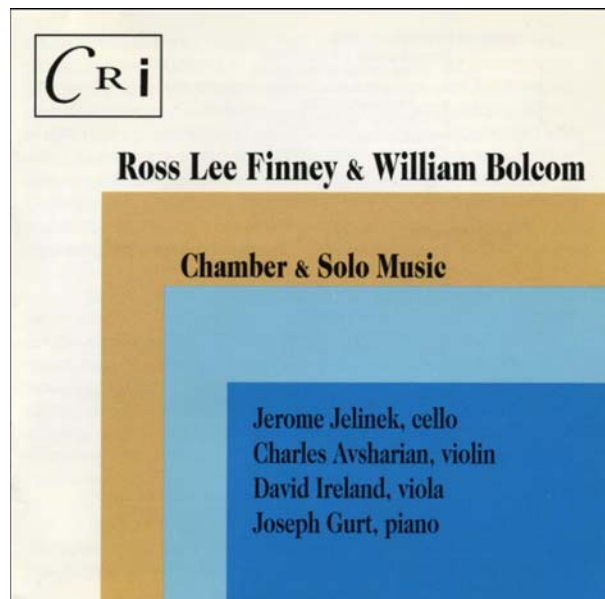


NWCR711

# Chamber and Solo Music

Ross Lee Finney & William Bolcom



William Bolcom

- Piano Quartet (1976) ..... (23:49)
1. I Barcarolle/Ketjak ..... (6:56)
  2. II Largo fantastico (Nachtstück) ..... (7:18)
  3. III Intermezzo ..... (5:09)
  4. IV Marcia risoluto ..... (4:24)
- American Trio: Charles Avsharian, viola;  
Jerome Jelinek, cello; Joseph Gurt, piano with  
David Ireland, viola

Ross Lee Finney

- Second Sonata in C for Violoncello  
and Piano (1949) ..... (16:26)
5. I Introduction: Adagio espressivo ..... (2:42)
  6. II Allegro con brio ..... (5:09)
  7. III Adagio arioso ..... (4:34)
  8. IV Prestissimo ..... (2:40)
  9. V Conclusion: Adagio espressivo ..... (1:19)
- Jerome Jelinek, cello; Joseph Gurt, piano
10. *Chromatic Fantasy in E* for  
Violoncello Solo (1957) ..... (10:07)
- Jerome Jelinek, cello
- Piano Trio No. 2 (1954) ..... (21:18)
11. I Allegro cantando ..... (6:50)
  12. II Allegro giocondo ..... (3:14)
  13. III Adagio teneramente ma con espressione  
(4:01)
  14. IV Allegro marcando, tempo di Marcia ..... (7:11)
- American Trio: Charles Avsharian, violin; Jerome  
Jelinek, cello; Joseph Gurt, piano

Total playing time: 72:02

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## Notes

**William Bolcom** (b Seattle, WA, May 26, 1938), composer and pianist, began studying piano at the age of five. At eleven he began composition studies as a private student with John Verrall and he continued with Milhaud at Mills College (1958-61). He studied with both Milhaud and Messiaen in Paris. A period of work with Leland Smith at Stanford University (1961-64) was followed by teaching at the University of Washington (1965-66) and Queens College, CUNY (1966-68). From 1968 to 1970 he was composer-in-residence at the Yale University Drama School and the New York University School of the Arts.

In 1971 Bolcom met the mezzo-soprano Joan Morris, whom he married in 1975 and with whom he began to develop programs on the history of the American popular song. Their recitals and recordings of songs by Henry Russell, Henry Clay Work, and others have done much to arouse interest in parlor and music hall songs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bolcom has also made solo albums of music by Gershwin, Milhaud, and himself. In 1973 he took a position at the University of Michigan, where he became associate professor of composition in 1977.

His compositions have won many awards, including two Guggenheims, several Rockefeller Foundation Awards, one

from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (for his opera for actors, *Dynamite Tonight*, written with Arnold Weinstein) and a Koussevitzky Foundation Award. Bolcom received the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1988. Among his more recent major works is the monumental Blake setting *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1984) and a recent opera premiered by the Chicago Lyric Opera.

Piano Quartet (1976) was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and premiered by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in October 1977 at Alice Tully Hall. The work has sometimes proven hard to understand for audiences and critics alike; at first the abrupt style-change of the third movement (Intermezzo) provokes nervous laughter in many people; they can't see how it fits with the rest of the piece.

"Increasingly, I find my music drawn from the dichotomies of the Blakean universe and the energy arising from their opposition. Really, the quartet is a play of contraries. In the first movement, Barcarolle/Ketjak, sharp contrast prevails between the warm and gentle barcarolle-like sections (in which a hint of the Chopin Barcarolle is later confirmed) and the driving 'Ketjak' sections (which were inspired by the Ramayana Monkey Chants of Bali). The juxtaposition of the greater and greater sweetness of the slow 6/8 and the

increasingly brutal and propulsive 4/4 statements ends in tragic violence.

“Largo fantastico (Nachtstück), which follows directly, has the mood of one of Robert Schumann’s late piano pieces, ‘Verrufene Stelle’ (from his *Waldscenen*, 1848-49), which, like this movement, seems to inhabit a blasted heath, a lifeless plain reminiscent of the landscapes of death that men have created in our own time. Beyond the contrary principle of the quartet, another idea of mine was to recall the form in which piano quartets have historically been cast; and just as the dynamic opposition of the first movement recalls the sonata forms of Beethoven, so this movement shares certain features with the general shape of many Classical slow movements, particularly in the placement of the opening and later glissandi in the strings. But it, too, seeks its absolute contrary, which will be found in the following movement.

“The Intermezzo follows without pause and its contrast with the Largo fantastico provides axis of the quartet, on which the entire form rests in active balance. Set against the relative atonality of much of the rest of the quartet, the Intermezzo is a simple waltz in E flat, perhaps a little nostalgic, but certainly the first purely human note since the Barcarolle. Although it is not in a simple ABA form like a minuet or scherzo, the Intermezzo stands for such a movement within the quartet.

“Again, the contrary principle brings forth the last movement, Marcia risoluto. Both my major commissions for the 1976 bicentennial observance took for their themes what I think of as a tragic flaw in the American psyche that seems to lead inexorably towards violence. While the Piano Concerto’s last movement was a cavalcade of brutal clichés and naïveté in constant juxtaposition, the impulse that leads the Piano Quartet to a (to me) terrifying conclusion is internal and psychological, having as much to do with the inner forces of the previous movements as with the overriding contrary principle. I plead guilty here to writing ‘program music.’ I am passionately concerned with, even frightened by, the American psyche and I deeply believe that, as we enter what may be the most perilous passage in our history, we need to understand ourselves better – otherwise certain disaster will follow. The contrary principle in the quartet derives as much from my own emotional fix on our nation’s spiritual state as from Blakean philosophy.

“I find that this piece has grown with time even in my understanding of it, and now I can indicate more clearly to performers what I meant. The present recording reflects my intentions as well as any performance can and I endorse it heartily.”

**Ross Lee Finney** (b Wells, MN Dec. 23 1906–d Carmel, CA Feb. 4 1997), composer and educator, was a member of a trio at the age of twelve and of a jazz group at twenty-one. His early study in composition was at the University of Minnesota with Donald Ferguson and at Carleton College, where he taught cello and history; he also studied with Boulanger (1927-28), with Edward Burlingame Hill at Harvard University (1928-29), with Berg in Vienna (1931-32), and with Sessions (1935).

From 1929 to 1948 Finney was a member of the faculty of Smith College. He was awarded both Guggenheim and Pulitzer fellowships in 1937, and from 1943 to 1945 he served with distinction in the Office of Strategic Services. After 1947, when he was awarded a second Guggenheim Fellowship, Finney composed much chamber music and was particularly concerned with problems of structure. In 1949 he was appointed professor of music and composer-in-residence at the University of Michigan. Providing music for the chamber groups of the university’s School of Music, and the

need to define his ideas on the nature of music for his advanced students, contributed to a decade of great creative energy. A gifted teacher, Finney soon attracted a group of talented students, among them Albright, Crumb, and Reynolds.

Finney’s many honors include a Rome Prize (1960), the Brandeis Medal (1968), and numerous commissions, among them those from the Coolidge and Koussevitzky foundations and from Yehudi Menuhin for the Brussels World’s Fair in 1958. In 1962 he was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

“My Second Sonata in C for Violoncello and Piano was the last work I wrote before my style underwent its conversion to serialization of pitch (my Sixth String Quartet in E, recorded on CRI 116, is my first twelve-tone work). After completion of the Sonata, it seemed to me that its melodic chromaticism was in conflict with its formal design, and after that this conversion was inevitable.

“Although I was strongly impressed by the twelve-tone technique, which I had learned with Alban Berg as early as 1931, it took almost twenty years, with a Depression and a World War, for me to find a way to make this new technique compatible with my natural melodic feeling and the classic-functional concepts that I had been drawn to as a student in Paris during the 1920s.

“In retrospect, I can trace in the works of these years my growing concern for the hexachord and the harmonic-melodic possibilities that were opened up. The very first measure of the Sonata presents such a hexachord and the second measure completes, except for one note, the total chromatic palette.

“My major concern when I composed the Sonata, however, was to give the natural singing quality of the cello complete freedom and to use the piano in such a way that it would never conflict with the cello and still have its own brilliance and articulation. The work is, of course, an arch form, with fast movements placed between the slow introduction and conclusion and the slow movement which is the keystone.

“My *Chromatic Fantasy In E* for violoncello solo was composed in 1957, a year before my *Fantasy in Two Movements* for solo violin which was commissioned by Yehudi Menuhin. The term “fantasy” refers more to the manner in which I employ the hexachord of the row than to the overall form of the composition. It was a completely unconscious chance, seen only in retrospect, that the hexachord of this work which one hears at the start is the same as the first six notes of the Second Sonata in C for Violoncello and Piano. More important, however, and completely conscious, was the quotation from Bartók’s Sixth String Quartet. The work unfolds freely through sections of contrasting moods.”

“My Piano Trio No. 2 was composed in 1954 on commission from Sigma Alpha Iota and was premiered at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1955 by the Albeneri Trio.

“Much of my music has, I think, a very simple surface but a complex organization under that surface. I’m not interested in writing about the complexity, and the simple statement of the surface needs no explanation. The ordering of the twelve notes of the scale is lyrical in the first movement; the second movement uses a permutation that leads to a somewhat zany statement; the third movement uses a permutation that makes possible an expressive and tender movement; and the last movement is a march.

“This work, like all my music, is really tonal, being centered on A. The time-space functions are very consciously controlled. My preference is for consonance and for singing melodies.”

**Jerome Jelinek** is a member of the University of Michigan

School of Music faculty. **Joseph Gurt** is on the faculty of Eastern Michigan University. **Charles Avsharian** is president of Shar Products, Inc. of Ann Arbor. **David Ireland** is a member of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

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## Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Classical productions, NYC

From CRI SD 447:

Bolcom Piano Quartet  
Finney Piano Trio No. 2

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by William J. Gross and John Monforte at the University of Michigan, May 1979, and October 1980.

From CRI SD 311:

Finney Second Sonata and *Chromatic Fantasy*:

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by Henry Root.

The original recordings were produced with support of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies of the University of Michigan.

Publishers:

Bolcom Piano Quartet: E.B. Marks (BMI)

Finney Trio: Carl Fisher; Second Sonata: Composer; Chromatic Fantasy: C.F. Peters

The original recordings were produced with support of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies of the University of Michigan.