

NWCR606

Rosi & Toni Grunschlag

Piano Duo



Paul Hindemith

- Sonata for Two Pianos (1942)..... (16:48)
1. I. Glockenspiel (6:43)
 - II. Allegro
 2. III. Canon..... (3:14)
 3. IV. Recitative..... (6:50)
 - V. Fugue

Darius Milhaud

4. *Les Songes* (1943)..... (6:08)

Esther Williamson Ballou (1915-1973)

- Sonata for Two Pianos (1949)..... (10:11)

5. I. (3:50)
6. II. Andante..... (6:17)
- III. Allegro Vivace

Norman Dello Joio

- Aria and Toccata* for Two Pianos (1949)..... (11:18)

7. I. Aria..... (5:27)
8. II. Toccata..... (3:51)

Robert Starer

- Sonata for Two Pianos (1981)..... (11:18)

Bohuslav Martinů

9. *La Fantasia* (1929)..... (7:45)

Ernst Bacon / Otto Luening

10. *Coal-Scuttle Blues* (1922-33)..... (6:03)
Rosi & Toni Grunschlag, pianos

Total playing time: 67:48

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Notes

Paul Hindemith (b 1895, Hanau, Germany; d 1963, Frankfurt/Main) began his musical career as a very young man, playing popular music in German nightclubs. When he was discovered by a rich patron and put through the conservatory in Frankfurt in 1921–22, he shocked the German musical establishment by using jazz elements in his compositions. In 1940, denounced by the Nazis, he moved to the United States and became a professor of music at Yale (where he remained until 1953), and a powerful influence on American music.

Sonata for Two Pianos contains four movements. The first, labeled *Glockenspiel*, maintains the illusion of chimes by continually suggesting the sweet-sour harmonic qualities that they possess. The end of the movement presents some extreme dynamic contrasts; for example, *fortissimo* chords in one piano are answered immediately, *pianissimo*, by the other piano. In the final measure, which begins *pianissimo*, the music becomes progressively slower and shorter until both artists attack without warning the opening *forte* chords of the fast paced second movement.

Eighth notes are introduced innocently enough in the second measure of this movement; it is not long, however, before they increase and multiply in waves, taking over completely and propelling the movement to its close.

Far more complex is the third movement, entitled *Canon*. Four hands weave four strands of music together to form a fantastic tapestry of sound. A muted world is created here; there is a plethora of *pianissimos*, and only one passage marked *forte*.

The fourth movement owes its inspiration to an anonymous Old English poem, written around 1300. Hindemith establishes the direct link between the poem and the music by labeling the movement *Recitative*, by quoting the Old English text in full (with translation), and by asking that it be played *a piacere* (as you see fit).

The Recitative leads directly into the concluding section, Fugue, to be played at a moderate tempo, in which Hindemith uses his contrapuntal skills to dazzling effect.

—Victor Rangel-Ribeiro

Darius Milhaud: *Les Songes* (1943)

Many chroniclers of twentieth-century musical life feel Darius Milhaud (b 1892, Aix-en-Provence; d 1974, Geneva) had done his best work by the end of World War II. It must be admitted that not only had his staggeringly voluminous output—some 441 opus numbers — moved well past its half-way point, but the major events of his fascinating life had certainly occurred by then, too. The talented son of a prosperous Jewish family in Aix, Milhaud grew up in and remained devoted to Provence. Early entry into the Paris

Conservatoire exposed him to the ebullient musical life that flourished between the defeat at Sedan and the outbreak of the Great War. There he studied with Widor, Dukas, and Leroux, rubbed shoulders with most of the Parisian creative community, and began to make his mark as an iconoclastic, innovative composer with an eye for a good libretto.

The French poet Paul Claudel invited him to travel to Rio de Janeiro as his secretary. During these two years (1916–1918), Milhaud absorbed impressions that recurred in his music for the rest of his life. His return to a war-weary Europe coincided with the arrival of jazz and the first published popular music from America. His already colorful hob-gob of style and temperament combined easily with the strong hues and rich vitality of informal music.

Like so many other Jews in the artistic community, Milhaud fled France in 1940 and landed very firmly on this feet, composing all the while, as a sought-after teacher at Mills College in Oakland. In 1943, the year *Les Songes* (Op. 237) came to life as a two-piano work, there was a brief pause in his composing libretto-based works, though he was never far from his beloved writers. An earlier collaboration with Fauvist André Derain is the basis for *Les Songes*' pastiche of dramatic impressions; in fact, *Les Songes* may have existed in another medium. Even in far-off California, Milhaud wasn't as busy with reverie and day-dreaming as the title implies, so it is no wonder that *Les Songes* is not all high-jinx and good spirits. Still, the dark shadows in it are more *triste* than they are somber. Derain's text, read at a leisurely pace, is, as one expects with each discovery of a Milhaud collaboration, elegant, evocative, and quite close to the actual development of the music. *Les Songes* is a microcosm of dash, wit, verve, histrionics, and the small blemishes of human life: sadness and ruined optimism.

Esther Williamson Ballou: Sonata for Two Pianos

Esther Williamson Ballou (*b* 1915, Elmira, NY; *d* 1973, Chichester, England) had the satisfaction of hearing much of her music performed in her own lifetime—something few woman composers had experienced. In 1963 she achieved the distinction of being the first American composer to have a work premiered at the White House. She attended Bennington College, Mills College, and did graduate work at the Juilliard School. Upon completion of her work at Juilliard, she was appointed to the faculty there where she served for several years. Her teachers in composition were Otto Luening, Bernard Wagenaar, and Wallingford Riegger.

Sonata for Two Pianos begins in the second piano with a four note ostinato figure cutting across bar lines; the first pianist counters with a lengthy thematic statement in a contrasting rhythm. The second movement, like the first, makes its musical points with long sweeping phrases, but this time more slowly and the atmosphere is altogether calmer and more deliberate. It ends in a long crescendo trill that leads immediately into the third movement, a sparkling Allegro vivace. There are deceptively quiet interludes, the last of these again introduced by a long trill. The sonata then builds up to a brilliant *fortissimo* climax, with a dissonant unresolved chord flung defiantly five times into the air.

Norman Dello Joio: Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos (1949)

Norman Dello Joio (*b* 1913, New York) began his musical training with his father, an organist who had emigrated from Italy in the early 1900s, and continued lessons with his godfather, Pietro Yon. He studied composition at the Juilliard School with Bernard Wagenaar and at Yale with Paul Hindemith. He has taught at Sarah Lawrence and the Mannes

College of Music, and, from 1972 to 1979, was dean of the School for the Arts at Boston University.

Dello Joio has composed many short piano works, three piano sonatas, songs, chamber music for theater and television, band music, dance scores, three operas, solo concertos for such unusual instruments as the harp and the harmonica, several orchestral works, and a large number of choral compositions. His awards include six honorary degrees, a Pulitzer Prize, and an Emmy Award. He writes: "The Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos was written in 1949. The aria, a simple lyrical statement, is followed by a technically motoristic toccata that is a virtuoso exercise for both pianists.

Bohuslav Martinů: *La Fantasia* (1929)

Bohuslav Martinů (*b* 1890, Policka, Bohemia; *d* 1959, Switzerland) was a most cosmopolitan and well-traveled gentleman, both musically and in the more traditional sense. Having trained as a violinist and being employed in the string section of the Czech Philharmonic, he immersed himself in the intellectual life of his capital. He soon uprooted himself to flit from serious musical endeavor to an unsettled pursuit of numerous facets of his chosen world. An ardent Czech, he abandoned Prague for Paris, exchanging Josef Suk's tutelage for the extraordinarily different world of Albert Roussel and the French modernists. He developed a highly distinctive compositional voice endowed with energy, angular turns of melodic phrase, and usually a presence of the Classical.

La Fantasia began to take shape in Bohemia but acquired its final form in Paris. It is in one movement replete with exceptionally contrasting sections. The so-called shockers are not the dissonances or the imperious pile-driven chords strewn throughout more aggressive passages; rather they are the occasional glimmers of unsullied tonality that are as suddenly revealed as they are left behind. There is definitely a sardonic, even diabolical humor peeking through the quick pages of this score. Its motifs are more rhythmic than melodic, and are couched in repeated intervals (such as minor seconds between the two onward-charging instruments). Its end is a romp that taxes the performers' ensemble and the very fabric of the two pianos.

Robert Starer: Sonata for Two Pianos (1981)

Robert Starer (*b* Vienna, 1924; *d* New York, 2001) began his musical education in his native city but left Austria after the Anschluss (or Anschluss) for Jerusalem, where he continued studies at the Palestine Conservatory. During the war, he served in the RAF. He moved to New York in 1947 to undertake post-graduate studies at Juilliard, whose faculty he joined two years later. He stayed there until 1974, when he left to eventually take up positions at two other nearby schools, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is a distinguished professor of music at both institutions and teaches there when not working and living on the west side of the Hudson Valley, not far from the Catskills.

He writes: "My Sonata for Two Pianos was written for Toni and Rosi Grunschlag and is dedicated to them. They gave the premiere at the 92nd Street Y, New York City, on November 1, 1981. The work is in one continuous movement but has four sections. The opening motif, in slight variation, is used to link them: an improvisatory moderator; a fugal Allegro with a somewhat Near Eastern-sounding subject; a melodious Andante; and a rhythmic Presto. In the coda the four sections' themes make a brief reappearance, and the work closes with an elaboration of the opening motif. About halfway through the sonata there is a slight hint of a Viennese waltz, my

homage to the town in which both the Grunschlag sisters and I were born.”

Ernst Bacon / Otto Luening: *Coal-Scuttle Blues* (1922-33)

Ernst Bacon (*b* May 26, 1898, Chicago; *d* 1990, California) was thoroughly immersed in teaching throughout his long life. He studied at Northwestern University, at the University of Chicago, and at the University of California. He pursued piano studies with G.D. Gunn and Alexander Raab, then composition with Karl Weigl and Ernst Bloch. He taught at the Eastman School of Music, was assistant conductor of the Rochester Opera Company under Eugene Goossens, and also held posts at the San Francisco Conservatory, the WPA Federal Music Project (San Francisco), and Syracuse University. In addition, he maintained a performing career as a pianist in this country and in Europe. Among his honors were a Pulitzer Award (1932, Symphony in D) and two Guggenheim Fellowships. He wrote several hundred songs, mostly to Dickinson and Whitman texts, and a number of operas, cantatas, two symphonies, and a piano concerto.

Otto Luening (*b* Milwaukee, June 15, 1900; *d* New York, 1996) had a father who was a performer, conductor, and composer. From the start, Luening explored many of the roads open to him, becoming an orchestral flutist, conductor, educator, inveterate member of contemporary music societies and their boards, and a recipient of countless awards and honors. He studied in Munich and Zurich until 1920, and then he returned to the U.S. to perform and conduct. His most important studies were with Volkmar Andreae, Philipp Jarnach, and Ferruccio Busoni. His performance and teaching career has taken him to Eastman, Bennington College, Juilliard, Barnard, and Columbia University where he became professor emeritus of music in 1968.

It is important to mention the consulting and advising role Luening has felt to be his life-long calling. From orchestral and chamber organizations to composers' alliances of many

stripes; from music publication and education committees to entities fostering composers, he has been active and audible around tables and through his unceasing correspondence since the 1920s. As important as is his work as a composer, for many it is also his work behind the public scenes and his steadfast fostering of new talent for which he will be remembered.

Bacon and Luening collaborated on the *Coal-Scuttle Blues* in 1922. Scored for two pianos, it manages to steal happily from both serious and bordello-esque musical idioms, and it treads repeatedly on the corns of conventional harmony, rhythm, and musical grammar. Otto Luening writes that: “It begins with a soft introduction that leads to the main subject. A B subject arrives, then the first returns. These two subjects alternate between the pianos. The directions speak of a “creamy smooth” subject, a “flea-bitten” counterpoint, and a “marshmallow” section that later becomes a tougher presentation of subject 1. A lush transition leads to a trumpety-strumpety style with virtuoso rhythmic and pianistic variations covering the entire range of the piano. Chesty, heavy rhythms alternate with sometimes archly presented variations; they go through trombone-like statements along with frisky counterpoint and a final strutting section. Passages and rhythms slide around the keyboards, ending in a diminuendo return of theme 1 that runs out of steam in a few closing measures.”

—Christopher Greenleaf

Toni and Rosi Grunschlag were born in Vienna and studied piano there at an early age. They continued their studies in the United States with Robert Casadesu and made their debut as a two piano team in New York's historic Town Hall. They are known for a remarkably energetic and unified performing style, and they have appeared in major concert halls throughout North America and Europe in programs featuring rarely heard masterpieces of the past and present.

Production Notes

Hindemith: Published by European American Music (BMI)

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Pianos for both sessions: Steinway D. During both sessions, the pianos were parallel to each other, retained their lids, and had their tails pointed more or less toward the microphones.

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