



DISTANCE

James Austin
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There is no underlying rhyme or reason to the selection of the works on this disc – each of them simply speaks to me in a way most other works don't, or at least haven't yet. It wasn't until I was rattling them off to a friend in Germany, my laundry list of recordables, that I was made to realize that these works, disparate in style and era, were actually spiritually linked

to one another. This friend remarked upon a “gewisser Distanz” – a certain kind of distance – that characterizes most of the works on this disc – most notably the pieces of Krenek, Hindemith and Carter. This “Distanz” to which he refers has a particular meaning in German – a kind of “unapproachableness” or removed quality which resists immediate engagement, humor or even enjoyment.

Most of the works on this disc are, upon first listen, foreign to ears accustomed to a diet of Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Mendelssohn. They are on the chilly periphery of classical music, abrasively private and unrevealing in comparison to their gregarious, largely romantic neighbors. But if they were truly unrelatable, truly alien, they would lack humanity – they would reject curiosity and remain forever opaque. And this is where the beauty of owning a recording is embodied – it is my firm belief that, with repeated listenings and a curious ear, these works begin to reveal themselves. They shed their frosty outer layer and expose a warmth of expression, a depth of atmosphere and a technicolor palette that rewards unlike any instant-gratification work of art. The work will draw you from being a tolerant (or perhaps even intolerant) neighbor, across its threshold, into a welcoming, if not complex environment. It will foster a deep friendship.

In a sense I had the easy route to this discovery – I had to

learn these pieces, perform them, in some cases many times, and reach a stage of familiarity in which I felt comfortable adding my interpretation to the halls of recorded music. I reveled in the distinctive atmosphere the music created – from the intricate, breathless counterpoint of the third movement of Elliott Carter’s *Trilogy* to the otherworldly sounds in the *Vier Stücke für Oboe und Klavier* of Ernst Krenek to the plaintive, fragile and constantly evolving lines of Peteris Vasks’ *Pieskarieni*. I attempted to tease every ounce of romance out of these works – above all through the singing, smooth vocal quality for which the oboe is celebrated – in particular the searing, yearning long lines of the conveniently titled *Inner Song* from Carter’s *Trilogy*, the endlessly rising opening of the second movement of the *Sonata* of Paul Hindemith, and the lilting second movement of the *Sonatina for Solo Oboe* by Krenek.

I wish you great curiosity and exploration over the 60-some minutes of this recording. If I’ve done my job correctly you will connect to this music in ways you wouldn’t expect upon first listen. I hope you find being in its presence as rewarding as I have.

JAMES AUSTIN SMITH

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895–1963) OBOE SONATA (1938)

It's difficult to translate the tempo indication of the first movement of Paul Hindemith's Oboe Sonata, the German word *munter*, into English, mostly because it is less a descriptive adjective than it is a state of being – awake, alert, ready. Little music puts me into such a state more than that of Paul Hindemith, and if there was one piece I was sure I wanted to record on my first disc, above any others, it was his Oboe Sonata from 1938. Hindemith's music speaks to me through its clarity, its cleanliness, its perfect blend of lyricism and liveliness, its tonal, harmonically pleasing core that exists in a decidedly complex, early 20th-Century sound world – nearly alienating but always returning to a place of comfort and familiarity.

This Sonata was one of the last works Hindemith wrote in Berlin before leaving for Switzerland and, eventually, the United States of America. By 1938 Hindemith had been profoundly blacklisted by the Nazi government, featured alongside Mahler, Schönberg, Schreker, Krenek, Webern and Weill as an example of a practitioner of *entartete Musik* – degenerate music. The idea of degenerate music, the focus of a 1938 Düsseldorf exhibition mounted by the Nazis, followed closely on the goose-stepping heels of *entartete Kunst* – degenerate art – exhibited the year before. Hindemith was, in particular, faulted for his theoretical analysis of atonality and for being part of a “Jewish clan” (not only of musicians,

but also of his half-Jewish wife Gertrud). The placard at the exhibition read: “The theorists of Atonality! The oldest is the Jew Arnold Schönberg, the author of “*Harmonielehre*” (1910) – the “most modern” is Paul Hindemith, the creator of “*The Craft of Musical Composition*” (1937). We have in these proponents of the atonal movement the parallel realization of the destruction of the arts and letters, the significantly spiritual instigators of intellectual constructivism and the most dangerous destructors of our peoples' and race's instincts for the clear, clean, right, correct and organic growth and we fight them from the highest look-outs of the folkland as international, rootless charlatans.” A massively powerful government singling out composers of contemporary classical music for their dangerous sounds – a measure of the power of music in German society, or the boundless paranoia of the Nazi regime? Perhaps both.

The brief first movement of the Oboe Sonata exploits the jocular qualities of the instrument – particularly at the very opening of the work with its quick articulations and its immediate juxtaposition of a feeling of two in the oboe line and three in the piano line. The first movement is perfectly compact and in the classical sonata form – the opening material returning near the end of the movement until the material is all spun together in a signature Hindemith conclusion, a satisfying G Major chord. Hindemith, like Prokofiev, is particularly good at endings – I have spent many pleasurable moments listening to the conclusion of the first movement of Hindemith's clarinet sonata, its beautiful piano

chords pulling the music concurrently farther and ever closer to the concluding harmony.

The second movement, considerably longer, begins with one of the most difficult slow phrases in the oboe repertoire - a profoundly moving legato line that moves ever-upwards, expressive and plaintive, against an almost mechanically descending piano line. These phrases, like in the Schumann *Stücke im Volkston* that appear later in this disc, are simultaneously wonderfully fulfilling and painfully revealing for the player and sadly do not become easier with repetition or experience. The movement moves between this opening material (or material related to it) and a kind of fugato faster material, placing the oboe and piano in a more direct conversation. It concludes with a steady, relentless march to the end which leaves me as breathless today as it did during my senior recital in high school.

The Oboe Sonata was premiered in July of 1938 not in Germany but in London, by the pre-eminent British oboist of the mid-20th Century, Leon Goossens, one month before the Hindemiths left Berlin. It is dubious to attempt to perceive personal or political strife within the bars of a piece of music created during such a period in a composer's life. Indeed the argument can be made that the creation of the music could itself have been a distraction, a joy separated from the quotidian pain of rejection, the betrayal of one's own homeland and the knowledge of inevitable relocation. It is nevertheless interesting to know the context of a composition written during such a turbulent time. Perhaps

there is in fact a reason why the opening bars of the second movement, the rising line of the oboe pulled so perilously ever-higher in the tessitura against the inevitably descending bass line is so incredibly difficult to truly master - that the oboist feels as if he or she has always left some stone unturned, some emotional tension in the line unresolved, left only to try, honestly, again the next time.

Hindemith would eventually move to New Haven, Connecticut, becoming a guest professor at the Yale School of Music in 1940 and a full professor in 1941. He was an immensely important figure in American music at the time: as a composer and an educator. While he is rarely mentioned at present-day Yale, his spirit pervades, especially for this oboist as a young graduate student. It is fulfilling to read his words, written to his wife: "I am actually fully prepared to remain here for a long time - with Yale as a foundation it is quite a joyful thought, and with Switzerland as a summer or autumn stay in the back of my mind. This godless Europe offers us otherwise no good options anymore, and here one may work unimpeded and with success."

There is, on the third floor of the Sprague Concert Hall at Yale University in New Haven, a classroom in which I spent many hours of lectures while pursuing my Master's Degree. In it is an old-fashioned chalkboard with pre-drawn music staves - an increasingly rare sight today. If you look carefully you'll see, below the lower right-hand corner of the chalkboard, a little plaque. It bears the words "Paul Hindemith's Chalkboard".

PETERIS VASKS (B. 1946)

PIESKARIENI (1983)

I was lucky enough to be offered the opportunity, a few years ago, to craft my own solo program at a somewhat storied venue in New York City - The Stone. The Stone is run by the legendary jazz and experimental saxophonist and composer John Zorn. It has a seemingly invisible sign and sits on one of the least attractive corners in all of New York City - 2nd Street and Avenue C - across the street from a gas station. From the outside it is the definition of unremarkable and, to be honest, on the inside as well. A small room, with seating for about 45 people, a small performance area (a stage it is not), and behind the performance area, a bathroom. In spite of it's lack of any real atmosphere, The Stone is revered within contemporary and experimental music circles because it remains one of the few experimental music venues that has survived the commercialization of Manhattan - a bastion of creativity in the middle of one of the world's largest and most expensive malls.

I spent hours on the internet searching for solo oboe pieces that I'd never heard of before, found a great number, almost none of which were recorded, and therefore had to spend a couple of hundred dollars on sheet music. There were a number of really interesting works, works that I've since performed or have been considering recording, but none struck me as profoundly as *Pieskarieni* or "Touches" by Latvian composer Peteris Vasks. There is something

about the simplicity and clarity of the structure - more or less A-B-A - and the dramatic immediacy of the language which quickly grabbed my ears. Most, if not all composers are drawn to the deeply lyrical, longing cantilena of the oboe and Vasks is no different. But whereas this becomes a liability in so many other works (there is only so long that an audience member can listen to endless, slow, drawn-out phrases), Vasks manages to employ it to its fullest without ever causing tedium. The opening, with its fragile attempts at line, constantly interrupted by quick flourishes or trills or grace notes, is paced perfectly; because of this pacing, by the time we finally arrive at a long phrase the release is simultaneously unremarkable and deeply satisfying. Once Vasks reaches the long line, he creates a feeling, both for the listener and for the performer, that the lines could stretch longer and longer - the same upward motive of grace notes to a long cantilena could be forever permuted, transposed - but Vasks has other plans - a "B" section - a deviation into series of trills that cleverly mask a continuation of the lines. The trills add urgency and drama and bring the instrument to its highest register, only to be brought back down to a return to the original cantilena "A" material - to a conclusion as halting and fragile as the opening. One final gasp and the music disappears.

Pieskarieni can be dismissed by some as lacking a certain amount of avant-garde - there are no extended techniques, no extraneous oboe sounds. What it lacks in 20th Century oboe technical innovation it possesses in mastery of pacing

and of atmosphere. If we're considering the title of this album, "Distance", as a nod toward the veiled listenability of much of this music, this work is probably the least alien of the 20th Century to a listener's ears - its motives and material are distinctly human and its broad emotion relatable. Indeed *Pieskarieni* translates from the Latvian into "touches" - not terribly distant at all.

ELLIOTT CARTER (1908-2012) *TRILOGY FOR OBOE AND HARP* (1992)

Without Elliott Carter oboists would be severely disadvantaged. Carter was one of the most prolific composers for the instrument, taking his place in our repertoire alongside Benjamin Britten, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach. Carter's oboe music came about largely due to his friendship with oboe giant Heinz Holliger, as well as his trust in the great American oboist Stephen Taylor, who played most of the American premieres of Carter's works. There is, for the performer, never a dull moment in Carter's music - it is difficult to be nervous for a performance of most of his works because there is simply no time to consider nerves - the music is dense and incredibly demanding but more often than not extremely well written for the instrument, which means that it is (conceivably) possible to play just about everything he

writes with precision and clarity.

I performed in Carter's presence a few times in New York before his passing in 2012. The most memorable experience was a performance of his early Sonata for flute, oboe, cello and harpsichord, his wonderful song cycle *A Mirror on Which to Dwell* for soprano and small ensemble, and his incredibly difficult *Oboe Quartet*. I spotted him from the stage, seated in the audience, and was determined to catch him at the conclusion of the performance and ask him to sign my score - the 90 year old was out the door before I could even put my oboe in its case. I have that sensation of attempted expedience and efficiency, as well as missed opportunity, every time I play the third movement of *Trilogy, Immer Neu*. It is a blur of notes, collaboration and concentration and before you know it, it's over. A major stroke of luck I have had in my performing life is playing *Trilogy* with the wondrous harpist Bridget Kibbey who actually worked with Carter on numerous occasions and possesses a keen understanding of the lyricism and playfulness that is at the heart of his often seemingly impenetrable output.

New music oboe and harp nerds will inevitably have the conversation "let's play the Carter!" but few actually end up doing it - there are a lot of obstacles - first you need to have a program with both an oboe and a harp (a rare occurrence), a presenter daring enough to program the work, and two musicians stupid enough to attempt it. Yet *Trilogy* works so well in so many ways: I love the progression from harp solo to oboe solo (albeit with brief interruptions from the other

player) and the inevitability, particularly when watching the players in performance, that they will at some point come together, which of course they do in *Immer Neu*. *Bariolage* and *Inner Song*, the respective harp and oboe solos, have their own lives as stand-alone pieces, and quite deservedly

so: Carter allows for the absence of the brief “comments” from the otherwise silent accompanying instruments.

Carter bases his whole conception of the work on the last two beautiful stanzas of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Sonette an Orpheus*, II, 10.

Aber noch ist uns das Dasein verzaubert; an hundert Stellen ist es noch Ursprung. **Ein Spielen von reinen Kräften**, die keiner berührt, der nicht kniet und bewundert.

Worte gehen noch zart am Unsäglichen aus...

Und die **Musik, immer neu**, aus den bebendsten Steinen, baut im unbrauchbaren Raum ihr vergöttliches Haus.

But existence is still enchanting for us; in hundreds of places it is still pristine, **A play of pure forces**, which no one can touch without kneeling and adoring.

Words still peter out into what cannot be expressed...

And **music, ever new**, builds out of the most tremulous stones her divinely consecrated house in unexploitable space.

Carter writes:

Each of the three sections of *Trilogy* was written for a special occasion. *Bariolage* (which has the motto: **Ein Spielen von reinen Kräften**) is a harp solo written for a festival of my music given in Geneva in March, 1992, for Ursula Holliger, to whom it is dedicated, to play. I was interested in writing for the harp as I had been a friend and admirer of Carlos Salzedo who wrote for the harp in such an inventive way.

Inner Song (which has the motto: **Worte gehen noch zart am Unsäglichen aus...**) was written for a festival of Stefan Wolpe's music in Witten, Germany, in April, 1992, for Heinz Holliger to perform, to whom it is dedicated. The fascinating friendship with Wolpe is a very treasured memory.

Immer Neu (whose motto is: **die Musik, immer neu**) is dedicated to Ursula and Heinz Holliger and provides a duet for them. Its outlook was suggested by Raffaele Pozzi who asked for the first performance at the Pontino Festival in June, 1992, a festival centered around a vision of the new that led so many beside Columbus to explore the world 500 years ago. In this piece each instrument in turn leads the other to a new tempo.

Carter employs the same technique as Claude Debussy in his preludes - the lines of poetry on which the individual movements are based are included at the *end* of each movement, not the beginning, as if to highlight an inspirational relationship rather than a directly representational one. Indeed, I can imagine a scenario in which a "play of pure forces" is

the same repeated pitch played on different strings (the term *bariolage* refers broadly to the practice of playing the same pitch on different strings of a stringed instrument - as you listen you will hear Bridget constantly returning to a series of repeated pitches (these pitches change throughout the work) - it is not necessarily a readily audible effect, but I imagine it would sound distinct from the same series of pitches played on the same string), but then again it's not exactly a flute playing an obvious "cuckoo" in Beethoven's *Pastorale Symphony* (an example of a directly representational musical depiction of a non-musical idea), so I'm not quite ready to draw that definite conclusion, which I think is the point of Carter's placing the words at the end of the movements.

What amazes me as I listen to Bridget play *Bariolage*, both in this recording and on the numerous occasions during which we've performed the work, is how decidedly consonant the harmonic language is. It's not very difficult for me to find romance in non-traditional harmony (that's partly what this whole recording is about) but it's rare that a composer works with such skill as to simultaneously obscure and reveal traditional harmony in the context of such jarring atonality. It becomes a kind of "Where's Waldo" game for me as I listen and I find it infinitely enjoyable to "lean-in" ever further into the generally scarce realm of tonality in Carter's music. The problem with this activity in performance is that I can easily lose my place in Bridget's part and come perilously close to missing the important "interjections" of oboe sound that foreshadow both *Inner Song* and *Immer Neu*.

I was introduced to *Inner Song* by my mentor, the genius oboist and musician Stephen Taylor. I was lucky enough to pursue and complete my Master's degree with Steve during his first two years of teaching at the Yale School of Music. I was and continue to be in awe of his ability to speak so commandingly, so assuredly, and when appropriate, so achingly beautifully through his instrument. Steve sat squarely within Carter's circle of trusted performers, alongside visionaries like clarinetist Charlie Neidich and cellist Fred Sherry. These New York musicians were (and are) keen to play contemporary music but approach it always with the same sensitivity and playfulness that they would any work of Schubert or Haydn. And herein lies the key to Carter's music - he approached *his own* works with that same sensitivity and humor. A musician's reaction to seeing such complex music is to attempt to get it right - Carter always advocated for big sweeps, lyricism, emotional content and, indeed, *playfulness*. This music, so impenetrable on first listen, so distant, is in fact exactly the opposite - human and alive. I will readily admit that I don't always hear these qualities in Carter's music - the *Triple Duo*, as an example, is a work I've always had trouble enjoying. I say this because you too might be thinking, as you read this, "he is off his rocker". But please trust me that *Trilogy* is immensely human and immensely rewarding. And if you are holding this in your hands then you've been kind enough to purchase this CD, which means that you can re-listen as many times as you want. If Bridget and I have done

our jobs well then you will hear it - it may just take a few more listens than a Mozart Serenade.

Inner Song is always searching, through incredibly difficult, smooth leaps from the very bottom to the very top of the range of the oboe, from as quiet as possible to as loud as possible. The rhythms Carter writes are particular and very exact - as I mentioned earlier the desire for the performer is to "master" these rhythms - play them absolutely correctly. But Carter has written them in the context of a solo instrumental work, and ever since any composer has written for solo instruments, the idea of rigid tempi and accurate rhythms has been, to a certain extent, irrelevant. Certainly a rhythmic and temporal structure needs to exist in order to execute a recognizable performance of a solo work, but the most important aspect of performing a work like this is to understand rhythm and tempo in the context of the dramatic element of performance. This is as simple as a story-teller telling a great story - the performance is as much about the content as it is about the timing, the nuance, the personal expression of the content of that story.

Inner Song has a kind of relentless, rubber band-style pull to its lines - they seem endless and yet are so naturally and effortlessly written - like *Pieskarieni* of Peteris Vasks, *Inner Song* defies the over-saturated, standard-issue oboe cantilena that can creep in so quickly. Carter defies by employing a philosophically boundless cantilena - he is, with Rainer Maria Rilke, addressing the space left when words "peter out into what cannot be expressed" (left

out of this english translation is the german word “zart” meaning delicately or touchingly). There is a sweetness to this failure - it creates the space for the emotional power of music to express what words cannot. This movement is not simply a random series of notes and rhythms but a personal exploration of the power that music has to express what words cannot (ironically inspired by a poem). There is this searching in these lines but also a sweet kind of swing that evolves - he is constantly shifting the rhythms from more straight or angular-sounding offbeats to a more lyrical triplet division. This distinction in notation is fairly inaudible in practice, but the atmosphere it creates is readily perceptible, or as I like to think, even if you can't hear it, you'd notice if it was gone.

Immer Neu is the kind of challenge for which musicians study years on end. The individual parts are fiendishly difficult; Carter puts them together like an intricate jigsaw puzzle in which, on purpose, every piece doesn't quite fit. We can count on one hand the number of times Bridget and I are meant to play together: the rhythms are not only incredibly complex, but we have no real ability to communicate them to one another - communicate too little and you fall off the grid, communicate too much and you end up playing (incorrectly) together. This rigorous counterpoint is a hallmark of Carter's compositional style, and it sets the tone for rehearsing, performing and recording a work like *Trilogy*. I can't help but think, however, how he must have taken a certain wry delight in crafting such technical challenges for the players. We

endeavored to maintain such a delight during the recording of the work: to keep the humanity both within the music and throughout the music-making.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) SONATA FOR FLUTE AND HARP IN E-FLAT MAJOR, BWV 1031 (1730–1734)

Elliott Carter was a master of counterpoint - in *Trilogy*, and in many other works. His is a counterpoint equal in rigor to that of Johann Sebastian Bach, yet oddly refracted: in Carter the art is to remain apart - in Bach, to remain together. Beyond wanting to record a Bach Sonata in principle, the two works paired here - Carter's *Trilogy* and the E-flat Major Flute Sonata of Bach - act as foils - they are surprisingly similar in their construction, only separated by two centuries of music history. Put another way, I imagine Bach would have admired Carter's music, and had he lived in the 20th Century, may very well have written music similar to the jovial New Yorker's.

The recording here of the E-flat Major Sonata is something of a double transcription - the work was originally written for flute and harpsichord, yet it lies quite well on the oboe with no need for any revision; the use of harp instead of harpsichord adds a resonance and warmth to the work that I find particularly fulfilling. Scholars suggest that this sonata may not have been written by Johann Sebastian Bach, but

by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: of the seven flute sonatas, regardless of which Bach was responsible, the E-flat is likely my favorite. There is a richness to the opening harp phrases of the first movement that is immediately palpable and a dance-like quality to the opening lines of the oboe that beautifully combines lyricism with lilt. The voicing is intricate and the work is difficult to perform, but the dialogue between the two instruments is endlessly rewarding and I find myself hearing new interplay, new motivic variation with every performance. The second movement Siciliano embodies simplicity - the smooth accompaniment from the harp beneath the elegant tune - perfect in its brevity and touching in its melancholy. This movement is the lyrical heart of this otherwise complex sonata. The complexity peaks in the third movement with a brilliant, technically-demanding duo of treble instrument and continuo. The movement is nearly constant passagework, verging on breathless, and is probably the least intelligent movement to transcribe for the oboe.

ERNST KRENEK (1900-1991) VIER STÜCKE FÜR OBOE UND KLAVIER (1966) SONATINA FOR SOLO OBOE (1956)

Ernst Krenek was born in Vienna in 1900 and by the age of 16 was studying composition with Franz Schreker at the Vienna Music Conservatory. Krenek explored numerous compositional styles throughout his career - from atonality to twelve-tone to jazz. Like Hindemith, Krenek was blacklisted by the Nazis in 1933 - it took only a few more years, the cancellation of his major opera *Karl V* at the Vienna State Opera, and Hitler's 1938 *Anschluss* of Austria to propel Krenek across the Atlantic to the United States. After academic posts at Vassar College north of New York City then later in St. Paul, Minnesota, Krenek moved to Los Angeles in 1947. In 1956, the year of composition of his *Sonatina* for solo oboe, he purchased a home in Tujunga, in as far north of the Los Angeles sprawl as the mountains allow, next to the Angeles National Forest. I've always enjoyed the *Sonatina* as much for its concise language and brevity as for its humor - particularly in the second movement, with its allusion to "Pop Goes the Weasel", which always manages to elicit a chuckle from audiences. On a recording full of so much serious music, the *Sonatina* seemed the perfectly cheeky conclusion.

The *Vier Stücke für Oboe und Klavier*, however, are an entirely different story. It never ceases to amaze me how Krenek, in 1945 having become an American citizen, moves to

the landmark city of post World War II American promise, Los Angeles - the first major city in America built on the premise that everyone can own a house and a car - a city of endless sunshine and suburbs, the fantasy of Hollywood - that Krenek, whom I imagine in a room in his house, perhaps overlooking a fruit tree, shaded from the intense desert sun, could produce such beguiling sounds as those in the *Vier Stücke*. This is not without precedent - both Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, among many other 20th-Century European luminary transplants - were longtime residents of the city - but the sensation remains with me nevertheless.

The *Vier Stücke* explore some of the more wild possibilities of the oboe a number of years before Luciano Berio did the same in his *Sequenza VII*. The composer calls for brilliant double trills (twice as fast as regular trills), fluttering the tongue while playing to create a kind of vibrating sound, transparent harmonic fingerings, fragile double harmonic fingerings (ethereal, airy-sounding pairs of pitches) - and he places all of these unusual sounds in the context of an atonal yet delicately romantic work - not necessarily avant-garde in conception but nevertheless boundary-pushing. The work is full of moments of inspiration - the end of the second piece, with its delicate *bisbigliando* (using different fingerings to produce the same pitch - not unrelated to *bariolage*) in the oboe over nearly jazz-sounding chords in the piano is one example. There is a grace to the pacing and wink of the eye from time to time - the oboist must understand and relish the opportunity to sound crazy: when Krenek combines

a flutter tongue with double trill - both at the same time - or writes fortissimo on a high G, the highest note of the instrument. The *Vier Stücke* is a work of extremes, endless colors, and dialogue between instruments in equal parts (with the pianist allowed in on the fun as well, striking the lid of the keyboard and percussively tapping the music stand). I have been enamored with these pieces since I first laid eyes on them - their creativity, romance, and sheer wildness transcend their thorny language and remove the distance they might otherwise embody. The proof is in the pudding - to presenters' amazement, audiences are routinely charmed by the *Vier Stücke's* weirdness and vitality.

Like Hindemith, Krenek's life was inescapably linked to politics. He was indelibly changed in the 12 years of Nazi power in Europe, and like Hindemith Krenek came to the United States and became an American citizen. In a classic understanding of immigration in America, we would understand these men to be American composers - and in a way I wish we would claim them as such. The overarching question is then, were their personal and compositional lives created by the terror they fled or saved by the opportunity they found? Our incessant desire to understand art as struggle leads us to the former, but I like to at least consider the latter as well. I prefer to think of Krenek in his house in Tujung, the mad immigrant crafting his strange sounds before heading to dinner at his local Denny's.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
FROM FÜNF STÜCKE IM VOLKSTON
OP. 102 (1849)

This disc required a little antidote for the supposed distance of the works of Krenek, Hindemith, Vasks, Carter and even the rigorous counterpoint of Johann Sebastian Bach. The *Stücke im Volkston*, or pieces in folk-song style, of Robert Schumann are a set of five beautiful works for cello and piano that lend themselves well to the oboe. Schumann gave oboists their major work from the 19th Century: the *Drei Romanzen*, Op. 94; the leap to oboe for these simple, beautiful pieces is a short and sensible one. The most simple music, however, is the most difficult to play - the performance must sound effortless, singing and heartfelt even while it reveals to the player his or her greatest, most fundamental flaws: intonation, rhythm, phrasing, dynamics - in a sense everything is laid bare because the music is so bare, and the beautiful melodies in which the player initially took such joy turn into little monsters demanding more talent, more practice, more ability. Nevertheless they are addictive, and when I considered adding music to this disc that was tonal or properly "old" (beyond Bach) they seemed a natural fit - one doesn't get much farther from the Carter *Trilogy* than

these. They are not folk songs per se, simply pieces "in a folk song style" - perfectly proportioned melodies with simple accompaniments regardless of whether they are slow and singing or brisk and triumphant.

I was once told by a very intelligent gentleman that pieces "talk to one another". And it's true: when we program a concert or a recording we consider not only which individual pieces we might program but where they're placed in a program and which works precede and follow them. Bach sounds different at the beginning of a performance than at the end. Mozart sounds different after Ravel than after Haydn, Wagner sounds different after Boulez than after Schumann - composers, styles, specific pieces - they all talk to one another. If you listen to this disc from beginning to end the Schumann *Stücke im Volkston* will sound very different than if you simply skipped right to them. Not only will you enjoy them more, you will hear more, because your ears are attuned to the intricacies of Carter, the otherworldly sounds of the Krenek *Vier Stücke*, the plaintive lines of Vasks, the counterpoint of Bach. All of these characters exist in Schumann, either disguised or in plain sight, in a different melodic and harmonic language. At the end of the disc, all of these works speak to one another - their language is close, if not even the same: the distance becomes irrelevant.

THANKS

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Although he made me stare into a Soviet microphone for two full days of recording in Stellenbosch, great thanks go to the masterful recording engineer Gerhard Roux.

I am incredibly lucky that Bridget Kibbey was so willing to join me in this project - I can't have imagined these recordings without her enthusiasm and her artistry. I hope we continue to play these pieces (and many more!) together for a very long time. Ryan Streber was our expert engineer and producer in New York City and I am ever grateful to

him for his consistent good-nature, professionalism and positivity. Thanks goes to Purchase College for allowing us to record in the Recital Hall and to Stellenbosch University for the magnificent Endler Hall in South Africa.

Everything I know I learned from my teachers: I am fortunate to have had some of the best of our times. Stephen Taylor, Christian Wetzel, Humbert Lucarelli, Ray Still - and the many others from whom I've also learned so much, if this disc is dedicated to anyone, it's to all of you. I still have much to learn from you.

Thank you to my parents and brothers and sister-in-law (who may recognize, with her husband, the E-flat Major Bach Sonata from their wedding ceremony) for their love and support and to Aaron and Sydney, without whom I would miss out on so much happiness.

And thank you to you for purchasing this CD, reading the liner notes, and reaching the end of them! A truly dedicated oboe fan.

JAMES AUSTIN SMITH

Praised for his “virtuosic” “dazzling” and “brilliant” performances (*The New York Times*) and his “bold, keen sound” (*The New Yorker*), oboist James Austin Smith performs equal parts new and old music across the United States and around the world. Mr. Smith is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (Chamber Music Society Two), the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), the Talea Ensemble, Cygnus and Decoda, and a regular guest of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He is a member of the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and the State University of New York at Purchase.

Mr. Smith’s festival appearances include Marlboro, Lucerne, Chamber Music Northwest, Schleswig-Holstein, Stellenbosch, Bay Chamber Concerts, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, OK Mozart, Schwetzingen and Spoleto USA; he has performed

with the St. Lawrence, Orion and Parker string quartets and recorded for the Nonesuch, Bridge, Mode and Kairos labels.

Mr. Smith received his Master of Music degree in 2008 from the Yale School of Music and graduated in 2005 with Bachelor of Arts (Political Science) and Bachelor of Music degrees from Northwestern University. He spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar in Leipzig, Germany at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater “Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy” and is an alumnus of Ensemble ACJW, a collaboration of Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, the Weill Music Institute and the New York City Department of Education. Mr. Smith’s principal teachers are Stephen Taylor, Christian Wetzel, Humbert Lucarelli, Hansjörg Schellenberger and Ray Still.

The son of musician parents and eldest of four boys, Mr. Smith was born in New York and raised in Connecticut.



BRIDGET KIBBEY

Harpist Bridget Kibbey “makes it seem as though her instrument had been waiting all its life to explode with the gorgeous colors and energetic figures she was getting from it” (*The New York Times*). Ms. Kibbey is a recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Classical Recording Foundation’s 2012 Young Artist Award, and winner of Concert Artist Guild’s International Competition and Astral Artist Auditions. Her debut album, *Love is Come Again*, was named one of the Top Ten Releases by Time Out New York; she can also be heard on a Deutsche Grammophon recording of Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ayre* and Luciano Berio’s *Folk Songs* with soprano Dawn Upshaw. Her solo performances have been broadcast on NPR’s Performance Today, on New York’s WQXR, WNYC’s Soundcheck, WETA’s Front Row Washington, WRTI’s Crossover, and A&E’s Breakfast with the Arts.

Ms. Kibbey recently spearheaded a five-orchestra World-Premiere Harp Concerto Consortium, for which she performed

a new harp concerto by Juno-Award winning Vivian Fung alongside standard harp concerti with the Alabama Symphony, Karlsruhe Badische Symphoniker, The Phillips Collection with the Phillips Camerata, San José Chamber Orchestra, and the Metropolis Ensemble. She is frequently featured with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in Alice Tully Hall and on tour, and was recently named a Principal Artist with Camerata Pacifica, with whom she will be featured the next five seasons.

Festival appearances this past season include Bravo!Vail, Savannah Music Festival, Music@Menlo, Chamber Music Northwest, Portland Chamber Music Festival, Pelotas Festival (Brazil), Bay Chamber Concerts, and Saratoga Performing Arts Center among others.

Ms. Kibbey is a graduate of The Juilliard School, where she studied with Nancy Allen. She is on the harp faculties of Bard Conservatory, New York University, and the Juilliard Pre-College program.



LUIS MAGALHÃES

Described as possessing a “wonderfully full sound” (*American Record Guide*) and a “polished, refined technique” (Allmusic.com), Stellenbosch-based pianist Luis Magalhães has achieved critical acclaim as both a soloist and a chamber musician. In addition to numerous performances in South Africa and his native Portugal, Luis has also appeared in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, Italy, Brazil, China, Japan, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and the United States.

In the studio, Luis has collaborated with Frank Stadler, Daniel Rowland, Peter Martens, and James Austin Smith. These partnerships have resulted in glowing reviews, as well as a coveted South African Music Award (2011). As one half of the Schumann-Magalhães duo, better known as TwoPianists, Luis has also released a further three critically acclaimed CDs, with another soon to be released. This collaboration with his wife, Nina Schumann, has been compared to the

duos of Ashkenazy-Previn and Argerich-Freire (*American Record Guide*). Luis is a co-founder of the independent label TwoPianists Records which has been the recipient of both local and international accolades. He is a co-founder of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, which has since 2004 become the premier classical music festival on African soil. He also co-founded the Stellenbosch International Piano Symposium.

Luis was awarded a DMus from the University of Cape Town in 2011, and currently holds a Professorship at the University of Stellenbosch. Luis has also given extensive masterclass tuition including lessons at New York’s fabled Juilliard School and numerous universities across Europe, Asia and the United States. As an expert pianist and educator, Luis has also served in the jury of the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition for Young Musicians (2012). Luis is a Yamaha International Artist.



DISTANCE James Austin Smith (Oboe)

Luis Magalhães (Piano) | Bridget Kibbey (Harp)

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) | Oboe Sonata (1938)

1. 03:54 I. Munter
2. 08:21 II. Sehr langsam - Lebhaft - Sehr langsam,
wie zuerst - Wieder lebhaft

Peteris Vasks (b. 1946)

3. 09:30 Pieskarieni for Solo Oboe (1983)

Elliott Carter (1908-2012) | Trilogy for Oboe and Harp (1992)

4. 04:49 I. Bariolage
5. 05:14 II. Inner Song
6. 04:37 III. Immer Neu

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750) | Sonata for Oboe and Harp in
E-flat Major, BWV 1031 (1730-1734)

7. 03:10 I. Allegro moderato
8. 01:55 II. Siciliano
9. 04:21 III. Allegro

Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) | Vier Stücke für Oboe und Klavier (1966)

10. 01:49 I.
11. 01:58 II.
12. 01:27 III.
13. 01:47 IV.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) | from Fünf Stücke im Volkston
Op. 102 (1849)

14. 03:24 II. Langsam
15. 01:52 IV. Nicht zu rasch

Ernst Krenek | Sonatina for Solo Oboe (1956)

16. 00:42 I. Allegro
17. 02:04 II. Adagietto
18. 00:50 III. Vivace
19. 01:47 IV. Andante - Allegretto -
Allegro con grazia - Presto

Total Time: 63:31

TP1039183

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Endler Hall, Stellenbosch University,
South Africa, 19 - 21 April 2014

TRACKS 4-9: Purchase College,
Purchase, New York, USA,
16, 18 February 2014

ARTISTS: James Austin Smith (oboe),
Bridget Kibbey (harp),
Luis Magalhães (piano)

PRODUCED BY: Nina Schumann

BALANCE ENGINEER: Gerhard Roux

PIANO TUNER: W. Heuer Musikhaus

EDITED & MIXED BY: Gerhard Roux

MASTERED BY: Tim Lengfeld

PHOTOS: Bakkes Images

NOTES BY: James Austin Smith

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