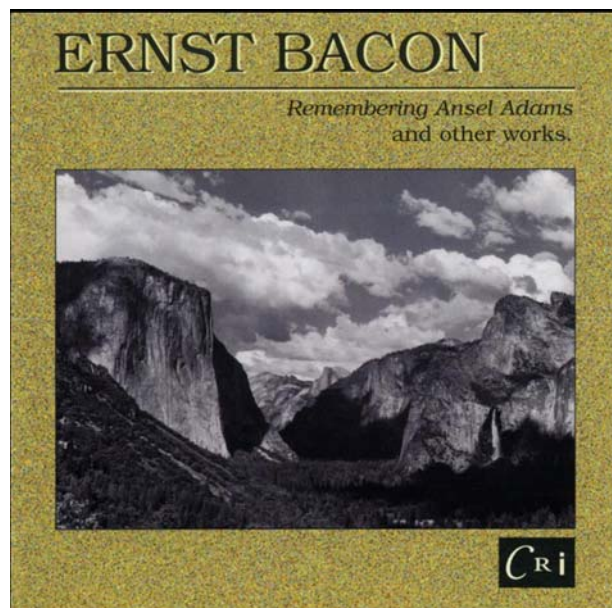


NWCR779

Ernst Bacon

Remembering Ansel Adams and other works.



1. *Remembering Ansel Adams* (1985) (14:25)
Richard Stoltzman, clarinet; Warsaw
Philharmonic; Jerry Swoboda, conductor
- Sonata for Cello and Piano (1948) (21:18)
2. I. Gravely; Risoluto; Allegro (8:14)
3. II. Commodo (3:35)
4. III. Lento (6:41)

5. IV. Allegro, ma non troppo (2:48)
Bernard Greenhouse, cello; Menahem
Pressler, piano
- Collected Short Piano Works (1950–1965) (19:16)
6. The Lobo Girl of Devil’s River (5:51)
7. Nuka (2:00)
8. Flop-Eared Mule (2:46)
9. Maple-Sugaring (0:42)
10. Yemassee River (1:27)
11. Drip-Drop Rain (0:52)
12. Habañera (3:00)
13. Pigtown Fling (2:38)
Emily Corbató, piano
- Tumbleweeds* (1979) (20:45)
14. Gualala River (2:45)
15. Sod Busters (2:57)
16. The Gillgaloo (3:22)
17. Little Boy Asleep (2:48)
18. The Oregon Trail (1:38)
19. Gospel Gulch (2:00)
20. Blue Grass (2:09)
21. Mexican Hat (3:06)
Dorothy Bales, violin; Allan Sly, piano

Total playing time: 76:03

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Notes

“Bacon is a very good composer indeed, one of America’s best...”

“The mood and temper of Mr. Bacon’s work are chiefly a meditation on nineteenth-century rural America. He is full of our Scotch-Irish folklore, knows it from the inside, speaks and writes it as his own musical language. Mr. Bacon also has a modern musician’s knowledge of American speech cadences...”

“Mr. Bacon’s work is remarkably pure in its expressive intent. It communicates its meaning with a straightforward and touching humanity. It is not got up with chromium-plated cadenzas or lace-curtainlike instrumental figurations, and it poses no passionate attitude. But it is full of melody and variety...it at least looks backward toward an ideal and primitive America without snobbery, self-deception, or truculence. It is honest and skillful and beautiful.”

—Virgil Thomson,

New York Herald Tribune, 1946

Ernst Bacon (b 1898; d 1990) was part of the pioneering generation of composers that included Thomson, Copland, Harris, and others who found a voice for American music. Born in Chicago on May 26, 1898, Bacon’s Austrian mother gave him a love of song and an early start on the piano. Although his varied career included appearances as pianist

and conductor, along with teaching and directing positions, his deepest preoccupation was always composing. His musical awards included a Pulitzer Fellowship in 1932 for his *Symphony in D Minor* and three Guggenheim Fellowships.

From his first job as opera coach at the Eastman School in the early twenties, Bacon went on to receive a master’s degree from the University of California at Berkeley and to teach at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he was associated with Ernest Bloch. During the thirties he was director of the WPA Federal Music Project and Orchestra in San Francisco and founded the Carmel Bach Festival. From 1938 to 1945 he headed the School of Music at Converse College in Spartanburg, SC, and established the New Spartanburg Music Festival. At Syracuse University he was director of the School of Music from 1945 to 1947 and composer-in-residence and professor of piano until his retirement in 1963.

In 1964 Bacon returned to the West, settling in the small town of Orinda, east of the Berkeley hills. Here, as everywhere else, he drew his greatest inspiration from nature, jotting down notes as he explored local trails. His fertile imagination and constant creative efforts left little time for the promotion of his works, and although nearly blind in old age, he continued to compose until the very end of his ninety-one years.

At the age of nineteen, while majoring in math at Northwestern University, Bacon wrote a complex treatise exploring all possible harmonies. However, when he began to compose music in his twenties, he rejected a purely cerebral approach, taking the position that music is an art, not a science, and that its source should be human and imaginative, rather than abstract and analytical. He did not find meaning in musical puzzles or arbitrary series of notes, but in life itself: things to celebrate as well as to ponder and grieve. For example, his cello/piano masterpiece, *A Life*, was begun when his son, Paul, was born and was completed twenty-six years later, when the same son died in an accident. Many of his smaller pieces were inspired by the tenderness and affection he felt for his six children, born of four wives.

Though well trained as a musician (including conducting studies with Goossens), as a composer Ernst Bacon was largely self-taught, except for two years of study with Karl Weigl in Vienna. Experiencing the depression of post-war Europe first-hand, he believed that the European avant-garde movement reflected the pessimism of that era and locale and was not appropriate to America. Returning to Chicago he set out to write music that expressed the vitality and affirmation of our own country. Sometimes compared with Bartók, he incorporated into his music the history and folklore, as well as the indigenous music, poetry, folk songs, jazz rhythms, and the very landscape of America.

As with Schubert, a large body of more than 250 art songs is the heart of an oeuvre that also includes numerous chamber, orchestral, and choral works. According to Marshall Bialosky, Ernst Bacon was “one of the first composers to discover Emily Dickinson...and set a great number of her poems into some of the finest art song music, if not actually the very finest, of any American composer in our history.” Other poets with whom he felt an affinity included Whitman, Sandburg (who was a personal friend), Blake, Bronte, Teasdale, and Housman. Twenty-two of Bacon’s Dickinson settings were recorded in 1964 by soprano Helen Boatwright with the composer at the piano and can be heard on CRI compact disc 675.

In his instrumental as well as vocal music, Bacon insisted on the primacy of melody. The spirit and sometimes the actual melodies of his songs, as well as of folk songs, are often recast as themes in his instrumental pieces. Defending melody and tonality against their detractors, he combined tradition with his own highly original ideas and created many appealing works, some of which are charming, picturesque, and playful, while others are profoundly touching and sad. Many of these works are still uncatalogued, in manuscript, and unknown to the world. The Ernst Bacon Society, a collection of colleagues, former students, friends, and relatives of the late composer, is dedicated to bringing these works to light through performances, recordings, and publications, so that they may take their worthy place in the twentieth century’s cultural heritage.

Remembering Ansel Adams is the composer’s tribute to his oldest friend in the West. At the time when they met in 1927, both men had ambitions as concert pianists, but as Bacon’s focus turned increasingly to composing, Adams chose to concentrate on photography. Besides music, their lifelong friendship was based on a shared love of nature and a passionate concern for the environment, as together they explored and climbed in the Sierra Nevada and Canadian Rockies. Adams once wrote to Bacon, “You are like the clear dawn wind in the midst of the foul smogs of contemporary cultural decay.”

Ernst Bacon was visiting at the Adams home in Carmel, CA, the day that Ansel died in the spring of 1985. He was deeply affected by his friend’s unexpected death and immediately set about writing an elegy for him. The work was premiered by the San Jose Symphony in 1986 with George Cleve conducting.

The grandeur and rugged beauty that Adams captured so eloquently in the light and shadow of his photographs is reflected in the tone of the elegy, which is scored for string orchestra, clarinet solo, and timpani. Soliloquies by the cello and clarinet in the opening section, which could represent the sorrow of the grieving friend and the solitary man in nature, are combined with a luminous, hymn-like theme in the strings. The middle section, more rugged and rhythmic, is a contrapuntal treatment of the musical letters in Ansel Adams’s name (A, E, A, D, A) and expresses his energy and individualism. In the last section the hymn-like theme returns, with the clarinet playing a quietly sparkling theme reminiscent of a tumbling mountain brook. The serene final cadence seems to fade into eternity.

The present recording of *Remembering Ansel Adams* was funded by the generosity of Virginia Adams, widow of Ansel Adams.

Ernst Bacon’s Sonata for Cello and Piano was premiered at Syracuse University in 1948 by the composer’s second wife, Analee Camp, with himself at the piano. The four movements are interspersed with evocative quotations from Walt Whitman’s poetry. “I know the amplitude of time” appears at the beginning of the slow introduction to the first movement. “How dare you place anything before a man?” stands before the robust *risoluto* that follows; and the expansive fanfare-like theme that signals the *allegro* main body of the movement carries over it the inscription, “Warlike flag of the great idea” (referring to Whitman’s apostrophe to democracy in “By Blue Ontario’s Shore”). “I draw you close to me, you women” bespeaks a lyrical transitional episode, and the assertive aspect of the movement returns with “What is a man anyhow? What am I? What are you?” “Tenderly—be not patient”—“Unborn deeds, things soon to be”—“World, take good notice” constitute the Whitmanesque verbal summation of the first movement’s course.

The second movement is an elegant and charming folk song-and-dance evocation bearing the one all-embracing epigraph: “Some of the younger men dance to the sound of the banjo or fiddle, others sit on the gunwale smoking and talking.” The middle part of the movement is marked by a delicious canonic episode between the cello and the piano right hand.

The *Lento* slow movement is solemnly tender and elegiac, with inscriptions drawn from the poem “To One Shortly to Die.”

From all the rest, I single you out...
You are to die—let others tell you what they please...
I cannot prevaricate...
Softly I lay my right hand upon you...
Strong thoughts fill you and confidence...
You forget you are sick...
I do not commiserate, I congratulate you.

“Let us go forth refresh’d amid the day” reads the introductory inscription to the virile fugue finale. The dotted-rhythms of the theme are almost an Americanization of the mirror *Contrapunctus XVIII* from Bach’s *Art of Fugue*.

The Lobo Girl of Devil’s River (1967) is an unpublished piano work based on the Texas legend of a girl, abandoned as an infant, trapped by ranchers, and rescued, adopted, and raised by wolves. In time she is capable of running with the pack

and speaking their language. Following Emily Corbató's New York premiere of this work, Raymond Ericson of the *New York Times* called it "virtually a tone poem. In a dissonant Ivesian vein, it has a primitivelike power..."

The shorter piano selections that follow are picturesque vignettes in diverse moods. "Nuka" was written for Bacon's little daughter, who was called by this name as a term of endearment. "Flop-Eared Mule" has a lop-sided rhythm, in character with its title. "Yemassee River" is based on a spiritual slave song. "Maple-Sugaring" is a cheerful piece written for children; and "Drip-Drop Rain" is another self-described miniature, gentle and evocative. "Habañera" is one of a number of pieces in which the composer drew on Spanish rhythms and colors; and "The Pigtown Fling" (second version) is a humorous American counterpart of the Highland fling.

Tumbleweeds, described by Bacon as "a cycle of freely used Americana," was commissioned by violinist Dorothy Bales in 1979 and premiered by Bales and pianist Allan Sly at the National Gallery in 1980. It is a succession of eight separate pieces, each calling up memories of tunes we have long known and half-forgotten—some from Appalachia, some from the prairies, some from covered wagon days. Some we may have come across in anthologies, as did the composer, but an encyclopedic listing of their sources might well inhibit the listener's pleasure of hearing them in Bacon's terms. The suggestive titles, "Gualala River," "Sod Busters," "The Gilligaloo," "Little Boy Asleep," "The Oregon Trail," "Gospel Gulch," "Blue Grass," "Mexican Hat," may point the way to their intended characters. "Little Boy Asleep" was written for the composer's youngest child, born when he was seventy-four.

—Ellen Bacon

Richard Stoltzman, clarinet, belongs to the highest rank of internationally known musicians. As a soloist with more than a hundred orchestras, as a captivating recitalist and chamber musician, and as an innovative jazz artist, Stoltzman has defied categorization, dazzling critics and audiences alike in his performances of all genres of music. His commitment to new music has resulted in the commissioning and premiere of dozens of new concertos and sonatas for the clarinet.

Jerry Swoboda, conductor, graduate with distinction from the Kraków Academy of Music, where he studied conducting with professor Krzysztof Missona. From 1986 to 1990 he was conductor and artistic director of the Polish Chamber Orchestra and Sinfonia Varsovia, with such eminent artists as Katia and Marielle Labèque, Gidon Kremer, and Yehudi Menuhin. From 1987 to 1992 he held the post of artistic director of the International Chopin Festival, and in September 1990, he took over as conductor and artistic director of the Silesian State Philharmonic Orchestra in Katowice, Poland.

The **Warsaw Philharmonic** gave its first performances in 1901. During its long and distinguished past the roster of conductors and soloists to appear with the orchestra reads like a history of classical music. Today, the Philharmonic presents fifty symphony concerts each season plus another fifty chamber music concerts, recitals, and other special events.

Emily Corbató, piano, received a bachelor of music degree from Syracuse University, where she studied piano with Ernst Bacon; and a master of music degree from the New England Conservatory. She has performed at Carnegie Recital Hall, Merkin Hall, the National Gallery of Art, the UN Secretariat

Library, and in England's Maison Française and Brighton's Music Festival. Her presentations of American repertoire and historical and contemporary compositions by women have brought her invitations from various music departments and women's study programs. She has recorded the music of Ernst Bacon, Ernest Bloch, Roy Harris, Arthur Foote, and Edward MacDowell. Bacon's unpublished piano works have been of special interest to her, and she has edited and prepared several of them for publications.

Dorothy Bales, violin, has toured throughout the United States in solo recitals under the New York Management of the Arts Program of the Association of American Colleges, and in chamber groups for Community Concerts, following her debut recitals in Boston, New York, and Washington. She participated for two summers in the Marlboro Festival and Carmel Bach Festival, appeared twice as soloist with the Boston Pops, and has given recitals in Paris, Salzburg, Vienna, Saabrucken, and Konstanz. She holds degrees from the University of Oregon, the New England Conservatory, and Boston University. A long-time student of Ivan Galamian in New York, she also studied in Europe with Henryk Szeryng, Gabriel Bouillon, and Ricardo Odnoposoff. She has taught at the New England Conservatory, Emmanuel College, Northeastern University in Boston, and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Allan Sly, piano, was educated in England at the University of Reading and studied composition with Gustav Holst and Benjamin Dale. He conducted his first complete *Messiah* at the age of twenty-one. In America he played in chamber music recitals throughout the East and held teaching positions at the College of William and Mary and Black Mountain College.

Bernard Greenhouse, cello, is one of the major interpreters on his instrument, having appeared in most of the major cities of Europe and in America in recital, with orchestras and chamber music ensembles, and on numerous recordings. His former teacher, Pablo Casals, wrote, "Bernard Greenhouse is not only a remarkable cellist, but what I esteem more, a dignified artist." He has been a member of the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and was a founding member of the Beaux Arts Trio. He recently has retired emeritus from his position as WCSL Professor at Rutgers University and, as well, from the New England Conservatory. His varied career has brought him recognition both as a soloist and chamber musician. He was recently awarded the National Service Award from Chamber Music America. Mr. Greenhouse plays the famed "Paganini" Stradivarius cello dated 1707.

Menahem Pressler, piano, was born in Magdeburg, Germany, and received most of his early musical training in Israel. His international concert career began when he won first prize in the Debussy Piano Competition in San Francisco in 1946, followed soon after by his North American concerto debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Eugene Ormandy. In 1955, Mr. Pressler co-founded the Beaux Arts Trio, which became one of the world's most enduring and widely acclaimed chamber music ensembles. In 1994, Mr. Pressler was honored with Chamber Music America's Distinguished Service Award. Since 1955 he has been on the piano faculty of Indiana University, where he holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Music.

Production Notes

Compact Disc mastered by Robert Woolf, engineer, at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

Remembering Ansel Adams recorded September 1997. Produced by Master Musicians collective, Reading, Pennsylvania.

Sonata for Cello and Piano from CRI SD 201. Recorded at Steinway Hall, December 1964. Engineered by Robert E. Blake.

Piano Works from Orion LP ORS-85486. Produced by Giveon Cornfield. Recorded by Scott Kent.

Tumbleweeds from Orion LP ORS-84465. Produced by Giveon Cornfield. Recorded by Scott Kent.

Publishing: Sonata for Cello and Piano: C.F. Peters. All other works unpublished.

All works ASCAP.

This compact disc has been made possible through the generous support of Virginia Best Adams (Mrs. Ansel Adams), The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, and The Ernst Bacon Society.