

SOCIAL FLUTTERBY



PIANO MUSIC OF DAVID SHENTON

JOANNE POLK, PIANO



STEINWAY & SONS

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### SIX MUSICAL ODDITIES, OP. 81

- 1 I. MONKEY BUSINESS 2:17
- 2 II. IN FULL SWING 2:36
- 3 III. PUNCH LINE 2:00
- 4 IV. GENTLE MISSTEP 2:35
- 5 V. BROKEN CHORDS 3:29
- 6 VI. SOCIAL FLUTTERBY 2:48

### 7 BALLADE, OP. 80 11:22

### SONATA, OP. 77

- 8 I. ALLEGRO 9:44
- 9 II. SCHERZO 6:36
- 10 III. ROMANZA 9:22
- 11 IV. RONDO 9:22
- 12 VARIATIONS ON SANTA CLAUS IS COMING  
TO TOWN (AFTER CHOPIN'S ETUDES) 13:09

PLAYING TIME: 75:27

**SIX MUSICAL ODDITIES, Op. 81** As soon as I had completed the composition of my Ballade, Op. 80, I was so encouraged to have received such a commission by the incredible Joanne Polk that I was bitten by the writing bug. So I immediately embarked on a new composition, Six Musical Oddities, Op. 81. The overall title came later. Many composers created so many wonderful forms of original piano compositions, yet I had never heard of nor played an "oddy," so I wanted to create something new to add to the piano repertoire.

*Monkey Business*, the first piece I wrote in the set, is a scherzo in sonata form, aptly named for the cheeky attitude the music conveys. Next, *Gentle Misstep* was born. The 11/8 time signature alludes to the misstep, meaning it's a modified waltz with one beat missing on the 4th sequence of um-pah-pah (3+3+3+2). The melody is simple enough, a five note ascending scale that later develops by adding notes to the main theme while at the same time layering itself in canonic form to give the pianist rather a difficult time, despite seeming rather simple and straightforward.

For the remainder of the opus I decided to try something new - to choose the titles first. *Full Swing* is a jazz etude with a lightly swung offbeat accent. It offers the unique opportunity for the pianist to become a rhythm section, since there is a walking bass section to be accompanied by a right-hand finger snap! *Punch Line* is a furiously playful little number. Every cadence is comprised of unexpected harmonic shifts, not dissimilar to how the recitation of a joke may prompt unexpected results at the punch line. The middle section is more lyrical with devilishly tricky upwardly soaring arpeggiated runs based on the upper extensions of jazz chords (sharp 9ths or 11ths, flattened 5ths and 9ths, etc.). *Broken Chords* is based solely on upward and downward arpeggiated four note chords. The right hand plays each note from the top down while the left hand does the opposite. The hands cross or intertwine somewhere in the middle of each sequence to create a new melodic line. The sentiment behind this work is melancholy, it being in the gloriously dark key of F minor. Finally, a rondo entitled *Social Flutterby* concludes the set. This piece, and all the others, do have a jazzy element to them. In all six pieces I wanted to convey a whimsical sentiment, to create piano music that is technically challenging and hopefully worth the effort. Once complete, I decided that *Musical Oddities* seemed befitting of these eccentric little vignettes.

**BALLADE, Op. 80** After recording my Chopin/Santa Variations so brilliantly during the great pandemic lockdown of 2020, Joanne Polk called me to ask if I would write an original piano piece for her. That's the greatest compliment a composer can receive. I am a huge fan of Chopin and I've performed his first and fourth Ballades

many times in public. The musical structure of these groundbreaking masterpieces is engrained in my subconscious so much so that this Ballade follows a similar form. The calm F major opening teeters over augmented left-hand harmonies and, like much of my music, has a slight jazzy feel. The second subject, in C major, rises and falls melodically, exploring numerous keys before settling back to the opening theme. The calm is shattered by a dark and stormy Allegro section, which ultimately winds down to reveal the daylight of the gentle opening theme once again. After a short time the calm is broken once again as the second subject theme enjoys a virtuosic development section, which brings us to the musical climax of the piece where all themes and subjects merge. We tentatively circle back to the coda that brings the Ballade to a peaceful conclusion, evoking another clear, calm sky.

**PIANO SONATA, Op. 77** The Sonata for Piano, Op. 77 is in traditional Romantic period sonata form, consisting of four separate movements: *Allegro*, *Scherzo*, *Romanza*, and *Rondo*. It is reminiscent in structure, of the great sonatas by Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms, and others from this period. The commission specified that the sonata be in a major key, be romantic yet unique in style, be somewhat technically challenging, and be melodic, not modern. The sonata was commissioned by Mr. Gregory Joseph for his wife, Barbara's, birthday. The sonata was completed in New York City, in August 2016.

**I. ALLEGRO** The first movement, *Allegro*, is bright and passionate and sets the tone for the sonata, which is in traditional sonata form, the exposition being a combination of march-like reverence with its counterpart second subject theme having a calm, choral-like sensibility (repeated with fiendishly difficult jumps, à la *Schumann Fantasie*). The development section concentrates largely on this second subject theme which, through Chopin-esque chromaticism, yields to the recapitulation in all of its high-spirited grandeur. It is worth noting that the main theme consists of the notes, B, A, B, A, B which is interspersed with reinforced left hand chordal accompaniment (*Rfz*), thus musicalizing the name, BARBARA, the sonata's dedicatee.

**II. SCHERZO** The second movement is a *Scherzo* much like those by Chopin and Mendelssohn. It is in the key of B minor, D major's relative, and is frenetic in mood, punctuated by short breaks, hopefully triggering an unnerving sort of sentiment. The second theme is almost Slavic in feel and has unrelenting energy and drama. The slow lyrical trio section concentrates on an ascending and descending melody that takes us through several keys before settling in C major, an easy enough transition back to B minor. The form is then pretty much repeated, albeit slightly shorter, and ultimately ends with the trio's main theme deceiving us into what we think will be a tranquil ending, before the nimble main motif wins the battle ending with a dark and dramatic conclusion. Note: the main

melody of this movement was (deliberately and ironically) very loosely based on the melody to *Happy Birthday to You*, a subtle nod to the dedicatee.

**III. ROMANZA** The *Romanza* is slow and lyrical and is based on a similar melodic progression to the first movement, suggesting the name Barbara with its B, A, A, B melody. If this piece were orchestrated, I'm certain a cello would be used to play the repeat of the theme in the exposition, as pulsating strings and horns accompany looking down from above. There is a Nocturne feel to the development section of this movement which leads us into a haunting minor version of the main theme. But, it ultimately ends happily as the melody becomes impassioned in a Rachmaninoff-inspired conclusion of the theme, which in turn leads us into a coda that leaves us peaceful and, hopefully, contemplative.

**IV. RONDO** The final movement is a *Rondo* inspired by many wonderful composers but is unique in many respects due to its use of the Indian inspired modality of the main melody (a nod the dedicatee's profession: Yoga!). The mischievous vigor of the second subject cannot seem to decide whether to stay in the dominant key of A or to jump to the seemingly unrelated key of C. Dominance wins (!) and, after another ornamented iteration of the *Rondo* theme, a chorale section is introduced, halting the frenzied Eastern figure in its tracks. This lush chorale, which is thematically transformed from the main theme, becomes lavishly amped up in virtuosic form to eventually return to the joyful, galloping rondo. The *Rondo* dances along gallantly before a dramatic descending D minor scale leads us back to flashback from first the *Scherzo*, then the *Romanza*, and finally the opening *Allegro* theme. This gives us a sense of coming around full circle and this first theme leads us nicely into a dramatic and incredibly virtuosic ending that is sure to rouse any audience to their feet (at least, that is my hope!).

**CHOPIN / SANTA** The question most people ask when I tell them about my Chopin/Santa Claus variations is "How on earth did you come up with this crazy idea?" Well, I was practicing the piano one November day about four years ago. I happened to be playing the first Chopin study, Op.10/1 at the time. As I was playing it my mind started to wander as I inadvertently changed the arpeggios, thus the harmonic direction of this study. Instead of going to G major in the 3rd bar I went back to C, then C7, F, etc, and I suddenly realized I was playing the harmonic progression to *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. That's when I had the further idea to delve a little deeper and see just how versatile these masterpieces were. I wanted to incorporate the basic elements of the 24 studies, maintaining the integrity of the patterns, the technical intentions, and as many of the original harmonies as possible while trying to weave in the melody of this great Christmas standard. The Studies by Chopin

are generally less melody-driven than his other group compositions, such as the Preludes or Nocturnes, so in many ways, they are more adaptable to transcriptions, since one can play the studies with different harmonies, yet they will remain recognizable as the Chopin Etudes.

The true challenge of playing this piece, aside from the obvious technical difficulties, is the realization that a pianist will have to 'unlearn' the original studies. I don't believe there are any concert pianists out there who have not played these 'rite-of-passage' works. That's why I needed to find a really special and gifted pianist to undertake this project; somebody who is technically proficient, brilliantly musical and who would see the value of this arrangement and not turn his or her nose up at it. I'm so grateful to my dear friend Joanne Polk who took on this crazy project and had to resist temptation to play what we pianists have had in our fingers for many years.

I hope you enjoy listening to this arrangement and, for all the pianists who may play it someday, I apologize to your teachers in advance....

– David Shenton



Pianist **JOANNE POLK** was catapulted into the public eye with her recordings of the complete piano works of American composer Amy Beach (1867-1944) on the Arabesque Recordings label. Ms. Polk celebrated the centennial of Beach's Piano Concerto by giving the work its London premiere with the English Chamber Orchestra at the Barbican Center under the baton of Paul Goodwin. A few days later, Ms. Polk performed the Piano Concerto with the Women's Philharmonic in San Francisco with conductor Apo Hsu in a performance described as "brilliant" by critic Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He went on to describe Ms. Polk's performance as, "an enormously vital, imaginative reading. Her playing was expansive in the opening movement, brittle and keen in the delightful scherzo. She brought a light touch to the foreshortened slow movement and fearless technical panache to the showy conclusion."

The first recording in the Beach series, *by the still waters*, received the 1998 INDIE award for best solo recording. *Empress of Night*, the fifth volume of Ms. Polk's survey of Beach's piano works, includes the Piano Concerto with the English Chamber Orchestra, Paul Goodwin conducting. The sixth volume of the series, *Morning Glories*, joins Ms. Polk with the Lark Quartet in three outstanding chamber music works by Amy Beach. Two all-Beach performances at Merkin Concert Hall, which featured Joanne Polk and the Lark Quartet, were applauded by the *New York Times*, as they deemed Polk's performances "polished and assured." *American Record Guide* reported, "Polk and the Larks played their hearts out. We in the audience shouted ourselves hoarse with gratitude."

Prior to recording the complete piano music of Amy Beach, Ms. Polk recorded *Completely Clara: Lieder by Clara Wieck Schumann*, her debut CD for Arabesque Recording, featuring Metropolitan Opera soprano Korliss Uecker. This CD was selected as a "Best of the Year" recording by *The Seattle Times* and was featured on *Performance Today* on New York Public Radio. Ms. Polk's CD for Albany Records, *Callisto*, features the solo piano music of Judith Lang Zaimont. Her CD titled *Songs of Amy Beach*, recorded with baritone Patrick Mason for Bridge Records, was nominated for a Grammy Award. In 2010, Ms. Polk's two-CD set of solo piano music by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, *Songs for Pianofore*, was released on the Newport Classic label. Ms. Polk's solo piano CD, titled *Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn*, was released in 2012 on the Bridge Records label.

In 2014, Ms. Polk's CD titled *The Flatterer*, solo piano music of French Romantic composer Cécile Chaminade, was released on the Steinway & Sons label. The CD was a "Pick of the Week" on New York's classical radio station WQXR, and debuted at number 1 on the Classical Billboard Chart. In 2017, Joanne Polk's CD, *Gershwin & Wild*, was released on the Steinway & Sons label and features Earl Wild's transcriptions of Gershwin songs, as well as Wild's Piano Sonata. *American Record Guide* called Ms. Polk's playing on this CD, "plush and dreamily attractive..."

In 2014, Joanne Polk was named as one of Musical America's *Top 30 Professionals of the Year* in an article titled, "Profiles in Courage." Ms. Polk's profile focused on her work promoting the music of women composers.

Ms. Polk received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music Degrees from The Juilliard School, and her Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from Manhattan School of Music. She has given master classes at many summer festivals and universities across the country, and in 2018 completed a five-city, three-week concert and master class tour of Taiwan and China.

In 2019, two of Ms. Polk's CDs, *Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn* and *The Flatterer: Solo Piano Music by Cécile Chaminade*, were included on New York City's classical radio station WQXR's *Essential Piano Recordings*.

In February 2020, Ms. Polk's CD *Louise Farrenc Etudes and Variations for Solo Piano*, was released on the Steinway & Sons label. In March 2020, Joanne Polk was interviewed about her Farrenc CD on NPR's *Performance Today* hosted by radio personality Fred Child. In December 2020, Ms. Polk's Farrenc CD was on *The New York Times* "Best Classical Music of 2020" list.

Ms. Polk recorded *Variations on Santa Claus is Coming To Town (after Chopin's Etudes)*, a brilliant and fun set of variations composed by David Shenton, utilizing all 24 Chopin Etudes, and weaving the popular Christmas song throughout. It was released as a digital album on the Steinway & Sons Label in November, 2020, and is also included on the present CD.

Although most concerts were suspended during 2021, Ms. Polk gave virtual masterclasses at various colleges and universities this year, including Boston University, and performed virtual recitals at summer festivals including the Puerto Rico Piano Festival.

Ms. Polk is a member of the piano faculty of Manhattan School of Music, and is an exclusive Steinway Artist.





Born in England in 1975, pianist, violinist, composer, and arranger **DAVID SHENTON** began writing music at the age of 9, composing in the classical/jazz subgenre, since his main influences have always been from the Classical and Romantic Periods and from traditional jazz music. Dubbed as “totally ingenious” by BBC Radio 3’s Jeremy Sams, David has composed around 200 works including sonatas for various instruments, 2 piano concertos, a violin concerto, a double jazz violin concerto, a symphony (composed at age 11), an oratorio, several string quartets, dozens of songs, instrumental works, four operas and ten musicals. David’s music has been described by critics as being “immediately accessible, while maintaining immense depth, beautiful melodic writing, and incredible sophistication.”

David began working as a professional musician at the age of 14, which was also the age he gave his concerto debut on the violin. As a pianist and musical director, David has collaborated with a host of stars including Vanessa Williams, Tony Bennett, Pinchas Zukerman, Renée Fleming, Liz Callaway, Sherrill Milnes, Sir André Previn, Michael Feinstein, Amanda McBroom, Katie Couric, Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, to name a just few. David has performed at all of the top concert halls in New York and London, and many other prestigious venues around the world.

He has written, orchestrated or arranged music for the concert hall, for Broadway and West End shows, and for the Hollywood and UK film industries. David founded two popular musical ensembles, Empire Trio and Uptown Girls, and tours extensively with these two groups in the US and Canada. He teaches extensively and, as a coach, accompanist, and teaching professor, has been on the faculties of NYU, The New School, The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute, Mannes College of Music, St. Thomas Choir School and Grace Church School.

David and his wife, soprano Erin Shields, share a passion for saving endangered wildlife and they have taught English in Africa where they frequently volunteer to work with elephants, rhinos and other endangered species. David graduated from the Royal College of Music in 1997 with the highest honors.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank Jon Feidner, Renée Oakford, and the wonderful team at Steinway & Sons for their enthusiasm for my compositions and for giving me the incredible opportunity of recording my music. The Steinway Spirio is stunning and I loved playing it after Joanne had finished her sessions! Thanks to Fred Child for your kindness and support, and for being, well, just a brilliant and lovely person! I'd like to thank my wife, Erin Shields, for always pushing me to write and for giving me inspiration every day of my life. My family have always been my biggest fans and I'd love to mention them here: my dear late mother Kathryn, father David, Sarah, James, Debbie, Anna, Maria, Elsie, Alfie, Poppy, Kat, Elliot, Rebecca, Mike, Barbara, Peggy, Tony, Jaci, Megan, Anton, Jim, Lisa, Natalie, Chelsea, Jonathan, Kelly, Joel, Joseph, James, and our dearly departed Jack, Rose, Nika, Natalia and Alex. And, most importantly, I'd like to thank my dear friend Joanne Polk for taking on this project. Your playing, like your personality, is exquisite, beautiful, brilliant and inspiring. I am so grateful you listened to me when I told you about my crazy idea to re-write the Chopin Studies as a Christmas song! Not many people would have listened. But you did. And I will forever be grateful to you for your support, generosity, and for being such a great friend! Cheers to you!

– David Shenton

Front and center, my immense gratitude to friend and composer David Shenton for his brilliant, creative, lyrical, poetic, eloquent, touching, innovative, humorous and virtuosic compositional style. There is something for every musical taste in these extraordinary pieces, and I found oh so much to my liking and loving in these works. My gratitude to Jon Feidner, at the helm of the Steinway & Sons Label, for his consistently masterful CD creations, and to Renée Oakford, Kazumi Umeda, Lauren Sclafani and Melody Nieuwen Hwang, for their exquisite work behind the scenes of all my CDs with the Steinway & Sons label. And to my friends, family, colleagues, students and enthusiasts – Dr. Jeffrey Langford, Dr. Julian Langford, Dr. Ruiqi Fang, Dr. Roberta Jellinek, Josann McGibbon, Aaron Morgan, Da Ping Luo, Steven Epstein, Debra Kinzler, Dr. William Becker, Dr. Nina Sugar, my friends at the Catskill Mountain Foundation, most notably Pam Weisberg, Norman and Leslie Ross, and many others – I say thank you immensely, for your constant encouragement and enthusiasm, in support of the music I choose to champion.

– Joanne Polk

## CREDITS

Recorded at Steinway Hall, New York City on April 27, 2021.

*Variations on Santa Claus is Coming to Town* recorded on July 28, 2020.

Producer: Jon Feidner

Engineer: Lauren Sclafani

Assistant Engineer: Melody Nieun Hwang

Editing: Kazumi Umeda

Mixing and Mastering: Daniel Shores

Equipment: Pyramix using Merging Technologies Horus Converters; mixed and mastered through  
Merging Technologies Horus Converter

Microphones: DPA 4006A, Schoeps MC6/MK2

Executive Producer: Jon Feidner

Art Direction: Jackie Fugere

Photo of Joanne Polk: Jeffrey Langford Photography

Photo of David Shenton: Erin K. Shields

Production Assistant: Renée Oakford

Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo

Piano Technician: Lauren Sclafani

Piano Steinway Model D # 616938 (New York)

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