



AMERICAN CLASSICS



Richard
DANIELPOUR

Twelve Études for Piano

Piano Fantasy • Lullaby • Song Without Words

Stefano Greco, Piano



Richard
DANIELPOUR
(b. 1956)

Twelve Études for Piano (2011–12)	40:46
❶ Étude No. 1 (Five-Finger Arpeggios)	1:55
❷ Étude No. 2 (Left Hand Étude, with Right Hand Playing Inside Piano)	4:42
❸ Étude No. 3 (Full Sounding Chords)	3:29
❹ Étude No. 4 (Rapid Scales)	1:22
❺ Étude No. 5 (Octaves)	2:15
❻ Étude No. 6 (Sixths and Trills)	5:27
❼ Étude No. 7 (Mirror Étude; Repeated Notes Between Both Hands)	2:35
❽ Étude No. 8 (Stride Étude)	2:36
❾ Étude No. 9 (Left Hand Étude: “Singing Left Hand”)	5:08
❿ Étude No. 10 (Arpeggio Étude)	2:33
⓫ Étude No. 11 (Repeated Notes with Ornamentation)	3:52
⓬ Étude No. 12 (Phrased Pairs)	4:32
⓭ Piano Fantasy (“Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden”) (2008)	17:55
⓮ Lullaby (2021)	3:35
⓯ Song Without Words (2021)	3:21

Richard Danielour (b. 1956)

Twelve Études for Piano • Piano Fantasy • Lullaby • Song Without Words

Work on my *Twelve Études for Piano* began in the fall of 2011 and finished in early 2012. The c. 40-minute work was commissioned by Vanderbilt University for a performance that was given in 2013 by three pianists who, at the time, were on the faculty of the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt – Mark Wait, Craig Nies and Amy Dorfman. Each of the études are dedicated to a pianist who I have known as a colleague, collaborator, or friend. The aforementioned three pianists who gave the world premiere of the work in December 2013 are the dedicatees of three of the études. Two of the études are dedicated to pianists who are recently deceased (*Étude No. 3* is dedicated to Joseph Kalichstein who passed away just before the writing of these notes, and *Étude No. 9* is dedicated to Leon Fleisher who passed away in 2020.)

Each of these études was written with the idea of a particular pianistic skill that any first-class artist would be expected to master. But at no time was I thinking that any of these études would simply be exercises; each of them had to be a piece of music with its own self-contained narrative, capable of being received purely as concert piece, but with a particular and clearly apparent technical demand.

Two of the études are primarily for the left hand. *Étude No. 2* employs the playing of the left hand in the lower region of the piano, while the right hand plucks strings inside the piano with a guitar pic. This second, and most unusual étude, is also the most non-Western in its overall sound, with hints of Persian music evoking my own ancestral heritage. The second étude is dedicated to Gary Graffman, while the ninth, a left-hand étude with the right hand playing mostly repeated notes, is dedicated to Leon Fleisher. Both of these great pianists spent a great portion of their career playing repertoire for the left hand, in part due to injuries they had sustained. Both of these artists are not only pianists, but also as human beings were a great inspiration to me in my life.

The sixth étude, coincidentally an étude in sixths, is dedicated to my friend and colleague André-Michel Schub. I actually showed this étude to André as it was in progress; he lived not far from me on the Upper West Side of New York where I was composing the collection. The final étude, which is a study in phrased pairs, is dedicated to my dear friend and colleague Philippe Entremont, who at the time of this writing is a few months away from his 88th birthday.

The études are not ‘in’ a key, but rather built around a harmonic area. In each étude, the key is defined by the tonal area in which each étude ends. The harmonic ordering of the twelve études is built around the circle of fifths, with the first étude ending in C major and the last ending in F major.

The writing of this work was not nearly as difficult as my desire to play each piece in the set from start to finish after it was completed. I wanted to do this to make sure that the pieces were indeed playable and achievable in spite of their technical challenges. While I consider myself to be a somewhat competent pianist, I quickly realized that the technical demand for many of these pieces was substantial. I also always compose my first drafts at the piano regardless of what the piece in question might be. I do this consistently, and habitually, not because I cannot hear the work away from the piano, but because I need, physically, in a sensate way, to feel the work. I have never been able to separate the actual music from the visceral and physical demands that are symbiotically bound with the making of my music.

In late 2020, the Italian pianist Stefano Greco had expressed his desire to perform my twelve études. He asked me if a recording existed and I mentioned to him that there was not, nor had there been a public performance of the entire set by one pianist. Stefano Greco’s artistry was extraordinary; his early recording of J.S. Bach’s *The Art of Fugue* showed him to be a master of Bach’s music, but I was not only surprised and delighted to know that he not only wanted to play these pieces, but thrilled when I finally had a chance to hear him play some of my études through a connection on Zoom.

The recording of the work took place in late September 2021, while I was in Rome from 29 August to 10 October. I will always be grateful to Stefano for the hours of time that he invested in studying my work. By the time of the recording, he knew these études from the inside out, as if he had composed them himself.

My *Piano Fantasy* (“*Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden*”) was composed on a commission from the Gilmore Foundation in 2008 for pianist Adam Golka. This work, of approximately 18 minutes in length, is based on the final chorale that appears in Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*. The work is actually a free set of continuous variations, with the theme coming at the end of the work rather than at the beginning, as is commonly found in a set of variations. This idea creates a kind of revelation of a “hidden song,” which is only unveiled at the end of the piece. Years after composing this work, I have come to understand this work itself as a search for grace, that which is not earned in life but given as a gift. The revelation of that chorale of grace comes at the end of a fugue, which is the final variation of the fantasy. This fugue, which starts out tonally (the subject itself is derived from the Bach chorale tune), becomes more and more dissonant, and in essence “corrupted,” until at its darkest moment, the chorale quietly emerges note for note as it was originally written by Bach. The work ends quietly and peacefully, echoing fragments of the chorale tune in the harmonic language that exists throughout the rest of the work.

The two short pieces that complete this album, *Lullaby* and *Song Without Words*, are piano transcriptions that exist as instrumental interludes in the second act of my opera *The Grand Hotel Tartarus*. These two works, which are the equivalent of bonus tracks on this album, were included largely because of Stefano Greco’s desire to play them after having heard me perform them for him during my stay in Rome in the fall of 2021. At the time of my writing these notes, I am currently at work on the second act of the opera.

Richard Danielpour

Richard Danielpour



Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

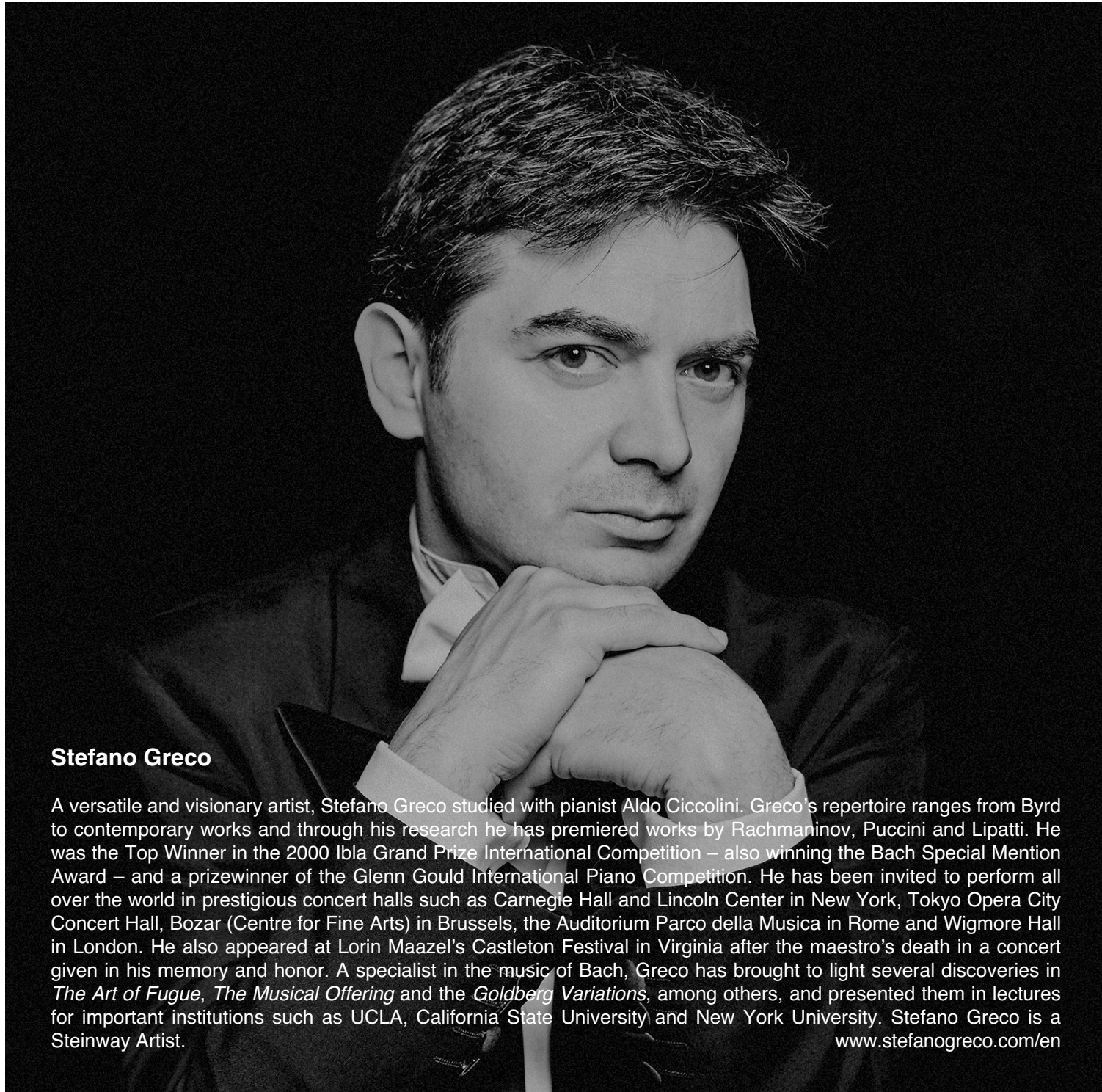
Richard Danielpour's list of commissions include some of the most celebrated artists of our day, including Yo-Yo Ma, Jessye Norman, Dawn Upshaw, Emanuel Ax, Gil Shaham, Frederica von Stade, Thomas Hampson, Gary Graffman, Anthony McGill, the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, the Guarneri and Emerson String Quartets, and institutions such as the New York City and Pacific Northwest Ballets, New York Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Mariinsky and Vienna Chamber Orchestras, Orchestre National de France, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, among many more. Danielpour is best known for his opera *Margaret Garner*, which was written with Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. He has received two awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Joseph H. Beards Prize from Columbia University, two Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships, and The Berlin Prize from the American Academy in Berlin. Danielpour is a professor of music at UCLA as well as a member of the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music.

In April 2019, JoAnn Falletta led the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus in performances of *The Passion of Yeshua*, which was recorded for Naxos (8.559885-86). The album was released in March 2020 to critical acclaim, and was nominated for three GRAMMYs in 2021, including Best Contemporary Classical Composition, winning the category of Best Choral Performance.

In 2020, the Oregon Bach Festival commissioned Danielpour to compose *An American Mosaic* as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to pay homage to those most affected by its devastation. The recording, released by pianist Simone Dinnerstein on Supertrain Records, garnered immediate critical acclaim, while receiving over three million streams on Apple Music alone, and was recently nominated for a GRAMMY for Best Classical Instrumental Solo.

In September 2021, he was awarded with a lifetime achievement award from the Cremona Music Festival and later that fall, he was awarded the Covell Chair from UCLA to support the composition and production of his new two-act opera *The Grand Hotel Tartarus*, making him only the second recipient of this coveted award.

Danielpour is one of the most frequently recorded composers of his generation. Many of his recordings can be found on the Naxos and Sony Classical labels. Danielpour's music is published by Lean Kat Music and Associated Music Publishers.



Stefano Greco

A versatile and visionary artist, Stefano Greco studied with pianist Aldo Ciccolini. Greco's repertoire ranges from Byrd to contemporary works and through his research he has premiered works by Rachmaninov, Puccini and Lipatti. He was the Top Winner in the 2000 Ibla Grand Prize International Competition – also winning the Bach Special Mention Award – and a prizewinner of the Glenn Gould International Piano Competition. He has been invited to perform all over the world in prestigious concert halls such as Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, Bozar (Centre for Fine Arts) in Brussels, the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome and Wigmore Hall in London. He also appeared at Lorin Maazel's Castleton Festival in Virginia after the maestro's death in a concert given in his memory and honor. A specialist in the music of Bach, Greco has brought to light several discoveries in *The Art of Fugue*, *The Musical Offering* and the *Goldberg Variations*, among others, and presented them in lectures for important institutions such as UCLA, California State University and New York University. Stefano Greco is a Steinway Artist.

www.stefanogreco.com/en

Richard
DANIELPOUR
(b. 1956)

- 1–12** **Twelve Études for Piano** (2011–12) **40:46**
- 13** **Piano Fantasy**
 (“Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden”) (2008) **17:55**
- 14** **Lullaby** (2021) **3:35**
- 15** **Song Without Words** (2021) **3:21**

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Stefano Greco, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 20–23 September 2021 at the Teatro Studio Borgna,
Auditorium Parco della Musica, Rome, Italy

Producers: Stefano Greco, Giacomo De Caterini

Engineer: Giacomo De Caterini

Editor: Stefano Greco

Mastering: Giacomo De Caterini, Igor Fiorini

Booklet notes: Richard Danielpour

Publishers: Lean Kat Music **1–12** **14** **15**,

Associated Music Publishers **13**

Special thanks to the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia,
Rome, Italy for their collaboration.

Cover illustration by nav (www.iStockphoto.com)



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Richard Danielpour is one of the most decorated, frequently performed and recorded composers of his generation. His commissions include works for some of the most celebrated artists of our day. Each of the *Twelve Études* is dedicated to a particular pianist with its own substantial technical demands, but all are conceived as concert pieces with a self-contained narrative. The variations in the *Piano Fantasy* are based on the final chorale of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*. All of these world premiere recordings were made in close collaboration between the composer and acclaimed pianist Stefano Greco.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
65:40