Water Droplets in Venice* (Op. 75, No. 2) was written and premiered in 2019. I have always admired the elegance, virtuosity and beauty that permeates Italian culture and, whilst composing the piece, had in mind the beautiful paintings of Venice by Canaletto. A pianist friend of mine told me after performing the work that it could have easily been one of my études because of its level of rhythmical difficulty. My music is of the post-modern age and very different in style to the Venetian master Canaletto, but I think that it shares the desire to make virtuosity seem easy.

The creation of a magical world with celestial melodies suspended high above is an important aspect of my piano writing and even my music in general, so I was naturally enthusiastic when I was asked if I would be interested in writing a lullaby. I also had another idea, and when the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre commissioned the work, I asked them whether I could create two original versions of the piece – one for solo piano and another for string quartet. I thought that it would be a very interesting challenge, as no sound worlds are more distinct from one another than piano and string quartet. The idea of having different versions of the same

piece started in 2015 when I wrote two versions of my *Concerto for Alto Saxophone*, one with string orchestra (*Op. 70a*) and the other with full orchestra (*Op. 70b*). My *Lullaby, Op. 81a* for solo piano was composed in 2018 alongside the *Lullaby, Op. 81b* for string quartet. I have now composed several other versions including string trio, wind quintet, and piano four hands!

In the past, I have often talked about two of my strong beliefs in music. The first one is the search for an absolute, the exact right notes in the right place so that the music feels eternal, as if it had always existed and could not be otherwise. The second one is that I think contrast is one of the most important elements in music and art, providing interest and creating structure whilst showing the ambivalence of all things. I also think that there is another important, third aspect that is always present in my music. Whilst music is entirely abstract for me, my compositions have a beginning, middle and an end, and in that sense tell a story – a musical story.

**Nimrod Borenstein**

## NIMROD BORENSTEIN

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 US. 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](http://www.nimrod-borenstein.com)  
[facebook.com/NimrodBorensteincomposer](https://facebook.com/NimrodBorensteincomposer)



## TRA NGUYEN

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 the 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](http://www.tranguyen.org)  
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**NIMROD BORENSTEIN**

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# NIMROD BORENSTEIN (b. 1969)

## PIANO WORKS: ÉTUDES

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Nimrod Borenstein's music has become ever more prominent and popular in recent years and his piano works exemplify his communicative and vitalising spirit. The two sets of *Études*, inspired by Chopin, some of which are based on a culture, country or myth, employ Borenstein's personal use of polyrhythms which allow melodies to float and glide in new, virtuosic and colourful ways. *Reminiscences of Childhood* is a suite exploring the innocence, playfulness and drama of early childhood. Acclaimed British-Vietnamese pianist Tra Nguyen describes Borenstein's music as 'inspirational and rewarding'.



TRA NGUYEN

1–6	ÉTUDES, OP. 66 (2014–19)*	20:01
7–12	ÉTUDES, OP. 86 (2019–20)*	17:25
13–15	REMINISCENCES OF CHILDHOOD, OP. 54 (2012)	11:19
16	WATER DROPLETS IN VENICE, OP. 75, NO. 2 (2019)*	02:41
17	LULLABY, OP. 81a (2018)*	04:47

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INFORMATION

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