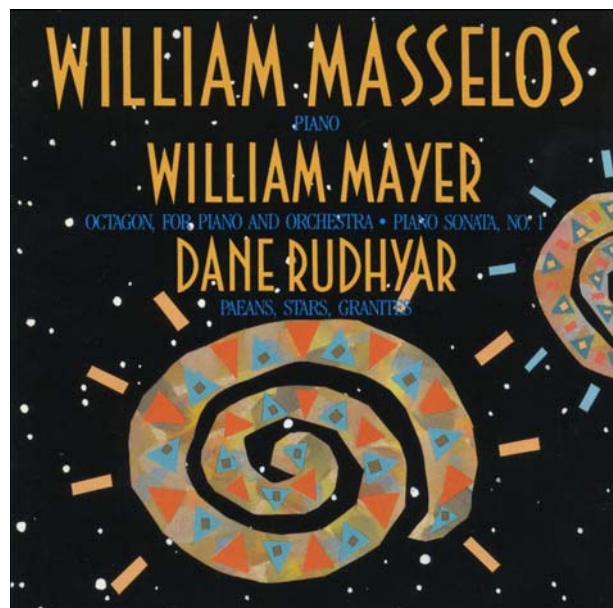


NWCR584

William Masselos

William Mayer / Dane Rudhyar



William Mayer (b 1925)

Octagon for Piano and Orchestra (1971) (28:15)

1. I. – Interrotto (6:58)
2. II. – Canzone (3:55)

3. III. – Scherzo (2:12)
4. IV. – Toccata (2:15)
5. V. – Fantasia (3:50)
6. VI. – Clangor (1:32)
7. VII. – Points and Lights (2:39)
8. VIII. – Finale (4:52)

William Masselos, piano; Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra; Kenneth Schemerhorn, conductor

Piano Sonata No. 1 (1960) (18:45)

9. I. – Andante
10. II. – Moderato
11. III. – Vivace e leggiero

Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985)

12. *Paeans* (1927) (7:00)

13. Stars from *Pentagram No. 3*
“Release” (1926) (3:00)

14. *Granites* (1929) (8:45)

William Masselos, piano

Total playing time: 65:43

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Notes

Throughout his career, **William Masselos** distinguished himself as a brilliant pianist completely dedicated to music of twentieth century composers. As he celebrates his seventieth birthday, he can easily be viewed as a leader, if not a path breaker, for subsequent generations of American pianists who have found contemporary music to be both a source of inspiration and a worthwhile vehicle for career advancement.

Modern works were part of Masselos’s repertoire since his New York debut in 1939 when he performed the Copland *Variations* and Griffes’s Sonata. Among the works which he premiered were Ives’s first Piano Sonata, which was written ten years before Masselos was born, and Ben Weber’s Piano Concerto which was written for him through a Ford Foundation grant. In 1957, he premiered Copland’s *Piano Fantasy*, a fiercely difficult work which he performed twice on the same program before an audience of New York’s most distinguished musical personages.

Masselos did not focus on the modern to the exclusion of the Romantic. His innovative concert programs were marked by their diversity and often their length. A famous 1969 Carnegie Hall concert ran for three hours (with the audience encouraged to come and go at will) and featured works of Rudhyar, Ives, Webern, Copland, Weber, Schuman, and Satie and concluded with Chopin’s Concerto in F Minor conducted by Max Wilcox.

Born in Niagara Falls, New York, Masselos made several major recital appearances before his ninth birthday. His teachers were Carl Friedberg and David Saperton. He is a

graduate of the Juilliard School where he was appointed to the piano faculty in 1976. He has also served as pianist-in-residence at Indiana University, the Catholic University of America, and Georgia State University.

William Mayer’s *Octagon for Piano and Orchestra* (1971) was begun in an abandoned schoolhouse in West Townsend, Vermont and completed in Rome and New York on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The composer writes:

“I remember being excited when I was told that the Roman villa I was working in had once been occupied by Franz Liszt. But I also remember being worried that I would be influenced by the termites that had partially taken over, as you could hear them chomping away in a steady slow tempo.

“In *Octagon* themes are often pitted against each other. In the very opening measures a fragile flute figure is pounded and eventually pulverized by attacking sonorities, first from the piano and then from the orchestra. This aggressive energy continues to bob up, but more sparingly, in succeeding movements, occasionally attacking new and more sturdy material without warning. These interruptions over a long span contribute an organizing element of their own to the work.

“There are, however, many stretches of the piece free from attacks. And there are a number of organizing principles totally unrelated to conflict. Each movement, for example, features a different facet of the piano. But certainly a central fact of *Octagon* is the alternation of the gentle with the abrasive.

“The first movement, as the title *Interotto* indicates, is a series

of interruptions—the piano even interrupts itself. There is tranquil relief, however, in an inner section scored for strings and English horn. The second movement *Canzone* is a lament, while the third, *Scherzo*, is insouciant in spirit. The *Toccata*, which follows without pause, is a relentless workout for the piano, primarily in its darker registers.

“The fifth movement, *Fantasia*, functions as the central arch of *Octagon*. An opening filmy motive in the piano reappears throughout, walling off episodes as if by a crystal curtain. The movement relates back to the second in its lyricism and looks ahead to the sixth and seventh in its bell sonorities. In the sixth movement, *Clangor*, these bell sounds are boisterous and brash, at times jeering, while in the seventh, *Points and Lights*, they are distant and delicate, as if the bells were ringing under water

“Piano perpetual-motion figures (quintuplets) draw the listener directly into the turbulent *Finale*. These figures spread throughout the orchestra and are then replaced by fragments of previous movements. Especially prominent are first movement sonorities attacking the simple lament heard in the second movement. A short and steely cadenza follows, leading directly into a massive orchestral cluster that includes organ for the first time. The work ends on an entirely new plane with remote piano chords and string harmonics—as if all the turmoil were receding into the galaxies.”

Of his Piano Sonata No. 1 (1960), Mayer writes:

“In the first movement, motion and tension grow gradually out of the apparently languid opening theme: percussive and clangorous sonorities surge toward a climax, whereupon the energy subsides into gentler material heard earlier—somewhat akin in visual experience to early morning mist clearing from a lake, only to return at dusk. A full circle is closed as the movement ends, note for note on the same motive with which it began.

“The second movement has a similar contour, with rhapsodic elements framing a faster and more precisely articulated middle section. The main motif is a descending minor second plus a minor third. There is, however, a clear difference between this movement and the preceding one: for the first ends in a rhetorical question mark, while this one concludes in quiet resolution.

“There follows an interlude, comprised of block chords, increasing in harmonic density, marching slowly and relentlessly towards what could be a grandiose climax. The climax never materializes, however; for at the very moment of its logical culmination the impudent third movement theme puts in an appearance—its jig-like character deflating the preceding build-up to pompous absurdity. Three times the ‘jig’ recurs in rondo fashion—the impression in my own mind being, in the faster sections, of scampering alternating with a kind of leap-frogging from register to register.

“The music resolves into a coda, which, in triple counterpoint, combines the main elements from each of the three movements: (a) the fifths that open the Sonata—this heard as the bass line; (b) the three note motif and basic harmonic motto of the second movement; and (c) the triplet figuration of the jig, which is heard as the top line. By contrast to the closing episodes of the first two movements, the Sonata ends here amid clangorous sonorities and on a note of unequivocal and positive resolution.”

Born in New York City (November 18, 1925), **William Mayer** entered Yale University with the notion of being a writer and graduated (1949) with equal affinities for music and language. A tilt toward music became evident as Mayer continued his training at Juilliard and the Mannes College of

Music, studying with Roger Sessions and Felix Salzer, and later with Otto Luening and Izler Solomon.

His many awards and honors include two NEA grants, a citation from the National Institute for Music Theatre for contributing to “the advancement of American musical theatre”—his James Agee-based opera *A Death in the Family* was named the best new work of its type for 1983—and Guggenheim and MacDowell Fellowships, as well as grants from the Ford Foundation and the New York and Michigan State Arts Councils.

Mayer’s versatility is manifest in his ongoing interest in all kinds of music. His catalogue includes three stage works in addition to *A Death in the Family*, and a variety of orchestral, chamber, choral, and vocal works. Among Mayer’s works for young people is *Hello World!* which was recorded with Eleanor Roosevelt as narrator, the ballet *The Snow Queen* and the opera *One Christmas Long Ago*.

No work, however, has had a greater impact than *A Death in the Family* (premiered by the Minnesota Opera in 1983 and given in 1986 at the Opera Theatre of St Louis), a work about which the late Robert Jacobson wrote in *Opera News*: “William Mayer’s three-act *A Death in the Family* should immediately become a candidate for regular airings around the country, so beautiful and meaningful is it, not only in its James Agee story but in the setting the composer-librettist has provided for it.” Listeners around the country were able to hear the St. Louis performance with Dawn Upshaw and Jake Gardner under the auspices of National Public Radio.

Mayer lives in New York with his wife, the artist Meredith Nevins Mayer. Their three children, concert pianist Steven and two journalist daughters Jane and Cynthia, have earned recognition and esteem in their respective professions.

“The characteristic features of my music are derived from speech. My music is actually a speech; the consonants and vowels of the ‘words’ of this speech being complex tones (chords) and melodic sequences,” wrote Dane Rudhyar in an essay about his piano work *Granites* (1929). Along with works such as *Paeans* (1927) and *Stars* from *Pentagram No. 3* (1925), Rudhyar put into musical practice what he had been investigating in Oriental philosophy since 1924. Rudhyar developed a highly unique style of polytonal composition alongside his writings on philosophy and world religions.

Paeans “was really a sketch for some larger orchestral work,” recalled Rudhyar in 1969, “but [Henry] Cowell wanted to publish it in New Music Editions.” Rudhyar first played *Paeans* in New York in 1927 at a performance sponsored by the League of Composers. Not too long after, on May 6, 1928, Richard Buhlig played the work (which Rudhyar later admitted was a poor performance) in a concert series organized by Aaron Copland and Roger Sessions. The performance was part of the inaugural season of the legendary Copland-Sessions series and appeared in the second New York program along with Copland’s *Two Pieces for String Quartet* and two movements of Sessions’s then incomplete Piano Sonata. Although Rudhyar was included among America’s most adventuresome musicians, his research into depth-psychology and astrology began to take his primary focus by 1930. At the time, *Paeans* remained the only piano work published. *Granites* and *Stars* only became available in facsimile versions in 1937. Thus, for more than a decade these early musical works remained forgotten or seldom performed.

In the late 1940s, pianist William Masselos rediscovered the New Music Editions publication of *Paeans*, which in turn led him to the other early works of Rudhyar. Masselos chose to perform *Granites* in concerts across the country and thereby

gradually attracted a new audience for both the music and the composer.

The Latin 'paean' is a triumphant hymn of thanksgiving in celebration of a victory, which Rudhyar thought of more in a spiritual sense, "announcing the birth of a greater Human Being." The three sections of *Paeans* are entitled *With Joyous Exhaltation*; *Epic and Resonant*; and *With Rhythmic Fullness*. "It is a difficult piece to bring out," the composer noted, "as it requires a great variety of tone colors." Instructions as to how to achieve this effect can be found in the composer's directions to "blend the resonances of all the chords by means of the pedal, for there is, in this music, but ONE HARMONY, that of the whole body of Sound or of Nature." Rudhyar desired a holistic approach from performers of his music, asking them to think of the piano as "a resonant mass of wood and metal, a sort of condensed orchestra of gongs, bells... total resonance, rather than... separate strings or keys."

With this approach, Rudhyar was consciously moving away from a concern for the twelve-tone row of atonal music as well as the neo-classical music of his American colleagues in the 1920s. This new direction had begun with a series of fifteen tone poems for piano entitled *Movements* (1924-26), published by Birchard, and influenced his nine *Tetragrams* (1920-28) and five *Pentagrams* (1924-27). The *Pentagrams* were given the titles *The Summons* (1924); *The Enfoldment* (1924); *Release* (1926); *The Human Way* (1926); and *Syntony* (1927). *Stars*, which is included on this recording, was part of *Release*. Another of this period, *Granites*, is full of uneven rhythms and craggy dissonances as the title suggests. Although played continuously, it is divided into sections, each exploring a specific mood and tone quality: "With condensed strength and majesty"; "With stark rigidity"; "Sharp and bright"; "With vibrant serenity"; and "With triumphant exultation."

Dane Rudhyar [Daniel Chenneviere] (1895-1985) was born on the eve of the twentieth century in Paris, France. He began his professional pursuits while studying both philosophy and law at the Sorbonne, and music, in private and at the Paris Conservatory. Just prior to World War I, when he was only eighteen, Claude Debussy's editor, Durand, published Rudhyar's book *Claude Debussy and the Cycle of Musical Civilization* (1913) along with some of the young student's piano compositions. This early multi-disciplinary focus, encompassing world arts, sciences and philosophies, would be characteristic of Rudhyar's activities for decades to come.

Rudhyar arrived in New York in 1916 to prepare for the

performances of some of his orchestral works at the Metropolitan Opera under the direction of Pierre Monteux. The performances were part of a festival of avant-garde dance rituals that "included poetic recitation, color and incense." As the music of Stravinsky and Ives was still unknown here, this was probably the first polytonal music heard in America (or "ultra-modern" music as it was then popularly called). In 1969, when this CRI recording was first released, Rudhyar recounted his arrival in what he called the 'New World':

"[Edgard] Varèse came to America a few months before I did. I was one of the original group of the International Composers Guild. But I really did not 'emigrate' to the U.S. Although I was warmly received, I did not expect to stay. Soon I went to Hollywood where I had been commissioned to write scenic music for the Pilgrimage Play there."

Other commissions followed, and in 1920, after having lectured extensively throughout North America and having recently published his first book of poems, Rudhyar permanently settled in California.

In 1922, after working for the motion picture industry and writing music for choreographer Ruth St. Denis, Rudhyar's symphonic poem *Soul Fire* was awarded the \$1,000 prize by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. As each decade followed, Rudhyar would continue to investigate and develop his own philosophies of music, incorporating Oriental philosophy as well as a new synthesis of depth-psychology and astrology. At times, his musical output would be set aside for other concerns. He would publish some thirty-five books and over a thousand articles including books on musical philosophy and history; essays, poetry, and studies of mysticism and astrology, as well as expressions of his distinct philosophical ideas in drawings and paintings.

In 1976, at the age of eighty, Rudhyar moved to Palo Alto, California and began a new period of renewed focus on music. He quickly completed several new full-length piano works (*Transmutation* [1976], *Theurgy* [1976], *Autumn* [1977], *Three Cantos* [1977], *Epic Poem* [1978]); *Nostalgia* (1977), a quintet for alto flute, piano and strings (premiered in New York by the new music group Relache in 1979); *Dialogues* (1977), a work for chamber orchestra; *Encounter* (1977), for piano and orchestra, plus two string quartets written for the Kronos Quartet and recorded on CRI (SD 418) in 1979, *Advent* and *Crisis and Overcoming*. Today, five years after his death at the age of ninety, the Rudhyar Institute for Transpersonal Activity continues to sponsor activities related to his work.

Production Notes

William Mayer

Octagon

Produced by Marc Aubort, Elite Recordings, Inc. Recorded in NYC, March 21, 1971. Originally released on Turnabout.
Publisher: MCA (Distributed by T. Presser) (ASCAP)

Piano Sonata no. 1

Produced by David Hancock. Recording Engineer: Robert Blake. Recorded at Steinway Hall, NYC. Publisher: Carl Fischer, Inc. (ASCAP)

Dane Rudhyar

Paeans, Stars, and Granites

Produced by Carter Harman. Recording Engineer: David Hancock. Recorded at Hancock Studios in NYC on October 2, 1969.
Publisher: New Music Editions (Merion Music, Inc., BMI)

The original recording was made possible by the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music.

Octagon was re-channeled from the original quadraphonic masters to stereo and digitally remastered by Marc Aubort, Elite Recordings, Inc., NYC. The Mayer Sonata and Rudhyar pieces were digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton with Charles Harbutt, engineer and Francis X. Pierce, assistant engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC.
Managing Director: Joseph R. Dalton

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