

**MARC-ANDRE HAMELIN, Piano**  
Winner of the 1985 Carnegie Hall  
International American Music Competition for Pianists

**New World Records 80354**

**Works by**  
**WILLIAM BOLCOM**  
**STEFAN WOLPE**

The career of William Bolcom (b. 1938) has led him from the West Coast (Mills College and Stanford University) to Paris (Milhaud and Messaien) and New York in the late 1960s, where he contributed to the ragtime revival. He has been teaching at the University of Michigan since 1973. This is the second of two volumes of twelve Etudes, the first of which was composed between 1959 and 1966 (and recorded by the composer). The Twelve New Etudes were originally written for Paul Jacobs, whose untimely death in 1983 brought the project to a halt. Bolcom has now completed the set and extended the dedication to include the pianists John Musto and Marc-Andre Hamelin.

These are etudes in synthesis as well as in pianism. Bolcom's wide-ranging sensibilities and compositional technique give him access to an extraordinary assortment of imagery. His delight in juxtaposing stylistic opposites tempts him to tickle one idiom in the ribs with another. The result is a kaleidoscope of vignettes imprinted by Bolcom's uniquely laconic ear.

In the preface to the score, Bolcom writes: "I now embark on a stylistic and harmonic synthesis no longer involved with any local style--that of a fusion of tonality *into* non-centered sound (often miscalled 'atonal'), as a planet in space draws gravity toward itself. Within this spatial (yet tonal) universe one can attempt to calibrate one's distance from a strong tonal center with greater accuracy." He goes on to explain that the tension between stylistic evolution and stylistic conservatism "produces a potential richness of musical energy that for my part I find enormously fecund and exciting. With the growth of skill in the management of this tension, it becomes possible to arrive at a musical speech that is at once coherent and comprehensible *and* in constant expansion." Of particular interest is the fact that, as Bolcom is an accomplished pianist, the quality and intensity of the pianist's physical address to performance is a fundamental factor in his compositional process. It gives his music an authenticity that effectively anchors the sophistication of his thought.

The composer provides the following descriptions in the score:

**Book I**

1. Fast, furious, headlong, but controlled. Sweeping gestures of hands, forearms, the body. Freedom of movement. 14 Oct. 1977.
2. Recitatif. Recitative style, rubato; finger-changes for smoothness' sake; smooth passage of line between hands. 2 May 1977.
3. Mirrors. Very light, rhythmic. Leaps, distorted mirrors, lateral stretches between fingers. 6 Dec. 1977.

**Book II**

4. Scene d'opera. A steady, rhythmic ostinato versus varied irrational rhythms. 25 Aug. 1980, revised 25 Nov. 1982.

5. Butterflies, hummingbirds. The lateral tremolo. Mercurial changes in color, attacks and rhythm. 31 Apr. 1980, revised 31 Aug. 1986.
6. Nocturne. Absolute contrast in dynamics and tone. 1 Apr. 1981.

#### Book III

7. Premonitions. "Free-falls" into piano keys; size of tone without banging. Inside-piano plucking. 29 Sept. 1982.
8. Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques). Lateral hand-jumps and stretches. Use of practically *no* pedal. 27 Nov. 1982.
9. Invention. Controlled legato lines with minimal pedal. Clear delineation of voices. 28 Apr. 1983.

#### Book IV

10. Vers le silence. Use of the pedals. Wide leaps and dynamic contrast. Trills. 1983-28 August 1986.
11. Hi-jinks. Lively, with a strange and ghostly humor. Dynamic contrast (in the piano section least naturally apt.). 1983-29 Aug. 1986.
12. Hymne a l'amour. Contrast of timbres, mostly by means of pedal. Orchestral sonorities. 1983-2 Sept. 1986.

*Battle Piece* was to have been the first of a series of works for solo piano entitled *Encouragements*, a project Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972) began in 1942, during the darkest days of World War II, as his contribution to the struggle against fascism. On the title page of the first version, Wolpe wrote: "Battles, hopes, difficulties/new battles, new hopes, no difficulties." Thus *Battle Piece* belongs to the genre of *Kampfmusik* that forms such an important part of his life's work. He began to compose this "music for the struggle" in Berlin in the late 1920s, when he wrote chamber operas, dance scores, theater music, and songs for agitprop troupes engaged in the fight against National Socialism. But *Battle Piece* is also a struggle on a deeper level, namely, to transmute disparate idioms into a more personal and yet communicative musical tongue.

Wolpe finished the first three parts of *Battle Piece* in 1943, sketched the fourth part through to the end and then set the work aside. In 1945 he began numerous compositional studies which addressed many problems of working with pitch-class sets (pitches of a group bearing a specific intervallic relationship to each other). Then in the summer of 1947 he took up *Battle Piece* again, rewrote the fourth part, and went on to complete three more sections that deal with the thematic material of the first three movements in new ways. What had originally been intended as a suite of separate movements evolved into a complex seven-part structure unified not only by the thematic material that recurs throughout the work, but also by Wolpe's inner struggle for a new manner and voice.

Wolpe brings many players to the stylistic arena of *Battle Piece*: the socialistic and utopian formalism of the Bauhaus; the expressionistic rhetoric and contrapuntal mind-set of Austro-German new music; the subtly inflected rhythms and song-based heterophony of classical Arabic music (encountered while living in Jerusalem); and the nervous, jazzy tempi of New York (his home from 1938). Out of these disparate elements emerges in *Battle Piece* a new musical amalgam forming the basis for Wolpe's great works of the fifties.

In Wolpe's view the composer must be an active member of the community and must be influenced by, as much as he guides and elevates, the musical language of the people. Thus, in *Battle Piece*, as in much of Wolpe's music, the tension between tonal and non-tonal, concrete and abstract ideas, is a

metaphor for the tension between collectivity and the individual. Wolpe avoids dogmatic adherence to a musical system that limits spontaneity; in fact *Battle Piece* gives the impression of continuously discovering itself rather than unfolding from fully articulated premises. The themes of *Battle Piece* are expansively scaled gestures that combine melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic features and are not restricted to the twelve pitch points of the chromatic scale. The "primordial theme" (to use Wolpe's words) which opens the first movement and recurs in all the following movements is a succession of fourteen motivic segments, each of which is formed from a set of two to nine pitches with a distinctive intervallic content. In this way Wolpe projects Webern's play with pitch-class sets into a tonally elastic environment and evolves what might be called a free harmonic serialism. The primordial theme is abbreviated in the last four movements, where more stable forms of the thematic material are interrupted by mobile and dispersed conditions.

After the strenuous conflicts and strivings of the first movement comes the interior monologue of narrowly bounded melismas of the second movement, the theme of which is intended to recall the D-minor ruminations of "Der Einsame im Herbst" from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. The character of each of the succeeding movements is set by a new countermelody added to some version of the primordial theme. The last movement integrates the principal themes of the earlier movements, and so creates a powerful finale.

Wolpe dedicated the first version of *Battle Piece* to his friend the author Friedrich Alexanian. Then in 1943 David Tudor, a seventeen-year-old prodigy, came to study the piano with Irma Wolpe, the composer's second wife. Tudor began to learn *Battle Piece* in 1947, at the time when Wolpe was setting out to complete the work. It was a remarkable collaboration, and Wolpe dedicated the final version to Tudor in recognition of the pianist's part in helping him to realize his conception of the piece. (I wish to acknowledge the assistance of David Tudor, who provided valuable information about Wolpe and his composing of *Battle Piece* in an interview taped on October 4, 1982.)

—Austin Clarkson

*Austin Clarkson is chairperson of the editorial committee of the Stefan Wolpe Society, Inc. and is Professor of Music at York University in Toronto.*

**The Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition** was created to focus the attention of performers, students, and teachers on the large repertoire of recital music written by American composers since 1900. By presenting the first-prize winners, and the winning programs, in public appearances and concert tours, the competition seeks to make this music part of the standard repertoire, a literature still dominated by pre-twentieth-century European music.

Since 1981 the competition has been sponsored by Carnegie Hall, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. It was formerly known as The Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition for Excellence in the Performance of American Music.

This is the eighth album in the series of recordings by the first-prize winners, presenting selected repertoire from the competition program that is not otherwise available on disc.

Preliminary rounds of the 1985 Competition for Pianists were held in Boston, Chicago, London, New York, and San Francisco. The judges were Jerome Lowenthal, Lambert Orkis, Stephen Pruslin, Leonard Stein, and Robert Taub. The semifinal and final rounds, held at Carnegie Hall in New York,

were judged by Dennis Russell Davies, Leon Fleisher, Paul Griffiths, Ursula Oppens, Vincent Persichetti, Gideon Rosengarten, and Russell Sherman. The second-prize winner was Steven Mayer; Alan Gravill won third prize.

**Marc-Andre Hamelin** was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1961. He attended Temple University, where he studied with Harvey Wedeen; currently a doctoral fellow at Temple, he studies with Russell Sherman. Hamelin made his U.S. orchestral debut in performances of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Piano Concerto, with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under Gunther Herbig. He recently completed a tour of Europe with the Montreal Symphony under Charles Dutoit. Hamelin has recorded with the Twentieth Century Consort, a Washington-based contemporary music ensemble, and has also recorded an album of piano works by Leopold Godowsky.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

##### **Stefan Wolpe**

Clarkson, Austin. "Stefan Wolpe's Berlin Years." *In Music and Civilization: Essays Presented to Paul Henry Lang*, M.R. Maniates and E. Strainchamps, eds. New York: Norton, 1984.

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Wolpe, Stefan. "Any Bunch of Notes." *Perspectives of New Music*, 21 nos. 1-2 (1982-83), pp. 295-310.

##### **William Bolcom**

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Rockwell, John. "Music, Every Which Way." *New York Times Magazine*, August 16, 1987.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

##### **Stefan Wolpe**

See also Selected Discographies for 80306, 308, 344.

*Battle Piece; Displaced Spaces*. David Holzman, piano, CRI SD 538.

Chamber Piece No. 2. Parnassus, Anthony Korf conducting, New World 80306.

Form; Piece in Two Parts for Solo Violin. Russell Sherman, piano; Rose Mary Harbison, violin. New World 80308.

Form IV: *Broken Sequences*; Passacaglia; Pastorale. Peter Serkin, piano. New World 80344.

##### **William Bolcom**

See also Selected Discography for 80356.

Piano Concerto. William Bolcom, piano; Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Sydney Hodkinson conducting. Pantheon PFN 2041.

Symphony No. 4; *Session I*. Joan Morris, mezzo-soprano; St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Leonard Slatkin conducting. New World 80356.

Twelve Etudes. William Bolcom, piano. Advance FGR-145.

**Marc-Andre Hamelin**, piano

**William Bolcom**: *Twelve New Etudes*  
(publ. E.B. Marks Music Corp.)

Book I

- 1- Fast, furious (:54)
- 2- Recitatif (3:29)
- 3- Mirrors (1:46)

Book II

- 4- Scene d'opera (2:47)
- 5- Butterflies, hummingbirds (2:02)
- 6- Nocturne (3:30)

Book III

- 7- Premonitions (3:12)
- 8- Rag infernal  
(Syncopes apocalyptiques) (2:04)
- 9- Invention (3:00)

Book IV

- 10- Vers le silence (6:10)
- 11- Hi-jinks (2:00)
- 12- Hymne a l'amour (6:59)

**Stefan Wolpe: *Battle Piece***

(unpubl. © Hilda Morley Wolpe and Katharina Wolpe)

- 13- Quasi presto (3:30)
- 14- Molto sostenuto (4:16)
- 15- Con moto ma non troppo (1:50)
- 16- Vivo (5:11)
- 17- Moderato (1:00)
- 18- Con brio (2:16)
- 19 Allegro non troppo (4:03)

Much of *Battle Piece* is through-composed. The tracks designate the seven sections referred to in the notes.

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