

# David Rakowski

(b. 1958)

## Études

Amy Dissanayake, piano

### From Études, Book II

<b>1</b>	Étude #20, <i>Fourth of Habit</i>	2:23
<b>2</b>	Étude #15, <i>The Third, Man</i>	2:42
<b>3</b>	Étude #17, <i>Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr</i>	1:55
<b>4</b>	Étude #16, <i>Ice Boogie</i>	1:49
<b>5</b>	Étude #18, <i>Pitching from the Stretch</i>	2:54
<b>6</b>	Étude #19, <i>Secondary Dominance</i>	2:56
<b>7</b>	Étude #12, <i>Northpaw</i>	4:10
<b>8</b>	Étude #11, <i>Touch Typing</i>	2:42

### From Études, Book IV

<b>9</b>	Étude #36, <i>Purple</i>	2:21
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### From Études, Book II

<b>10</b>	Étude #13, <i>Plucking A</i>	3:54
<b>11</b>	Étude #14, <i>Martler</i>	2:25
<b>12</b>	Étude #21, <i>Twelve-Step Program</i>	3:56
<b>13</b>	Étude #29, <i>Roll Your Own</i>	5:55

### From Études, Book III

<b>14</b>	Étude #23, <i>You Dirty Rag</i>	2:41
<b>15</b>	Étude #24, <i>Horned In</i>	2:19
<b>16</b>	Étude #30, <i>A Gliss is Just a Gliss</i>	1:58
<b>17</b>	Étude #26, <i>Once Bitten</i>	2:50
<b>18</b>	Étude #27, <i>Halftone</i>	2:47

### From Études, Book IV

<b>19</b>	Étude #35, <i>Luceole</i>	2:14
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### From Études, Book III

<b>20</b>	Étude #28, <i>You've Got Scale</i>	2:45
<b>21</b>	Étude #22, <i>Schnozzage</i>	2:38
<b>22</b>	Étude #25, <i>Fists of Fury</i>	3:15

# David Rakowski

## *Études*

Historically no more than a handful of composers have, in their music at least, evinced genuine wit, with no detectable sense of strain. The names of Haydn, Mozart, Rossini, Ravel, Stravinsky and Prokofiev come immediately to mind, as does, to those of us fortunate enough to know the man and his music, that of David Rakowski.

Rakowski's music in general and his continually expanding collection of solo piano études in particular—at this writing 48 of what he projects to be 50 or more have been composed—are laced with examples of his agile mind and sheer delight in his ability to, as he puts it, "play games with the ways that notes get put together."

Among the composers listed above, it seems particularly felicitous to invoke the name of Haydn when discussing the music of David Rakowski. Like Haydn, Rakowski combines a genuine seriousness of purpose and absolute command of a highly sophisticated technique with flashes of humor that is by turns wry, more than a little bent, whimsical and even, at times, outrageous. Obvious manifestations of this can include not only the punning titles of so many of Rakowski's pieces, including those of the études on this disk, but also the performance indications in the scores themselves ("Allegro troppo"—"too fast"; "pipistrello in uscita dal inferno"—"bat out of hell"). Even the prefaces to the extant books of études, while containing very precise and utterly serious directives for the pianist, are by no means out of bounds: for example, he writes that *Touch Typing* is designed as an étude for the index fingers only. Pianists who wish to use

more fingers may do so at their discretion, but should also be very, very ashamed." Similarly, *Schnozzage*—one of the most breathtakingly beautiful, lyrical and unfunny pieces in the entire collection—"calls for the middle part to be played with the nose. The middle part may be played instead by a second person contributing a third hand, or by an extremely well-trained pet." Of course, taking such gems as these out of context cannot begin to do justice to the manner in which he simply, offhandedly slips them into an otherwise perfectly normal set of performance notes, giving the reader a gentle, unexpected, but ultimately delightful little jab.

On another more important plane, the attentive listener to the études recorded here can look forward to many unexpected and delightful jabs of a purely musical nature. For, make no mistake about it, just as there is infinitely more to Haydn than surface naïveté and rustic humor, there is infinitely more to Rakowski than punning titles and mere cleverness. Clearly, neither of these attributes is sufficient to sustain a work that is not substantive in its material and assured in its execution. In Rakowski, as in Haydn, there is the same sense of a mind that never stops, of a determination to create music that is simultaneously subtle, richly complex and teeming with ideas, yet lucid in structure and distinctive in profile.

David Rakowski's piano études now span a period of fourteen years (and counting), from the appearance of *E-Machines* (#1) in 1988 to the present (2002). They also span an impressively large musical and expressive range, from the most viscerally powerful, edgy and consummately virtuosic fast tempo études (*Martler*, *Fists of Fury*) to the slower, delicately nuanced and exquisitely wrought, but no less technically and musically demanding ones (*The Third*, *Man*, *Pitching from the Stretch*, *Northpaw*, *Schnozzage*).

In 1991, three years after completing *E-Machines*, Rakowski was unaware

that it and the two subsequent solo piano pieces he had recently composed—*BAM!* and *Nocturnal*—could in fact legitimately be called études until the pianist Lyn Reyna, who had premiered *E-Machines* and *Nocturnal*, pointed this out to him. Initially he was responding to pianists who liked his music and wanted to play as yet unwritten solo piano pieces by him. Since he didn't feel drawn at the time to the idea of composing large-scale solo piano works, working in smaller forms seemed a good way to fulfill the requests of his piano playing colleagues while getting comfortable in the new medium. Gradually he came to think of writing relatively short and concentrated solo piano pieces as a kind of "compositional respite." If he found that he had reached an impasse in a large project in which he was engaged, he would often find it useful and restorative to lay the larger work aside for the time being and compose an étude. "Writing unrelated pieces that are brief and single-minded," he has said, "helps keep the gears moving and helps me return to the bigger piece with a fresh perspective." As such occasions for a compositional change of pace periodically asserted themselves and more études accumulated, the idea of compiling them into "Books" of ten each seemed reasonable, as well as practical from the standpoint of publication. Further elaborating on his process he writes, "I gave myself a rule that an étude had to be written in six days or less (since *E-Machines* was written in six days), could not be revised, and could not have any a priori notions of how the whole piece should go." Many of the études have been written for and bear dedications to specific performers and they are often composed in response to suggestions given by the players themselves. And a few, he adds, have emerged "because I had great titles that cried out for pieces."

What Rakowski does not say is that the "seat-of-the-pants" approach generally is more likely to work well for composers like himself, who are not only

exceptionally gifted but highly disciplined, experienced and extremely well-trained. Such attributes cannot help but manifest themselves, even when he is not fully aware of drawing upon them. This fact also slightly undermines his reference, quoted above, to writing "unrelated" pieces. A composer like Rakowski is bound to create relationships between and among these works that have been such an integral part of his recent oeuvre, even when he isn't making a conscious effort to do so; once again, as with Haydn, the mind never stops. Though it is neither necessary nor practical to perform all of the études in one fell swoop, and though there is no rigidly prescribed order in which they must be played, there are a number of gestures and ways of dealing with material that recur throughout the series. What is often striking as well as tantalizing is the manner in which these commonalities contribute to a sense that the collection as a whole might be thought of almost as one gigantic work.

A few examples may be instructive. Thus far, in every étude whose number ends in zero (except for #10), as well as in the middle section of Étude #36, *Purple*, there appears a version of the quasi-triplet figure known to jazz musicians as "swing eighths." Throughout the series, there are passages as well as entire études where moving gradually from one extreme register to another (e.g. low to high, as in *Martler* or *You've Got Scale*) is a salient feature of the shape (one might even say trajectory) of the piece. Rakowski has pointed out that almost all of the études, despite their disparate surfaces, share formal similarities and a rather traditional sensibility when it comes to structure. "Almost all of them," he says, "have expository music, developmental music, and a recapitulation of sorts, sometimes with a coda." He goes on to add that tension and release, clarity of phrasing and voice leading, as well as "accumulations of events that are released suddenly" all contribute to a sense of overall unity in the cycle.

In accordance with this striving for formal clarity, Rakowski is not afraid of a clear sense of pulse or, when the material manifests a plenitude of exquisite detail that truly cries out for it, of literal repetition. There are numerous examples, as in *Fourth of Habit* and *Twelve-Step Program*, where repeat signs are thoughtfully and effectively used to aid in insuring the comprehensibility of the structure. Balancing this healthy directness and clarity is true complexity in the best sense—variety, depth and richness—as opposed to mere complication for its own sake.

Not unexpectedly, these pieces are, to put it mildly, exceedingly difficult to play, though the fact that some of today's finest and most venturesome pianists find them eminently pianistic testifies eloquently to Rakowski's craft and obvious concern for conceiving music that is idiomatic as well as enjoyably challenging for performers. This is all the more noteworthy given the fact that Rakowski, unlike most of the best-known writers of piano études, is not himself a pianist. His études cover most of the traditional technical and musical territory staked out by past and present masters of the genre such as Chopin, Debussy, Liszt, Scriabin, and Ligeti. This includes études on specific intervals as well as études on different types of traditional and more novel playing techniques (crossing hands, right hand alone, inside the piano, scales and arpeggios, glissandi, use of fists, nose, etc.). Even when not explicitly concerned with extreme speed and virtuoso fireworks, there are myriad requirements in all of them that must be met in the realms of phrasing, articulation, projection of important contrapuntal lines, voicing of harmonies, and good old-fashioned musicality. As in all the greatest works of this type, it ultimately is futile to speak of technical and performance issues as distinct from musical and compositional ones, or as distinct from matters of expression and communication; these études transcend such oversimplifications and false dichotomies.

Transcendental too is the pianism of Amy Dissanayake, who seems to have been born to play this music. In a musical age too often notable for its emphasis on style over substance, it is heartening as well as exceptional to find a young pianist who is willing and able to play this music with painstaking attention to its every nuance, with a formidable and seemingly limitless technique. It is, however, even more exceptional and heartening that she couples that willingness and those abilities with equal quantities of the understanding, passion, verve and commitment that this music not only demands, but richly deserves.

### From ÉTUDES, BOOK II:

*Étude # 20, Fourth of Habit (1998); (étude on fourths)*

As he has unleashed more and more of his études upon the world, Rakowski has felt the need to find means of organizing them within the overall collection. He took a page from Debussy's book—his first book of études actually—, deciding to base several of his own études on specific intervals (thirds, fourths, fifths, octaves, etc.). *Fourth of Habit* is in fact the last of six consecutive études built on intervals, as well as being the last étude in Book II, and was composed for Geoffrey Burleson, who specifically requested that his étude be based on the interval of a fourth. Burleson is not only a virtuoso and champion of new piano music, but is a formidable jazz improviser to boot; his prowess in this arena is acknowledged in the "swing eighths" rhythmic figure mentioned earlier, and this étude marks the first appearance of that figure in the collection.

*Étude #15, The Third, Man (1997); étude on thirds*

As the first in the series of études on intervals, this piece is an homage to Debussy

in more ways than one, recalling the ambiance of one of that master's "greatest hits," *Claire de lune*, which is almost quoted in the very last measure. The brief recapitulation in this étude coincides with a pause on a C sharp (the lowest one on the piano) in the bass's gradual descent to the C immediately below, which is the lowest pitch in the piece.

*Étude #17, Keine Kaskadenjagd mehr (1998); étude on falling thirds and fourths*  
David Rakowski describes awakening in June of 1998 "on a particularly steamy and warm morning with the sound image of descending high register piano," and concluding that "this was a template for an étude on descending thirds and fourths." This image suggested waterfalls, which in turn brought to mind a song called "Waterfalls" by the R&B group TLC. (There is no quotation from the song in the étude.) TLC's song contains the phrase "don't go chasing waterfalls," misremembered by the composer as "no more chasing waterfalls," hence the German translation, though it is and likely will remain unclear exactly why the title is in German. Rakowski notes that "this étude strangely caught a virus—octaves first infect the texture of running descending lines about halfway into the piece, and then slowly take it over, until they get blown away by the climactic sneeze just before the return."

*Étude #16, Ice Boogie (1997); étude on octave leaps*

Written for Steven Weigt, this is chronologically the second of the interval-based études, and is, in the composer's words, "based entirely on melodic octaves, in all sorts of rhythmic relationships to each other, within a steady stream of eighth notes." In his inimitable manner Rakowski characterizes its climax as a "gonzo boogie woogie from hell." The title refers to a particularly intense ice storm that

struck Maine as he began composing the piece, and during which most of it was written, sometimes by candlelight.

*Étude #18, Pitching from the Stretch (1998); étude on tenths*

The baseball reference that gave rise to the title of this lyrical gem resulted from the composer's having made a field trip to Fenway Park with some friends from the MacDowell Colony to see Pedro Martinez pitch for the Red Sox. He writes: "The 'stretch' represents the hand position to play the tenths in the piece. It's slow and unfolds under a right hand rhythm of all quarters, giving the melody (such as it is) to the left hand."

*Étude #19, Secondary Dominance (1998); a curiously strong étude on seconds*

The principal technical challenge for the pianist in this rhythmically bracing and delightfully off-kilter étude, described by the composer as "painfully difficult," is its unpredictability, i.e. the non-patterned nature of the combinations of figures derived from alternating or repeated notes a second apart. On the plus side, though, Rakowski particularly enjoys the fact that the ending gesture is a non sequitur, which, he says, "seemed just right."

*Étude #12, Northpaw (1996); right-hand étude*

It has become more traditional over the years to write pieces for the left hand alone rather than for the right. Scriabin wrote an étude for the left hand, and Brahms made a transcription for left hand alone of the famous *Chaconne* from Bach's *D minor Partita* for solo violin. It has generally been assumed that most pianists, particularly right-handed ones, could stand to develop greater independence of the left hand. In this case, however, the impetus was a call from Lyn Reyna



requesting a right-hand piece as a gift to her friend Barbara Barclay, who had fallen off a ladder, injuring her left hand. A hauntingly beautiful and slowly unfolding piece, it is, as its composer writes, "based around F-sharp and A, with a slow descent to the lowest A on the piano over a melody that stays close to the register where it begins."

*Étude #11, Touch Typing (1996); étude for index fingers only*

Composed at the American Academy in Rome in the late spring, the idea for this étude came when Rakowski found himself sitting at a laptop computer attempting to help another Fellow with his e-mail program. Rakowski noticed that this man typed with only his index fingers, but had taught himself to do so extremely rapidly. According to the composer, "the 'theme' of the piece is 'asdfgh' (where the left hand rests to touch-type on a 'qwerty' typewriter keyboard), or A-A-flat,D,F,G,B." This figure pervades the entire work, which is built on a fast-slow-fast formal scheme.

**From ÉTUDES, BOOK IV:**

*Étude #36, Purple (2001); étude on a chord*

Amy Dissanayake is a part-time jazz pianist, and when David Rakowski asked her for ideas for piano études he might compose especially for her, she suggested an étude on her favorite chord: the right hand position of a sharp-9 chord, for instance E-B-flat-E-flat, reading up. It turns out that not only is this harmony commonly used in jazz as well as in much of Rakowski's music, it is the ur-chord of Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze*, hence the title. In the middle section of the piece the composer quotes from *Fourth of Habit*, one of the first Rakowski études that

Ms. Dissanayake played.

**From ÉTUDES, BOOK II:**

*Étude #13a, Plucking A (1996/2002), inside-the-piano étude*

Written for Marilyn Nonken, a great interpreter of Rakowski études in her own right, this piece exploits the problems, logistical as well as musical, of playing inside the piano. The composer discovered that it works perfectly well on many smaller pianos, but not on a Steinway D, because of the different locations and configurations of crossbars, etc. In January 2002, knowing that Amy Dissanayake would be using a Steinway D for this recording, Rakowski created an alternative version, Étude #13a, that would take into account these differences. In addition to occasional notes played normally on the keys, it exploits, in its eerily beautiful way, harmonics, plucked strings and stopped (or muted) tones, in which one hand damps the strings near the pins while the other strikes the keys.

*Étude #14, Martler (1997); crossing hands étude*

Martler's title is a conflation of the first and last names of the English pianist and composer Martin Butler, one of Rakowski's good friends. In the process of writing a piece based on the opening of Butler's *Jazz Machines*, Rakowski ultimately realized that the piece he was writing was really about hand crossings. These become increasingly more and more harrowing until just before the recapitulation, when the left hand plays in the middle register and the right crosses over to the bottom of the piano. The visual effect of this étude in performance is in many ways no less stunning than the powerful aural impression it makes.

**From ÉTUDES, BOOK III:**

*Étude #21, Twelve-Step Program (1999); étude on chromatic scales and wedges*

This piece is an homage to Earl Kim, a composer who had recently passed away as Rakowski had resolved to begin Book III. He recounts, "I remember in particular one very striking vocal chromatic 'wedge' from an extended vocal cadenza in Kim's *Exercises en Route* and wondered if I could write a whole piece based around such chromatic wedges." (A chromatic wedge is a series of intervals that contract and expand symmetrically by half steps.) Beginning with jerky rhythmic projections of the wedge, it gradually smooths out into running sixteenth notes and slower, more extended versions of the wedge. The ending manages to evaporate just before a recapitulation might have occurred.

*Étude #29, Roll Your Own (2000); étude on rolled chords*

Based on one of several suggested ideas for études from composer Jason Eckardt, to whom *Roll Your Own* is dedicated, Eckardt's proposed title alone rendered it irresistible. The crux of this piece is an extremely slow moving, relentless sequence of rolled chords in half notes that accompany a melody confined to the middle register. The rolled chords gradually fan out, getting progressively wider until the rolled chord becomes all eight C's on the piano keyboard. The texture more quickly contracts in register to the opening rolled chords, with which the étude concludes.

*Étude #23, You Dirty Rag (1999); étude on melody in the left thumb*

Rakowski's original idea was for intricate left-hand figures to act as a background to a melody that would mostly be stated in the left thumb. In his words, he "copped an

upbeat beginning figure from Hayes Biggs's *Tagrango* to get me going, and this developed, sort of beyond my control, into ragtime-like figures. As such, it also developed into an étude in which the speed of the two hands is quite different: slow ragtime in the left hand and extremely fast, double-time ragtime figures in the right, zipping over the entire range of the piano." As the composer from whom the upbeat figure was cribbed, I am more than pleased to have helped push things beyond his control.

*Étude #24, Horned In (1999); étude on horn fifths*

"Horn fifths" are familiar to most listeners to classical music, even if they don't recognize the term, which refers to a specific type of figure that sounds like a hunting call played by a pair of horns. The title is a pun on the name of David Horne, for whom this étude was written. Only horn fifths are used, eventually at least once at every possible transposition, creating a very attractive sort of polytonal blur. The final pages stretch out a horn fifth on G for almost five bars in the bass, against which the upper parts articulate other horn fifths at different pitch levels and at faster rates of speed. The effect is one of distant, gauzy, tolling bells, a kind of soft-focus tintinnabulation, ending with the original pitch level of the horn figure, "as if," the composer writes, "nothing had happened."

*Étude #30, A Gliss is Just a Gliss (2000); étude on glissandi*

Yet another vernacular-influenced étude replete with "swing eighths," Rakowski describes this piece as "a raucous sort of atonal honky-tonk that shifts from register to register in the coarsest and crassest way possible, with glissandi." The opening marking given to the pianist is, aptly enough, "Deranged," and the glissandi keep coming, though the piece, somewhat surprisingly, ends very quietly

and not at all raucously.

*Étude #26, Once Bitten (2000); étude on mordents*

Derived from the Italian word meaning "to bite," the term "mordent" refers to a very short and snappy trill figure, consisting of a main note that alternates with the note below. The most famous example in music history may well be the opening of J. S. Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue* in D minor, and in fact, Rakowski begins this étude with precisely those same pitches. A favorite of the composer's it involves some rather intricate finger-twisting in the inner voices of the harmonies as the mordent figure moves around.

*Étude #27, Halftone (2000); Left-hand/Right-hand/Black-key/White-key étude*

This piece combines separate white-note and black-note musics that can be played together as well as individually. Avoiding the clichés that so often arise from such restricted pitch material was initially daunting. His solution, as in so many other cases in the cycle of études, was registral. "There is white-note music that starts high and fast that descends and gets slower," he writes, "and black-note music that starts low and slow and gets higher and faster. I thought the most dramatic part of the piece would be when both musics are played together and they cross each other in register." The unique example of "open form" in the entire collection, on this recording the white-note music is heard first, followed by the black-note music, and then both simultaneously.

**From ÉTUDES, BOOK IV:**

*Étude #35, Luceole (2001); étude on rising seconds and thirds*

*Luceole* is the first étude Rakowski composed specifically for Amy Dissanayake. He recalled thinking of *Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr*, but this time with smaller intervals going up instead of down, and in jerky rhythms. At first he likened these figures to little puffs of smoke. Setting it aside for three months, he returned to it at the MacDowell Colony. While there, he passed a field full of fireflies one evening when walking to his studio, and realized that perhaps he "wasn't writing musical puffs of smoke, but musical fireflies." This new image led him to the ending, with its high, shimmering tremolos, and to his title, which is the Italian word for fireflies.

**From ÉTUDES, BOOK III:**

*Étude #28, You've Got Scale (2000); étude on scales and arpeggios*

Teresa McCollough, who has recorded several of the études, including *BAM!*, which she particularly enjoyed performing, suggested the idea of this piece to Rakowski. Similarly to *BAM!*, the piece begins with relentless fast running sixteenth notes that ascend gradually from the bottom register. "Plain old running scales and arpeggios slowly mutate into chords that build up out of the perpetual motion," writes Rakowski, "after which the piece goes back to the bottom register where it belongs."

*Étude #22, Schnozzage (1999); étude for the nose (or third hand)*

There are a number of (probably) apocryphal stories involving notes played on a keyboard instrument with the nose. Rakowski heard the version in which Mozart shows Haydn a piano piece he has composed which culminates in five octaves worth of C's which must be played simultaneously. When Haydn protests that this



is physically impossible, Mozart demonstrates by playing the outer octaves with his hands while leaning down to play the middle one with his nose. This piece alternates "solo" passages for the nose with "tutti" passages for the hands alone, and is arguably one of the most gorgeous of the études.

*Étude #25 Fists of Fury (1999); étude for fists*

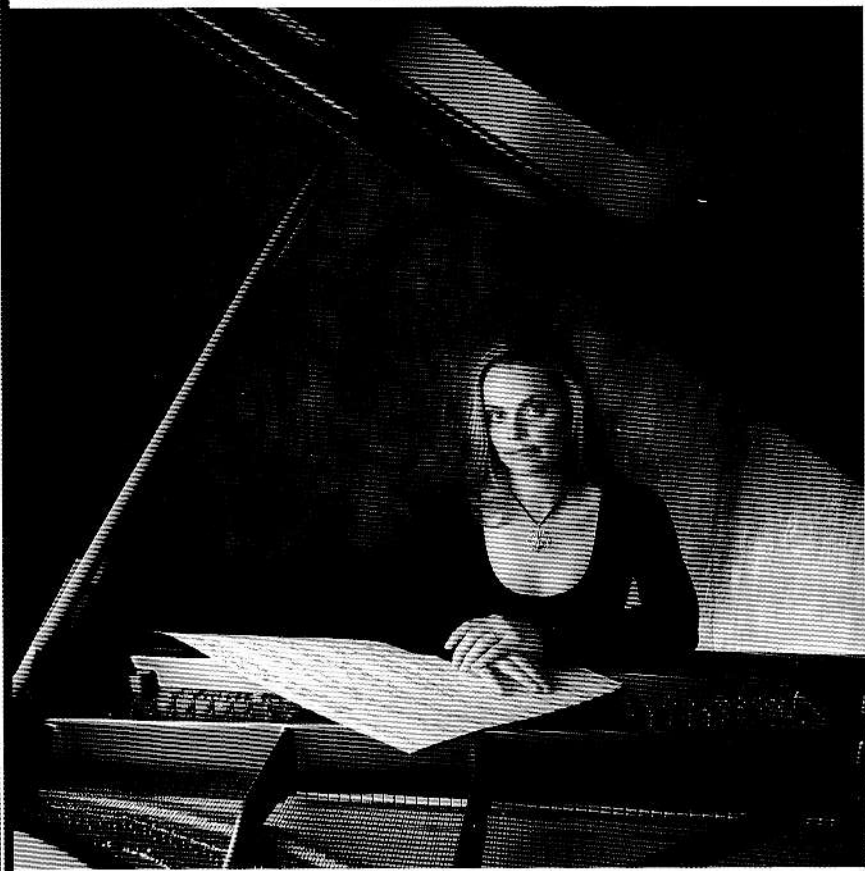
A virtuoso tour-de-force for Marilyn Nonken, the idea for this piece grew out of an extremely demanding and magnificently played solo concert she had undertaken at New York City's Miller Theater at Columbia University, and on which she performed the first two Rakowski études. The concert had been advertised under the rather absurd title "Fists of Fury," a moniker rather more redolent of martial arts à la Bruce Lee than of exciting and formidable new piano music. Rakowski decided to write Marilyn a piece with that title that actually does call for fists about a quarter of the time. Fast, loud and furious, it quotes from *BAM!*, as well as from the finale of Beethoven's Ninth, a piece the composer had, as a trombonist, played years before.

Notes by Hayes Biggs, 2002

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Hayes Biggs is a composer holding the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition from Columbia University, a Master of Music degree from Southern Methodist University, and a Bachelor of Music Degree in piano performance from Rhodes College. He lives in Manhattan and teaches at the Manhattan School of Music.

**David Rakowski** was born and raised in St. Albans, Vermont. His early musical training was on trombone, and like so many composers of his generation, he also played keyboards in a bad rock band. His interest in composition was spurred by encounters on record with music of Boulez, Ives and Babbitt, and later, the music of Stravinsky, Berg, Martino, and Davidovsky. He studied at New England Conservatory with Robert Ceely and John Heiss, at Princeton with Milton Babbitt, Peter Westergaard and Paul Lansky, and at Tanglewood with Luciano Berio. He has composed two symphonies, four concerti, three song cycles, a children's ballet, and a great deal of chamber and vocal chamber music, as well as several dozen piano etudes. His music has been performed all over America, in Canada and Mexico, as well as in Europe and China, and has been recorded on CRI, Innova, and Americus. He has been commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, "The President's Own" US Marine Band, Speculum Musicae, Sequitur, Network for New Music, Parnassus, Ensemble 21, the Riverside Symphony, the Triple Helix, Boston Musica Viva, the Crosstown Ensemble, the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, and others. He has received a Rome Prize, an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and Guggenheim and NEA fellowships. In 1999 his *Persistent Memory*, commissioned by the Mary Flagler Charitable Trust for Orpheus, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and in 2002 his *Ten of Kind*, commissioned by the US Marine Band, was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Rakowski has taught at Stanford, Columbia, and Harvard Universities, and is currently Professor of Composition at Brandeis University, whose faculty he joined in 1995. He was also Composer-in-residence at the Bowdoin Summer Music Festival and Guest Composer at the Wellesley Composers Conference. His music is published by C.F. Peters, BMI. Currently he lives in Massachusetts and Maine with his wife, the composer and clarinetist Beth Wiemann.



Though her repertoire ranges from Baroque to contemporary, **Amy Dissanayake** is especially committed to performing music of living composers. She has premiered many solo and chamber works, and has worked with such composers as Pierre Boulez, George Crumb, Augusta Read Thomas, Joan Tower, David Lang, Simon Bainbridge, and David Rakowski. She appears regularly on the Chicago Symphony's MusicNOW series, and has performed with the Chicago Contemporary Players, Chicago Pro Musica, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, and Klang. *The Chicago Tribune* called her solo performance of Berio's *Sequenza IV* on the Chicago Pro Musica series "extraordinary" in its "mastery of what lay on the dense, printed page and beyond." The French newspaper *La Republique du Centre* called her performance of Frederic Rzewski's *Down by the Riverside*, "ascetique et sensuelle." *The Chicago Tribune* praised her "dashing virtuosity," and the *Chicago Sun Times* called her a "ferociously talented pianist."

Amy Dissanayake has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician in the United States, Europe, Asia and Africa. Her selection in 1993 as a United States Artistic Ambassador led to a highly acclaimed concert tour of eight countries in Africa and South Asia, where she gave solo recitals, lectures, and master-classes as part of a broad-based cultural exchange program sponsored by the United States Information Agency. Ms. Dissanayake served as the principal pianist of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago for six years, and has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as an extra keyboardist. Awards include a stipend prize at the 2000 Darmstadt Internationale Fercinkurse für Neue Musik, first prizes in the American Opera Society of Chicago competition, the Union League and Civic Arts Foundation piano competition, the Farwell Competition, and the Rose Fay Thomas Competition, which led to a solo performance in Orchestra Hall, Chicago. Ms. Dissanayake has also been a prizewinner in the Joanna Hodges International Piano Competition and the Frinna Awerbuch International Piano Competition, and made her New York City recital debut at the Donnell Library in 1992.

Amy Dissanayake has appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras, including the Chicago Chamber Orchestra, New Hampshire Philharmonic, and the Symphony Orchestra of Sri Lanka, and has been featured on Chicago's classical music radio station, WFMT. Other recent performances include the June in Buffalo Festival, the Rotterdam Music Biennial in The Netherlands, and solo recitals in the People's Republic of China. Ms. Dissanayake studied with Ursula Oppens at Northwestern University, where she earned a Doctorate in Piano Performance in 1999. She currently divides her time between San Diego and Chicago.



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