

GEORGE PERLE
Piano Works

New World Records 80342

MICHAEL BORISKIN, Piano
Pantomime Interlude and Fugue
Short Sonata
Suite in C
Fantasy Variations
Six New Etudes

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 etudes 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 Etudes* 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 re-ordered, 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 bi-rhythmic 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 preamble. 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 "Toccatina" (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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Recording engineer: John Newton

Assistant engineer: Edward Abbott

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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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.

Six Etudes. Bradford Gowen, piano. New World NW 304.

Six Preludes. Robert Helps, piano. CRI 288.

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- Praeludium (: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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