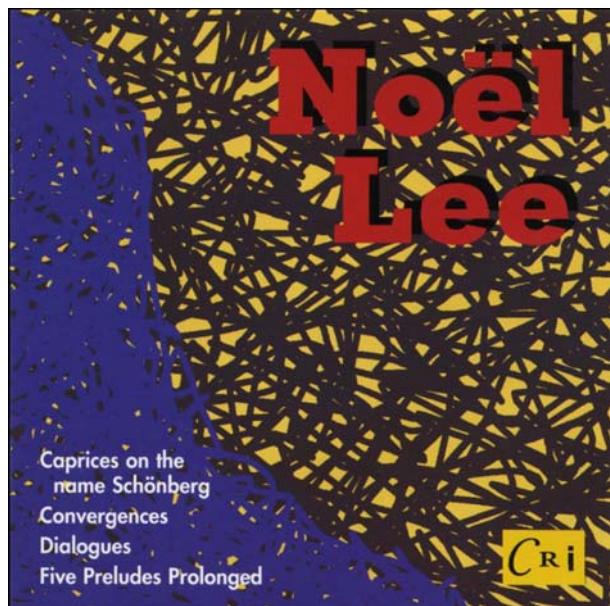


NWCR798

Noël Lee



<i>Caprices on the name Schoenberg</i> (1973-75)	(23:33)
1. I – Proclamation (Deciso)	(00:42)
2. II – Exhortation (Allegro angoscioso)	(5:43)

3. III – Stanza (Andantino)	(6:46)
4. IV – Challenge	(1:55)
5. V – Splotches, Streaks (Scherzoso)	(3:50)
6. VI – Synchrony (Energico, ritmico)	(2:52)
7. VII – Suffix (un poco mosso)	(1:45)

Noël Lee, piano; Le Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique; Jean-Pierre Marty, conductor

8. <i>Convergences</i> (1972)	(15:02)
András Adorján, flute; Noël Lee, harpsichord	

<i>Five Preludes Prolonged</i> (1992)*	(18:47)
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9. I – Imprint	(4:14)
10. II – Prelude at the second	(3:25)
11. III – Interval	(4:06)
12. IV – Prelude as Tango	(3:22)
13. V – Non-measured Prelude	(3:41)

Noël Lee, piano

14. <i>Dialogues</i> (1958)	(9:29)
Ole Böhn, violin; Noël Lee, piano	

Total playing time: 67:13

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Notes

Caprices on the name Schoenberg (1973–75) is a dodecahonic composition which makes ample use of “traditional” harmonic tensions. The row is derived from the letters of Schoenberg’s name according to the German scale: A. SCH.BE.G where S = Es (E-flat), H = B natural, etc. The row is a mirror row, the last six notes being the “reflection,” i.e., exact inversion, of the first six notes. During the cadenza there are short quotes from Schoenberg’s Opus 33 for piano as well as from Schumann, the latter to remind the listener that the four notes “A-S-C-H” were the kernel of most of the themes in *Carnaval*.

It might be noted that this piano concerto gives equal importance to the orchestra, that the composer is not really a devoted Schoenbergian, and also that the titles, “caprice” and some of the others, may seem too whimsical for this music! Other remarks could comment on the critical reaction of nearly twenty years ago: “...tempered ever so nicely with what we call ‘neoclassic’—that is, a bit of humor and once in a while a beat,” “...full of Berio-like woodwind colors,” “making the outcome sound rather like a French Elliott Carter”—this composer was highly flattered at the time to be mentioned in such distinguished company!

The idea of writing *Convergences* (1972) originated with András Adorján, the flutist recorded here. In the initial toccata-like section, the instruments discourse independently. The harpsichord sprays the twelve notes, the flute queries irregularly. The harpsichord attempts to keep the tempo, the flute takes liberties. After the two knocks and a transition passage, the harpsichord ties its notes into neat bundles, places them next to neat pauses; the flute fastens a long cantabile line upon them. The silences become longer, the

music seems nearly to stop. Points of sound gradually begin to build, more and more notes are added. Blocks of sullen silence appear wedged between segments of jagged sound. The segments shatter, and with the *Agitato*—a kind of central core—the converging becomes more turbulent, more determined. The instruments play together very precisely, urgently. Nothing is left unsaid. Everything must be discussed, scrutinized, analyzed, dissected, investigated, pursued. The breaking point is reached, the instruments split apart: showers of sparks from the flute, foam, fury, eruption from the harpsichord. Chopped, battered chords, silences, a page from the opening toccata; the lone flute plunges to its lowest note, and the harpsichord comes slowly to a standstill.

The Five Preludes Prolonged (1992), recorded here for the first time, are works composed over a period of years for various occasions: 1) “Imprint”—which was written for a concert at Harvard University in 1991 to honor the retiring chairwoman of the Music Department, Luise Vosgerchian—emerges from and comments on bars thirty-three and thirty-four from Debussy’s poetic piece *D’un cahier d’esquisses*. 2) “Prelude” at the second is an attempt to capture the “breezy impertinence” exemplified by the style of jazz exemplified by pianist Oscar Peterson. Here, the word “second” implies rapidity and precision (as in “split second” or in the French “à la seconde”) and can also justify the constant use of intervals of seconds and therefore of the complementary sevenths and ninths. 3) “Interval” was written for a German collection of contemporary, but not-too-difficult, piano compositions, and an earlier version of 4) “Prelude as Tango” for an American collection of modern tangos—a collection which was planned in the 80s but seems to have disappeared from the scene. The title 5) “Non-measured Prelude” (*Prélude non mesuré*) is a

term used in French harpsichord music of the seventeenth century. Here fragmented motives appear in spurts of sound at various places on the keyboard.

Dialogues (1958) were written for and dedicated to Paul Makanowitzky, a magnificent and exceptional violinist of Russian origin and French education. (Upon returning definitively to the U.S. in 1965, Makanowitzky taught in New York, in Philadelphia and in Ann Arbor before retiring to Maine where he died in February 1998.) This piece is constructed as a series of eight connected variations based on the four-note motive centered on B initially stated by the violin. Each succeeding variation until the last one starts with the same pitches and the motive appears throughout the work 353 times, horizontally and vertically. (This statistic was prompted by a listener who wanted to know exactly, after having lost count during a performance.)

—N.L.

Noël Lee, born in China in 1924 of American parents, received his early musical education in Lafayette, Indiana. He studied at Harvard University with Walter Piston, Irving Fine, and Tillman Merritt, and at the New England Conservatory of Music. In 1948, he went to Paris to continue his education under the guidance of Nadia Boulanger.

Boulanger wrote:

Noël Lee is one of the finest musicians I have met. Composer with a real personality, he has refinement and strength, an acute perception of the resources of his instrument, a sense of the hierarchy of values and a total understanding of the works.

Among the many awards he received in early years are from the Lili Boulanger Composition Prize, the Young Composers' Contest of the Louisville Orchestra, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In recent years the Cultural Affairs Ministry in France and the French National Radio have given him three important commissions—an unusual distinction for a composer not of French nationality. In 1986, he was awarded second prize in the Arthur Honegger Composition Contest for a set of Piano Etudes—the first prize going to György Ligeti—and, in 1991, the Foundation of France awarded him the Charles Oulmont Prize.

Aaron Copland wrote:

Here is a composer who writes his music with his eyes wide open, and with a kind of cool intensity that defines his personality...Music to him is a natural language, a language he uses without strain or mannerism. ...no matter

how complex the textures may be, the musical discourse is always lucid and reasoned.

Lee's career as a concert pianist has led him on tour on six continents. In Europe he has recorded 188 LPs and CDs since 1955, of which fourteen have received the *Grand Prix du Disque*. This recorded repertory—from J.S. Bach to Jean Barraqué—comprises the first complete recording of all the Schubert Piano Sonatas, including several unfinished ones which Lee has completed, the entire piano literature of Debussy and Ravel, and numerous works of twentieth-century giants including Charles Ives, Charles Griffes, Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland, and Elliott Carter.

In the United States Lee has been visiting professor at Brandeis and Cornell universities and at Dartmouth College. In Europe he frequently gives workshops in piano, chamber music and vocal literature and collaborates extensively with publishing houses for new editions of French piano, four-hand, and two-piano music. In the spring of 1998 the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in the French government awarded Lee the grade of "Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres."

Jean-Pierre Marty (conductor), a former piano student of Alfred Cortot and of Julius Katchen, pursued a career in conducting which, eventually, led him to become musical director of the Washington Opera. Upon returning to France, he became artistic director of the Opera Department at the French National Radio in Paris and later director of the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau. His book *The Tempo Indications of Mozart* is published by Yale University Press.

András Adorján (flute), was born in Budapest, and lived in Copenhagen from the age of twelve. Following his diploma in dentistry, he studied flute with Jean-Pierre Rampal and Auréle Nicolet and soon won several international prizes. After holding positions as principal flutist in orchestras in Stockholm, Cologne, Baden-Baden and Munich, and while appearing on more than eighty LPs and CDs, he was appointed professor at Conservatories, first in Cologne and later in Munich.

Ole Böhn (violin), is principal concertmaster of the Norwegian Opera in Oslo, as well as first violinist in the the Leonardo Quartet. He has built a career playing contemporary concertos throughout Europe and the Americas with, among others, James Conlon, Oliver Knussen, Lukas Foss, and Michael Gielen. In conjunction with the San Francisco Symphony he was responsible for commissioning the Elliott Carter Concerto and has encouraged many composers to write for the violin.

Production Notes

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From CRI SD 408:

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Five Preludes Prolonged were recorded in Paris in May 1994 by Youri Kiselhoff.

Convergences and *Dialogues* were recorded by Peter Willemoës.

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(ASCAP)