

PROGRAM NOTES

Stephen Dankner

Stephen Dankner received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music Composition from the Juilliard School in 1971. A list of commissioned works since 1990 includes ten symphonies, where Dankner was the composer-in-residence with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra from 2004-2007 (Symphonies Nos. 3-9), eighteen string quartets (Quartets 3-10 commissioned and premiered by the Amerinet String Quartet), a saxophone quartet (commissioned by the Mana Saxophone Quartet), seven concerti (two for piano, one for violin, two for cello and one each for E flat clarinet (commissioned by the Louisiana Philharmonic for E flat clarinetist Stephanie Thompson) and alto saxophone); four major song cycles; sonatas for violin (3), piano, alto saxophone, cello; four piano trios; a piano quartet, saxophone quintet (saxophone quartet with piano) and five orchestral tone poems. The National Symphony Orchestra, Albany Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Nürnberg Symphoniker, Portland Youth Philharmonic and others have commissioned works and have given premieres of these and other works. The Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra has given premiere performances of seven of his ten symphonies during the period 1998-2012. The composer has twice been a recipient of a State of Louisiana Division of the Arts Fellowship in Music Composition (1986, 1998) and the State of Louisiana Division of the Arts Mini-Grants (4 - 1998-2004). Winner, William Lincer International Composition Award for Piano Quartet (2001). Fellowship residencies at Yaddo, Virginia Center for Creative Arts (11), A Studio In The Woods and The Millay Colony. Dankner was a recipient of a Surdna Arts Teacher's Fellowship to compose his Eighth Symphony (2004-'05). The composer also is a digital visual artist and has had many juried exhibitions of his gicleé prints in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts since 2006. Stephen Dankner resides in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Stephen Dankner: Sonata no.2

The *Sonata No. 2* was composed in 1999. Contrasting with its predecessor, the piece is in four brief movements lasting 18 minutes. The opening *Adagio* is serious and stately, ending in a sort of harmonic haze. This reverie is broken by a stridently accented *Allegro molto*, requiring the performers to perform with unfettered technical virtuosity. Near its conclusion, this movement slows down, transitioning without pause into a sultry *Tempo di tango*. This movement was composed under the influence of the great Argentinean tango composer Astor Piazzolla – a master of both native/popular and contemporary classical musical idioms – a compositional exploit I have long sought to emulate. The fourth and final movement begins seamlessly from the preceding tango rhythms and continues the dance until a climax is reached. Then begins a curtailed recap of thematic elements heard in the first two movements – a reminiscence of past emotions half-remembered. A *coda* recalls the essence of the tango, with the piano's lowest bass notes droning the incessant dance pattern, as if from a great distance. The piece ends in the "clouds of time." No, we're not in exotic *Rio*, but in Williamstown. Still, we can dream...

- Stephen Dankner

Fred Hersch: Tango Bittersweet

Fred Hersch is widely recognized as one of the world's most influential jazz pianists. He is also a prolific composer who has written music for many leading classical and jazz artists. *Tango Bittersweet* was composed in 1991 for Hersch's trio and has since been arranged for various configurations.

The left hand of the piano is very rhythmic throughout, embracing the percussive, syncopated character of the tango. The right hand sometimes supports the rhythm, sometimes the harmony, and sometimes the melody, and there is a section without the string instrument where the pianist shines. Somewhat jazzy; highly chromatic but never atonal.

- *Fred Hersch*

Willis Delony: Summer Waltz and Capriccio

Connections between musical styles and the marriage that results when they come together in a single piece has always been a source of fascination for pianist Willis Delony. His new composition *Summer Waltz* employs the richness of jazz harmony along with the rhythmic feel associated with the style. The improvisatory sections in the piece also follow typical jazz practice, notably influenced by the great Bill Evans. But at the same time, the musical world of the classic piano character pieces by Chopin, Brahms and Debussy is present to a large extent. Just as important: the piece takes advantage of the violin's expressive possibilities, adding another dimension to a genre normally associated with solo keyboard.

Capriccio is a new composition for violin and piano that combines both jazz and traditional classical elements, as do most of my pieces. The opening section features a couple of playful themes played by the violin, set in a relaxed, swinging style that features occasional hints of Afro-Cuban rhythms in the piano. The tempo relaxes in the piece's second section, which features a lyrical violin melody framed by lush jazz harmonies that form the basis for some piano improvisation. After this slower interlude, the opening themes are reprised in a return to the playful, "capricious" atmosphere.

- *Willis Delony*

Stephen Dankner: Sonata no.1

Composed in 1992, *Sonata No. 1* is a large-scale work in a single continuous movement and lasts 22 minutes. It opens with an *Adagio* introduction for the solo violin and is soon joined by the piano. The theme gradually morphs into an *Allegro*, now cast in an agitated setting. As the music progresses, it takes on a 19th-century, *mittel-European*, *Romani* flavor, with lots of vivacious and colorful writing for both instruments. As the music transitions to the second, highly contrasted and lyrical theme, exuberant Romantic feelings take hold, and the music soars to the heights of unrestrained passion. These two sections define the exposition of the *Sonata*. From there, an elaborate development section follows, based upon the first theme, and climaxes in a *Romani*-like violin cadenza; a recapitulation of the opening section re-introduces the two themes in varied settings. An elaborate coda brings this evocative piece to a rapturous conclusion.

- *Stephen Dankner*