



# AMERICAN INTERSECTIONS

Nina Schumann  
Luis Magalhães

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This recording celebrates the diversity of American music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the neo-Romanticism of Samuel Barber to that most influential of American art music developments, minimalism. Its title, 'American Intersections', points toward one of the most commented-upon facets of American musical life: the fact that the country is a melting pot of musical cultures, a crossroads of musical traditions, a colourful tapestry of diverse sounds. This recording features composers who all worked against the backdrop of an increasing tendency toward modernism in European art music. Yet, we find the direct influence of Latin-American and Southern American music; we find direct engagement with the blues tradition, with its origins in the West African slave population; we find a continuation of Romanticism alongside a representative of the modern minimalist style that no composer today can ignore. There is music inspired by daily life at hotels, there is music that is overtly political, there is music that engages with the European tradition and forges it into something totally original.

Not without truth did Emma Lazarus compose the lines that captured the promise of the New World to European settlers, today inscribed beneath the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore". Since the

rediscovery of the Americas in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, migrants from all over the Old World have traversed the Atlantic in search of a new life. The native population of North America was systematically marginalised by the settlers, while the slave trade introduced a significant African population in the most barbaric of circumstances. The social effects of slavery are still present today, and it is the harsh social circumstances that post-slave trade African Americans experienced that gave rise to spirituals and the blues. These styles fused and mixed with the multitude of European-derived folk styles, leading eventually to jazz, rock, and pop. American popular music has become one of the symbols of Western globalisation, and it can be traced back to this intersection of Africa and Europe in the New World.

One composer continuing the European Romanticist tradition in the United States was Samuel Barber (1910-1981). Barber was something of a musical prodigy, as both a pianist and a composer. His early talent for composition led him to his first serious formal piano lessons at the age of 14, at the highly selective Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Here, his teacher was the Italian Rosario Scalero, who also taught Lukas Foss and Gian Carlo Menotti. (The latter would be a firm friend and colleague of Barber's throughout his career, and

provided the libretto to his opera *Vanessa*.) Barber, the mature composer, was a product of the American pre-World War Two musical establishment, and would for the entirety of his career largely shun the wave of modernism that swept American conservatories and university departments. His personal style was only slightly tinged by the dissonances of modernist European music, and even his later forays into a neoclassic-inspired style are hallmarked by his idiosyncratic romanticism. As a result, Barber was much beloved by the American public and critics alike, earning him scholarships to study in Europe from both the Pulitzer Committee and the American Academy. Typical of his output is the String Quartet in B minor, op. 11 (1936), whose slow middle movement is best known in its orchestrated version as the *Adagio for Strings*. This tragically morose work is, along with *Souvenirs*, the composer's most famous work. The contrast in affect between these two works is dumbfounding: the moving *Adagio* is a frequently performed for state funerals and memorial services, while *Souvenirs* is a masterwork of wry wit and capricious indifference.

*Souvenirs*, op. 28, was written as a collection of piano duets (two players on a single piano) around 1951–52. In the preface to the 1954 Schirmer score, Barber notes that the work originated in duets written for casual performance with a friend (this friend was his student, Charles Turner). It was Lincoln Kirstein, co-founder of the New York City Ballet, who suggested that this music be used for a ballet. The suite consisted of dances—waltz, schottische, pas de deux, two-step, 'hesitation'

tango, and gallop—so the adaptation to ballet was natural. As to the setting of the ballet, Barber evoked the memory of visiting New York's Hotel Plaza with his mother as a child for the occasional meal, where he wondered about the daily activities of the various guests. Barber explains in his preface: "One might imagine a divertissement in the setting of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; 'Souvenirs'—remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness." Incidentally, Charles Turner had first met Barber at the Palm Court, where they had listened to two pianists playing arrangements of Broadway tunes in the bar.

Once the four-hand version of *Souvenirs* was completed, Barber orchestrated it while in Europe on business for the UNESCO-affiliated International Music Council. (Orchestration actually took place mostly at Glenveagh Castle in Ireland, as well as in Corsica and Switzerland.) Barber also produced a solo piano version in 1952, while that same year, Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale recorded a two-piano version at the behest of Columbia Records (it is the Gold-Fizdale arrangement that is recorded here). A number of conductors wrote to Barber, desperately seeking rights to conduct the orchestral version, but Barber continually held off further performance until a ballet staging could be arranged. In the end, Barber's orchestral version was actually debuted before the ballet version, after an employee of Schirmer authorised a performance. The honour of the première ballet staging eventually went to the New York

City Ballet in late 1955. The reason for the frenzied interest amongst conductors was clear from the outset: *Souvenirs* was obviously going to be an enduring and popular work. History has since proven this to be the case.

William Bolcom (b. 1938) is an interesting compositional figure who, it might be said, embraces much of the character of American art music in general. As with his teacher Darius Milhaud, Bolcom did not consider 'light music' below his station. After studying with Milhaud in California, Bolcom departed for the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire. Bolcom was particularly interested in serial composition at this time, as might be expected given the tutelage of Messiaen. However, on his return to New York in the 1960s, Bolcom became an extremely proficient performer of ragtime music. Bolcom's own rags, his performances, and his general enthusiasm for ragtime contributed significantly to the revival of the genre. Ragtime music also sparked an intense interest in the history of American popular song, especially in its earliest stages. Together with his wife, the singer Joan Morris, Bolcom has frequently been engaged in performances celebrating the popular musical heritage of the United States. As a composer, his efforts have been focussed on developing a hybrid style, merging the world of modernism with that of popular music. To this end, Bolcom has composed a formidable catalogue of large-scale works in this unique style, including symphonies, operas, and a gargantuan setting of the poetry of William Blake that took 25 years to complete. His output

has earned him four Grammy Awards and a Pulitzer Prize. The latter was awarded in 1988, at a time when the musical postmodernism, with its stylistic plurality, was at its height.

After exposure to 19th century Latin-American dance music via a book given to him by the critic Michael Feingold, Bolcom began composing his *Recuerdos*. (The title means 'Remembrances' or 'Reminiscences'.) Bolcom notes that through exploring these folk dances, he became aware that the tradition of ragtime was part of a larger trend of piano dance music around the time of the First World War. Each movement is inspired by Latin-American dance music, and is written in honour of a musician. The 'Chôro' represents a style of song invented by Ernesto Nazareth, and is dedicated to the memory of the French musician Jean Wiéner, who was a friend of Milhaud. The 'Paseo' is dedicated to the American-born composer Louis-Moreau Gottschalk and, according to Bolcom, "partakes of his untrammelled romanticism". The 'Valse Venezolano' is dedicated to the Venezuelan Ramon Delgado Palacios, one of the composers involved in the waltz craze in 19th century Venezuela.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) is one of the most celebrated compositional figures produced by the United States. His *El Salón México* again finds its influence south of the border. The version for two pianos recorded here was made by Leonard Bernstein in 1941, alongside a solo piano arrangement. Bernstein's two-piano version has supplanted John Kirkpatrick's 1935 arrangement, whose purpose had been an

early performance at the School for Social Research in New York. Bernstein was in awe of Copland, and soon after they met in 1937, they forged a close (and possibly intimate) relationship. The two became each other's champions: Copland wrote letters of recommendation and gave Bernstein critical advice on his compositions, while Bernstein included Copland's works on concert programs at every opportunity.

Copland, as with most of the composers featured on this recording, showed a distinct interest in leftist politics. These political views were largely responsible for Copland's shift toward writing more accessible music in the early 1930s, of which *El Salón México* is a good example. Socialist sympathies may also have had to do with his visit to Mexico in 1932. Ultimately, these political leanings led to Copland's persecution and public hearing during the communist witch-hunts of the 1950s; ultimately, he escaped censure. While in Mexico, Copland had visited a dance hall with the name 'El Salón México', where the local music fascinated him. Copland decided to write a piece that evoked the musical spirit of that Mexican dance hall, after finding melodic material in a Mexican folksong book. It took some time to perfect the syncopated effects, but when the orchestral version was premièred in 1936 under the baton of Carlos Chávez in Mexico City, *El Salón México* became an instant success. The work's European performances in London (1938) and Paris (1939) did much to establish Copland's reputation beyond the Americas, and bring him to the attention of the art music powerhouses of the Old World.

The music of the disenfranchised African-American working class is the direct social inspiration for *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, by Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938). Rzewski boasts an impressive résumé of teachers. At Harvard, Walter Piston taught him orchestration; at Princeton, he studied with Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions. A Fulbright Scholarship allowed Rzewski to study in Florence with Luigi Dallapiccola, while later in Berlin he would add Elliot Carter to his illustrious list of teachers. And Rzewski didn't only compose: he soon forged a reputation as a superb pianist, particularly with regard to the interpretation of modern music. He premièred Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* in 1962, and two years later he played in the première of Plus Minus. As a teacher, Rzewski lectured at the Cologne Courses for New Music, sister to the famous new music courses at Darmstadt; he also held positions at CUNY, Yale, and co-founded the electronic music group Musica Elettronica Viva in Rome. He received commissions from, amongst others, John Cage's intimate collaborator, the dancer Merce Cunningham.

All this involvement with the experimental pioneers of post-War European and American music might lead one to assume that Rzewski is a dyed-in-the-wool avant-garde composer. However, he hasn't been afraid to return to traditional devices, such as tonality. Similarly, Rzewski wrote works championing virtuoso playing, a particularly unfashionable practice in avant-garde circles. Most noticeable, however, is his interest in collective musical interaction, reflected in both the subject matter of his programmatic music, as well as his musical choices

themselves. These concerns doubtlessly spring from his strong socialist leanings. Take, for example, his monumental variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, which uses as a theme a song by the leftist Chilean composer Sergio Ortega, and is commonly associated with popular political movements. The *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, presented here in the composer's own two-piano arrangement, is cut from the same cloth. The piece is the final part of his set entitled *Four North American Ballads*, written in 1979 for solo piano. Each movement features a musical re-imagining of other pieces of music, which are all somehow related to popular protest or social awareness. The original *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* is an old blues tune dating from the 1930s, sung by African-American workers at Winnsboro Cotton Mill in South Carolina. In the song, never-ending and dehumanising factory work is lamented, laying blame at the feet of the authoritative managerial figure of Mr. Tom Watson. Rzewski strips the original tune of its irony and fatalism, and turns it instead into an angered and brooding reflection of the frustrations of the African-American working class.

Minimalism is the quintessential American art music style, and one that is today frequently associated with modern composers. Minimalism traces its roots to the 1960s, particularly with regard to the counter-culture, and is in essence a reaction against the avant-garde that dominated American university departments after the Second World War. It is not, however, a return to an older, more conservative style. Minimalism was something new. And with its penchant of

eroding of the distinctions between performer, composer and audience, it became a runaway success—so much so that it is frequently spoken of as the 'New Mainstream' (where the old mainstream is represented by tonally-oriented composers like Shostakovich, Britten, Copland and the like). The key composers that instigated the movement are American, and include familiar names such as Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Steve Reich and John Adams. Today, many composers across the world spend inordinate amounts of time defining and characterising their output in terms of minimalist and post-minimalist trends.

As the name implies, the minimalist composer reduces the musical materials to a bare minimum—for instance, a small motive, a rhythmic principle, or some sort of interaction between instruments. These minimal materials are then used to generate an entire composition, usually through extensive repetition with a gradual rate of change. There is an intense interest in the music of other cultures, particularly of Bali, India and especially African musical styles. Even rock music serves as a source of inspiration, because what binds all these different types of music is the extensive use of repetitive cyclical structure. *Hallelujah Junction* by John Adams (b. 1947) is a case in point. In this work, small motives are repeated incessantly, with the two pianos gradually moving in and out of synchrony with one another. This creates an ever-changing polyphonic effect, akin to Steve Reich's well-known 'phasing' technique. Realising the subtle and gradual rhythmic effect requires exact performance.

*Hallelujah Junction* was written in 1996 for the pianists Grant Gershon and Gloria Cheng, and saw its first performance in April 1998 at a concert at the famous J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The work is dedicated to Ernest Fleischmann, managing director and administrator at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The title has multiple meanings. First, 'Hallelujah Junction' is the name of a truck stop near the border of Nevada and California. Adams owned a cabin in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and would often travel via Hallelujah Junction. As Adams writes, the name of the truck stop was "a great title looking for a piece". The second implication of the title is directly musical, and refers to the minimalist technique employed. Adams writes that the word 'junction' reflects the rhythmic interplay that emerges from gradual application of rhythmic asynchrony between the two pianos—a rhythmic interlocking 'junction' of the two pianists. The third implication of the title is a nod back to American art music's European heritage, and becomes plainly obvious toward the end of the piece: the repeated 'Hallelujah' motive from Händel's *Messiah*. This motive is, in a slightly butchered form, already present from the outset of the work (that is, the work opens with the 'le-lu-jah' portion of the motive). The end product is a composition that uses a direct reference to the Old World in the context of the New, resulting in a meaningful intersection of the identity of the modern United States with the heritage of European art music.

## TWOPIANISTS

Having gained comparisons to the fabled piano duos of Ashkenazy-Previn and Argerich-Freire (American Record Guide), the Magalhães-Schumann duo, best known as TwoPianists, is one of the finest chamber music ensembles on African soil. Comprised of established Stellenbosch-based musicians Luis Magalhães and Nina Schumann, TwoPianists was formed in 1999 while both were under the tutelage of maestro Vladimir Viardo. Since then, the TwoPianists duo has toured extensively throughout the US, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Spain, China and Japan, in addition to numerous performances in their home country of South Africa. As TwoPianists, Nina and Luis have also given masterclasses both in South Africa and abroad, including masterclasses at New York's Juilliard School. In 2014, the TwoPianists duo assumed the role of Yamaha International Artists, reflecting their growing prestige in the musical world.

The ensemble's debut recording, comprising the full works for two pianos by Rachmaninov and released by Universal Music, established their reputation as recording artists. Their second release, consisting of virtuoso showpieces and released on their own label, has further cemented that position by being described as "Mehr kann man wirklich

nicht verlangen.” (Deutschland Radio) and “thrilling and flamboyant, tender and passionate, vibrant and dynamic” (MusicWeb International). Their most recent release is a nod to their parallel careers as soloists: Bach’s monumental Goldberg Variations, in piano duo format. As soloists, Nina and Luis boast a joint résumé that includes performances at the Shenzhen Concert Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Wigmore Hall, amongst others. They have also performed and recorded with an astonishing array of musicians, including Bryn Terfel, Michelle Breedt, Daniel Rowland, Frank Stadler, Priya Mitchell, Benjamin Schmid, Alissa Margulis, Ramon Jaffé, Demarre McGill, Abel Pereira, Claudio Bohórquez, Mirijam Contzen, Gareth Lubbe, Carol Wincenc, Ivan Monighetti, Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, Leon Bosch and Jeff Bradetich.

A native of Portugal, Luis’s prodigious talent at the keyboard was fostered by a line of eminent teachers, including Eduardo Rocha, José Alexandre Reis, Pedro Burmester and Vladimir

Viardo. He has also received high-profile masterclass tuition from musicians as distinguished as Paul Badura-Skoda and Alicia de Larrocha, in addition to collecting a wide array of competition prizes and awards. Nina was born and raised in picturesque Stellenbosch in South Africa, where from a young age her musical talent was impossible to ignore. En route to studying under Viardo at the University of North Texas, and having benefited from the guidance of piano pedagogues Lamar Crowson and Vitaly Margulis, Nina scooped up virtually every major South African music prize on offer.

Their services to the South African musical community include the founding of an independent record label, TwoPianists Records. This exciting venture has won both praise and awards in South Africa and internationally. In 2004, Luis and Nina founded the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, which has since gone on to become one of most important classical music festivals in Africa. Given their success, it isn’t surprising that more than music binds TwoPianists: Luis and Nina are husband and wife.



# AMERICAN INTERSECTIONS

Nina Schumann & Luis Magalhães

## Samuel Barber (1910-1981) Souvenirs Op. 28

(arr. for two pianos by Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale)

- |   |       |                  |
|---|-------|------------------|
| 1 | 03:24 | Waltz            |
| 2 | 01:51 | Schottische      |
| 3 | 04:16 | Pas de deux      |
| 4 | 01:34 | Two-step         |
| 5 | 03:57 | Hesitation Tango |
| 6 | 01:57 | Galop            |

## William Bolcom (1938- ) Recuerdos

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 7 | 03:37 | Chôro (Homage to Nazareth)                                   |
| 8 | 05:16 | Paseo (à la mémoire de Louis-Moreau<br>Gottschalk)           |
| 9 | 04:12 | Valse Venezolano (à la mémoire de Ramón<br>Delgado Palacios) |

## Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

- |    |       |   |
|----|-------|---|
| 10 | 08:44 | El Salón México (arr. for two pianos by<br>Leonard Bernstein) |
|----|-------|---|

## Frederic Rzewski (1938- )

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
| 11 | 09:24 | Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues (arr. for two<br>pianos by the composer) |
|----|-------|--|

## John Adams (1947- )

- |    |       |                     |
|----|-------|---------------------|
| 12 | 14:36 | Hallelujah Junction |
|----|-------|---------------------|

TOTAL 62:49

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PRODUCED BY THE ARTISTS: Nina Schumann  
and Luis Magalhães

BALANCE ENGINEERS:

[1-8, 10-11] Gerhard Roux;

[9] Wolf-Dieter Karwatky

MIXED & EDITED BY:

[1-8, 10-11] Gerhard Roux;

[9] BKL Recording Studios Lüneburg,  
Germany, by Wolf-Dieter Karwatky

PIANO TUNERS:

[1-8, 10-11] Keith Goodwill;

[9] W. Heuer Musikhaus

PHOTOS: Riehan Bakkes

PROGRAM NOTES: Barry Ross

GRAPHIC DESIGN: mrdesign



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