George Perle's affection for the piano began in childhood, when he first heard the instrument: he
speaks with precise recall of the very moment when he became entranced at age of six listening to the
first of the *Trois nouvelles études* of Chopin. While he has created a rich and important list of works in
nearly every medium except opera over the past half-century, he has composed more for the piano (in
both its solo and chamber roles) than for any other instrument. His expanding keyboard canon now
includes a dozen études in two collections, one set of preludes, a suite, two brief sonatas and a
sonatina, a variety of individual pieces, and two large chamber works which prominently feature the
piano (the *Concertino* and *Serenade No. 3*). In 1986, Perle received the Pulitzer Prize in music and a
MacArthur Foundation Fellowship--honors confirming his belated emergence as one of today's most
distinguished composers. For those seeking a contemporary idiom that is challenging yet not
inscrutable, Perle's catalogue offers vast rewards.

Perle's music is elegant, poised, lucid, effervescent. His instrumental writing is resourceful and
idiomatic. The boundaries of his pianistic world are defined by the instrument's eighty-eight keys, and
exclude any electronic, extra-musical or (with but one fleeting exception) inside-the-piano sounds.
One of his main concerns has long been with how notes relate to each other and combine to "make
sense," and from this has come his pre-occupation with developing a comprehensive post-tonal
harmonic language. His concept of "twelve-tone tonality" elaborates certain procedures found in the
music of such diverse composers as Bartok, Berg, Debussy, Scriabin and Stravinsky, and treats the
twelve notes of the chromatic scale in a manner as all encompassing and consistent as that of earlier
composers who used the seven-note diatonic scale. In this regard, he has written of obtaining "a new
understanding of how to map large-scale relationships of twelve-tone tonalities and modes, so that
every note and every chord is part of a unified structure, just as in Classical tonality." His approach
differs substantially from orthodox "twelve-tone" or "serial" composition, in which all twelve
chromatic tones are theoretically given equal weight. Of the works on this recording, the *Suite in C*,
*Fantasy-Variations*, and *Six New Études* to varying degrees exemplify the evolving twelve-tone tonality
concept. The remaining two works were "freely and intuitively conceived."

*Pantomime, Interlude and Fugue* (1937) is one of Perle's earliest surviving compositions. "Pantomime" is
an ingratiating miniature, written in a kind of neo-classical idiom using an expanded tonal language.
The tranquil and somber "Interlude" is made up of repetitions and transformations of the opening
measure's two-voice figure in the right hand over a simple left hand accompaniment; as it slowly dies
away, the last note of the piece becomes the first note of the "Fugue." The long fugal subject is
perfectly symmetrical, with ten bars divided into five-measure halves, each half split into 2 + 1 + 2, and
each 2 a mirror image of the other.
Fantasy-Variations (1971) combines an improvisational (but precisely notated) musical rhetoric with a more tightly structured variation format. The beginnings of each of the interconnected variation sections are clearly defined by the appearance (however altered) of the distinctive opening idea, an impetuous triplet figure followed by its descending chordal "answer." During the course of the variations, the extended main material reappears compressed, expanded, transformed, occasionally reordered, always modified in character. A proliferation of measured pauses, as well as the interpolation of cadenza-like passages, imparts a feeling of extemporaneousness to the whole.

The dazzling Six New Etudes (1984) is the companion set to Perle's immensely successful Six Etudes of 1976 (recorded by Bradford Gowen on NW 304). Like the earlier collection, the new studies explore both the "usual" mechanical problems and more subtle pianistic concerns involving articulation, nuance, pedaling, and rhythm. The short "Praeludium" is a dashing curtain-raiser, full of daredevil stretches and double notes. The whirling "Gigue," in rondo form, is filled with treacherous leaps and quick hand-crossings. The "Butterflies" in the title of the third etude are probably the only biphrhythmic ones in music; they flutter along quietly in fours in the right hand against threes in the left, and disappear in just a minute. "Romance" is a sensitive study in subtle dynamic inflection and controlled rubato, with a yearning, rising phrase at the outset which becomes progressively more insistent with each appearance. "Variations" is a tour-de-force of rapid, wide-ranging chordal passages and sudden changes of dynamics and articulation; any of the eleven uninterrupted sections could conceivably be considered the main material, while the remaining ten sections offer various perspectives, somewhat like a prism revealing its many facets when observed from different positions. "Perpetuum mobile," the solo version of the identically-titled movement of Serenade No. 3, is an exhilarating study of ethereal scales, prickly cross-rhythms, and nimble, intricate pedaling.

The Suite in C (1970) opens with a brief march-like preambles. The unusual titles, "Cycles" and "Chinese Puzzle," refer to Perle's process of harmonic and intervallic organization in those movements. "Cycles" falls roughly into three parts, the outer sections characterized by their open octaves and softly floating chains of thirds, the middle by its crisp, playful triplets and crashing chords. "Chinese Puzzle" is unlike any other Perle piano work, an extremely leisurely meditation with a whimsical conclusion. The following short, free-form "Improvisation" should sound as if it were being created on the spot, although every detail has been specified by the composer. The concluding "Toccata" (not to be confused with the 1969 work of the same name) might almost have been called an etude, given its fleet, good-natured treatment of touch, dynamics, and meter.

A great deal of activity has been packed into the fiendishly difficult Short Sonata (1964). Several distinctly characterized elements—the opening "rush" of notes; two ascending, striding motives in single notes, and a falling chordal figure—are introduced early in the first movement; their subsequent interaction is fast-paced and kaleidoscopic, and the movement, concludes with a frenzied juxtaposition of the opening ideas. The florid middle movement, consisting of two sections and concluding with a fleeting reminiscence of the first section, brings but brief respite from the mercurial outer movements. The finale is a whirlwind rondo, in which the main recurring idea is the wide-ranging eighth-note passage heard at the beginning.

—Michael Boriskin

Michael Boriskin, a native of New York, is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music. He has worked closely with George Perle, and has premiered several of his pieces. Boriskin's extensive concert schedule of both standard and contemporary repertoire has included the Kennedy Center, BBC, South West German Radio, Smithsonian Institution, RIAS/Berlin, and the Munich, Mexico
City, and Denver symphonies. He has also performed overseas for the U.S. Information Agency and Jeunesses Musicales. A recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalists Award, he makes his recording debut with this release.

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Assistant engineer: Edward Abbott
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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY
Ballade; Concertino; Serenade No. 3. Richard Goode, piano; Music Today Ensemble, Gerard Schwarz conducting. Nonesuch 979108.
Monody I. Samuel Baron, flute. CRI 212.
String Quartet No. 5 Composers Quartet. Nonesuch 71280.
String Quartet No. 7. New York String Quartet. CRI 387.
Thirteen Dickinson Songs; Two Rilke Songs. Bethany Beardslee, soprano; Morey Ritt, piano; George Perle, piano. CRI 403.
Three Movements for Orchestra. Royal Philharmonic, David Epstein conducting. CRI 331.
Toccata. Robert Miller, piano. CRI 306.

**George Perle, Piano Works**

Michael Boriskin, Piano

Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow
Recording engineer: John Newton

Pantomime, Interlude and Fugue
(publ. Boelke-Bomart, Inc.)
1- Pantomime (1:12)
2- Interlude (3:12)
3- Fugue (1:49)
4- Fantasy-Variations (6:55)
   (publ. GunMar Music, Inc.)

Six New Etudes
(publ. GunMar Music, Inc.)
5- Praeuludium (:35)
6- Gigue (2:25)
7- Papillons (1.01)
8- Romance (2:26)
9- Variations (2:17)
10- Perpetuum mobile (1:40)

Suite In C
(publ. GunMar Music, Inc.)
11- Introduction (:30)
12- Cycles (4:44)
13- Chinese Puzzle (3:25)
14- Improvisation (1:18)
15- Toccata (2:13)

Short Sonata
(publ. Theodore Presser Co.)
16- (:59)
17- (2:35)

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