

Christopher Vassiliades Plays the Piano Music of Meyer Kupferman Vol. 1

Of the myriad musical voices I have experienced in my life as a performing artist I have always had a close affinity to the music of Meyer Kupferman. To my mind, his sonorities are some of the most deeply touching, his formal choices some of the most interesting of many a composer now writing.

One of Kupferman's great gifts (he is also a poet, painter, educator, clarinettist, conductor, etc.) is his ability to challenge the performer on many levels: To rethink his technique, serving to deepen the artist's relationship to his instrument; to reexamine the nature of musical expression and thus express emotions with ever more intensity: and most importantly to perceive with new ears Kupferman's music as though personally conceiving it at that very moment. Meyer Kupferman years ago began to challenge me with these notions; I owe him a great debt of gratitude for contributing to make me the musician and artist I have become. I cannot think of a more wonderful and rewarding way to have spent half a

Our years of rehearsal for our many all-Kupferman concerts has produced a unique collaboration between creator and interpreter that continues to this day. I hope that you will experience on this CD some of the lively spirit of creation and re-creation that we felt in our work sessions. And so it is with joy and in celebration of life that I
present to you my interpretations of some
of Meyer Kupferman's most fascinating
keyboard works.

-CV

Two Imprints was composed in memory of Kupferman's dear friend and accompanist Lisl Cohen in 1990. The two contrasting movements of this piece suggest to Kupferman certain qualities and musicianly gestures of Ms. Cohn which he would like to remember her by. The pieces are unusually crystalline and personal, the first in the form of an exquisitely harmonized single long melody. "When I composed this little tribute to my dear friend," said Meyer Kupferman, "I remembered how fond she was of Schoenberg's Opus 11 and Berg's Opus 1...and perhaps that influenced me...." The second movement is based mostly upon repeated sestolet patterns interrupted in rondo style by contrasting, contrapuntal material. The final gesture of the piece extends beyond the keyboard itself, seemingly preserving Ms. Cohn's memory into eternity.

Infinities Fantasy, composed in 1962, is based upon Kupferman's well-known Infinities row which has been the basis for numerous compositions since 1961. The pitch materials for the row are: G, F, A-flat, C-flat, B-flat, D, F-sharp, E, C, E-flat, A, C-sharp. The work follows the traditional form of a fantasia, that is, a work conceived in sectional form. It is of historic interest to

note that the echo-pedal technique which begins the piece was invented by Meyer Kupferman. To the listener, the overall impression of this work is that it mimics the sonorities, timbres and gestures of electronic music of the period, but is performed instead by a live artist; this novel approach results in a work of enormous tension and excitement.

The premiere was equally exciting, but unfortunately the excitement was more akin to the infamous premiere of Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps. Premiered by and dedicated to Adele Marcus during the first season of Philharmonic Hall, this audacious work was greeted with both cheers and boos from the audience. The factions of the audience divided yet more violently when Ms. Marcus defiantly announced that she would play the entire piece again as an encore, garnering even more cheers and boos. The composer and his wife thought of finding cover, fearing a mob scene! The piece languished unperformed since that time until it was resurrected by Christopher Vassiliades. It would seem that great music, fortunately, has a way of surviving the test of time.

Partita, composed in 1948 and dedicated to Morton Estrin for his New York debut, is a wildly virtuosic work, demanding from the performer boundless musicality as well as boundless technique and stamina. The Praeludium is based upon the opening recitativo and intervallic extensions of the famous cruciform BACH motive which are in turn fitted into an overall arch structure and coda. Kupferman's masterful use of counterpoint throughout the movement seems a fitting

tribute to the old master. The movement's lyrical, slower coda provides a surprising ending and changes the tides of energy for the advent of the following movement. The superbly beautiful Arioso is based upon a melody derived from the octatonic scale (alternating half- and whole-steps) and methodically rises higher through the keyboard. The Toccata-Burlesca closes the piece with an almost overpowering display of acoustic pyrotechnics. The whimsical, machine-like toccata which frames the movement includes a simple dominant-tonic figure in B minor and grows to an almost unbearable intensity until the final climax explodes the keyboard into a cascading glissando in sixths. Kupferman later recast this section into his OSTINATO BURLESCO for orchestra, also available on CD from Soundspells Productions (CD111).

Tiananmen Suite, originally composed as a statement of support during the student demonstrations in Peijing in 1989, was completed instead as a memorial to the brave young Chinese students murdered in Tiananmen Square. A great lover of democracy as well as of things Chinese, Kupferman renders for the listener a heartfelt, passionate musical landscape of terror and fury in contemplation of this great human tragedy. Existing much as a series of photographs capturing emotional moments in time, this piece serves as a perennial warning.

Conceived as a tone poem in five short movements, Kupferman gives the music an unmistakable Chinese flavor throughout, yet avoids cliche, thus reinventing the style. The first movement suggests a tense, stifling ritornello, as if depicting a troublesome situation fated to revert back to its original state. Of special note are the so-called special pianistic techniques (pizzicati and stopped notes) which here suggest traditional Chinese instruments. The brief second movement, intended to illustrate the excited chatter of the students as they enter Tiananmen Square, is mostly monophonically conceived, the large tessitura of the single, rapid melodic line creating the illusion of many hocketing voices. In the third movement a series of dissonant chords frames a freely repeated E ostinato; around this pitch lyrical and dramatic sound events crescendo, suggesting a growing sense of unrest. The fourth movement is a somber statement illustrating scenes of hunger protests and sickness and is binary in form, its second half containing a countermelodic overlays which magnify the original melody. While thinking of how to end this piece, the composer received his inspiration, it seems, from Fate. He writes the following note on the final page of the score:

I have just learned the tragic news of the Peijing massacre on the radio today, Saturday, June 3, 1989. I have composed this finale of fifty-six c-sharp minor chords dedicated to the memory and spirit of each of the fifty-six students and workers killed on this day by the Chinese army in Tiananmen Square. A few moments ago, however, another report indicated that the latest count had reached one hundred dead....

History has come to bear witness, of course,

that the dead count reached a far greater number than even this mere one hundred.

Cirrus, composed in 1989 and dedicated to Christopher Vassiliades, typifies Kupferman's lifelong interest in painting and music. The idea of cloud images or abstractions is transformed here from a visual conception to a temporal canvas for piano. The slowly unfolding harmonies and rhythms generate a free-floating sound world. Surprising new timbres introduced late in the piece create a musical environment which constantly renews itself.

Distances, written in memory of Frederick Ewen in 1988, is a lyrical elegy consisting of huge melodic leaps, virtuosic cadenzas and unusual canonic passages. This moody piece possesses a certain "romantic" flexibility resulting in an unusually haunting and poetic miniature.

Pico (..among the smallest particles), composed in 1975 and dedicated to Morton Estrin, contains an entire sonata movement, preceded by a slow introduction, in the time frame of about one minute. Musical quotes, numerous contrapuntal devices and dramatically varying textures and timbres abound in this extremely economical and humorous foray into transcendental virtuosity. In fact, it has probably taken longer to read this paragraph than to listen to the entire piece!

The Canticles of Ulysses, composed in 1991 and dedicated to Christopher Vassiliades, takes the form of five brilliant toccatas performed as a single movement. Each of these toccatas depicts vividly the spirit of adventure in Homer's Odyssey. The

first section depicts a tale of derring-do involving Ulysses' men and consists of dazzling staccato displays followed by a devilishly difficult talea in sestolets. The sirensong of the second section mixes tonal and atonal material into a unique sound environment. The Ulysses Theme of the third section illustrates superbly the yearning and mercurial spirit of this hero. The gradually approaching Greek dance of the fourth section, a rondo, blooms into a powerful, gyrating orgy of splendor. The surging ostinati figures of the final section depicts Ulysses' excitement as his ship, the Argos, speeds toward home and his beloved Penelope. The cascading tones which begin and overwhelmingly end this finale suggest the arrows with which Penelope's suitors greet Ulysses, thus transforming his return into yet another adventure.

The music, imminently characteristic of Kupferman's pianistic style, encompasses compositional methods ranging from free triadic usage through twelve-tone chromaticism. To grasp the complexity of the rhythmic design and the virtuosity implicit in the poetics of Kupferman's conception, the pianist must regard his pianism free of technical preconceptions The sweeping melodies of this audacious and lyrical work are the birth-cry of a unique musical voice.

Notes by Christopher Vassiliades
"My Music..."
by Meyer Kupferman

The music I love to write often crosses over a broad spectrum of styles usually character-

ized by tonal and atonal positions. Since I have been doing this sort of thing for fifty years, the notion of mixing opposing elements which is very natural for me has included thematic and athematic materials, jazz and non-jazz ideas and a host of rhythmic and textural opposites that I would prefer to describe as dynamic or creative polarization. As for performing artists, my best players and interpreters are those who have a real feel for these aesthetic games; they must be artists who command considerable virtuosity and a deeply rooted expressivity, since my work often touches on neo-romantic performance traditions. I suppose I should admit at this point that in the early days I was very quickly hooked on the challenge of big, romantic forms. This became evident as soon as I started composing for orchestra: My first symphony, first piano concerto, first cello concerto and first opera were all completed before I was twenty-one. Although these were never listed as tone-poems, it was for my self alone that these symphonic pieces were based on folk legends, fragments of mythology or the rich passions of epic poet-

After working in a free chromatic style during the 1940's, the twelve-tone system gradually occupied more and more of my attention. Since I was totally self-taught in music composition and wore no academic handcuffs to hold me back or keep me in line, I plunged right in and freely adapted the whole dodecaphonic system to my own selfish needs. Thinking that I had stumbled upon a gold mine, I created a form where each new work was based on a rotataing series of tone centers - clearly a contradiction of atonality! This kind of re-invention soon led to what I then regarded as my first major innovation: all forty-eight permutations of the row were employed in a symmetrical distribution of

tonal centers, each seven bars long and each coordinated by and evolved from the pitch sequence of the basic row. MY CHAMBER SYMPHONY (CD112) was an early example of this tone-center rotation procedure. Since the symphony had a bit of success and was premiered on an important ISCM concert along with John Cage's LANDSCAPES FOR TWELVE RADIOS I was happy to continue in this direction...for a while.

The 1950's represented a period of many swings back and forth between this form of private atonality and my 'old reliable' chromatic tonality. Perhaps my LYRIC SYM-PHONY (CD110) and FOURTH SYMPHO-NY (1955, Louisville) are the best examples of the latter approach. My SONATA ON JAZZ ELEMENTS (1958, Serenus), a freely twelve-tone, hard-hitting jazz sonata, clearly showed that although I might have taken leave of my senses writing such an enormously difficult keyboard work, I had not abandoned the jazz world. Dreaming about the mind-boggling operatic success of Menotti, many young American composers like myself were caught up in the operatic explosion of the 1950's. Stravinsky's THE RAKE'S PROGRESS was an important contribution and urged us on still further. Although none of us really succeeded, I did manage to compose four operas during this crazy decade: DOCTOR FAUSTUS LIGHTS THE LIGHTS, VOICES FOR A MIRROR, THE CURIOUS FERN and DRAAGEN-FOOT GIRL.

The 1960's marked the beginning of my CYCLE OF INFINITIES, a series of related twelve-tone works spanning nearly four decades all based on the same tone row. I became totally committed to this direction, discovering along the way that my 'Infinities' tone row was like a magic tune that could yield anything I required in terms

of melody, counterpoint, texture or harmonic organization. My CYCLE OF INFINITIES started out with four different solo instrument concerts: unaccompanied flute, viola, cello and coloratura soprano. Each concert became a spectacular tour-de-force for the artist, particularly since new echo techniques, theatrical illusions such as lighting and choreography, and an array of electronic devices which enabled these solo instrumentalists or singers to perform live against their own pre-recorded sounds, were all part of each 'Infinities' event.

Also, I composed many 'Infinities' jazz works like my JAZZ STRING QUARTET (premiered at the White House when Johnson was president), CONCERTO FOR CELLO AND JAZZ BAND (CD114), INFINITIES PROJECTIONS (for chamber orchestra - CD114), INFINITIES FOR STRINGS, JAZZ INFINITIES THREE for sax, bass and drums (premiered at the Library of Congress during the First International Jazz Festival) and MOON-CHILD AND THE DOOMSDAY TROM-BONE, a jazz concerto for oboe (Ronald Roseman) and a small group of versatile artists including the wonderful Jan DeGaetani who sang jazz onstage for the first time with this 'Infinities' piece. A high-light in my evolving CYCLE OF INFINI-TIES was an opera without orchestra, THE JUDGMENT, composed in 1968. The libretto was based on the biblical story of Lot in Sodom. Conceived in gigantesque proportions, THE JUDGMENT, in three long acts, called for huge stage sets, nineteen soloists, five choruses and absolutely no supporting instruments. I never concerned myself about where my poor singers would get their pitch or how they would maintain the twelve-tone intonation. Each singer had to have perfect pitch or a remarkable sense of relative pitch. Since I had worked with artists of this type before I could foresee no great difficulty. Now, however, I believe that I must have been wrong since THE JUDGMENT has still not seen the light of day.

The early 1970's marked the beginning of a major turnabout for me. My music embraced a new multi-style approach which I soon wound up calling 'gestalt' form. Today I can safely say I wasted many hours hopelessly trying to explain to my academic cronies why I gave it such a name. My lecture in Aspen, for example, proved to be a bust until I played some tapes of my new 'gestalt' music. Suddenly there was a glimmer of understanding. "Why does music always have to be consistent?", I asked, "Life certainly isn't except when it chooses to be!" My new 'gestalt' idea provided me with a great raison d'etre to explore expansive musical conceptions of changing elements or, in fact, totally contrasting styles so incongruous that they had no business being near each other, let alone in the same composition! Thus armed with the chameleon-like aesthetic of my 'gestalt' idea, I could not only combine tonality with atonality but create a believable blend of music which could include touches of aleatoric, romantic, minimalist, jazz, electronic and even folk-like materials in the same piece. Eventually I discovered that the 'gestalt' traffic flowed better in large forms. As a result an avalanche of massive 'gestalt' works followed: YIN YANG SYMPHONY, CONCERTO FOR SIX INSTRUMENTS AND ORCHESTRA SYMPHONY FOR TWELVE, THE CELES-TIAL CITY and CONCERTO FOR CELLO AND TAPE ORCHESTRA.

The 1980's and 1990's reveal a continued expansion of my 'Infinities' cycle. I would not be exaggerating if I said my 'Infinities' row was like an old friend with whom I enjoy a visit a few times a year. My weakness for atonal jazz provides me with other
aesthetic 'pals and cookies.' Speaking about
1990, it would appear I opened a Pandora's
box with my new book titled ATONAL
JAZZ. The book explains my ideas about
twelve-tone improvisation and is published
with an 'Infinities' play-along CD (Dorn
Publications). I scribbled the first draft of the
book on my way to Lithuania in that scary
summer of 1990. Our nervous little caravan
of soloists, engineers, producers and wives
sneaked into Vilnius to record my JAZZ
SYMPHONY (CD104) without Soviet visas!
Very dangerous - so was the music! But
that's another story.

I do not wish to give the impression that I abandoned my grandiose 'gestalt' fantasies, for the 'gestalt' form eventually did emerge as the central preoccupation of my music from 1980 through 1996. The compositions of this period were centered around two instruments: the piano and the amplified guitar. The major keyboard works are THE MOOR'S CONCERTO (piano and orchestra, CD110), A LITTLE IVORY CONCERTO (piano and chamber orchestra, CD100), MASADA (piano and five instruments) and four big piano sonatas: THE CANTICLES OF ULYSSES, RED SONATA, TWILIGHT SONATA and SONATA OCCULTA. The works for amplified guitar are CONCERTO FOR GUITAR AND ORCHESTRA (CD113), ICE CREAM CONCERTO (for eleven players and ice cream vendor, CD109), THESE SUNS ARE DARK and HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK, both for solo guitar, GOING HOME (for guitar quartet) and ICARUS (for guitar, viola and cello).

Just to show that I am still keeping my hand in there, I should explain that I do play my instrument, the clarinet, every day, and conduct once in a blue moon, or whenever it is less of a hassle for me to do it. My musicians are very sensitive individuals, often high-strung or just plain strung-out from too much concentrated work on my music. It is good, therefore, that I hold myself in high esteem as an excellent coach (I haven't killed anyone yet, but I have been tempted to many times!). I try to impress upon my artists that they should enjoy the challenge of 'impossible' passages, arguing, making revisions and planning important musical events.

In closing let me say that music has been my life and I am very grateful to have lived it. Although the hardships, struggles and disappointments are never forgotten, the real joy of making something out of nothing is always there in front of me.

Meyer Kupferman December 1995

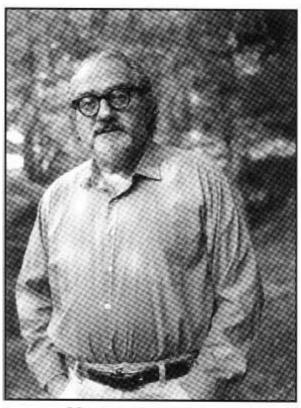
Christopher Vassiliades, pianist and composer, received his piano training at the Manhattan School of Music where he studied piano with Robert Goldsand. Other teachers have included Harvey Sollberger, Paul Zukofsky and Avraham Sternklar. He has distinguished himself in premieres of numerous works by many of the world's greatest contemporary composers and by performing with many important New York-based ensembles such as The Group for Contemporary Music, The New Music Consort and Bang On A Can. His performances can be heard on Soundspells Recordings and CRI labels. Possessing a special love and affinity for the Music of Meyer Kupferman, Mr. Vassiliades has toured the United States in a forty-year retrospective piano recital of this body of work. Many of Mr. Kupferman's more recent works have been premiered by and dedicated to him.

Mr. Vassiliades has composed fifteen operas,

two dance works, three musicals and dozens of theater, cabaret and chamber works which are often performed throughout the United States and Europe. His musical comedy, GRAVE ROBBERS OVER HOLLYWOOD (1993-4), written with librettist Andrew Joffe, is inspired by the life and works of filmmaker Edward D. Wood, Jr., and is authorized by the Wood estate. He is currently collaborating with Mr. Joffe on a fulllength opera based upon J. K. Huysmans' infamous novel A REBOURS. Other operas include THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY (1985) and CATHARSIS (1988) which was commissioned by the City of Iraklian (Crete). In 1987 the World Music Society commissioned his FIRST RHAPSODY ON GREEK FOLK SONGS AND DANCES.

Mr. Vassiliades was founder and Artistic Director of Oval Window Chamber Ensemble from 1986 to 1989 and has received numerous grants from Meet the Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts and other such organizations. In 1986 he was a finalist in the prestigious Kucyna International Composition Prize Competition for his monodrama LES METAMOR-PHOSES DU VAMPIRE.

In addition to performing and composing, Mr. Vassiliades is a dedicated educator and has taught on the theory faculty of The Manhattan School of Music since 1992 and also on the faculties of Sarah Lawrence College (1991) and the Manhattan School of Music Preparatory Division (1985 to the present) and maintains a teaching studio in Manhattan.



MEYER KUPFERMAN

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THE PIANO MUSIC OF MEYER KUPFERMAN Vol. 1 CHRISTOPHER VASSILIADES PIANO

Two Imprints

Doloroso (2:51)

Rubato (4:29)

Infinities Fantasy (10:16)

Partita

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5

6

7

8

9

10

11

14

18

19

Praeludium (7:13)

Arioso (3:38)

Toccata-Burlesca (5:09)

Tiananmen Suite

Slow and Austere (2:31)

Real Fast (0:43)

Broadly (2:47)

Lyrically (2:46)

Agitated - Big! (3:30)

12 Cirrus (4:15)

Distances (2:37)

Pico (...among the smallest particles) (1:20)

The Canticles of Ulysses

Maestoso - Allegro Molto (2:21)

Lento (2:53)

Lento Espressivo ed Agitato (3:37)

Allegretto con molto appassionato (3:41)

Finale: Tempestuoso (4:04)





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