



# Drew Petersen

BARBER | CARTER | GRIFFES | IVES | ZAIMONT



STEINWAY & SONS

In 2017, **Drew Petersen** added winner of the American Pianists Awards to a decorated young career that already included prizes from the Leeds International Piano Competition, the Hilton Head International Piano Competition, Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Competition and the New York Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition. Petersen was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2018.

At age five, Petersen was presented at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall and by age nine, he gave a solo recital at Steinway Hall for the company's 150th Anniversary. *The New York Times* has written about the early performances of the gifted, "freckle-faced 10-year-old who still impresses adults with his intelligence, maturity and depth," and *New York Magazine* prominently featured Petersen in an article about child prodigies. Petersen's extraordinary gifts were also chronicled in the documentary *Just Normal*, and in Andrew Solomon's book, *Far From the Tree*, which featured case studies of exceptional children.

Overseas engagements have included recitals at the Musica e Arte Festival in Tolentino, Italy; Verbier Festival in Verbier, Switzerland; Euro Arts Music Festival in Leipzig, Germany; and American Spring Festival of the Czech Republic.

Petersen graduated cum laude from Harvard at age 19 with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Social Science and did his undergraduate and graduate music studies at the Juilliard School, the former as a recipient of the prestigious Kovner Fellowship. He has recently been accepted into the Artist Diploma program at the Juilliard School.

An avid traveler, it's always a happy coincidence when Petersen's travels take him somewhere near the ocean—a calming, grounding environment that's as much an inspiration for his own music-making as it is an escape. He raced competitively as a child and continues his love of swimming with regular open water swims of 1-2 miles.



Charles Tomlinson Griffes' Fantasy Pieces epitomize the composer's sensual, full-bodied keyboard aesthetic, fusing late Romanticism, French Impressionism and Russian mysticism. Griffes' lush harmonic palette and sinewy contrapuntal lines also evoke the sound world of Ferruccio Busoni, the composer/pianist who recommended G. Schirmer to publish Griffes' works. Griffes connected each piece with a specific text of his choosing, including one of his own for the concluding Scherzo.

The genesis of Charles Ives' Concord Sonata dates back to 1911, when the composer first conceived of a piano work whose four sections would evoke key literary and philosophical figures of the mid-19th century Transcendentalist movement. *The Alcotts* movement offers a lyrical, introspective respite from the first two movements' combative complexity. Earlier in the Sonata, Ives utilizes the celebrated four-note "fate knocking at the door" motive that begins Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in a craggy, pounded out manner. Here, however, the motive is plain spoken and delicate.

Nearly twenty years after the Concord's completion, John Kirkpatrick gave its first integral New York performance at Town Hall on January 20th 1939. Among those present was Elliott Carter, who had first gotten to know the Concord during his teens. Ives encouraged Carter's youthful aspirations to be a composer, and wrote him a recommendation to get into Harvard University. During the postwar years, Carter abandoned his earlier populist style, as borne out in the 1945/6 Piano Sonata's gradual elimination of a definite scheme of tonality, wavering between two keys a semi-tone apart. While the first movement is cast in standard sonata form, one invariably focuses upon Carter reveling in the instrument's sonorous potential by way of extreme textural contrasts, striking overtone effects and ingenious use of the pedals.. These elements similarly inform the elaborate second movement fugue, although Carter likened the Sonata's rhythmic pliability to the freedom characterizing great jazz piano virtuosos of that era.



While Carter's Sonata slowly eased itself into the repertory, Samuel Barber's Sonata quickly became (and still remains) the "go to" piece for young pianists seeking a surefire yet substantial American crowd pleaser. Its first movement consists of two main themes, one hammered out in gnarly minor seconds, the other more lyrical and arpeggiated. Barber's use of twelve-tone rows concern textural freshness more than organizational rigor. The Scherzo's assiduous duple and triple meter alternations and playful bitonality define the state of "delightfully off balanced." The Adagio mesto is a spacious lamentation in the form of an imposing passacaglia. The sonata would have ended there had his friend Vladimir Horowitz not suggested that Barber add "a flashy last movement, but with content."

Judith Lang Zaimont's well-crafted and wide-ranging piano works can be both challenging and audience friendly at the same time. They also are idiomatic enough to sound harder than they actually are to execute, a characteristic one could ascribe to Zaimont's own remarkable pianism. Commissioned for the 2017 American Pianists Awards, *Attars* refers to the work's five brief sections respectively named for fragrant essential oils used for perfumes, medicines and religious ointments. *Roses* features long-lined melodies surrounded by arpeggios in all varieties, in contrast to *Musk's* late-Scriabinesque restraint and the moody hues of *Pink Lotus'* processional repeated chords. *Jasmine* is a fleet, almost improvisatory toccata, while *Frangipani* brings the Romantic Waltz Fantasy tradition into the 21st Century.

— Jed Distler



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at Steinway Hall, New York City.

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Photo of Drew Petersen: Dario Acosta