

STECHER & HOROWITZ

C O M M I S S I O N S

Lowell Liebermann | Michael Torke | Gabriela Lena Frank | Avner Dorman

John Musto | Michael Brown | Walter Piston

Aristo Sham | Charlie Albright | Daniel Kim | Mackenzie Melemed

Leann Osterkamp | Anna Han | Matthew Graybil | Larry Weng



STEINWAY & SONS



Melvin Stecher | Walter Piston | Norman Horowitz

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C O M M I S S I O N S

Lowell Liebermann	TWO IMPROMPTUS, OP. 131	<i>Aristo Sham</i>	
	1 I. Limpido con molto rubato		4:57
	2 II. Molto lento e sereno		3:19
Michael Torke	3 BAYS OF HUATULCO*	<i>Charlie Albright</i>	8:11
Gabriela Lena Frank	4 NOCTURNO NAZQUEÑO	<i>Daniel Kim</i>	8:16
Avner Dorman	THREE ETUDES	<i>Mackenzie Melemed</i>	
	5 I. Snakes and Ladders		2:04
	6 II. Funeral March		3:21
	7 III. Sundrops Over Windy Water		3:05
John Musto	IMPROVISATION AND FUGUE	<i>Leann Osterkamp</i>	
	8 Improvisation		4:01
	9 Fugue		5:06
Michael Brown	SUITE FOR PIANO	<i>Anna Han</i>	
	10 I. Prelude		0:58
	11 II. Chant		2:52
	12 III. Fugue		1:08
	13 IV. Finale		1:52
Walter Piston	CONCERTO FOR TWO PIANOS SOLI	<i>Matthew Graybil / Larry Weng</i>	
	14 I. Allegro non troppo		7:34
	15 II. Adagio		8:36
	16 III. Con spirito		4:32

Playing time: 69:59

*Later renamed BLUE PACIFIC



Melvin Stecher and Norman Horowitz, Executive Directors of the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation, have devoted a lifetime to the musical education of young people. Internationally recognized as one of the most distinguished duo-piano teams of their generation, Stecher and Horowitz are equally renowned for their multi-faceted activities as performers, teachers, composers and educational consultants — activities that have earned them a unique position in the world of music. The Stecher and Horowitz Foundation, a non-profit organization, is an outgrowth of the Stecher and Horowitz School of the Arts which was founded in 1960. The Foundation is now dedicated to a concept that seeks to inspire and support outstanding young musicians worldwide. The Foundation's New York International Piano Competition, held every two years, is dedicated to providing artistic development, educational enhancement, seminars, master classes, and performance opportunities. The competition has also commissioned original works from important composers of our day. These works are presented on this album, some for the first time, performed by some of the notable prize-winners of the competition. Also included is the premiere recording of the two-piano version of Walter Piston's *Concerto for Two Pianos*, written for Stecher & Horowitz.

THE MUSIC

TWO IMPROMPTUS, OP. 131 (2016) | Lowell Liebermann (b. 1961)

Lowell Liebermann writes, "When I was approached to write a piece for the New York International Piano Competition, my immediate resolve was to *not* write a virtuoso knuckle-busting showpiece (it being a given that the majority of pianists taking part in competitions these days are possessed of superb technical apparatus) but instead, write a piece (as it turned out, two pieces) that would showcase the pianists' musicality. Each of the Two Impromptus has a single loud climax, but otherwise they deal in shades of dynamics ranging from *p* to *ppppp*, and require great subtlety of dynamic control, color and rubato, while asking the performer to execute daunting polyrhythmic combinations as they maintain a placid and lyrical line. The Impromptus are dedicated with great affection to Melvin Stecher and Norman Horowitz." Aristo Sham, who won both the first prize in the 2016 competition as well as the award for best performance of a commissioned work performs.

BAYS OF HUATULCO (2006) | Michael Torke (b. 1961)

Bays of Huatulco is performed by the 2006 first prize winner and now extremely active concert pianist, Charlie Albright. Michael Torke comments, “*Bays of Huatulco*, later renamed *Blue Pacific*, was commissioned by the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation for their Third New York Piano Competition in 2006. It was written on a cliff side overlooking the sparkling Pacific Ocean in southern Mexico. The sun shines without fail, the temperature rarely strays from the mid-80s, and an ever-present breeze blows off the water. Reminiscent of this setting, a song-like melody develops through a series of keys, reaching its full height near the end.”

NOCTURNO NAZQUEÑO (2014) | Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972)

Gabriela Lena Frank comments, “*Nocturno Nazqueño* for solo piano, graciously commissioned for the New York International Piano Competition in 2014, is a short tone poem that evokes one of the ancient cultures of South America, the Nazcas. A race of people who left behind gigantic geoglyphs on the coast of modern Perú sometime between 500BC and 500AD, the Nazcas have stirred popular imagination as to their purpose in creating these mysterious figurines etched into the earth. I rather fancy the hypothesis that the Nazcas created the large and brilliant images of birds and monkeys in order to communicate with their gods in the sky. This tone poem imagines these geoglyphs dancing at night, in communion with their ancient deities.” Daniel Kim, awarded the prize for best performance of a commissioned work performs.

THREE ETUDES (2012) | Avner Dorman (b. 1975)

Dorman chooses the most demanding model — Ligeti — in creating music that is at once precisely fashioned and fantastical, as well as technically demanding. The first piece, “Snakes and Ladders,” looks back through Ligeti to Conlon Nancarrow in its boogie-woogie mania. The ladders are scales that run in wobbling motion up and down the keyboard, against snakes that are lopsided changes of chords. As the central slow movement, the “Funeral March” revolves in a theme on chords at once dense and clear, grave and aloof. “Sundrops Over Windy Waters,” living up to its title, challenges the performer to extremes of velocity. So fast are the interchanges of the hands in the outer sections that the monophonic construction, one note at a time, is obscured in the shimmer. The middle section, still super-fast, provides contrast in being anchored to its repeating bass notes. — *Paul Griffiths*

The *Three Etudes* is performed by Mackenzie Melemed, who won the 2012 prize for best performance of a commissioned work.

IMPROVISATION AND FUGUE (2008) | John Musto (b. 1954)

Leann Osterkamp, whose recording of the complete solo piano works of Leonard Bernstein has just been released on the Steinway label, performs the John Musto commission.

John Musto comments, "The *Improvisation* lays out the elements of the whole piece. It begins with a brooding, lyrical blues, very much inspired by the sound world of my friend, jazz pianist Fred Hersch. A little three-note motif from the blues insinuates itself into a tango, slightly quickening the pace. This in turn morphs into a delicate *scherzando* with roulades sweeping up the keyboard. The blues returns briefly as a halting minuet until it is rather rudely interrupted by a manic *presto*, in the driving style of novelty pianist Zez Confrey. After a climactic few bars of hammered chords (which will return at the end of the piece) the introspective blues quietly returns. Although it seems that the ensuing *Fugue* is the logical outgrowth of the *Improvisation*, having incorporated many of its elements, it was actually written first. The piece ends with a quiet reminiscence of the blues."

SUITE FOR PIANO (2013) | Michael Brown (b. 1987)

Anna Han, first-prize winner of the 2012 competition, performs Michael Brown's *Suite*.

Michael Brown comments, "The *Prelude* features mostly quiet yet sweeping scale-like gestures with changing meters and a playful wit. The second movement, *Chant*, features a lilting swing in 6/8 creating a hushed and intimate atmosphere. The final two movements snap us out of the inward world featuring more lively contrapuntal writing in the *Fugue* and a frenzied and outgoing *Finale*."

CONCERTO FOR TWO PIANOS SOLI (1967) | Walter Piston (1894–1976)

After hearing the wonderfully brilliant performances of this concerto with the Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra by those great artists Melvin Stecher and Norman Horowitz, who had commissioned the work, I had the notion that a version for two solo pianos would enable them to play it more often, and in places where a symphony orchestra is not available. Furthermore, it seemed to me that I might thereby contribute to the rather sparse literature of original pieces for duo-piano teams. I did not wish to make an 'arrangement', but rather a rethinking of the entire score in terms of the two solo instruments, so that the two versions stand as separate and individual works. – Walter Piston

The world premiere of the "Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra" occurred on July 4, 1964, at the Congregation of the Arts, at the Hopkins Center, Hanover, New Hampshire. The new version for two solo

pianos was completed in the fall of 1967, and was performed in its premiere season throughout the United States and Europe by Messrs. Stecher and Horowitz. The work is cast in three movements: *Allegro non troppo*, reflecting Dr. Piston's genius for musical architecture; an intensely moving *Adagio*; and the finale, marked *Con spirito*, a light buoyant, and cheerful section that moves at breathtaking speed. With two grands, he could emphasize counterpoint and varieties in musical texture. The work starts with the two pianos playing the syncopated and modal (in Mixolydian) main theme doubled over four octaves. Later the music is highly contrapuntal. The contrasting second theme allows the soloists to display their virtuosity and unanimity of ensemble.

The Piston Concerto is performed by 2006 competition winner, Larry Weng, and 2004 winner, Matthew Graybil.

The Stecher & Horowitz Commissions was recorded

January 16-17 and March 5, 2017 at Steinway Hall, New York City.

Producer: Jon Feidner | Engineer: Lauren Sturm | Editing: Kazumi Umeda

Production Assistant: Renée Oakford | Assistant Engineer: Melody Nieun Hwang

Mixing and Mastering: Daniel Shores

Equipment: Pyramix using Merging Technologies Horus Converters;

mixed and mastered through Merging Technologies Horus Converter

Microphones: DPA ST4006A, AEA N8, Schoeps MC6/MK2

Executive Producers: Eric Feidner, Jon Feidner

Art Direction: Jackie Fugere

Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo

Piano Technician: Lauren Sturm

Pianos: Steinway Model D #597590 (New York), Steinway Model D #519960 (Hamburg)

Photos: R. Andrew Lepley

The Competition Egg by Theo Fabergé, Created for The New York International Piano Competition



STECHER & HOROWITZ

C O M M I S S I O N S

Melvin Stecher and Norman Horowitz, the acclaimed American piano duo known as *Stecher & Horowitz* since 1951, are equally celebrated in the world of music education. Their biennial New York International Piano Competition has recognized some of the best young pianists of our time.

The competition has also commissioned original works from important composers of our day. These works are presented on this album for the first time, performed by some of the notable prize-winners of the competition. Also included is the premiere recording of the two-piano version of Walter Piston's

Concerto for Two Pianos, written for *Stecher & Horowitz*.

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4	Gabriela Lena Frank	NOCTURNO NAZQUEÑO	<i>Daniel Kim</i>	8:16
5-7	Avner Dorman	THREE ETUDES	<i>Mackenzie Melemed</i>	8:31
8-9	John Musto	IMPROVISATION AND FUGUE	<i>Leann Osterkamp</i>	9:08
10-13	Michael Brown	SUITE FOR PIANO	<i>Anna Han</i>	6:52
14-16	Walter Piston	CONCERTO FOR TWO PIANOS SOLI	<i>Matthew Graybil / Larry Weng</i>	20:43

Playing time: 69:59

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