

NAXOS

JOHN CORIGLIANO

Complete Solo Piano Music

Piano Concerto • Fantasia on an Ostinato
Prelude for Paul • Étude Fantasy • Winging It



Philip Edward Fisher, Piano

Albany Symphony • David Alan Miller

John Corigliano (b. 1938)

Complete Solo Piano Music

John Corigliano's music has been commissioned, performed, and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Honors include a Pulitzer Prize for his *Symphony No. 2*, a Grawemeyer Award for *Symphony No. 1* (over 300 performances worldwide), an Academy Award (Oscar) for Best Original Score (*The Red Violin*), and, of his five GRAMMY Awards, three for Best Contemporary Composition (*Symphony No. 1*, *String Quartet*, and *Mr. Tambourine Man*.)

Recent scores include a second opera, *The Lord of Cries*, with a libretto by Mark Adamo based on *The Bacchae* of Euripides and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Corigliano's first opera since *The Ghosts of Versailles* for The Metropolitan Opera in 1991, *The Lord of Cries* was commissioned by the Santa Fe Opera and given its premiere in July 2021. *Triathlon*, for orchestra and saxophone soloist (who plays three instruments throughout the work) was introduced by Timothy McAllister and the San Francisco Symphony in April 2021. It is Corigliano's tenth piece for soloist and orchestra, after his concertos for piano, oboe, clarinet, flute (*Pied Piper Fantasy*), guitar (*Troubadours*), violin (*The Red Violin*), and percussion (*Conjurer*), as well as the orchestral song-cycles *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* for amplified soprano, and *One Sweet Morning* for mezzo-soprano. Other scores include *Symphony No. 3 – Circus Maximus* for multiple wind ensembles, as well as a rich folio of chamber works.

The French premiere of *The Ghosts of Versailles*, in a co-production with the Glimmerglass Festival, was given by the Royal Opera of Versailles in December 2019 and subsequently released on DVD, CD, and Blu-ray. This followed its 2015 staging by Los Angeles Opera, which collected 2017 GRAMMYs for Best Opera Recording and Best Engineered Classical album.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

In this concerto the writing for both solo piano and orchestra is extremely virtuosic and theatrical. While the work is basically tonal, there are many atonal sections, and in the trio of the second movement there is a section of strict twelve-tone writing. The rhythms throughout the work are highly irregular and meters change often.

The first movement, the largest in scope, uses sonata-allegro form in an original way. After a few bars of introduction by the brass, the piano enters with a large cadenza accompanied by percussion and harp. This section introduces the main theme – a savage three-note motto (B flat, B natural, C). This highly energetic portion reaches a peak climaxed by a piano run which concludes on the orchestra's opening note, E. A sudden *pianissimo* for the full orchestra signals a change of tempo and mood. The following lyrical orchestral *tutti* introduces and expands the movement's second theme – a *cantabile* melody first heard in the solo horn – and builds to a large orchestral climax. After this, the piano re-enters, echoing its original three-note motto. A sudden change of tempo then introduces the development section, in which two opposed metamorphoses take place: each theme is developed separately. This distinct development transforms the aggressive three-note motto into a lyrical theme, and the lyrical theme into a savage motto; in other words, each becomes the other. At the end of the development the first theme is heard in canon while the piano and brass toss about the second theme. The climax leads directly to a second cadenza which marks the beginning of the recapitulation, followed this time by a diabolic coda which brings the movement to an end.

The second movement is a short and fleeting *scherzo* which breaks the emotional tension generated in the first movement. Three short repeated chords form the *scherzo's* motto, which is based on the superimposition of major and minor thirds. The trio is based on a twelve-tone row derived from the piano figures in the beginning of the movement.

In the third movement all the themes are based on six notes. The form is arch-shaped, building to a peak and diminishing to a hushed single-note piano melody which leads directly into the final movement: a rondo whose major theme, a *fugato*, utilizes orchestral and piano tone-clusters as an integral part of its structure. The three subsections of the movement incorporate the major themes from the earlier three movements, concluding with the original three-note motto of the first movement joining to end the concerto in a burst of virtuosic energy and color.

Fantasia on an Ostinato

The seventh Van Cliburn International Piano competition, held in 1986, commissioned me to write their competition piece to be played by twelve semi-finalists.

In mulling over the project I immediately rejected the idea of a technical showpiece as redundant. What could I write that would test something the standard repertoire could not?

I decided that I could investigate the performers' imagination and musicality. A young performer's life is dominated by guidance: from living teachers to the encyclopedic recorded repertoire of the world's important pianists playing the standard repertoire, they are trained from childhood to re-create, rather than to create. But this piece would be brand new: no example waited to guide (or limit) them. And the piece would be deliberately constructed to make the players' teachers of little to no help. They were to be on their own.

And so I constructed the beginning and end of *Fantasia on an Ostinato* precisely – the work was a giant arch built upon these foundations – but I made the large central section a series of interlocking repeated patterns: the performer decided the number and, to a certain extent, the character of these repetitions. In other words, the shape was his/hers to build. Interestingly, the duration of this piece varied from 7 minutes to over 20 in the Cliburn performances!

These repeated patterns comprise my only experiment in “minimalist” technique. While mulling over this piece I remembered minimalism's forebears – Pachelbel's *Canon*, Ravel's brilliantly scored *Boléro*, and the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, in which a relentless ostinato, or accompaniment figure, continues unvaried (except for a long crescendo and added secondary voices) for nearly five minutes: unusual in Beethoven, who constantly varied his materials.

The first half of my *Fantasia on an Ostinato* develops the obsessive rhythm of the Beethoven and the simple harmonies implicit in the first half of his melody. Its second part launches those interlocking repetitions and reworks the strange major-minor descending chords of the latter part of the Beethoven into a chain of harmonies over which the performer-repeated patterns grow continually more ornate. This climaxes in a return of the original rhythm and, finally, the reappearance of the theme itself.

Prelude for Paul

Prelude for Paul (2021) was commissioned by Paul Sekhri, a biotech CEO and gifted amateur pianist. His love of music of all eras is enormous, and has resulted in his having the opening bars of Rachmaninov's second piano concerto tattooed on his forearm.

Armed with this knowledge, I managed to sneak those memorable bars into his piece, which is short and very lyrical.

Étude Fantasy

In 1976 the Kennedy Center celebrated the United States Bicentennial by commissioning a group of composers to write major solo piano works for its famed piano series. When James Tocco chose me to write a work for him, I was delighted, as I had long admired his aristocratic and dynamic pianism. But the shape of the work had yet to be determined, and while weighing possibilities I kept remembering James' performance of an étude for left hand alone by Felix Blumenfeld.

A poor amateur pianist myself, I have always wondered if composers favored the left hand even before Paul Wittgenstein's injury forced him to commission concertos for left hand alone from Ravel, Britten, Prokofiev, and Strauss. That curiosity, and Tocco's mastery, led me to the idea of my own left hand étude – and taught me why the left hand is really better for solo work than the right. Unfortunately, I realized, one can only play the left hand alone for so long non-stop, and so my “major work” would be quite shorter than the commission expected; however, what about a suite of études in the form of a fantasy, of which the left-hand study would be the first and germinal? The idea took over, and I listed all manner of étude possibilities. From that list, and the opening study, I built five intertwined études using the same material: music derived from the limits and possibilities of the left hand but later reworked to exploit other pianistic skills.

The first étude is bold and ferocious, lasting over four minutes in this recording. Harold C. Schonberg once wrote that it made the Ravel left-hand concerto look like “child’s play.” The material – a six-note row and descending half-step – grows into a furious climax before yielding to the second étude, a study in legato (smooth-lined) playing. The third étude is back to virtuosity. The title *Fifths to Thirds* describes the technique: the pianist can only use two pairs of fingers – his first and fifth (to play a fifth) and his second and fourth (to contract to a third). Through devilish crossed hands and other virtuosic devices the player presents a singing melody and plays his own accompaniment by varying the attack (legato vs. staccato) of these two intervals. In the fourth étude, *Ornaments*, the pianist, now with both hands available, adds all manner of trills, tremolo, grace notes, and more to the opening left-hand material. After building to a mighty climax – the sonic peak of the fantasy – a study of melody follows: desolate and non-climactic, it is based on the half-step descent of the first étude. The work ends quietly with the opening motto heard in retrograde, or backwards, attended by a mournful two-note ostinato.

Winging It

When I was a kid I was always improvising on the piano. My mother taught piano in the living room of our Brooklyn apartment, and a parade of young people filled the air with Czerny, Mozart, and Bach during my after-school hours. After they left, I went to the piano and made up things. Sometimes they resembled Mozart, Bach, and Brahms, and sometimes they resembled nothing familiar at all.

Writing music down is a very laborious process. While today’s computers make it easier, I still use a .9mm pencil to draw every note I imagine. Improvisation is sometimes useful to get starting material, or to advance a short distance, but since the act of notating it is so cumbersome, it is really impossible to capture an improvisation of any length.

It is possible to tape record an improvisation, but transcribing it is quite difficult, and the composer always ends up changing things while translating sound into notes. I did only one improvisation on tape, the two-and-a-half minute *Hinchi Mushroom Dance* for the film *Altered States*. I was improvising to the picture, and later used the shape of the improvisation (changing lots of notes) to form the orchestral dance in the film.

This project is quite different from transcribing an audiotape. Here, I was determined to improvise piano pieces on a keyboard, and translate them as accurately as possible to the page so Ursula Oppens could perform them in concert. In order to do this, I utilized a computer technology known as MIDI sequencing, which captures both the sounds and a crude but accurate notation of what is played.

I also needed an expert musician and technician to “translate” the notation. This is much more complex than it sounds. Since I improvised freely, there was no steady beat for the mechanism to insert measures. Mark Baechle was tasked with listening to what I played, and then trying to figure out how to put it into measures that made sense. There are many ways of notating the same music, so this required extraordinary musical experience.

Baechle made his “translation” of what he heard and saw, and then I often re-barred it, or re-wrote it to clarify the moving voices or the right-left hand relationships. This happened several times until the written piece matched the recorded played one.

Even then, certain changes had to be made – mostly due to my poor piano playing. Repeated sonorities or chords were often not repeated accurately in my performance, even though I knew that was what I wanted. So I had to correct the written proofs to compensate for my splattered notes.

While I tried to accurately reproduce everything I played, sometimes it was not practical. The last work, a three-minute virtuosic piece, had ascending passages in running 16th notes in several sections. While I wanted to repeat those sections, I couldn’t remember them exactly, and therefore played other 16th notes in an ascending pattern. I could have notated these different passages as improvised, but that would be asking the pianist to play a consistently fast piece that never repeated any notes. So occasionally, I copied the same notes into a later passage that was meant to do the same thing.

The first improvisation was too short, and didn’t have a satisfying ending, so I took the liberty of repeating the opening section again (termed *da capo*) and added a single “composed” measure to end the piece.

Other than that, these three improvisations are just that. They are titled by the date they were played.

Albany Symphony

Violin I Jill Levy (Concert Master)
Liz Silver (Assistant Concert Master)
Amanda Brin, Emily Frederick,
Rowan Harvey, Akiko Hosoi,
Aleksandra Labinska, Audrey Lo,
Sasha Margolis, Yue Sun,
Mune Takahashi, Esther Witherell

Violin II Mitsuko Suzuki*
Kathryn Aldous, Marla Bracco,
Brigitte Brodwin, Ouisa Fohrhaltz,
Marge Hickey, Madeleine Jansen,
Barb Lapidus, Julia Meynert-Guarino,
Michelle Stewart, Ubaldo Valli

Viola Noriko Herndon*
Carla Bellosa, Dan Brye,
Anna Griffis, Hannah Levinson,
Christine Orio, Beth Moll,
Josh Wareham

Cello Susan Debronsky*
Kevin Bellosa, Matt Capobianco,
Marie-Therese Dugre,
Cathy Hackert, Petia Kassarova,
Erica Pickhardt, Jameson Platte

Double Bass Phil Helm*
Luke Baker, Jim Caiello,
Jered Egan, Mike Fittipaldi,
Patrick Swoboda

Flute Brendan Ryan*
Jake Chabot
Christina Hughes (Piccolo)

Oboe Karen Hosmer*
Boris Baev
Nat Fossner (English Horn)

Clarinet Wei Wang*
David Gazaille
Carina Canonico (Bass Clarinet)

Bassoon Stephen Walt*
Kristin Flower
Lori Tiberio (Contrabassoon)

Horn Bill Hughes*
Julie Bridge, Joey Demko,
Alan Parshley, Victor Sungarian

Trumpet Eric Berlin*
Eric Latini, Andy Stetson

Trombone Greg Spiridopoulos*
John Shanks
Chuck Morris (Bass Trombone)

Tuba John Bottomley

Timpani Jeremy Levine

Percussion Matt Gold*
Ian Antonio, Nick Tariello

Harp Lynette Wardle

*Principal

Philip Edward Fisher



Philip Edward Fisher is widely recognized as a unique performer of refined style and exceptional versatility. A prolific solo and chamber musician, he has appeared across his native United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America. His extensive recording credits include a two-disc set of Handel *Keyboard Suites* on Naxos (*Vol. 1*: 8.572197, *Vol. 2*: 8.573397) and an album of Russian piano music on Chandos. Fisher has appeared with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, and the symphonies of Albany, San Antonio, Toledo and The Juilliard School, working with conductors Hannu Lintu, David Alan Miller, John Axelrod, Sebastian Lang-Lessing, Cristian Măcelaru, Larry Rachleff, James Lowe and Giordano Bellincampi. Fisher holds degrees from the Royal Academy of Music and The Juilliard School. In 2001, he was granted the Julius Isserlis Scholarship by the Royal Philharmonic Society of London, and was elected an associate of the Royal Academy of Music as part of their honors list for 2016.

Recorded: 2 June 2019 [1]–[4] at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Troy, New York
and 21–22 January 2021 [5] [7]–[14] and 15 August 2022 [6] at the Adelphi University Performing Arts Center (AUPAC),
Garden City, New York, USA

Executive producer: Philip Edward Fisher

Producers: John Corigliano, Silas Brown

Engineer and editor: Silas Brown

Assistant engineers: Jeremy Kinney, Sean Jones, Joe Vartanian

Albany Symphony



The Albany Symphony fulfills its mission by performing, commissioning and recording the works of established and emerging American composers. Founded in 1930, the orchestra serves a diverse regional audience covering more than seven counties of New York and parts of three states. Its annual programming includes a nine-concert 'Classics Series' with performances throughout New York's Capital Region, each featuring a recent or world premiere composition by a living composer; an annual American Music Festival, its capstone multi-day celebration of new music, including a performance by the new music ensemble Dogs of Desire; a Family Series with costumed cast which inspires new generations of symphony patrons; and holiday and pops concerts, in collaboration with area youth performing arts groups. The orchestra's commitment to recording new music has led to four GRAMMY nominations, a 2014 GRAMMY Award for its Naxos recording of John Corigliano's *Conjurer* with Dame Evelyn Glennie (8.559757), and a 2021 GRAMMY for its recording of Christopher Theofanidis's *Viola Concerto* with Richard O'Neill. www.albanysymphony.com

David Alan Miller



Photo: Gary Gold / Albany Symphony

David Alan Miller is one of the leading American conductors of his generation. The two-time GRAMMY Award-winning music director of the Albany Symphony has reaffirmed the orchestra's reputation as the nation's leading champion of American symphonic music. Miller has guest conducted most of America's major orchestras, including the orchestras of Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco, as well as the New World Symphony, the Boston Pops, and the New York City Ballet. In addition, he has appeared frequently across Europe, the UK, Australia, and the Far East as a guest conductor. Miller received GRAMMY Awards in January 2021 for his recording of Christopher Theofanidis' *Viola Concerto*, and in 2014 for his Naxos recording of John Corigliano's *Conjurer*, with the Albany Symphony and Dame Evelyn Glennie. In addition to his work with the Albany Symphony, Miller currently serves as artistic advisor to the Sarasota Orchestra and the Little Orchestra Society of New York.



John Corigliano

John CORIGLIANO

(b. 1938)

Complete Solo Piano Music

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|---|--------------|
| Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1968) | 32:35 |
| 1 I. Molto Allegro | 14:47 |
| 2 II. Scherzo (Vivace) | 3:05 |
| 3 III. Appassionato (Andante) – | 8:20 |
| 4 IV. Allegro | 6:23 |
| 5 Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985) | 13:05 |
| 6 Prelude for Paul (2021) | 3:31 |
| Étude Fantasy (1976) | 18:15 |
| 7 No. 1. For the Left Hand Alone – | 4:05 |
| 8 No. 2. Legato – | 2:49 |
| 9 No. 3. Fifths to Thirds – | 2:34 |
| 10 No. 4. Ornaments – | 3:56 |
| 11 No. 5. Melody | 4:51 |
| Winging It (2008) | 13:09 |
| 12 I. September 28, 2007 | 3:31 |
| 13 II. January 3, 2008 | 6:44 |
| 14 III. June 7, 2008 | 2:44 |

Philip Edward Fisher, Piano

Albany Symphony 1–4

David Alan Miller 1–4

Full recording details can be found inside the booklet.
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

John Corigliano's music has been commissioned, performed, and recorded by some of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. He is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, five GRAMMY Awards, the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, and an Oscar. The *Piano Concerto* ranges in expression between lyricism and atonality and is extremely virtuosic and theatrical, while the competition piece *Fantasia on an Ostinato* investigates the performer's imagination and musicality through minimalist techniques. The devilish discipline of *Étude Fantasy* contrasts with the improvisatory origins of *Winging It*, while *Prelude for Paul* echoes the soul of Rachmaninov.

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Playing
Time:
1:21:04