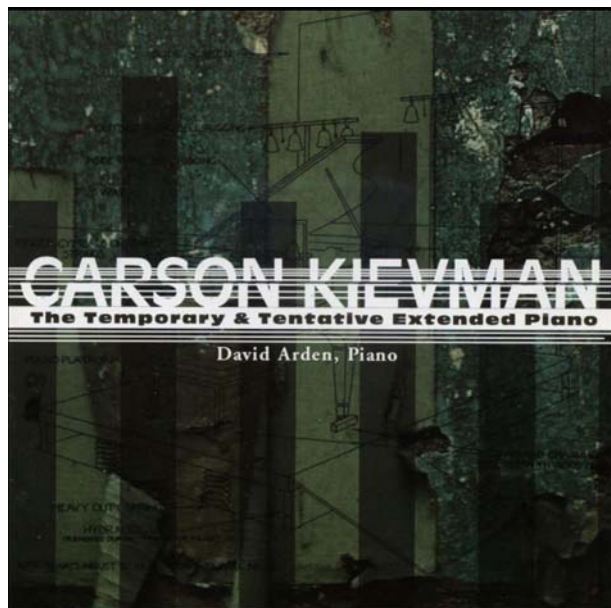


NWCR845

Carson Kievman

The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano



1. *Introdictus* (1992, rev. 1998) (3:11)
2. *Toccatada* (1991) (3:40)
3. *Meditation* (1992, completed 1998) (24:30)
4. *Harpo* (1986) (9:58)
5. *Nuts & Bolts* (1995) (9:56)
6. *The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano* (1976/77) (10:16)
David Arden, Piano

Total Playing Time: 61:53

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Notes

A novel by Daniel Pennac and a movie by Pierre Boutron, both of 1997 and both titled *Messieurs les enfants*, tell the magic and burlesque story of a metamorphosis. A schoolteacher assigns a bizarre essay topic: “You wake up one morning and you notice that, in the night, you have changed into an adult. Absolutely panic-stricken, you rush into your parents’ bedroom. They have been changed into children. Say what happens next.” Doing their homework, three children soon discover that the fiction is no longer hypothetical. Their parents have mysteriously become children. The children themselves are now grown-ups, suddenly forced to find their way into the adult world while keeping a child’s eye on what surrounds them, happiness and absurdity, pain and death.

The music of Carson Kievman is the music of a “monsieur l’enfant.” Not music for childhood, neither *Kinderscenen* nor *Children’s Corner*, but music from childhood, as only children catapulted into adulthood can conceive and only adults who have not forgotten can sustain. Love for the extremes, fascination with nature, playful theatricality are three recurrent features in Kievman’s opus. His music can be disordered, chaotic, and messy. It can be irresistible, moving, and sublime. It can be both sophisticated and naïve, incomprehensible and transparent, frustrating and exciting. Worse, the bits that first sound like one thing become the opposite thing after repeated listening, and vice versa. The proof is in the pudding.

One may be tempted to apply to Kievman’s music the label of “poly-stylism,” a term usually reserved for the complex mixtures of old and new, meta-Baroque and post-serial elements typically found in the compositions of Alfred Schnittke. But this does not seem fitting. If one needs an (ugly) neologism to

describe the essence of Kievman’s music, this can only be “strato-stylistic” (I said it was ugly). Like radicchio or archeology, the music of Kievman is about layers on layers.

On the surface, and only the surface, Kievman seems to accept traditional structures and conventions—after all, he is still writing full-fledged symphonies in the twenty-first century. Digging a bit, a web of formal extensions and experiments reveals his very personal approach to what classical form is supposed to mean (a good example on this recording is a piece originally titled Sonata No.1 (42), and now split into three separate compositions, an introduction or intro-dictus, a toccata (da) and a meditation!). Dig more, and the influences—implicit or explicit—of modern masters emerge (Messiaen’s “Regards,” Nancarrow’s “Studies,” Cage’s work for prepared piano, Schoenberg’s “Klavierstücke,” with sprinkles of Ives and Harry Partch). Dig further and vague traces of the Romantics appear, let alone Bach and Couperin... Even smart critics are on record as confusing “the cyclonic order of childhood” (Pennac, once again) at the root of Kievman’s music with shapelessness. But once the Ariadne’s thread to his music is found, the sense of stylistic disorientation is permanently replaced by admiring bewilderment for the continuous flow of its invention.

This recording presents the integral (so far) of Kievman’s music for solo piano. The first composition, *Introdictus*, was written for David Arden in 1992 and revised in 1998. It is a free-form prelude, whose continuous flow of arpeggiations are reminiscent of the *style brisé* of early French harpsichordists, updated after Debussy’s “Images” and Ravel’s “Tombeau” and refined in light of Messiaen. At the end of the piece is the Japanese-sounding inscription “Rubato

Abligato Mishimoto Bonsai Davidsan,” which is as translatable as a line from Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*.

Toccatada (1991, rev.1998) is what it promises to be, an almost dadaistic toccata to be played “as fast as possible,” in the spirit of Nancarrow playing Prokofiev playing Bach. The entire piece sounds like an easy-going celebration of fun and speed. The mid-section of *Toccatada* interrupts the symmetry of this *moto perpetuo* in 5/8 by introducing three peculiar bars in 6/8. Once again there is an inscription at the end of the score, in pig-Italian: “Alla Molovia Spiccatino Viverace Ardini”.

The third piece, *Meditation*, was composed in 1992 and completed in 1998 (when combined with the previous two works, these three compositions might still be performed as a modern “Sonata”). At more than twenty-four minutes, *Meditation* is the longest of the compositions on this disc. The title notwithstanding, no ghost of Massenet is invoked here. And the fact that, in the first half of the piece, a number of “sound effects”—thunderstorms, raindrops, cicadas—gently reverberate echoing and integrating the sounds of the piano, should not be misinterpreted as an exotic surrender to new age temptations. *Meditation* is no consolatory lobster bisque for the soul. If anything, its soundscape is as lunar and limbo-like as anything Kievman has ever written, the musical equivalent of Tarkovsky’s zone in “Stalker.”

In the first part of the piece, chords in fortissimo and pianissimo keep alternating, recalling Mussorgsky’s “Catacombae” from *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Like the choir in a Greek tragedy, the sound effects comment discreetly on the “events” emanating from the piano. The entire section can be thought of as a descent to Hades in slow motion (“if you think that you are playing too slow—says the score—than slow down even more!”), or a journey from the exterior dimensions of natural forces and influences into the interior dimensions of psyche and monologue—a theme that emerges over and over in recent works by Kievman, most explicitly in his “Hurricane” Symphony. In the second section, choir bells join the piano in an obsessive iteration of the interval E-C sharp, suggesting chimes heard from a distance. Memories of actual childhood blend here with echoes of musical fragments. To find a comparable musical experience, one has perhaps to go back to Schoenberg’s *Klavierstück* Op.11 No. 2, or Chopin’s second Prelude. The somber chords of the first part return at the end, their extreme dynamic swings now softened within a quieter range. The final inscription is “Achtung langsam aber zie kinder nicht heir mein friend”.

Harpo (1986) can be described as a sort of *Fantaisie-Impromptu*. In its serene lyricism and amiable humor, it is possibly the most approachable piece of this collection. In fact, this work was created as a warm-up composition exercise after a three-year period when Kievman stopped composing. The flourished passages of the right hand and the basso-ostinato patterns of the left hand make the piece similar in spirit to a set of “variations upon a ground” of the Elizabethan Renaissance. At the same time (talking about stylistic layers in Kievman), *Harpo* can also remind one of a relaxed improvisation, somewhere between Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett. Such interpretation is implicitly sanctioned by the composer himself who asks for the tempo to be “slightly flexible within the meter,” substantially authorizing a rubato close enough to unobtrusive swing.

Nuts & Bolts was composed between 1992 and 1995. Both this piece and the contemporaneous Symphony No. 3 (“Hurricane”) were written—as noted in the score—“as a response to having lived through, and been devastated by, one

of the most extensive natural disasters of our time—the South Florida Hurricane of 1992.” At the heart of these Sturm-und-Drang compositions is the interplay between external forces and interior feelings, between actuality and imagery, catastrophe and trauma. The Symphony describes the hypnotic anticipation of the hurricane, the panicked excitement during its unleashing, and the resigned surrender to the beauty of natural forces as manifestations of an irresistible destiny. Similarly, the coexistence of dramatic, contemplative, and descriptive elements lies at the core of *Nuts & Bolts*, which represents a sort of chiaroscuro study vis-à-vis the timbral and textural fresco of the Symphony.

After a brief introduction, tension builds up in long stretches of crescendo, only to burst suddenly and to restart again and again (a procedure somewhat reminiscent of the waves of “fuerza y luz” in the work by Luigi Nono, friend and mentor of Kievman). Toccata-like passages for the two hands seem to rotate in whirls around a point of static calm, an “eye of the storm” implied by the music but never explicitly admitted or represented. At the micro-structural level, a ternary rhythmic pattern recurs obsessively throughout the score. The meaning of the triplet as a constructive and expressive device is clarified at the very end of the composition, where the acceptance of natural devastation as a manifestation of fate is hinted at by the quotation of the “Destiny” motto from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, the motif formed precisely by three repeated notes and a falling third. *Nuts & Bolts* concludes with a mysterious sequence of triplets in diminuendo for the left hand, oscillating between F-sharp and F and slowly extinguishing into silence.

The last composition is the oldest in this collection (written in 1976–77 as a duo), *The Temporary Piano and The Tentative Extended Piano*, the composition dedicated to David Arden. Title and musical content gently mock both the German Baroque of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the New York Minimalism of La Monte Young’s *Well-Tuned Piano*. Kievman’s gusto for theatrical gestures is emphasized in this piece, whose staging options range from a simple concert performance to an elaborate technical production in which the “Pianist” is assisted by a page-turner “Butler” and a bunch of “Servants” including another “Butler,” a “Maid,” a “Chauffeur,” a “Press Secretary,” and his (her) “Personal Secretary”! In the theatrical version, the pianist sits on a platform with springs, surrounded by choir and cowbells. Vocalizing, bell-playing, and body-shaking all concur to build up action. At the climax, the pianist, exhausted, collapses into the piano. Reviewing the premiere of *The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano* and other pieces, Leighton Kerner of *The Village Voice* wrote: “As a builder of music-theater constructions, Kievman is a wizard!... Kievman and his musicians conspire to reveal a theater where music is not content to accompany speaking, singing, or dancing, and is not inclined, no matter how entertainingly, to imitate non-musical components, but takes over, instrumentally pure, tolerating no accomplice-arts. To the extent that Kievman’s present work achieves this, it is stunning!”

—Paolo Pesenti, 2000

For decades, **Carson Kievman** has followed an independent course that has blended New Music with theatrical, visual, and literary arts. Yet neither his music nor his career have found their way into easy categories. His symphonies, operas, and experimental works have been performed internationally in stage, concert, dance, and museum settings, from the Berkeley Art Museum in 1975, the Pennsylvania Ballet in 1983, and a music-theater retrospective at the national theater-Mannheim in 1995. The recipient of numerous international

awards, Kievman was most recently honored with a Naumburg Fellowship to Princeton University.

With the 1996 release of his first CD, *Symphony No. 2(42)*, Kievman's music work was made available to an even wider audience. The New Albion recording led to critical acclaim from reviews such as the *All-Music Guide*, which wrote: "In the tradition of such visionary pieces as Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transfiguration), Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, Toshiro Mayazumi's *Mandala Symphony*, etc., the program of this four-movement work is transcendent and epic in scope... A truly original and artistically sensitive work." From *Spoletto Today*: "It provides one of the most powerful musical experiences I had in recent times."

While *Symphony No. 3* has also been recorded for future release, the CRI release of *The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano* represents all of Kievman's works for solo piano (thus far). Pianist David Arden was responsible for many of the works original premiers. Earlier commissions include two "Soundtheater" works for Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival (1987-91 and 1978-79), as well as opera commissions from the Tanglewood Music Festival (1977-78) and the Donaueschingen Festival / Sudwestfunk (1982-84). More recent projects include *Sine Nomine* (Auctore Ignoto) for the English Vocal group the Binchois Consort (premiered in 1999), forthcoming works for Henry's Eight Ensemble of London, a work for the Brentano String Quartet, as well as upcoming performances of *Symphony No. 4*. *Symphony No. 3* ("Hurricane") has also been recorded for future release.

For more information and a catalogue of works go to:

<http://www.carsonkievman.com>

Pianist **David Arden** has devoted himself for twenty-five years to the promotion of contemporary music. He has been awarded the Kranichsteiner Prize at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse

für Neue Musik, First Prize at the Gaudeamus International Competition for Contemporary Music, and was a Prizewinner in the Carnegie Hall International Competition for American Music. Mr. Arden has worked with, and premiered pieces by, such notable composers as Henryk Górecki, Olivier Messiaen, Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Galina Ustvolskaya, John Cage, Earle Brown, Jacob Druckman, Bernard Rands, Lou Harrison, and David Lang.

Mr. Arden has had three world premiere CDs released: *Luciano Berio: The Complete Works for Solo Piano* (New Albion Records); *Earl Brown: Music for Piano(s) 1951-1995* (New Albion Records); and *Górecki Solo Piano Music* (KOCH International Classics). Mr. Arden performs regularly in Europe and has toured Asia, the South Pacific and South America for the United States Information Agency's Arts America Program. He has made radio broadcasts in Belgium, Holland, France, Germany, England, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the U.S.

In addition to his performing activities, Mr. Arden has been a pedagogical innovator in the area of early-years music education. He was assistant professor at the University of California at San Diego and is the founder and director of the New School of Piano, established in San Francisco in 1985 and specializing in a unique course of early-years piano instruction. He is the author of *Creative Music-Making At The Piano*, an instructional book for preschool age children.

Mr. Arden studied at the University of California, Los Angeles and Peabody Institute of Music in Baltimore before going abroad to study at the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Music in Antwerp (Belgium), where he received his Concert Diploma, and at the Musik Hochschule in Cologne for more advanced studies of contemporary music. His teachers have included Aloys Kontarsky, Frederic Gevers, and Lucy Brown.

Production Notes

Produced by David Arden and Carson Kievman.

Digital editing by James Moses (assisted by Carson Kievman) at Princeton University's Sound Kitchen.

Introdictus, Toccata, Meditation, Harpo, The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano: engineered by John Whiting. Digitally rerecorded at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, Germany.

Nuts & Bolts: Engineered by Jack Vad. Digitally recorded at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

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