

PIANO MUSIC OF DAVID KRAEHENBUEHL (1923–1997) 80584-2

R A N D O M W A L K S

Martha Braden, pianist

The life and career of David Kraehenbuehl (pronounced "crane byool") spanned many worlds. Composer, performer, theorist, college professor, publisher, music education innovator—the job titles only scratch the surface of Kraehenbuehl's passions and his impact on the musical world. Thousands of beginning piano students have delighted in his sprightly "March of the Trolls"; Catholic churches across the country have used his psalm settings, *Service Music for the Mass*. In founding the *Yale Journal of Music Theory*, he helped to establish the guiding principles of modern music theory and push that discipline into the realm of psychology.

Kraehenbuehl's passion was to write music. He composed for piano, orchestra, voice, and many combinations of instruments. He studied with Paul Hindemith, one of the foremost twentieth-century composers, yet also found inspiration in early music. Although he often wrote in intricately organized forms governed by complex generative principles, he nevertheless always sought to create music with highly infectious immediate appeal. "Music," he often said, "is dance and song." The piano was Kraehenbuehl's first instrument, and it was the one to which he always returned. This recording, which he planned and programmed several years before his death, not only represents his concert oeuvre for solo piano, but spans the decades of a rich compositional career.

Martha Braden, the pianist on this recording, first met Kraehenbuehl at the New School for Music Study in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1960. Kraehenbuehl had chosen to leave a professorship at Yale to join Frances Clark and Louise Goss as musical director in their new keyboard education program, and Braden was one of the young teachers on the faculty. "I started working with him in 1960," she recalls. "He was a gregarious, brilliant person, but as plain as an old shoe. No one felt threatened by him. He was quite open, but he liked to be with people who could keep up with him. My duo partner, Doris Martin, and I started coaching with him on the Hindemith sonata, which was a big adventure. We studied Mozart, Haydn, Prokofiev, Shostakovich; we analyzed Schumann's *Album for the Young*. David taught composition to the staff. Working with him was such fun, though we knew we were being challenged at every point. He used to love to make wild statements like, 'Only 50 percent of the notes really matter,' or 'Made a mistake? That was a good one!' He disliked authority and rigidity in the music world, and his sense of humor got him out of a lot of trouble. He could wave his hand across the room and knock out realms of authority, and we'd all laugh." That early alliance continued even after both Kraehenbuehl and Braden had left the school, and this recording is its culmination.

David Kraehenbuehl was born in Urbana, Illinois, in 1923, into a family that took the life of the mind seriously. His father, John Otto, renowned in the field of illuminating engineering, was a professor at the University of Illinois. David's mother began teaching him piano when he was five; the Ohio River flood of 1931 inspired his first composition for solo piano, which he did not write down. The non-formal aspect of David's education was rich and often self-directed. By the age of 11, he was studying the Beethoven symphonies by playing them in four-hand piano transcriptions with a University of Illinois professor of philosophy, Paul DeLargy. A year later, he was playing sonata repertory with an adult violinist friend, Sol Cohen, and wrote a sonata for violin and piano with four movements in the styles of, respectively, Brahms, Chopin, Beethoven, and Debussy. At age 12, he began piano studies with Stanley Fletcher at the University of Illinois/Urbana. He wrote rounds and canons for his high school singing groups, despite being the sort of child who was told at school, "You are a listener; don't sing, just mouth the words." Ironically, he had a uniquely rich, melodious speaking voice. Kraehenbuehl graduated from high school at 16, and continued to compose rounds and canons for voices, chamber music, and larger piano works as a student at the University of Illinois, from which he graduated in 1943 with degrees in music, German, and mathematics.

In 1947, after a stint in the Army Signal Corps in the Pacific, Kraehenbuehl returned briefly to the University of Illinois where he met and married Marie Marek, a cellist. In September 1947, he entered Hindemith's class at the Yale School of Music, where he earned a Mus.B in theory and a Mus.M in composition in two years. His first published work, "Variations on a Pavane of Hermann Schein, for Four Clarinets," dates from that time, and shows the influence of his teacher.

Awarded the Yale School of Music's prestigious Ditson Prize for postgraduate training abroad in 1949, Kraehenbuehl spent a year studying medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, which included studies in flute and harpsichord. In 1950, he began a decade-long stint in university teaching. On a recommendation from Hindemith, who called him "the most talented student I've ever had," he was appointed assistant professor of music history and theory at Colorado College, in Colorado Springs.

Diptych for Solo Piano was written for the pianist Max Lanner, a Colorado colleague, who performed it in 1951 as part of the college's annual summer music festival, a high-powered gathering of important performers and composers. In structure, Braden calls *Diptych* "the closest Kraehenbuehl ever gets to a sonata." The composer noted the influence of Hindemith in the piece, which is based on a chromatic theme. Its first movement, based on Kraehenbuehl's 1949 viola trio, is a series of variations in which the theme, rhythmically varied, always appears somewhere as a *cantus firmus*. The second movement is a wild and witty romp that recalls the composer's time in the Signal Corps and his exposure to the Yale Marching Band. Kraehenbuehl burlesques the sacred "Marine Hymn," speeding it up and altering it, and follows it with the trio of Sousa's march, "Stars and Stripes Forever," which becomes the basis for a totally new melody. "It's faster than the wind," says Martha Braden. "David thought faster than anyone, played faster than anyone. He expected us to be able to think and play as fast as he did. His idea was that the music goes in and does its work on the listeners. They don't have to hear every note: Their brain cells pick it up and organize it, and they get the message. Even if they didn't like the piece they heard, it has already done its work."

In 1953, Hindemith decided to return to Europe and asked that Kraehenbuehl replace him at Yale. That September, Kraehenbuehl returned to New Haven, and became head of the Yale School of Music theory program. His seven years there were a time of tremendously varied activity: in addition to teaching and composing, Kraehenbuehl founded the *Yale Journal of Music Theory* and served as its first editor; he was curator of Yale's Museum of Historical Musical Instruments; he served as program annotator, flutist, pianist and guest conductor of the New Haven Symphony; he was also conductor of the New Haven Chorale. Two dozen works date from this period, ranging from orchestral and chamber pieces to incidental instrumental music for theatrical productions.

During his time in New Haven, Kraehenbuehl converted to Catholicism. Many of his most serious and best compositions after that date were of a spiritual nature, including both sacred and secular works inspired by scriptural texts. Kraehenbuehl, whose family had read the Bible as literature during his boyhood, said that he found the Scriptures the greatest possible interpretation of human experience and therefore used them often as the inspiration, if not always the verbatim texts, for liturgical and other serious works.

In the *Toccate per Cembalo*, written for harpsichordist Robert Conant in 1955, Kraehenbuehl was moving away from Hindemith and finding new inspiration in the music of Stravinsky. Hindemith's style, he felt, limited the affective expression to irony, and Kraehenbuehl wanted to write music that would express joy and light, that would dance and sing. The *Toccate* is based on a diatonic tone row, with each successive toccata a variation of the first, all in different affects, culminating with the sprightly and dance-like "Vivace." When Martha Braden went to work on the piece, she picked up the

reference right away, not realizing it was deliberate. "I called him and said, 'I love this—and I've noticed that the same theme keeps coming back, and it reminds me of Stravinsky.' He said, 'I guess you didn't read the program note. It's actually a seven-note tone row that repeats itself for 27 pages!' I laughed—I'd figured it out myself, and it was so nice that I just heard it as beautiful music. But in fact, David always put the program notes last on purpose."

Kraehenbuehl never lost his early interest in mathematics, science, and the relationship of different disciplines. (Had he not been a musician, he often said he would have been an astronomer.) Another of his activities at Yale was a study in information theory, undertaken with Edgar Coons, seeking a new probability mathematics to deal with the effect of pattern on listeners at any given moment in a musical composition. Their jointly authored article was published in the *Yale Journal of Music Theory*, and Kraehenbuehl wrote *Kaleidoscope*, a three-part solo piano work to illustrate the theory. Renamed *A Formal Triad* in 1994, the piece works with the manipulation of predictability factors. According to Kraehenbuehl, "For an element that is much the same as much that precedes it, that element is minimally affective because it presents little new information. Its affective force increases as it is different from what precedes it." The movement names for *A Formal Triad* (s/s, d/d, s/d) refer to sameness and difference. Despite its high-powered theoretical underpinning and difficulty of execution, this piece too has basic listener appeal—it was even orchestrated for the New Haven Symphony for a youth concert. "The third movement, s/d, sounds so American to me," Braden says. "I hear the prairie, the West. It relates to some inner nostalgia; it's a mystery. There's a lot of mystery in David Kraehenbuehl."

Edgar Coons, who is now Professor of Psychology & Neural Science at New York University, wrote in a letter to Braden, "David Kraehenbuehl was one those rare individuals whose compositions and theories were not only intimately integrated but who gave to this integration a voice at a deeply societal level. His music covers the spectrum of human emotional experience from the jocular to the intensely profound. But always it looks at our emotions, whatever they may be, through an Apollonian eye that seeks to discern what is the instructive message. Listening to David Kraehenbuehl offers not only wonderful pleasures but a deep message of meaning."

In 1960, Kraehenbuehl took a major life step: He left Yale to join the New School for Music Study in Princeton. While he loved working with the graduate students at Yale, the New School was an opportunity to fulfill another dream: to raise the musical and technical standards for elementary piano music given to children. In the years that followed, Kraehenbuehl contributed to the prodigious Frances Clark Library materials including a theory program, a piano technique program, a set of original jazz compositions, and other pedagogical pieces designed to help piano students grasp and use essential concepts of musicianship. He continued his efforts with young pianists when he founded the National Keyboard Arts Associates with Richard Chronister and Thomas McBeth, and created another keyboard instruction program. In his view, children needed to think like composers. "David and Richard helped children start manipulating short ideas—transposing them, putting them in different orders," says Martha Braden. "They were given materials to choose from—it wasn't just open-ended, but they would finish pieces themselves, and were encouraged to compose their own pieces. That's such a natural thing for children at about age 10, and these children were given the green light to make music. David never talked about composing, just about making music. If you took a wrong ending, he'd laugh and say, 'You could have done that if you wanted to.'"

In 1962, Kraehenbuehl wrote *Ephemera: Studies in Controlled Randomness*. These four very brief pieces were reworkings of some 1955 experiments in twelve-tone set technique random writing; in 1995, he added a fifth piece, "Exultation," taken from the piano part of the cello sonata *Ash Wednesday*, and renamed the set *Random Walks* for Martha Braden. "They're really wild," she says. "They never have the same pattern twice. 'Elegy' is like a musical mobile. 'Exultation' is faster than you

can actually comprehend. It adds itself up as it goes on. There's no time to think back on what it meant—you can only think forward." Kraehenbuehl chose a set of notes, rather than a row, using a telephone book to ensure randomness, but he exercised control over it as well. In a letter to the pianist he wrote, "Most current randomness does not please me. Effective randomness was practiced in the sixteenth century by Josquin des Prez and in the nineteenth century by Chopin in his Prelude in E minor. Such controlled-random music creates surprisingly accessible music for the listener which is, however, truly demanding for the performer. Well, [Martha], I hope you enjoy digging into these pieces. All the best for an exhilarating, if perhaps somewhat exhausting, time." In Kraehenbuehl's random music, the listener thus feels the sense of randomness, but the composer has actually controlled and manipulated that sense.

Random Walks is a prime example of Kraehenbuehl's attitude toward length—none of the pieces is more than two minutes long, and three last less than one minute. Martha Braden recalls, "He used to say, 'Music is about a sonority. When you have decided on your structure, and decided on the sonority that represents what you want to get across, you talk about that sonority. Maybe you make variations. And when you've said what you have to say, you stop. A lot of music is way too long!' "

The late 1960s brought yet another new direction to Kraehenbuehl's life. In 1968, his *Missa Populi Dei: Mass of the People of God*, won a \$2,500 prize from the J.S. Paluch Company for settings of the Mass in English. He was appointed music editor and then managing editor of the company, for which he developed a complete parish music resource used in thousands of United States Catholic parishes. Kraehenbuehl wrote numerous works for the church, for his own parish and others. The next decade brought numerous compositions in many arenas: pedagogical, liturgical, large-scale works in other forms. A former Yale student, Goff Owen, commissioned *Appalachian Elegy*, for 15-voice choir, piano, harp, chimes, and percussion, which received its premiere in 1982 with the Princeton Pro Musica. In the same year, the Kraehenbuehls moved to Wisconsin, where Kraehenbuehl was quickly named choir director at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman in La Crosse.

In celebration of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Bach in 1985, Martha Braden commissioned the *Toccata sopra B-A-C-H: Tombeau de Bach*, which she performed as the centerpiece of a New York recital in 1985. (This is a famous pattern: B-flat=B in German; B-natural =H in German.) The work is based on the four triadic three-note sets that can be drawn from a complete 12-tone set, in this case, two major triads (C and D) and two minor triads (B-flat and A-flat). Placed in succession, these four triads yield three four-note chromatic sets, the B-A-C-H set and its two transpositions. The sets are presented at the beginning of the work, and every note in the toccata is drawn from them. Its structure is drawn from the toccata structure used by Bach. Kraehenbuehl wrote numerous works based on this set of four triads, as if to demonstrate that a twelve-tone set does not determine the nature of the music derived from it any more than the major scale forced Mozart's works into a single aesthetic character.

For Braden, the Bach connection was especially apt. She says, "Like Bach, David was a genius at stirring up, generating energy with patterns of intervals, pitches, and time, and then providing the audience with the satisfaction of closure, because he actually uses up all that energy before going on to another idea.

"I was lucky that my teacher, Frances Clark, encouraged me from an early age to associate with living composers and know their intentions. Commissioning this man's work, and coaching with him on it, made me the very happiest I have ever been in my professional life, and was the bravest thing I ever undertook. Even more poignant is the fact that it was a nearly impossible struggle for David to compose the *Toccata* because of the crippling effects of a stroke. Fortunately, as a master pianist, he did not need to play it as he was composing—he heard in his inner ear, and drew on his vast knowledge of piano technique. I worked from a computer printout. It took him another year to copy the

piece with pen on paper! It was so kind of him not to tell me until years later how very hard it had been." Braden used part of a personal grant from Irving Gilmore to commission the piece, which she feels "may prove to be one of our great American masterpieces."

David Kraehenbuehl's last decade continued to fuse the many interests that had captivated him all his life. There were more commissions, including *Drumfire: A Cantata Against War*, for soprano, baritone, SATB chorus, and orchestra (1986), again a commission by Goff Owen, more expansive than the first. Kraehenbuehl continued to play as well, in two-piano recitals and chamber music. He continued his work with young people, teaching advanced piano students and working during the summers in the Symphony of the Hills, founded and conducted by Frank Italiano of La Crosse. After a heart attack, a stroke, and bypass surgery in 1989, he was no longer able to perform, but he continued to compose, and began to organize his works, many of them unpublished, for recording and posterity.

In 1994, Kraehenbuehl returned to his 1954 suite of 12 piano pieces, *Peter's Tune*, which he retitled *Looking Back: Twelve Images From My Past*. (Ten of the pieces were also reworked and arranged for recorder duo.) The suite, which Kraehenbuehl saw as a twentieth-century equivalent of Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, to be played for children rather than by children, translated experiences in the composer's life into music. While the pieces are sophisticated for the pianist, and enjoyable for adult listeners, Martha Braden loves playing them for young children.

The pieces also represent another of Kraehenbuehl's fundamental ideas—that music is representative of experience rather than programmatic. If the composer's structure matches the structure in a listener's mind, he felt, the listener will get it, even on an unconscious level. That structure speaks for itself. "David would often say in a lesson, 'You're pointing,'" Martha Braden recalls. "I would try to set the stage for the audience to hear something begin, or to emphasize that 'this is an important note.' He would say, 'Don't point, go right into it. I didn't write a ritard there because I don't need it. A phrase does not end. When something new begins, then you know you've ended.' "

The kernel of *Looking Back*, "Peter's Tune," was written by Peter Pinchot, an eight-year-old Kraehenbuehl student. When Peter repeated the piece several times without changing it, the composer realized that its unusual mixed meters were exactly what the boy intended. He notated it, and began to work with it. Four of the pieces in the suite are variations on the tune; each piece a particular memory. "A Strange Procession" and "Castles in the Air" are memories of a teen-age year spent in bed after a severe illness during which the composer read books and studied the pattern of cracks in the ceiling. "The Old Organ Grinder" dates from the composer's year in Basel, when he encountered a man with a wheezing, decrepit organ on a freezing day. "Playing in the Rain," the first variation on Peter's tune, puts Peter in the left hand and the rain in the right hand, for a joyous romp in a flooded street. "Follow the Leader" represents the childhood game, and as in reality—for children rarely follow their leader exactly—the rhythm of the canon is inconsistent. In "Goldfish in the Sun," Kraehenbuehl recalls a pool on the campus of the University of Illinois, where he would stand for long periods of time, watching the carp idle and dart. "Roughhouse" evokes the pre-bedtime free-for-all at the young Kraehenbuehl's house—a riotous time of cartwheels and somersaults. Of "Falling Asleep," the composer wrote, "This final variation on Peter's tune brings a day of lively activity to a peaceful end. Like the final pieces in the Schumann *Kinderszenen*, this reflection gently concludes this set of images, not all from my childhood, but all from my past life."

David Kraehenbuehl died in 1997. An archive of his works and materials has been established at the Irving S. Gilmore Library at Yale University. —*Heidi Waleson*

Heidi Waleson is the opera critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and U.S. correspondent for *BBC Music Magazine*.

The American pianist **Martha Braden** has devoted much of her career to expanding the standard repertoire of twentieth-century piano masterpieces. This recording of the music of David Kraehenbuehl was undertaken at the request of the composer, who was coaching her in the music at the time of his death. She has also created the first catalogue of Kraehenbuehl's works, and an edition of his music for solo piano. Two previous CDs were devoted to the music of Alexander Tcherepnin and Ross Lee Finney, both of whom were her teachers.

A student of the pedagogical innovator Frances Clark, and who later coached with Erno Balogh, Ross Lee Finney, Julius Hereford, and Ming Tcherepnin, Martha Braden has always worked with living composers, and has placed their music at the center of her performing and teaching career. She has performed extensively in the United States, Mexico, and the Far East. During a three-month tour of the People's Republic of China, she presented numerous concerts and master classes along with a series of lecture-recitals on the history of Western music. Her residencies and workshops at colleges, universities, and state and national teachers' conventions in the U.S. focus on the role of the performer in the twenty-first-century, the education of audiences, and the music of twentieth-century masters.

Martha Braden was singled out by the philanthropist Irving S. Gilmore, and received a series of Gilmore and Gilmore Foundation grants to underwrite her concert and recording activities. A major prize winner at both the Bartok-Kabalevsky International Piano Competition and the Ibla International Competition in Sicily, she was also awarded a travel grant as the Tcherepnin Society's first Foreign Exchange Artist. Her record series, *Music Through History* is used in Montessori classrooms worldwide.

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R A N D O M W A L K S

Martha Braden, pianist

Diptych

- | | | |
|---|----------------|------|
| 1 | I. Variations | 6:24 |
| 2 | II. Quickmarch | 4:14 |

Toccate per Cembalo

- | | | |
|---|----------------|------|
| 3 | I. Liberamente | 4:05 |
| 4 | II. Leggiero | 2:15 |
| 5 | III. Furiante | 2:18 |
| 6 | IV. Grave | 2:37 |
| 7 | V. Vivace | 3:34 |

A Formal Triad

- | | | | |
|----|-----|---------------|------|
| 8 | S/S | Larghetto | 2:49 |
| 9 | D/D | Lento-Presto | 1:58 |
| 10 | S/D | Lento-Allegro | 6:36 |

11 Toccata Sopra B-A-C-H: Tombeau de Bach 11:42

Molto adagio—Con brio—Allegro molto—Cantabile—Allegro vivace

Random Walks: Studies in Controlled Randomness

- | | | |
|----|------------|------|
| 12 | Elegy | 1:49 |
| 13 | Epigram | 0:31 |
| 14 | Enigma | 0:46 |
| 15 | Epitaph | 1:07 |
| 16 | Exultation | 0:55 |

Looking Back: Twelve Images from My Past

17	Peter's Tune	0:26
18	A Strange Procession	1:38
19	The Old Organ Grinder	1:50
20	Sad Cuckoo	1:31
21	Playing in the Rain	0:49
22	Castles in the Air	2:15
23	Tantrum	0:31
24	Round and Round	1:12
25	Follow the Leader	0:31
26	Goldfish in the Sun	2:27
27	Roughhouse	0:58
28	Falling Asleep	1:32

TOTAL TIME: 69:23

All works published by Martha Braden.

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