

# FROM HAMMERS TO BYTES

Lambert Orkis  
piano and synthesizer

Richard Wernick  
(b. 1934)

*Piano Sonata No. 2* (2000) (36:10)

## Part I (10:09)

- 1 I Intrada (in the form of a march) (1:54)
- 2 II Arioso triste (in the form of a canon) (6:23)
- 3 III Toccata (in the form of an etude) (1:52)

## Part II (14:21)

- 4 I Fantasy Variations (14:21)

## Part III (11:40)

- 5 I Tempo della Toccata (2:12)
- 6 II Tempo del'Arioso (5:55)
- 7 III Tempo della Marcia (3:33)

James Primosch

(b. 1956)

*Sonata-Fantasia* (2001) (40:03)  
for piano and synthesizer, one player

## I. Theme and Variations (24:01)

- 8 Prelude fantastico, quasi improvvisando (2:24)
- 9 Tema semplice, ma espressivo e con poco rubato (1:25)
- 10 Variation I sognando, flessibile (1:30)
- 11 Variation II scampering; leggero (0:50)
- 12 Variation III con fuoco (0:57)
- 13 Variation IV moderato, flowing (1:20)
- 14 Variation V moderato; like a mechanical toy (0:55)
- 15 Variation VI sempre delicato e legato (1:01)
- 16 Variation VII andante; a bit tipsy (0:55)
- 17 Interlude largo, contemplativo (1:21)
- 18 Variation VIII allegretto (0:55)
- 19 Variation IX pompous, a little grotesque (1:19)
- 20 Variation X molto vivace (1:07)
- 21 Variation XI grand; in romantic style (1:34)
- 22 Variation XII senza tempo; quasi cadenza (1:09)  
(like a parody of the preceding variation)
- 23 Variation XIII cryptic (1:24)
- 24 Variation XIV presto (1:24)
- 25 Postlude fantastico, quasi improvvisando (2:31)

## 26 II. Meditativo adagio molto, mesto (9:09)

## 27 III. Daddy-O's New Groove, allegro (6:53)

## FROM HAMMERS TO BYTES

Note by Lambert Orkis

The idea of commissioning two large works for solo piano came to me while vacationing with my wife in Vienna. While dining at a tavern that had been frequented by both Beethoven and Schubert, the historical environment stimulated my thinking about the rapid evolution of the pianos of that era, and how most of the music that was heard on those instruments was new.

Having spent much of my life performing new music, as well as playing and acquiring period instruments and also working with the new electronic keyboards, I decided to attempt to construct a concert program that would show not only past influences in keyboard writing, but demonstrate that the technology of the piano is not in stasis and has the potential for further development.

Choosing Richard Wernick as one of the composers was natural, as he had already written two large-scale works for me and I continue to be attracted to his rigorous and highly refined style of music. Many years ago Wernick introduced me to James Primosch, who was working with Wernick on a post-graduate degree in composition at the University of Pennsylvania. I premiered Primosch's *Apparition* for piano in his student days at Penn and watched his development as a composer, being impressed by his ability to write in a highly personal style while fearlessly incorporating elements of the past into his music. Primosch's music involving electronic keyboards also interested me, as I was already attracted to the special attributes of these instruments in my work as Principal Keyboardist with the Kennedy Center's National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC.

Richard Wernick's *Sonata No. 2* is a large work that, through a creative architectural design and tightly controlled manipulation of musical ideas, engages

and rewards the attentive listener with a musical experience of depth and substance. As the first and last movements are basically mirror images of one another, one gets to hear similar music from a different perspective with the result that new connections are made in one's musical conscience. In a way, it is like a trip on a mountain road that one takes both ways. The views change, depending upon which way one is going.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, with its brilliantly conceived *Fantasy Variations*, is particularly arresting as its many variations seamlessly flow into one another. If at one point the listener believes the theme has morphed into ragtime, that listener will be right, for near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, Wernick gives honor to the great Scott Joplin.

Some listening advice may be helpful. Wernick's *Sonata No. 2* has significant areas of slow moving music. By exercising patience, sitting back and allowing yourself to be enveloped in the sound, you will be better prepared to enter the meditative state that can allow you to fully appreciate this music. Wernick is a genius at making time seemingly stand still--a technique that allows for enormous contrast in his musical architecture. He submits both the listener and the performer to a stimulating musical journey and we, in the process, are transformed by the experience.

As James Primosch's *Sonata-Fantasia* is written for the piano and a Kurzweil synthesizer, the listener has no way of knowing what type of sounds to expect. The first movement of Primosch's piece is a large-scale theme and variations. Primosch's formal treatment of the variation structure is mostly traditional, with the beginning and end of each of the variations obvious. The substance of these variations, however, is anything but traditional. As the performer must often play both instruments simultaneously and overcome the problems inherent to that effort, these variations become something of a modern equivalent to Chopin's piano

etudes. In addition to the multitude of new timbres, the listener will also be aware that there are sharply contrasting styles being presented. I like to think of this movement as a modern version of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Instead of a roomful of different pictures, however, here a single idea is given contrasting treatment. Indeed, one may begin to think that many composers have each contributed a variation to this movement, so fluent is Primosch in writing in different styles. If one or more of the variations remind you of a particular composer, that was the intent. Musical memories of Primosch's former teachers, Richard Wernick and Mario Davidovsky, are invoked, and composers such as Bach, Schubert, Thalberg, Liszt and Chopin are models--each with its own distinctive synthesized timbre.

The beauty and power of the slow movement is pure Primosch and speaks for itself, though I do want to point out how Primosch uses the power of the synthesizer at the end of the development. As the piano is pushed to its limit, the Kurzweil is employed to continue the tonal growth contributing to a feeling of unlimited power.

With the last movement, *Daddy-O's New Groove*, Primosch challenged me not only technically and musically, but also culturally, as I have never considered myself a person who, in fact, grooves. But working on the assumption that an old dog can learn new tricks, I have done my best to catch the spirit and, in any case, have had a lot of fun in the process. By the way, if at times you think you are hearing sounds that are not being played by me, you are right. There are a few episodes in this movement that uses the Kurzweil's "Song" mode. I simply push a button and the instrument does the work for me. Now *that* I consider groovy.

## ***Piano Sonata No. 2***

Note by Richard Wernick

There are many aspects of music that are completely and easily quantifiable. It is possible to discuss all sorts of things such as melodic types, aspects of rhythm and

pulse, speed, texture, harmony, etc. But it is almost impossible to talk about "music". At the moment verbalization begins, music disappears, and verbalization, by its very nature, distorts the meaning of the music. Music is, and yet it is infinitely more than it is; the mystery of musical thought and meaning cannot be expressed in words.

This is not to say that the more general attributes of a piece cannot be discussed to a certain degree. "Road maps" can be drawn to assist the listener; analyses can help elucidate compositional procedures, and students can be taught how to imitate the styles of their illustrious forebears. But compositional procedures are not the same as the creative process, so I should content myself with relying on the good will and musical concentration of those who may be hearing, for the first time, a long and complex sonata.

The listener, however, deserves more consideration than that. I have, therefore, provided fairly detailed movement indications. Part I is in three sections, played without pause, and sufficiently differentiated, one from the other, to be perfectly clear. This is followed by the *Fantasy Variations* that comprise Part II. With no break in the music this is followed by Part III, which is for all practical purposes, a reprise, in reverse order, of Part I. A brief reminiscence of the Variation theme brings the sonata to a conclusion.

What is most important to me in discussing this piece, is the fact that it would not exist, in its present form, without Lambert Orkis. I do not think enough is understood and appreciated by the listening public about the symbiotic relationship between composer and performer. After so many years of composing I am infinitely more comfortable when composing for an individual or group with whom I have had a long-standing musical relationship, and I suspect that the feeling is shared in great part by performers.

Mr. Orkis and I have been colleagues and friends for many, many years.

## *Sonata-Fantasia* for piano and synthesizer, one player

Note by James Primosch

He understands my music and I understand his playing in ways that can arise only from such long term and intense musical relationships. Mr. Orkis possesses a rather special talent for dealing with long, arching forms, so it is no coincidence that my two longest pieces were commissioned by and written for him. In addition he has a particular gift for getting "inside" a piece, of extracting from polyphonic inner voices those which are substantive and those which are decorative. Over the course of 30 minutes or more this can be a critical component in keeping a piece "alive" and fulfilling the composer's intentions. His understanding of "drama", the notion, for example, that rests are not moments of silence, but moments of tension, contributed greatly to my employing those very means. Again, it is no coincidence that this sonata is replete with contrapuntal devices and dynamic contrasts.

But what I find most remarkable is that Mr. Orkis tends to learn a piece in much the same way that I compose it. In this particular case the listener will hear Part III as being Part I in reverse order, but the piece was not composed that way. Part III was written first, and then "put backwards" to make up Part I; Part II was composed from the middle variations outward in both directions, much as if the keystone were to be the first part of an arch that is put into place (which I believe is a physical impossibility, but music is different). Then the original Part III was altered somewhat by interweaving brief references to Part II.

When Mr. Orkis and I began to discuss the piece, many weeks after he first received it nearly two years ago, I discovered that he was studying the piece in much the same way that I wrote it: Part III first, with references to Part I, and then adding, incrementally, elements of Part II, connecting measure to measure, phrase to phrase and variation to variation until the musical jig saw puzzle had become complete. One might suppose that this method would lead to a result that is sectionalized and fragmented, but the opposite is true. The long arch of the piece, at least in its performance, is so secure that Mr. Orkis can allow himself a great deal of freedom in regard to the repetition of materials, making each return slightly different from the one before. A composer's dream come true!

In my *Sonata-Fantasia*, the Kurzweil synthesizer serves to amplify and expand the timbral possibilities of the piano, to provide an augmented range of keyboard colors, and to give voice to the ghosts of the piano's past, such as the harpsichord and fortepiano. I call the piece a *Sonata-Fantasia* not only because of the fantastical sound world created by the blending of electronic and acoustic sound, but because of the improvisatory feeling of the work throughout. Various musical recurrences across the movements bind the piece together and reinforce the sense that the work is conjured up rather than calculated.

The work opens with a set of 14 variations on an original theme, framed by a prelude and postlude, with an interlude occurring at the midpoint of the set. Wide-ranging in expressive character, these variations sometimes take as models keyboard textures created by past masters, including Bach, Schubert, and Chopin. The slow movement is meditative and grieving, and includes musical material from my choral setting of the *Salve Regina*, a Marian antiphon that speaks of how we "poor banished children of Eve" cry out from this "vale of tears". This choral setting was the first piece I completed after the death of my father. The finale reaffirms the power of positive swinging, although it is shadowed by darker material from earlier in the piece. The Daddy-O of the title is myself, so named by my twin children, born in 1999. It is a mystery as to why they picked for me a nickname out of popular usage for decades; they must detect in me some secret desire to be a 50's hipster.

I warmly dedicate the piece to Lambert Orkis. Only a musician of his formidable virtuosity, imagination, and wide-ranging experience would seek out an adventure like this project, which combines demanding keyboard writing with the special challenges of manipulating two keyboard instruments simultaneously.

**Richard Wernick**, born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1934, studied under teachers including Irving Fine, Harold Shapero, Arthur Berger, Ernst Toch, Leon Kirchner, Boris Blacher, and Aaron Copland. He has taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo, the University of Chicago, and 1996 saw his retirement from the University of Pennsylvania, where he had been the Magnin Professor of Humanities. He has won numerous awards for his compositions including the 1977 Pulitzer Prize, is the only two-time first prize Friedheim Award recipient, and has been honored by awards from the Ford Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Mr. Wernick has composed numerous solo, chamber, and orchestral works, vocal, choral and band compositions, as well as a large body of music for theater, films, ballet and television. He has been commissioned by some of the world's leading performers and ensembles, among them are the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra, the Juilliard String Quartet, and the Emerson String Quartet. For Lambert Orkis, he has previously written two main works: *Sonata for Piano* (1982) and *Concerto for Piano* (1989-90), both of which were recorded by Mr. Orkis for Bridge Records. Other recent works include two short solo guitar pieces for David Starobin, *Da'ase* and *Trochaic Trot*, both of which are performed regularly by Mr. Starobin and which he has recorded. In addition, at Mr. Starobin's request, Mr. Wernick composed a guitar concerto which he entitled *The Name of the Game*. This work was commissioned by Network for New Music and was premiered by them in Philadelphia last October. Subsequently, Mr. Wernick has completed his *Cello Sonata No. 2* for Scott Kluksdahl, and is currently working on a piece for String Quartet and Horn commissioned by the Library of Congress for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Juilliard Quartet's residency there. In the summer of 2001, Richard Wernick was composer-in-residence with the Marlboro Music Festival. From 1983 to 1989, he served as the Philadelphia Orchestra's Consultant for Contemporary Music, and from 1989 to 1993 served as Special Consultant to the Music Director.

When honoring him with its Goddard Lieberson Fellowship, the American Academy of Arts and Letters noted that "A rare economy of means and a strain of religious mysticism distinguish the music of **James Primosch**. Through articulate, transparent textures, he creates a wide range of musical emotion." Andrew Porter stated in *The New Yorker* that Primosch "scores with a sure, light hand" and critics for the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Dallas Morning News* have characterized his music as "impressive", "striking", "grandly romantic", "stunning" and "very approachable."

Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1956, James Primosch studied at Cleveland State University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University. He counts Mario Davidovsky, George Crumb and Richard Wernick among his principal teachers.

Primosch's instrumental, vocal, and electronic works have been performed throughout the United States and in Europe by such ensembles as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Collage, the Twentieth Century Consort, and Speculum Musicae. His *Icons* was played at the ISCM/League of Composers World Music Days in Hong Kong, and Dawn Upshaw included a song by Mr. Primosch in her Carnegie Hall recital debut. During the 2001-2002 season he enjoyed premieres by the Chicago Symphony, Speculum Musicae, and pianist Lambert Orkis.

Among the honors he has received are a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Guggenheim Fellowship, two prizes from the American Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters, a Regional Artists Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, the Stoeger Prize of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, a 2002 Fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and a fellowship to the Tanglewood Music

Center where he studied with John Harbison. Primosch has received commissions from the Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundations, the Chicago Symphony, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, the Folger Consort, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Speculum Musicae, pianist Lambert Orkis, the Barlow Endowment, Town Hall, the New York Youth Symphony, the Network for New Music, and the New York Camerata. In 1994 he served as composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Music Festival. Recordings of his music have appeared on the Albany, Bard, Centaur, CRI, and New World labels.

James Primosch is also active as a pianist, particularly in the realm of contemporary music. He was a prizewinner at the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Rotterdam, and appears on recordings for New World, CRI, the Smithsonian Collection, and Crystal Records. He has worked as a jazz pianist and a liturgical musician.

Since 1988 he has served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, where he directs the Presser Electronic Music Studio.

**Lambert Orkis** has received international recognition as chamber musician, interpreter of contemporary music, and performer on period instruments. He has appeared world-wide in recital with violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter since 1988 and with cellist Mstislav Rostropovich since 1983, and continues to appear with The Castle Trio, a period instrument ensemble in residence at Washington, DC's Smithsonian Institution.

A multi-Grammy Award nominee, his wide discography comprises works of the Classical, Romantic, and Modern eras. He has released discs on Bridge Records of works written for him by George Crumb and Richard Wernick including Wernick's *Piano Concerto* which he premiered in The Kennedy Center, Washington, DC, and in Carnegie Hall, New York with The National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by, Mstislav Rostropovich. That work was subsequently honored with a Friedheim Award, and the European premiere took place in The Hague, Netherlands, with Het Residentie Orkest, Lambert Orkis at the piano, and the composer conducting. In April 2002, Lambert Orkis premiered in Philadelphia the works found on this recording.

With Anne-Sophie Mutter, he has frequently recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, winning a Grammy Award for "Best Chamber Music Performance" for the complete cycle of Beethoven *Violin and Piano Sonatas*. He has also recorded works of Brahms, Schumann, and Chopin/Franck with Dutch cellist Anner Bylsma.

Solo recordings as fortepianist of Schubert discs for Virgin Classics, and for the Smithsonian Collection of Recordings a landmark CD of music by Louis Moreau Gottschalk on an original Chickering piano, have been released. As founding member and fortepianist of the Smithsonian Institution's Castle Trio, he has given many performances including several cycles of Beethoven's twenty-eight major works for fortepiano and strings, and produced highly regarded

recordings of Beethoven and Schubert trios.

Mr. Orkis has recently performed with other distinguished artists including cellists Lynn Harrell, and Han-Na Chang, violinist Julian Rachlin, and principal players of the Philadelphia and National Symphony Orchestras. His performances encompass appearances as soloist and chamber music artist in the United States, Europe, and Asia, most recently with Mr. Rachlin in a return engagement to Vietnam and a benefit concert in Cambodia. Having been chosen as Honored Artist for the New Aspect International Arts Festival which was held in Taipei, Taiwan, he performed as soloist and chamber musician and conducted workshops and master classes. An invitation has been extended to him to participate as performer and juror for the Trondheim (Norway) International Chamber Music Festival and Competition in September 2003.

Lambert Orkis holds the position of Principal Keyboard of Washington's National Symphony Orchestra. He is Professor of Piano at Temple University's Esther Boyer College of Music, where he was honored with the university's Faculty Award for Creative Achievement and the Alumni Association's Certificate of Honor.

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