

An Artistic Collaboration

by Bradford Gowen

The relationship between composer and performer is obvious: the composer needs someone to play his music, and the performer needs music to play. Beyond this purely practical level of mutual need, however, there is another sense in which composers and performers often work together to shape our art.

In earlier times, the composer and the performer of a piece were apt to be the same individual. From the troubadours through Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, there was hardly a player more prominent than the composer himself in the performance of his works. The nineteenth century saw instrumental virtuosity rise to new levels, and there emerged a host of *pianist-composers* from Czerny to Anton Rubinstein and beyond, as well as some *composer-pianists* such as Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. This dual role of composer and performer, however balanced in the individual, has not carried through the twentieth century; the dichotomy between creator and re-creator has increased with growing trends toward specialization, until the existence of a concert musician with equal standing as a composer and performer is a rarity.

In our country, the first composer who was also a proficient pianist was undoubtedly the versatile Alexander Reinagle, who played his sonatas in Philadelphia in the seventeen-eighties. Within a hundred years Gottschalk and MacDowell had appeared, and the tradition continued with Cowell, Copland, and others, who played their own compositions almost exclusively.

It is often true that the composer's works reflect his own experiences as a player. However, for generations there have been virtuoso performers whose unusual abilities inspired the creation of works far beyond the instrumental proficiency of their composers. In such a case, the player enlightens the composer, who in turn directs the player. (One thinks of Joachim's aid to Brahms in the latter's violin concerto.)

Such sharing—the willingness of composer and performer to learn from each other, and the commitment of the performer to the newly created (or not-yet-created) work—has led in the past couple of generations to a linking of the names of some composers with some pianists: Ben Weber and Alan Hovhaness with William Masselos, John Cage with David Tudor, Louise Talma and Quincy Porter with Beveridge Webster, George Crumb with David Burge, John Corigliano with James Tocco, Frederic Rzewski with Ursula Oppens. The list is long, even without such crusaders as Masselos, John Kirkpatrick, and George Pappastavrou, who worked to promote the music of Charles Ives.

The existence of performers such as these, committed to the development of modern musicianship, has led to innumerable opportunities for composers, who in turn have produced challenging and important music worthy of pianists' best efforts.

When a composer and performer are brought together by a work that is their joint concern, there is stimulation far above the level of practical, mutual need. The composer can express himself beyond the confines of notation (and may even learn how his notation can be made more precise), and the

performer is brought closer to the spirit and the letter of the music at the same time. In a piece that involves playing inside the instrument, the composer may learn from the player about variations in interior construction from one type or size of piano to another, and may revise his writing accordingly. Sometimes, even to play on the composer's piano gives the pianist a new concept of the intended sonority. If the composer has written with the pianist's individual style and capabilities in mind, he will be interested in the success of his attempt. Interpretations evolve and solidify as point after point is discussed.

"What did you really mean here?" "I am surprised by the way you played it, but I like it." "That's just what I had in mind." "I like to use some rubato." "I had actually thought of it *this* way." "Is the tempo all right?"

In such exchange lies the life-giving collaboration essential to music.

The compositions recorded here, by contemporary composers of widely differing styles, reveal a kinship with the past. Forms and procedures from several earlier periods served to inspire or guide these composers, sometimes superficially, sometimes deeply. Acknowledging at once the vitality of the past and the need to be new, these composers have contributed to the evolving continuity of music.

Samuel Adler

Sonatina

Samuel Adler (born March 4, 1928, in Mannheim, Germany) studied at Boston and Harvard universities. He studied composition with Walter Piston, Paul Hindemith, and Aaron Copland, and conducting with Serge Koussevitzky. Adler founded and conducted the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra and has remained active as an instrumental and choral conductor. He is the author of textbooks on choral conducting, sight-singing, and orchestration. He taught for ten years at North Texas State University and from 1966 to 1993 was professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music.

An unusually prolific composer, Adler has produced symphonies, oratorios, cantatas, operas, string quartets, and a great deal of other chamber music, and many songs, short choral works, and instrumental solos, among them the series of *Cantos*, each for a different instrument.

The piano music of Adler includes, besides the four works recorded here, two short pieces ("Capriccio" and "Thy Song Expands My Spirit"), four volumes of pedagogical pieces, a sonata for two pianos, and two piano concertos. At every level of difficulty his music is marked by an urgent, communicative nature, with lyricism holding its own against intense rhythmic energy. Though requiring the full resources of the instrument, his piano works usually do not spring from the qualities of the piano itself, and often are not conventionally pianistic. Yet their compositional integrity and instrumental effectiveness give them a clear identity amid the vast amount of American piano music of this century.

This *Sonatina* (1979) is a virtuoso work with an innocent-sounding name. Like the *Sonata Breve*, it has three movements in fast-slow-fast order, but the qualities of the movements differ from one piece to the next. The *Sonatina's* opening movement makes no reference to the gracious poetry that begins the

Sonata Breve. Instead, it shares the high-voltage style of the *Sonata Breve*'s finale, thereby requiring a different style for its own finale. Adler's solution is a fantasy-like third movement that has the effect of an improvised cadenza. The middle movements of both works are slow and sectional, but, while the *Sonata Breve*'s is unsettled and dramatic, the *Sonatina*'s is a relaxed song and dance.

Exuberance marks the *Sonatina*'s sonata-allegro first movement. While continually traversing a wide range on the keyboard, its busyness is offset by a lyrical theme in sixths. High spirits prevail, aided by energetic counterpoint and fast figuration. The slow movement begins very gently. It is a coloristic and songful essay in simple form, more tuneful and less dissonant than the outer movements. The perpetual-motion finale erupts from the bottom of the keyboard and continues with six unbarred pages of notes to be played "as rapidly as possible." Most of the movement is in single-note texture with long pedals. A few fortissimos break into the generally pianissimo level, generating nervous excitement that finds release in a crashing recall of the opening of the first movement.

The *Sonatina* was commissioned by pianist Jeffrey Jacob, to whom it is dedicated.

Robert Evett

Chaconne

Robert Evett (born November 30, 1922, in Loveland, Colorado; died February 3, 1975, in Takoma Park, Maryland) studied composition with Roy Harris and Vincent Persichetti. The bulk of his instrumental work is in standard forms; for the piano there are sonatas, etudes, and a concerto. He also composed a number of choral works. Evett settled in Washington, D.C., where he pursued a double career as an editor of *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic Monthly* and as a composer. He was a bright light in Washington's musical life, and his compositions were to an unusual degree the result of local commissions.

The *Chaconne* was composed in 1950. In form and concept, in texture, and in melodic and rhythmic pattern, it refers to the Baroque period—but its harmonic style identifies it with the mid-twentieth century. The *Chaconne* is decidedly tonal, but Evett moves easily from archaic modality to latter-day dissonance without sacrificing stylistic unity or integrity of detail.

The theme, one long phrase of eight measures, makes its rounds seventeen times in subtly changing polyphonic textures that become chordal at occasional climactic points. Evett's love of cross-relations is obvious throughout.

This piece does not depart radically from its Baroque models, but neither is it an exercise in copying what has already been written; Evett has freshened an old form with elements from his own time.

George Perle

Six Etudes

George Perle (born May 6, 1915, in Bayonne, New Jersey) is one of America's most esteemed composers. Recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, and an array of other

major honors, he studied composition with Wesley LaViolette and Ernst Krenek and has taught at major universities throughout the United States. He is the author of seven books, including a two-volume study, *The Operas of Alban Berg*.

Perle's compositions include a large proportion of chamber works. His sizable catalog of piano works includes solos, a concertino, and two concertos.

Six Etudes was completed in 1976 and was premiered that same year by Morey Ritt at the ISCM World Music Days in Boston. At that time it was Perle's largest piano work, and it remains one of the most significant American piano compositions of the second half of the twentieth century. Proceeding from genuine musical impulses, these etudes are rich in their variety of expressive, exciting, and spontaneous-sounding writing. Though composed in a dissonant harmonic idiom, they contain an abundance of thirds and sixths that impart a characteristic euphony and aural attractiveness not necessarily apparent on the page. For where the composer "gets his notes," the reader is referred to Perle's book *Twelve-Tone Tonality* for a discussion of his unique vision of twelve-tone composition.

Six Etudes are extremely idiomatic without being imitative of earlier composers' piano writing. They display a great variety of textures and sounds that show the instrument to good advantage.

Performance difficulties abound—these are etudes, after all—both for the mechanism and for the mind. The player must be a pianistic athlete, negotiating interlocking hands, rapid pianissimo passages, repeated notes, cross-rhythms and dynamics, very wide jumps, and lightning movement from one thick chord to another.

Problems for the intellect belong largely to the areas of tempo and rhythm. Metric modulations are plentiful, sometimes resulting in formidable metronome indications, as in Etude VI, which presents three interrelated alternating tempos. Even every ritard and accelerando is controlled by metronome markings.

Throughout the etudes there is a predominant tempo and rhythm relationship of two to three, in which one tempo or rhythm is half again as fast or slow as the other. For example, in Etude III measures of sixteenth-notes are interrupted by measures of dotted sixteenths.

However mind-stretching, all apparent complexities of tempo and rhythm are resolved in the simplicity of logic, though not without much thought. George Perle is a composer of depth, subtlety, and pianistic understanding, and the primary challenge to the performer is to be as good a musician as the composer is.

Samuel Adler

Sonata Breve

The three-movement *Sonata Breve* was written in 1963 and is dedicated to Stefan Bardas. Though composed in a dissonant, nontonal language, the work has well-defined tonal centers. The formal structures are generally not standard, but they possess their own inner balance, which emerges despite a lack of

clear thematic repetition. (An exception is the ABA middle movement).

The work as a whole is characterized by the effective juxtaposition of opposing musical ideas. Thus, in the first movement, grotesque *secco* passages tease and interrupt the flow of long, graceful lines. The heart of the middle movement is delicate, hesitant; yet, on either side tension hovers over the drooping phrases and harsh sonorities. The finale, a brilliant toccata, contrasts thin-textured runs in sixteenth-notes with the thickness of octaves and huge chords in slower rhythms.

Brief though this sonata is, it encompasses a wide range of emotion and pianistic effect.

Henry Cowell

Exultation

There is hardly an American musician who is not indebted to Henry Cowell (born March 11, 1897, in Menlo Park, California; died December 10, 1965, in Shady, New York). He worked with fervor and imagination in many areas of music, not only producing a large and tremendously varied body of compositions, but in effect shaping much of what we think of as the contemporary American musical scene.

"Radical," "conservative," "sophisticated," "folk-like," "complex," "naive," "American," "exotic"—any of these adjectives could be used to describe various works of this unrestrained composer. But it is for his astounding innovations, many of them associated with the piano, that he is most remembered.

As early as age fourteen, Cowell presented a public performance of his own piano compositions that included the playing of tone clusters (Cowell's own discovery, if not his invention), or, as he later called them, "secondal chords." A tone cluster is a grouping of seconds played simultaneously or as an arpeggio with the flat hand or forearm or occasionally with a board. Clusters abound in *Exultation*, both as accompaniment and as melody.

Exultation (1919) is what Cowell called a "walking tune." Over a rhythmic accompaniment of left-arm clusters in 3/4 the right hand plays an eight-measure Lydian tune in alternating measures of 4/4 and 5/4. The rhythmic patterns in the melody are virtually identical in each phrase, as are the articulation and bouncy style, lending an element of naive squareness to the metrically complicated situation. The second tune (derived from the accompaniment to the first) unfolds in broad phrases, with the roles of right and left now switched. The pentatonic melody appears in right-arm clusters in 3/4 over a two-layered left-hand accompaniment in varying pulses of 4/4 and 2/4. Again, rhythmic patterns remain basically the same from phrase to phrase. After a brief interlude without clusters, all the foregoing is repeated with minor variations, and the piece ends in a resounding crash.

Complexity and simplicity, radical "noise" and catchy modal tunes—these disparate elements are here combined by the sure hand of Cowell into a jubilant piece of Americana.

Wendell Keeney

Sonatina

Wendell Keeney (born June 18, 1903, in Linden, Indiana; died Bethesda, Maryland, March 10, 1989)

was a pianist who studied composition with Rubin Goldmark and Nadia Boulanger and produced a number of beautifully crafted works. He was for many years chair of the music department at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. Later he moved to Washington, D.C., where he continued to teach privately.

Keeney's *Sonatina*, completed in 1943, received its first performance by Johanna Harris at Yaddo. In the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries enjoy an easy coexistence. It is indebted to Classical models for its form of three conventionally structured movements and for the clarity of statement and texture that pervades the composition. The harmony is largely diatonic, but allows room for some pandiatonism and bitonality. The style of Scarlatti is the source of the keyboard writing, although here again there are elements of a later time: occasional pedal effects and some unusually spread-out passage work. Good-humored virtuosity in the outer movements contrasts with lyrical calm in the middle, producing overall a work of refinement, wit, and grace.

Samuel Adler

The Road to Terpsichore: A Suite of Dances

This set of five short pieces is one of Adler's most accessible works. It seems to turn its back on the nervous agitation and earnest activity typical of much of this composer's music, and instead to link his characteristic high energy and expressive intensity with a spirit of happy ease.

The first two unspecified dances form a contrasting pair. Bracing bustle in the cocky opening movement gives way to a spacious, spontaneous song in the second. The latter's chant-like atmosphere, dripping with pedal, is violated by an eruption of nervous energy that quickly fizzles, allowing the interrupted soliloquy to resume. The last three movements are in the styles of well-known dances: a wistful waltz with arching lines, a biting and clever tango, and a perpetual-motion tarantella.

Commissioned for young pianists by the Music Teachers Association of California in 1989, *The Road to Terpsichore* was premiered at the Association's convention that year.

Frederic Goossen

Fantasy, Aria, and Fugue

Frederic Goossen, pronounced GO-ssen (born July 30, 1927, in St. Cloud, Minnesota), studied at the University of Minnesota, where his principal teachers were Donald Ferguson and James Aliferis; he also studied privately with Arthur Shepherd. For many years Goossen was a professor of composition at the University of Alabama.

Instrumental music is prominent in Goossen's creative output, which contains works in every category save opera. There are several large piano works in addition to the one recorded here: a suite, a sonata, and the Concerto and *Chorale Variations* for piano and orchestra.

Fantasy, Aria, and Fugue was written in 1973. It is a synthesis of Baroque forms and techniques and Romantic emotional expression.

Like the ringing of a great bell, an E-major chord swings from the bottom of the keyboard to the top,

announcing several things at once: a characteristically full sonority and an affirmation of tonality with the work's nobly lyrical opening phrase. This confident lyricism is a hallmark of the entire composition.

Alternation of polyphony and homophony begins early in the *Fantasy*, when two-part writing takes over from the opening chords and octaves. From this point on, chordal and fugato passages follow each other in a freely expressive style, constituting a movement whose roots lie in the lyrical and dramatic gestures and the contrapuntal working-out of the Baroque toccata.

Following the sonorous conclusion of the *Fantasy*, the *Aria* sets forth a singing theme with a three-part texture. Like all the themes of this work (with the important exception of the opening one), the *Aria* melody is notable for its long phrases and narrow range of pitch. After a simple succession of ideas, tonal and atonal, flowing and halting, the *Aria* concludes (as the *Fantasy* does) with a restatement of its own opening theme.

The dissonant three-voice *Fugue* is concerned with a determined subject whose rugged squareness is offset by rhythmic displacement in the episodes, as the strictness of the three-part texture is offset by long pedals and frequent octave doubling. After much working-out of the subject, its last appearance, in augmentation, is harmonized with large, consonant chords that lead to a fortissimo restatement of the opening theme of the *Fantasy*. Tonality, though freely treated, exerts a magnetic force throughout the three movements, and the work ends, as it began, on an E-major chord.

Samuel Adler

Canto VIII

Canto VIII exhibits the greatest range of pianistic techniques found in Adler's music. In Adler's terminology, a canto is an equivalent of the nineteenth-century concert etude: a short composition designed to show off the capabilities of the instrument and its player in virtuoso style. [*Editor's note: Adler composed Canto VIII for Bradford Gowen in 1973.*]

As in some of his other works, Adler here creates a form determined by psychological effectiveness rather than by inherited architectural formulas. Tension and release—especially as achieved through texture, dynamics, and rhythm—are the elements that establish the small units as well as the large form of the work. Key feeling and harmonic progression are of little importance; abrupt contrast and forward sweep are at the heart of this piece.

Canto VIII's sensational style calls forth many playing techniques that have been widely practiced since the 1960s, although Henry Cowell tried them out much earlier in the century. Sustained harmonics and string pizzicatos are heard in the slow introduction, followed in the faster main section of the piece by tone clusters, glissandos on the strings, attacks on the strings with the flat hand, and stopped notes (one hand pressing down on the string while the other hand plays the corresponding note on the keyboard). All three pedals are called on as well.

In a live performance, the speed of the player's movements in and out of the piano lends visual excitement to all the goings-on, but even without that element *Canto VIII* generates a good deal of excitement through its colorful contrasts and exhilarating energy.

Bradford Gowen has received national attention since winning first prize in the 1978 Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition for Excellence in the Performance of American Music. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied piano with Cécile Genhart and composition with Samuel Adler. He later studied piano with Leon Fleisher and with Dorothy Taubman. After winning the American Music prize, Mr. Gowen made his New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall. On Memorial Day 1980, he performed Aaron Copland's Piano Concerto with the National Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the composer; the next year he performed several more times with that orchestra under Mstislav Rostropovich and Maxim Shostakovich. In January 1985 he performed the world premiere of Samuel Adler's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra at the Kennedy Center. His numerous chamber music performances have included appearances at the Library of Congress Summer Chamber Festival. He has also appeared with cellist David Soyer, with the Kronos Quartet, and with the Guarneri Quartet. He has made many duo appearances with his wife, pianist Maribeth Gowen, including a 1997 Schubert bicentennial concert at the National Gallery of Art devoted to the composer's four-hand works. He has written for many years for *The Piano Quarterly* and *Piano & Keyboard*, and made a number of recordings for *The Piano Quarterly*. He has served as judge for several international piano competitions, including the Kapell, the Gina Bachauer, and the Sydney, and he was a member of the Advisory Committee that created and ran the *Seventeen Magazine*/General Motors National Concerto Competition. Since 1981 he has been on the faculty at the University of Maryland, where he was Chair of the Piano Division from 1990 to 1994. He is one of the 48 pianists featured in Benjamin Saver's 1993 book, *The Most Wanted Piano Teachers in the USA*.

The Kennedy Center-Rockefeller Foundation International Competitions for Excellence in the Performance of American Music were designed to focus attention on the large repertory of recital music written by American composers since 1900. By rewarding distinguished performers of this repertory, the competition was created to interest performers, students, and teachers in this music; by presenting the first-prize winner (and the winning program) in public appearances and concert tours, audiences and managers should come to regard this music as a part of the standard repertory, a literature still dominated by pre-twentieth-century European music.

This was the premier album in a series of recordings by the first-prize winners, presenting selected repertory from the program which is not otherwise available on disc.

Preliminary rounds of the 1978 Competition were held in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Vienna. The judges were Robert Black, Ulysses Kay, Robert Miller, George Pappastavrou, and Beveridge Webster.

The semifinal and final rounds, held at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, were judged by Robert Black, Ulysses Kay, William Masselos, John Ogdon, Rodion Shchedrin, Toru Takemitsu, and Beveridge Webster.

The second-place winner was Donna Coleman; the third-place winner, Robert Weirich.

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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Samuel Adler

Brass Fragments. Keystone Wind Ensemble, Jack Stamp conducting. Citadel CTD 88120.
String Quartet No. 4. Charleston String Quartet. Gasparo GSCD 307.
String Quartet No. 7. Cleveland Quartet. CRI CD 608.
Sonata No. 2. C. Castleman, violin; B. Harbach, harpsichord. Albany Troy 041.
Southwestern Sketches. Keystone Wind Ensemble, Jack Stamp conducting. Citadel CTD 88120.
String Quartet No. 4. Charleston String Quartet. Gasparo GSCD 307.
String Quartet No. 7. Cleveland Quartet. CRI CD 608.

Henry Cowell

Aeolian Harp. Robert Miller, piano. New World 80203-2.
The Banshee. Robert Miller, piano. New World 80203-2.
Piano Piece (Paris 1924). Robert Miller, piano. New World 80203-2.
Pulse. New Music Consort. New World 80405-2.
Quartet Euphometric. The Emerson String Quartet. New World 80453-2.

Robert Evett

Billy in the Darbies. William Parker, baritone; William Huckaby, piano; Virgil Blackwell, clarinet; Columbia String Quartet. New World 80475-2.

Frederic Goossen

At Casterbridge Fair. S. Mabry, mezzo-soprano; P. Wade, piano. Owl OWL 35.

Clausulae. M. Kartman, violin; W. Henderson, piano. CRI CD 665.

Temple Music. M. Kartman, violin; W. Henderson, piano. CRI CD 665.

George Perle

Concerto No. 2. Michael Boriskin, piano; San Francisco Symphony, David Zinman conducting. Harmonia Mundi 907124 CD.

Fantasy-Variations. Michael Boriskin, piano. New World 80342-2.

Hebrew Melodies. Steven Honigberg, cello. Albany TROY 157.

Lytic Intermezzo. Michael Boriskin, piano. New World 80342-2.

Serenade No. 3. Richard Goode, piano; Music Today Ensemble, Gerard Schwarz conducting.

Complete Wind Quintets. Dorian Wind Quintet. New World 80359-2.

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EXULTATION 80304-2
BRADFORD GOWEN, piano

SAMUEL ADLER (b. 1928)

SONATINA (publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

- 1 Fast and brilliant 2:36
- 2 Slow and very gently moving 5:05
- 3 Very fast (Perpetual Motion) 2:50

ROBERT EVETT (1922-1975)

- 4 *CHACONNE* 3:52 (publ. American Composers Alliance)

GEORGE PERLE (b. 1915)

SIX ETUDES (publ. GunMar Music, Inc.)

- 5 I 0:57
- 6 II 1:37
- 7 III 1:31
- 8 IV 2:22
- 9 V 2:00
- 10 VI 3:21

SAMUEL ADLER

SONATA BREVE (publ. Oxford University Press)

- 11 I Allegro grazioso 3:00
- 12 II Adagio con delicatezza 4:00
- 13 III Allegro di bravura 2:59

HENRY COWELL (1897-1965)

- 14 *EXULTATION* 1:41 (publ. Associated Music Publishers, Inc.)

WENDELL KEENEY (1903-1989)

SONATINA (publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

- 15 I Allegro 2:32
- 16 II Quasi adagio 1:37
- 17 III Presto 2:02

SAMUEL ADLER

THE ROAD TO TERPSICHORE: A Suite of Dances (publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

- 18 Fast and wild 1:30
- 19 Free, quite relaxed, but stately 3:59
- 20 Like a waltz 1:20
- 21 Like a tango, with verve, and very rhythmic 1:38
- 22 Like a tarantella, fast and furious 1:50

FREDERIC GOOSSEN (b. 1927)

FANTASY, ARIA, AND FUGUE (publ. American Composers Alliance)

- 23 Fantasy 3:27
- 24 Aria 4:03
- 25 Fugue 3:53

SAMUEL ADLER

- 26 *CANTO VIII* 4:53 (publ. Carl Fischer, Inc.)

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