

Music for piano four hands has always formed part of the standard keyboard literature. Four-hand pieces have been composed for a variety of reasons. Some, including familiar works by Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms, have been written specifically for the medium. Some are transcriptions of works, usually for larger forces, either by their original composers or by others. These enabled performances in small-scale or home settings different from those for which the works were originally destined, thereby expanding the works' audiences and increasing their popularity. In the nineteenth century, four-hand versions of symphonies and large chamber works were often the principal means for their dissemination. Yet other four-hand pieces have been arranged by their composers from other formats in order to create a definitive version of a work. While the four-hand repertory is largely identified with nineteenth-century music, it has continued to thrive in the twentieth century. The best-known modern transcription is probably Stravinsky's own arrangement of his *Rite of Spring*, which for eight years was the only published version of the work. Several major works of Schoenberg were also first published in four-hand versions, only later to appear in print in their original format.

The four-hand pieces on this recording are representative of all the types described above. Harold Shapero's *Four-Hand Sonata for Piano* and Arthur Berger's *Composition for Piano Four Hands* were written as four-hand pieces. On the other hand, John Kirkpatrick created his transcription of Virgil Thomson's *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* in order to further the transmission of the work. Arthur Berger arranged his *Rondo* for solo piano as a four-hand piece for Shapero's sixtieth birthday, and his solo *Aria* and *Capriccio* expressly for this recording. At another time, Berger arranged his orchestral piece *Perspectives III* for piano four hands, withdrawing the original version, which dissatisfied him.

Thomson, Berger, and Shapero, despite their distinctive styles, are all associated in their formative years with the American neoclassic school of composition. This was a tonal style prevalent from the mid-1920s to the early 1950s, influenced primarily by Stravinsky, French compositional sensibilities, and American jazz and folk idioms. The composers had long-standing personal associations as well. Berger was Thomson's fellow music critic at the *New York Herald-Tribune* for many years, while Shapero and Berger were longtime colleagues on the faculty of Brandeis University.

The performers on this recording have also had a long personal and professional association with all three composers. Rodney Lister studied composition with each of them; David Kopp coached with each as solo pianist, playing their works. As a duo, Kopp and Lister have performed since the mid-1980s, with the major works on this recording figuring in their repertory since that time. This is wonderful, distinctive, often brilliant music, and it is the performers' hope that this recording will, in the best tradition of four-hand playing, serve to bring it to a wider audience and to further its performance.

**HAROLD SHAPERO** was born in 1920 in Lynn, Massachusetts. As a teenager he studied composition with Nicholas Slonimsky and Ernst Krenek. He earned his undergraduate degree at Harvard from 1939–42 under Walter Piston, worked with Paul Hindemith at the Berkshire Music Center in 1941–42, and with Nadia Boulanger at the Longy School after graduating (1942–43). His compositions earned high praise and a string of prizes throughout the 1940s, including a Rome

Prize, two Guggenheim fellowships, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Naumberg Fellowship. More than Thomson and Berger, who also worked in the neoclassical idiom but with a modernist bent, Shapero reached beyond surface harmonic language and formal models to the harmonic foundations and phrase discourse of musical classicism. His symphonic works display the breadth and seriousness of purpose of his European antecedents, while his instrumental music often evokes a traditional sensibility.

This said, the brilliant *Four-Hand Sonata for Piano*, written in 1941 while Shapero was still an undergraduate, shows a distinctive voice influenced equally by the American present and the Continental past. It is dedicated to Leonard Bernstein, Shapero's classmate and childhood friend, and was first performed by the pair. In its mix of the traditional and the contemporary vernacular, its style most closely recalls those of Aaron Copland and Bernstein himself. The Sonata contains three movements in the customary arrangement, with a serious, highly organized first movement, a slow yet unsettled second movement, and a spirited and energetic third movement in sonata-rondo form.

The first movement, like a traditional sonata form, is structured around the opposition of two harmonic fields. Unlike the traditional tonic and dominant, though, Shapero uses a minor ninth chord and a major ninth chord as the sources for contrasting harmonic and melodic material throughout the movement. Furthermore, the pitch C serves as primary root for both chords. From the minor ninth chord Shapero extracts minor and major seventh chords and a principal melody with focal pitch  $Eb$  whose head motive ( $Eb, D, Eb, Bb$ ) derives from the latter. From the major ninth chord he also generates seventh chords, but, more importantly, consecutive open fifths, filling in the upper one to form either the head motive of a secondary melody (C, G, D, B) or a gapped chord. Here Shapero appears to avoid the  $Eb$ , which would directly engage the  $Eb$  of the other head motive. This emphasizes the distinctness of the melodies and their sources over the potential tension inherent in their differences. While the source chords and their derivatives are freely transposed to all pitch levels, Shapero holds his melodies to the same place for the most part. The principal melody, with its distinctive  $Eb$ , is never transposed, while the secondary melody, clearly distinguished by its series of open fifths, usually occurs on the tonic and dominant levels (C or G), occasionally elsewhere.

The two harmonic fields serve in alternation as the basis for large sections of music. The opening of the movement introduces them both: a slow, gentle introduction fixes a high-register  $Eb$  as the goal of repeated chordal gestures embroidered by wide-interval diatonic melodic fragments, after which contrasting material introduces the secondary melody, featuring open fifths, in the middle register. Following this, the principal melody with focal  $Eb$  enters in a faster tempo, first playfully, then heroically. The music dies down, then resumes with the open-fifth secondary melody presented in a number of ways: first in octaves, then developed in canon, then in fragments in the bass, gaining momentum into a climactic section juxtaposing the major-ninth sonority both as melodic motives and as gapped chords. Finally the theme returns literally doubled at the fifth, its characteristic melodic interval. After this it gives way to the contrasting sonority and a strident buildup to the triumphant recapitulation of the principal theme. The transitional material that follows mixes the two sonorities and parts of their melodies, leading to a coda recalling the slow introduction and unraveling bits of the main theme to conclude.

The second movement is in E major with secondary emphasis on the relative modes. It begins, like the first movement, with a slow introduction of chordal gestures embroidered by melodic fragments, but its character is considerably more rugged, brought about in part by the prominent use of dissonant intervals, especially the fourth. Shapero softens the rugged texture and relegates it to the background in the extended cantabile tune that follows. The rugged music returns, although this time the melodic fragments explode into wild trajectories and assume a frantic, motoric quality. While the motoric aspect soon plays out, agitation remains, captured in a dramatic section interspersing thick chords, heavily laden lines, and dramatic sweeps from top to bottom of the piano. After this stormy passage, an unaccompanied middle-register melody garnished by pale upper-register chords restores calm. A brief flashback to the rugged music initiates the transition to the third movement. This final movement is a buoyant sonata-rondo in C major in which Shapero slithers deftly through key after key from start to finish. The energetic neoclassic-meets-latin rondo theme is the stabilizing force, alternating with two interior sections. The first of these, a jazzy passage full of clarinet-style melodies based on triadic motives, is heard twice. Like Copland and Bernstein, Shapero had Benny Goodman in mind when writing in this vein. The second, a section of more subdued character featuring smoother, more stepwise material, is heard once in the middle of the movement. After the final appearance of the rondo theme the accompaniment emerges into the foreground, rising in intensifying waves of activity toward a dazzling climax at the end.

**ARTHUR BERGER** was born in New York in 1912. He received a bachelor's degree from New York University in 1934 and a master's degree in 1939 from Harvard, where he studied musicology with Hugo Leichtentritt and theory and analysis with Walter Piston. He subsequently studied composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris in 1939, and Darius Milhaud in California from 1939 to 1942. Berger was music critic for the *Boston Transcript* (1934–37), the *New York Sun* (1943–46), and the *New York Herald Tribune* (1946–53), where he was an assistant to Virgil Thomson. He was co-founder of the scholarly journal *Perspectives of New Music* and served as its editor from 1962 to 1963. He taught at Mills College (1939–41), North Texas State University, Brooklyn College, and The Juilliard School before becoming a Professor at Brandeis University in 1953, where he remained until retirement. Since becoming emeritus professor at Brandeis he has taught at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Berger's earliest extant compositions, the *Two Episodes* for piano (1933), were written under the influence of Schoenberg's drama with music, *Die glückliche Hand*, and his *Suite* Op. 25 for solo piano. However, feeling out of sympathy with the aesthetics of modern German music, which seemed to him to be inextricably entwined with its procedures, and committed to a leftist political persuasion that demanded that "serious" music must be fashioned to appeal to the masses, Berger felt composition to be impossible. He stopped writing music for several years, until the path to composition was reopened to him by the neoclassic music of Stravinsky. The three early works on this recording were all originally composed as solo piano pieces during this period of revived activity. The *Capriccio* of 1945 was never released for publication by Berger and was arranged by him especially for this recording at the performers' request. Its seven sections, each in a different key from the last, move through a variety of textures and tunes while sharing a common declamatory character and a narrative style drawing on both motivic and melodic resources. Its neoclassic roots show in deliberate "wrong" notes and in the return of the opening theme and key in the final section.

The solo version of the *Aria* first appeared as the second of the five movements of Berger's 1947 *Partita* for piano, and was also arranged for this recording by the composer. Its two halves begin with the same slow, arpeggiated melody typical of Berger's neoclassic style: strongly lyric, yet comprised of wide diatonic intervals. In the first half this material proceeds developmentally toward a strong climax, while in the second half it leads to the eventual breaking up of the original tune and a luminous conclusion.

The *Rondo*, originally published in 1945 as a solo work dedicated to Harold Shapero, was arranged for four hands by Berger in 1980 on the occasion of Shapero's 60th birthday. Here a long theme begins modestly in small intervals and scales before wildly devolving into large leaps in all directions, returning to steps and scales as if nothing had happened, then alternating between the two states until the larger intervals come to predominate. The interior sections of the rondo include a rough, dissonant *ruvido* and a delicate, clearly Stravinskian dance episode.

All three pieces reflect the strong neoclassic formal influence shaping Berger's music of the period. They also possess a distinctive quasi-tonal character deriving from a compositional technique (discussed below) resulting in diatonic seventh and added-sixth chords presented out of familiar context and intermixed with diatonic scale fragments. The two quick pieces also display the fine, lively, and engaging rhythmic sensibility distinguishing all of Berger's music from his early works to more recent ones, and what Virgil Thomson described as his "just barely concealed sidewalks-of-New-York charm."

After the Second World War, the twelve-tone and serial techniques of Schoenberg began to be considered with new seriousness by many composers who had previously regarded them with indifference or outright hostility. Though the most striking and celebrated conversion to "the system" was made by Stravinsky, practically every composer came under its influence in some way or other. Even composers as unlikely as Benjamin Britten and Virgil Thomson began to incorporate these ideas into their compositions. Since the twelve-tone music technique had by then become an international language, Berger now felt free to explore his original interest. However, he felt that applying twelve-tone procedures strictly was uncongenial to his personal working methods.

Berger's music has always featured the manipulation of three-note cells. Early on he used diatonic cells containing a third (C, E, F, for instance—diatonic but not triadic) as building blocks yielding pitch collections with punning references to tonality. His later music involves completely chromatic trichords (C, C#, D, for instance), usually employed in contrasting chromatic hexachordal fields. These are comprised of two sets of paired trichords dividing the twelve pitches of the chromatic spectrum in a mutually exclusive way, and are used to obtain effects similar to modulation. By the 1960s Berger had developed a method of constructing his compositions in an intuitively improvisatory way which he refers to as "perpetual variation." He has described this as "a form of ruminating over the same material, turning it this way and that, allowing it to fluctuate in mood and tempo within sections, and ultimately, despite the sectional breaks (mere pauses for breath), one relatively long movement." Both the *Composition for Piano Four-Hands*, Berger's major work for the medium, and *Perspectives III*, originally the third movement of the 1953 *Chamber Concerto* for chamber orchestra, follow this sectional design.

The *Composition*, composed in the 1960s and first performed in 1976 by Berger and Christopher Kies, has been revised several times prior to its final revision for this recording. It consists of nine movements arranged in a loose succession of alternating moods ranging from languid lyricism to percussive declamation to snappy, driving propulsion. Two main sections of four movements each, separated by a free, suspended interlude, are followed by a slow coda with cadenza. The piece's opening material is repeated at the beginning of the fifth section and again in the coda; otherwise, everything proceeds without explicit internal reference. Each movement contains its own thematic materials developed with regard to character, register, rhythm, and tempo. While Berger deliberately eschews most formal conventions of musical rhetoric such as local repetition and building to a climax, there are periods of heightened intensity and activity toward the end of the two main parts of the piece, in the third and eighth movements.

*Perspectives III*'s more modest scope encompasses six movements but bears structural similarities to the *Composition*. Its two halves begin similarly, with slow-moving motives and chords overlaid with repeated notes in disparate registers. The first three movements progress from this supernal state through moderately increasing activity to a clear (uncharacteristic?) climax, while the last three movements pass through a very active phase back to the rarefied calm of the opening, now punctuated by incisive chords. There is great variety of texture, including an unusual sparseness reminiscent of the Thomson symphony and indicative of both works' genesis as orchestral pieces.

**VIRGIL THOMSON** was one of the leading American composers of his generation, and among the greatest American composers of opera. His most important works are two operas written with Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All*, and an opera on a libretto by Jack Larson, *Lord Byron*. He also wrote symphonies, concerti, sonatas, masses, string quartets, music for film, and many other works in many forms. Thomson was also arguably the most influential American music critic of the first half of the century. His tenure as chief music critic of the *New York Herald-Tribune* extended from 1939 to 1954.

A native of Kansas City, Missouri, Thomson received his early education and musical training there. After serving in the army during the First World War, he went to Harvard, where he studied composition with Edward Burlingame Hill and choral conducting with Archibald T. Davison. A traveling fellowship from Harvard in 1921 enabled him to live in Paris for a year, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger. Returning to the United States, he finished his Harvard degree and became organist and music director of King's Chapel in Boston. After a year of study with Rosario Scalero in New York, he moved back to Paris, where he had further lessons with Boulanger. These ended in 1926 with the completion of his *Sonata da Chiesa*, described by Thomson as his "bang-up graduation piece in the dissonant neo-classic style of the time." He lived in Paris for most of the 1920s and '30s, returning to New York in 1939, and living there for most of the rest of his life. He died in New York in 1989 at the age of 93.

Thomson said that although he loved the theater and loved church music, he was much happier backstage in both places than he was in the audience, where he was not a good customer. The Southern Baptist churches of his childhood dominate much of the ethos of his music, particularly in his early work, in which he said that he was telling Paris about Kansas City. Baptist hymns combined with the Anglican chant of his professional church music life as predominant elements in his personal style.

Thomson began sketching the *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* in 1926 during the time he was studying with Nadia Boulanger. The composition of *Four Saints in Three Acts* intervened before its completion in 1928. During the seventeen years that elapsed between the completion of the *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* and its first performance, Thomson tried to interest a number of conductors in performing it. In his autobiography, *Virgil Thomson by Virgil Thomson*, he wrote about showing the work to Serge Koussevitzky: "At his house in Jamaica Plain I played it to him while he read the score. After one movement he said, 'Good!' After two he said, 'Very good!' After three he said, 'Wonderful!' After the fourth he threw up his hands and said, 'I could never play my audience that.' He was not articulate about his troubles with the fourth movement, but he seemed to find it not serious enough for a Boston public." Shortly after the *Symphony's* completion, John Kirkpatrick, best known for his advocacy of Ives but in fact tireless in his promotion of all American music, arranged it for piano four hands as one of a series of arrangements of American symphonies. Thomson played this version with an unknown collaborator for the Harvard Musical Club during a visit to Cambridge in 1929. Its first public performance was given by Scott Wheeler and Rodney Lister at a concert of the Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble in Boston in 1981. Thomson had revised the finale of the *Symphony* before its first orchestral performance, and at his direction Wheeler and Lister revised Kirkpatrick's arrangement to conform with the published orchestral score. When David Kopp and Lister later played the arrangement as part of a festival at Harvard celebrating Thomson's ninetieth birthday, they further edited it, with Thomson's enthusiastic approval.

Despite its name, more than one hymn tune figures in the *Symphony*. The principal tune, "K," is generally sung to the words "How Firm A Foundation." Other tunes that appear throughout include "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," and "The Bear Went Over the Mountain." The composer John Cage, in his book on Thomson's music, quotes the composer in the following description of the work: "It is a set of variations on the hymn 'How Firm a Foundation;' each movement consists of a further set of variations tightened-up in various ways, the first in the manner of a sonata, the second as a Bach chorale-prelude, the third as a passacaglia. The fourth is twice tightened-up, once as a fugato, once as a rondo." Throughout, Thomson delights in his characteristically straight-faced presentation of seeming opposites on the same canvas. The *Symphony's* hallmarks include a palette of predominantly spare, sometimes single-voice textures set off by full-blown ones. Four-square hymn harmonizations redolent of Kansas City are placed cheek-by-jowl, often quite abruptly, with contrapuntal, chant-like successions of highly dissonant intervals or juxtapositions of different tunes in distantly related keys. At high points these occur simultaneously, creating a noisy but calculated polytonality. Thomson's simple original orchestration, which often isolates individual orchestral sections and instrumental colors to evoke the effect of the small home-town ensembles that embody the hymns' sensibilities, loses some of its potency in its translation to the keyboard. At the same time the transcription gains a great deal from the inevitable focus on the music itself, and from its reduction to the small-scale performing forces which the original often strives to emulate.

—David Kopp and Rodney Lister

**David Kopp**, pianist, has performed as soloist and with chamber groups in the United States and Europe. He has performed numerous premieres by composers of his generation and has recorded music of Berger and Webern with cellist Rhonda Rider of the Lydian Quartet. For many years he co-directed the Music Production Company, a Boston-area new-music ensemble. Currently on the theory faculty of the University of Washington, he previously taught at Yale, Harvard, M.I.T., and at

Brandeis, where he was a member of the piano faculty. His teachers include Charles Rosen, Luise Vosgerchian, Evelyne Crochet, Jules Gentil, and Nadia Boulanger. His book, *Chromatic Tonality and Nineteenth Century Music*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, and his articles appear in leading journals.

**Rodney Lister**, composer and pianist, has performed in first performances of works by composers including Arthur Berger, Virgil Thomson, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Michael Finnissy, and Lee Hyla. His works has been performed extensively in the United States and Britain. He was a student at the Blair School of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, and at Brandeis University. He also studied privately with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Virgil Thomson. He is currently on the faculty of The New England Conservatory of Music, where he teaches composition, theory, and chamber music, and is co-director of the annual contemporary music festival of the Preparatory School. He is also a music tutor at Pforzheimer House at Harvard University, and is on the faculty of Newton North High School and Greenwood Music Camp.

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**WORKS FOR PIANO FOUR HANDS 80536-2**

David Kopp, primo  
Rodney Lister, secondo

**Harold Shapero (b. 1920)**

*Four-Hand Sonata for Piano* (ms)

- 1 I Very Slowly - Moderately Fast - Very Slowly – Tempo 7:10
- 2 II Slowly - Slightly Faster – Slowly 6:06
- 3 III Fast - Slightly Faster 4:35

**Arthur Berger (b. 1912)**

- 4 *Composition for Piano Four-Hands* (publ. C. F. Peters Co.) 13:08

**Arthur Berger**

*Suite for Piano Four-Hands* (ms; ASCAP)

- 5 Capriccio 3:25
- 6 Aria 3:10
- 7 Rondo 4:11

**Arthur Berger**

- 8 *Perspectives III* (ms; ASCAP) 8:38

**Virgil Thomson**

*Symphony No. 1* ("Symphony on a Hymn Tune") (publ. Southern Music Publishing Company)  
arr. John Kirkpatrick

9	I	Introduction and Allegro	9:48
10	II	Andante cantabile	4:51
11	III	Allegretto	3:04
12	IV	Allegro	4:54

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