

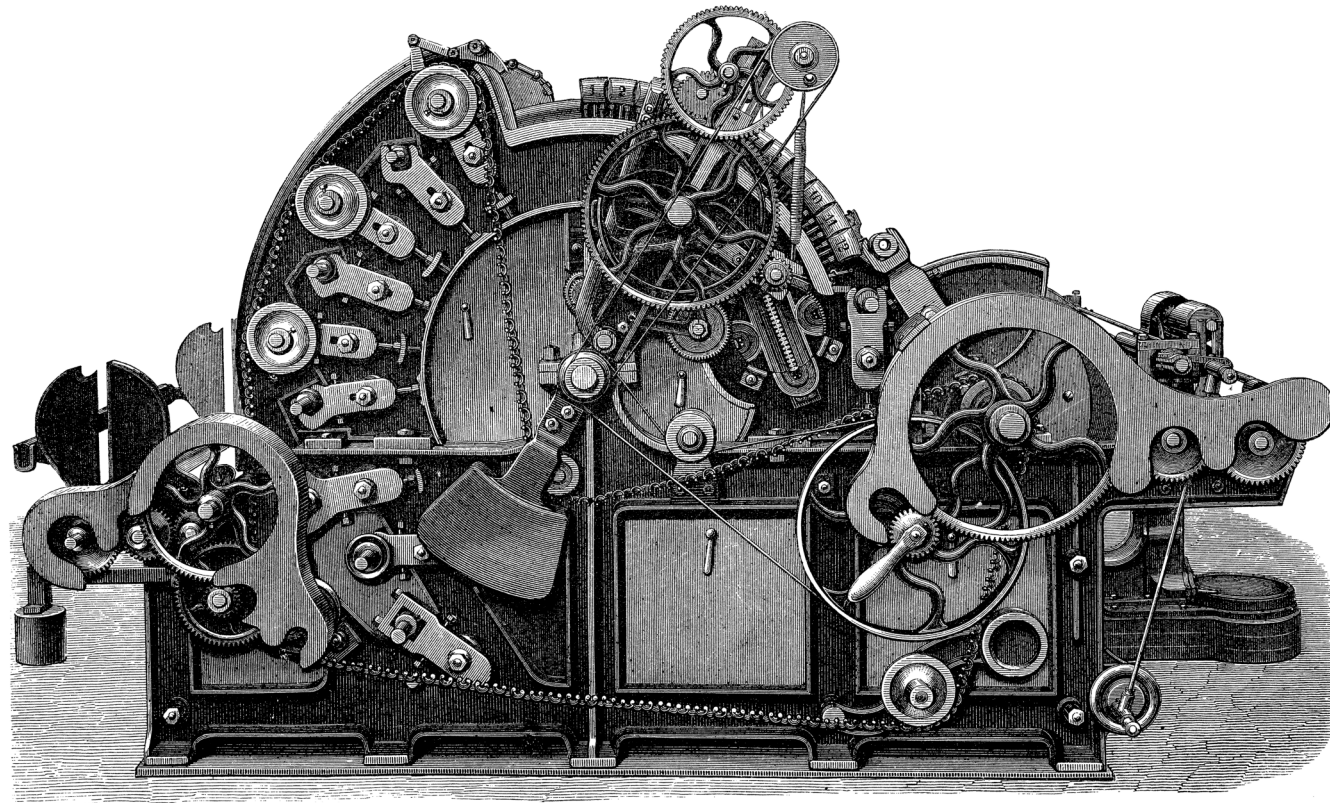


AMERICAN CLASSICS



Frederic
RZEWSKI

Let It Shine • Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues



Bobby Mitchell, Piano

Frederic Rzewski (1938–2021)

Let It Shine • Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

Frederic Anthony Rzewski was considered to be one of the most important American composer-pianists of his time. His major compositions, which often incorporate social and political themes, include *Coming Together* and the 36 variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Rzewski was born on 13 April 1938 in Westfield, Massachusetts. He began playing piano at the age of five and attended Phillips Academy, Harvard, and Princeton, where his teachers included Randall Thompson, Roger Sessions, Walter Piston, and Milton Babbitt. In 1960 he went to Italy on a Fulbright scholarship, a trip that proved formative to his future musical development. In addition to studying with Luigi Dallapiccola in Florence he began a career as a performer of new piano music, often with an improvisatory element. In 1966, Rzewski co-founded Musica Elettronica Viva with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum in Rome. The ensemble conceived music as a collective, collaborative process, with improvisation and live electronic instruments prominently featured. In 1971, Rzewski returned to New York, and in 1977 he became professor of composition at the Conservatoire Royal de Musique in Liège, Belgium, then directed by Henri Pousseur. He also occasionally taught for short periods at schools and universities throughout the United States and Europe, including Yale University, the University of Cincinnati, the California Institute of the Arts, the University of California San Diego, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, and Trinity College of Music, London. A prolific composer, Rzewski produced a vast quantity of works, especially for piano solo, continuing to write until he died of an apparent heart attack in Montiano, Tuscany on 26 June 2021, at the age of 83. In 2008, I traveled to Brussels to play Frederic Rzewski's *Stop the War!* for him at his home. From then on, until he passed away, we met regularly, and I championed so many of the solo piano pieces that he wrote during those years that we became friends. Rzewski's prolific output is well represented in 21st-century concert life, but it is mainly the earlier works that are regularly performed. Piano pieces such as the 36 variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, *North American Ballads*, or *De Profundis*, and ensemble works like *Coming Together* and *Les Moutons de Panurge*, have achieved canonic status in that they are frequently heard around the world. Yet they represent a small percentage of Rzewski's immense compositional output.

Let It Shine was written for the American pianist Carl Patrick Bolleia and is the second work in a cycle called *Six Movements* that Frederic Rzewski composed in 2019. The short "movement" is based on the popular gospel song of unknown origin *This Little Light of Mine*. Bolleia performed the piece as an encore at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2019, which may have constituted the world premiere performance of the work.

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues is the fourth of six *North American Ballads* that Rzewski composed between 1978 and 1980. *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* was composed in 1979 and is based on the workers' song of the same name. Rzewski evokes the clamour of the cotton mill in the piece by enlisting the pianist to use their entire forearms to elicit sound from the piano. The melody slowly emerges from this soundscape, and by the time it becomes clearly recognizable, the tune corresponds with this stanza from the song's lyrics:

*Ol' man seargent sittin' at the desk
The damn ol' fool won't give us no rest
He'd take the nickels off a dead man's eyes
To buy a Coca-Cola an' a eskimo pie*

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues is one of Rzewski's most often performed piano works.

Bobby Mitchell

Bobby Mitchell



Photo: Marc-Henri Cykier

Bobby Mitchell is an American pianist whose interests are embedded in the here and now of music as performance art. Not afraid to cross the traditional boundaries of programming and performance practice, he is active as a solo and collaborative pianist on modern and historical instruments and is also experienced in the fields of improvisation and composition. He has performed extensively in the Americas, across Europe, Asia, South Africa, and the Middle East. Highlights include concerto performances with Philippe Herreweghe and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century as well as numerous performances of Frederic Rzewski's 36 variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Other activities related to Rzewski's music include the world premiere of *Winter Nights*, written for Mitchell in 2015, the US premiere of the *Songs of Insurrection*, as well as involvement in the Dutch radio's initiative to record Rzewski's entire novel-for-piano *The Road*. Mitchell has released recordings on Naxos, Alpha/Outthere, New Focus, and VDE-Gallo.

www.bobbymitchellpiano.com
www.youtube.com/mitchellbobby

Also available



8.559928

Frederic
RZEWSKI
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1 **Six Movements –**

II. Let It Shine (2019)* 6:13

2 **Four North American Ballads –**

No. 4. Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues
(1979) 11:43

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Bobby Mitchell, Piano

Recorded: 13 February 2022 at The Right Place Studio,
Brussels, Belgium

Producer and editor: Marc-Henri Cykiert

Engineer: Bastien Gilson

Booklet notes: Bobby Mitchell

Publishers: Sound Pool Music 1, Zen-On Music Co. Ltd. 2

Cover: Machine for softening, cleaning and preparing cotton,
antique illustration

Photograph by ilbusca (www.istockphoto.com)

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Frederic Rzewski was one of the most important American composer-pianists of his time. The themes explored in his late piano works are typical of his entire body of work in their uncompromising and universal nature. *Let It Shine* from 2019 is based on the popular gospel song of unknown origin *This Little Light of Mine*. *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* was composed in 1979 and is based on the workers' song of the same name and has since become one of Rzewski's most widely performed piano works. This digital release complements 8.559928 on which Bobby Mitchell plays Rzewski's *Saints and Sinners*, *War Songs*, *Winter Nights* and two excerpts from *Dreams*.

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Playing
Time:
18:01