

Samuel ADLER

CHAMBER AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

THY SONG EXPANDS MY SPIRIT FOR PIANO SOLO

IN MEMORY OF MILTON FOR VIOLIN SOLO

VIOLIN SONATAS NOS. 2, 3 AND 4

FESTSCHRIFT FOR PIANO SOLO

FANTASY FOR PIANO SOLO

STRING QUARTET NO. 10

Michelle Ross, violin
Michael Brown, piano
Cassatt Quartet

SAMUEL ADLER AND HIS MUSIC

by Jürgen Thym

Samuel Adler was born in Mannheim, Germany, in 1928 and, escaping Nazi oppression, came with his parents to the United States in 1939. He holds degrees from Boston University and Harvard University. He studied composition with Paul Hindemith, Walter Piston and Aaron Copland. After his academic studies he returned to Germany as a soldier, where he founded and conducted the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble that was instrumental in the cultural diplomacy of the United States in Europe after the Second World War and during the Cold War. He served on the faculty of North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas) from 1957 to 1966, the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester from 1966 to 1995, and at the Juilliard School of Music in New York from 1997 to 2017, mentoring hundreds of students of composition at those schools over nearly six decades and gaining recognition as one of the most sought-after teachers. And he was active not only at those institutions: he spent his summers at Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine, and at the Freie Universität Berlin. He has written books on choral conducting, sight-singing and orchestration¹ (*The Study of Orchestration* serving as the standard textbook in conservatoires and music schools across the world) as well as an autobiography, *Building Bridges with Music: Stories from a Composer's Life*.² Adler's compositions have been performed by major symphonic, choral and chamber ensembles, as well as singers and instrumentalists, in the United States and abroad. Many of his works have been recorded and are available on the Albany, Citadel, CRI, Crystal, Gasparo, Golden

¹ *Anthology for the Teaching of Choral Conducting*, Schirmer Books, New York, 1971; *Sight Singing – Pitch, Interval, Rhythm*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1979; *The Study of Orchestration*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1982.

² Pendragon Press, Hillsdale, NY, 2017.

Crest, Linn, Lyrichord, Naxos, Mark Records, RCA, Troy, Turnabout and Vanguard labels. He has received many honours and awards, including five honorary doctorates and the Order of Merit (*Bundesverdienstkreuz*) of the Federal Republic of Germany.

That auspicious career had an auspicious beginning: family lore has it that when he was born in 1928, in a Mannheim hospital that bore a plaque notifying the world that a century-and-a-half earlier Mozart had lived at the site, his mother, Selma, predicted that her son, too, would become a composer. Though in hindsight the prediction seems to be strikingly clairvoyant, it should be said that, in addition to the location of his birth, music was on the cards in other respects: Hugo Adler, his father, was a cantor at the Mannheim synagogue, and made a name for himself as a composer of religious oratorios and synagogue music; and his mother, too, liked music, enjoying dancing in particular.

In any case, Hugo and Selma decided in 1935 to get young Sam started on the violin. There is a moving image of the boy, posing with his fiddle on the snow-covered steps outside his parents' residence in Mannheim. Several teachers advanced his skills in playing the instrument, perhaps not far enough to allow him a career as a soloist or orchestral musician, but sufficient to instil in him a fondness for the violin that has lasted a lifetime, and I cannot help seeing a connection between young Sam playing the violin at an early age and the composer Samuel Adler who lent his creativity and imagination to writing some of the most beautiful music for that instrument in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond: the music recorded in this album provides ample proof. The soaring sound of the violin, hovering over the texture of the other instruments, seems to be an expression of the boundless sense of hope and optimism that Adler has maintained even in some of history's darkest times.

Invoking Mozart can be justified for other reasons as well. Adler is an uncannily prolific composer, whose works by now have broken the 500-mark, almost matching the Köchel total of 626 (and counting). Even the pandemic has not stopped his creativity. Granted, composing is a relatively solitary activity, dependent on peace and quiet as well as a lack of distractions from the busy outside world. But Adler has found a way, by means of technology, to engage performers and listeners and get his latest works



The nine-year-old Samuel Adler in 1937, on the steps of the family home in Mannheim

performed and heard. His song ‘When Great Trees Fall’ (after a famous poem by Maya Angelou), commemorating the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the autumn of 2020, gave focus to the sentiments of a large segment of Americans at a time of national mourning and was heard by many. At age 93, he has just finished his Seventh Symphony. ‘Do you have a performance?’, I asked. ‘No,’ he answered, ‘I just composed it for myself.’ Even over the phone, I could sense the tongue-in-cheek quality of his response. Adler is not the sort of composer to write music to be put away in the drawer or as a kind of *Flaschenpost* (message in a bottle) to be discovered decades later on the shores of another continent. He writes for the here and now.

He lends his creativity, moreover, to the requirements of his fellow human beings. He has composed hundreds of pieces, mostly vocal and choral, that one may describe as functional music, to be performed in celebrations and festive occasions in synagogue and church. Indeed, they come close to being what his teacher, Paul Hindemith, called *Gebrauchsmusik*, ‘music for use’. The practical approach could be seen quite early in his life when, as a student, he composed a horn sonata for his girlfriend of the time, who was a horn-player. Many – in fact, most – of his works have come into being because someone commissioned – or, to use another word, wanted – them. And performers and performing organisations have generally enjoyed presenting Adler’s works to their respective musical communities. All the works presented here owe their existence to close connections between composer and performers.

The compositions at hand represent a cross-section of his chamber music involving one or more string instruments, with a few solo piano works interspersed for contrast. They span a time period of almost sixty years and range from the mid-1950s to the second decade of the 21st century.

The earliest work here is the **Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano**. Composed at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire in the summer of 1956, it reveals the influence of Adler’s teachers Piston and Copland. At a time when American composers were drawn to serial techniques of composition, Adler pursued a path of expanded tonality. The three movements are centred on G, B and A. The first movement, an *Allegro moderato* [2], juxtaposes two themes (one fidgety and nervous, the other lyrical and song-like) and

develops them over rhythmic ostinato patterns; a recapitulation presents both themes again in slightly modified form. It is followed by the second movement (*Lento espressivo*) [3] that is the lyrical centrepiece of the sonata: an expressive melody (*dolce* or sweet) is stated in the violin, developed in the middle section by both instruments, and returns in the form of a recapitulation, fading away at the end into near-inaudibility. The last movement, *Allegro molto ma non troppo* [4], is perhaps the most ‘American’ of the three, concluding the sonata in Coplandian fashion with a peasant dance or hoe-down. The work was given its first performance in 1958 in Aspen, Colorado, by Marjorie Fulton-Harrell and Brooks Smith.

The **Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano**, composed in Dallas in 1965 and premiered by Carroll Glenn and Brooks Smith in New York City in 1968, is an altogether different beast. It consists of six episodes performed without interruption – in other words, in a single movement but with aspects of a multi-movement work [6]. Episodes 2 and 4 (both marked ‘Very slowly’) relate to each other as slow sections and episodes 3 (‘Suddenly fast – Very lively’) and 5 (‘Like a waltz, gracefully’) as dance-like scherzos (with variation techniques playing a role in linking both pairs), whereas the outer episodes 1 and 6 (both marked ‘Fast and intense’) relate to each other in tempo, character and structure (the latter may be considered a retrograde of the former).

The **Sonata No. 4 for Violin and Piano**, composed at the beginning of 1989, was premiered by William Steck and Cary Lewis a year later in Washington, DC. Steck, to whom the sonata is dedicated, was concert-master of the National Symphony at the time, and his instrumental prowess was very much on Adler’s mind when writing the piece. Fiendishly difficult for both violinist and collaborative pianist, it explores the full range of instrumental colours of the violin and challenges the virtuosity of both players, especially in the outer movements. The first movement, ‘Quite fast’ [9], juxtaposes melodic fragments and sustained melodies with relentlessly forward-driving rhythms (the instruments alternating), until the momentum is exhausted in a coda (featuring a twelve-tone melody in the violin and a D major arpeggio in the piano!). The slow movement, ‘Quiet and dream-like’ [10], provides an introspective and meditative contrast. A middle section featuring an innocent dance-tune ‘playfully’ developed by

both instruments is framed by 'dreamlike' outer sections in which a soaring cantilena presented *con sordino* (with mute) by the violin is accompanied by chords and melodic fragments in the piano. The energy of the first movement returns in the third, 'Fast and very rhythmic' [11], a dance movement in $\frac{6}{8}$ occasionally 'spiced up' with irregularities by way of hemiolas and segments in $\frac{5}{8}$; swirling semiquavers (sixteenth notes) and repeated chords provide additional impetus. Exuberance and *élan vital* are perhaps the appropriate terms for describing the character not only of the first and third movements but the entire Sonata.

Adler has composed no fewer than ten string quartets,³ often composed for, and premiered by, such first-rate ensembles as the Fine Arts Quartet (No. 6), the Cleveland Quartet (No. 7), the Franciscan Chamber Players (No. 8) and the Esterhazy Quartet (No. 9). The **String Quartet No. 10** (his last contribution to the genre to date) is no exception. With financial support from the Fromm Foundation, it was commissioned by the Cassatt Quartet to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Bowdoin International Music Festival in 2014. The Quartet has performed it numerous times since then. Like the Third Violin Sonata, it is a one-movement composition, with individual sections suggesting a multi-movement work. It begins [12] with a slow introduction, faintly recalling the beginning of Mozart's 'Dissonanzen' Quartet, K465: the lower strings gradually present the foundation in the form of chords in stacked fifths, allowing the first violin to soar high above the others with an expressive melody. It is a sonority that later returns twice to introduce the middle section of the Quartet, which functions as a slow movement. But first the listener is taken on a wild ride ('Fast and very agitated'): although the agitation is occasionally interrupted by melodic fragments tossed back and forth between the various instruments, the overall aural impression is that of a relentless and energetic forward drive. The slow 'movement' follows: a section of utter calm and introspection in which the soaring quality of the first violin again predominates (interrupted briefly and poignantly by the 'sighs' of a series of *glissandi* in all instruments). A dance-like finale ('Fast and with abandon') concludes the work.

³ Adler withdrew his first two string quartets, making the Third Quartet really his first.

The other compositions presented here are less ‘weighty’, single-movement pieces. The *Fantasy for Piano Solo* [1] of 2014, dedicated to Michael Brown, and the *Festschrift: A Celebration for Solo Piano* [7] of 2007, commissioned to celebrate the teaching of the pianist and bassoonist Wiley John Williams at the University of South Carolina, are toccata-like rhapsodies, both preceded by slow introductions. *In Memory of Milton for Violin Solo* [5] of 2012 is a tribute to an unusual friendship. Milton, of course, is Milton Babbitt (1916–2011), a Princeton composer and theorist who preceded European composers in conceiving total serialism as early as 1947–48. Adler and Babbitt became colleagues at Juilliard in 1997, and their schedule in New York City overlapped to allow them to have dinner together on Mondays in Babbitt’s favourite restaurant (Vietnamese, if memory serves). During one of those encounters, Milton reflected on the teaching of composition: ‘You know, Sam, I think we have had more composition students than any other two composers in history. If they have not studied with me, I am sure they have studied with you.’ The commemorative piece for solo violin is in ABA form: an ‘agitated’ middle section in $\frac{5}{8}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ is framed by slow, rhapsodic outer sections, presenting several soaring melodies, ‘very slowly yet freely’, in improvisatory fashion. Taking its cues from the title of a poem by Walt Whitman, *Thy Song Expands My Spirit for Piano Solo* (published in 1983) [8] was a tribute to Aaron Copland on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in 1980. A slow introduction consisting of chords of stacked fifths gives way to a very fast and rhythmic toccata-like main section.

Jürgen Thym is Professor Emeritus of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. Samuel Adler and he were colleagues for nearly 25 years and have stayed in touch in retirement. Jürgen Thym collaborated with Samuel Adler on his autobiography, Building Bridges with Music.

Michelle Ross is a performer and a composer. Her repertoire as a violinist spans a wide range, from the Baroque to the music of the present day, and she seeks out unusual performance venues. When her debut album, *Discovering Bach*, of Bach's partitas and sonatas for solo violin came out in 2017, she brought those masterpieces to the public by way of a month-long blog and pop-up performances in New York City coffee shops, subway stations, ferries, bookstores and hospitals —an activity that caught the attention of Alex Ross (no relation) in *The New Yorker*.

She has appeared as a soloist and guest concertmaster with major orchestras in the United States, Europe and Asia. Seasoned as an artist at the Marlboro Music Festival from 2011 to 2014, she has toured extensively with Itzhak Perlman and Musicians from Marlboro, and has curated chamber music festivals in -the Rocky Mountains of Utah, and in collaboration with visual artists at the Grand Central Atelier in New York City.

As a composer, she has ventured into improvisation, both on the violin and the piano, as well as into electronics. She can be heard collaborating with Jon Batiste on Movement 11 in his genre-defying album *We Are*. She received degrees in English literature from Columbia University and in music from the Juilliard School of Music, where her teachers were Itzhak Perlman, Dorothy Delay, Ronald Copes and Catherine Cho (violin) and Samuel Adler and Kendall Briggs (composition).



Photograph: Isa-Marie Mazucco

Michael Brown was described by *The New York Times* as ‘one of the leading figures in the current renaissance of performer-composers’. Winner of a 2018 Emerging Artist Award from Lincoln Center and a 2015 Avery Fisher Career Grant, he is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He makes regular appearances with such orchestras as the National Philharmonic and the Albany, Grand Rapids, North Carolina and Seattle symphonies, and was selected by Sir András Schiff to perform an international solo recital tour, making debuts in the Tonhalle in Zurich and 92nd Street Y in New York. He has appeared at the Bard, Bridgehampton, Marlboro, Mostly Mozart, Music@Menlo, Ravinia, Tanglewood and Tippet Rise music festivals and performs frequently with his longtime duo partner, the cellist Nicholas Canellakis.

A prolific composer, his *Concerto for Piano and Strings* (2020) was co-commissioned by the Gilmore Piano Festival and by the NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra in Poland, and was premiered by the Kalamazoo Symphony in 2021, with the composer as soloist. He was the composer and artist-in-residence at the New Haven Symphony for the 2017–19 seasons and a 2018 Copland House Award winner. He was the First Prize winner of the Concert Artists Guild competition, is an alumnus of The Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two), and earned degrees in piano and composition from The Juilliard School, where he studied with the pianists Jerome Lowenthal and Robert McDonald and the composers Samuel Adler and Robert Beaser. He lives in his native New York with two nineteenth-century Steinway Ds that he has christened Octavia and Daria.

Named after the American Impressionist painter and feminist Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), the **Cassatt Quartet** was founded in New York City in 1985 by the first participants of the Juilliard School Young Artists Quartet Program. The Quartet made an early name for itself as an ensemble specialising in contemporary music. The group has performed widely in



Photograph: Bill Weidman



both Americas, Europe and Asia; over the years, it has won, or been placed second at, several chamber-music competitions (Banff, Coleman, Fischhoff). Its performances can be heard on the Albany, Cantaloupe, CRI, Koch, Naxos and New World labels.

The musicians making up the Cassatt Quartet have changed over the span of more than 35 years. Muneko Otani, the first violinist, is the only original member of the group. She studied violin at the Toho Gakuen School of Music in Tokyo, and also undertook graduate work at the New England Conservatory in Boston. She is currently on the faculty of Columbia University and Williams College. Jennifer Leshnowar, second violin, joined the Quartet in 2001. She received her training at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and at the Peabody Conservatory (with Sergiu Luca and Sylvia Rosenberg, respectively) and has given master-classes in Ireland, Italy and Mexico. Ah Ling Neu, viola, has a remarkable international pedigree; born to Chinese parents in Japan, she received her training at the San Francisco

Conservatory of Music and the Hague Royal Conservatory in the Netherlands. Like Otani, she is on the faculty of Columbia University and an Artist Associate at Williams College. Elizabeth Anderson, cello, joined the Quartet after performing with the Meliora Quartet for many years. Holding degrees from the Juilliard School of Music, California State University and the Eastman School of Music, she has appeared as a recitalist in the United States, Europe and Asia and has recorded for Nonesuch, RCA and Telarc.



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SAMUEL ADLER Chamber and Instrumental Music

1	<i>Fantasy for Piano Solo</i> (2014)*	5:01
	Violin Sonata No. 2 (1956)	12:27
2	I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	3:44
3	II <i>Lento espressivo</i>	4:21
4	III <i>Allegro molto ma non troppo</i>	2:22
5	<i>In Memory of Milton for Violin Solo</i> (2012)*	5:08
	Violin Sonata No. 3 (1965)	16:08
6	Fast and intense – Very slowly – Suddenly fast – Very lively – Very slowly – Like a waltz, gracefully – Fast and intense	
7	<i>Festschrift: A Celebration for Solo Piano</i> (2007)*	4:11
8	<i>Thy Song Expands My Spirit for Piano Solo</i> (1980)*	4:04
	Violin Sonata No. 4 (1989)	16:01
9	I Quite fast	4:46
10	II Quiet and dream-like	6:37
11	III Fast and very rhythmic	4:38
	String Quartet No. 10 (2014)*	16:26
12	Very slowly – Fast and very agitated – Very slowly – Fast and with abandon	
	Michelle Ross, violin 2–6 9–11	TT 77:29
	Michael Brown, piano 1–4 6–11	
	Cassatt Quartet 12	
	Muneko Otani and Jennifer Leshnowar, violins	
	Ah Ling Neu, viola	
	Elizabeth Anderson, cello	

* FIRST RECORDINGS