

# William Bland

(b. 1947)

## Sonata #4, in E-flat Major - (28:54)

### 4 "Goodbye" Concert Rags

- 1) "Goodbye-vrations" Rag - Slowly (6:42)
- 2) "Serve Your Beef with Tears" Rag - Allegro (5:55)
- 3) "Good-Bye my Fancy" Rag - Slowly, Moderato, Allegro molto, Slowly (8:31)
- 4) "Kiss the Millennium Goodbye" Rag - Allegro (7:41)

## 5 Air de Ballet - Andante moderato (3:33)

## 6 Nouveau Rag - Slowly (4:23)

## 7 Pastorale - Andantino giocoso (5:41)

"Barbara and I walking in the countryside  
before sunset; picking wildflowers."

## Sonata #14, in B-flat Major (33:03)

- 8 1) Allegro maestoso, Lento cantabile, Allegro maestoso (9:22)
- 9 2) Andante cantabile (suggested by a Theme by Massenet) (5:37)
- 10 3) Theme and Eleven Variations (on a theme by Handel) (17:59)
  - 11 Theme - Allegro moderato (altissimus e basso) (1:18)
  - 12 1st Var. - Allegro maggiore (0:52)
  - 13 2nd Var. - Allegretto minore (1:06)
  - 14 3rd Var. - Lento cantabile (1:50)
  - 15 4th Var. - Allegretto piacevole (1:52)
  - 16 5th Var. - Allegro (1:06)
  - 17 6th Var. - Lento (1:02)
  - 18 7th Var. - Waltz - minore (1:40)
  - 19 8th Var. - Allegro molto (1:00)
  - 20 9th Var. - Andante grazioso / attacca (0:52)
  - 21 10th Var. - Sarabande - maggiore (2:19)
  - 11th Var. - Finale - Allegro moderato/Maestoso (2:52)

## Notes by David Starobin

For William Bland (b. 1947), the piano sonata is an expansive form that houses far flung source materials and musical influences both popular and classical. His cycle of 24 piano sonatas (one in each of the major and minor keys) was begun in 1998 and currently stands at 16 completed works. Each of the sonatas is a multi-movement structure with the shortest being some 20 minutes in duration. Bland's decision to base his cycle around the major and minor tonalities marked a confirmation of the composer's steady movement away from the free-tonal language and open-forms that had dominated his music during the 60s and 70s. He writes that "After the first, *Sonata in G major*, was written, I started planning the entire series and initially determined the order of the sonatas and their respective keys. I felt that the exploration of each key with a large-scale sonata would offer extensive possibilities as to form and content."

Bland's varied musical background has included work as a church organist, in musical theater, and as a teacher of composition at a number of universities and conservatories. His sonata cycle reflects the scope of his musical activities, encompassing both the predictable and the surprising, often juxtaposed for maximum effect. At times intensely original, at other times innocently sweet and derivative of a variety of popular genres of the past, his sonatas are both nostalgic and adventurous in their argument. In summing up his cycle-in-progress, Bland writes: "Most of the sonatas reflect memo-

ries of individuals, or of specific literature, paintings, or music. The few sonatas which have titles are organized around specific subjects. Most communicate a concept or attempt a portrait, while a few offer music solely as an aural rhapsody."

*Sonata #4, in E-flat Major – 4 "Goodbye" Concert Rags* was composed in 1999. Each of its four movements is based on a quotation that suggests a farewell. Its first movement, "*Goodbye-vrations*", was written for a valued member of the church choir Bland directed in Martinsburg, West Virginia. The movement makes musical references to the choir member – Margaret Gregory – including the alto melody of the trio, and the quotation of an old Baptist hymn at the end; "He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought". The musical motif at the beginning – a half-step followed by a 6th, is developed in all the movements of the sonata. The second movement, "Serve your beef with tears" Rag is based on a line from an obscure 1930's film, "Melody for Two". In the scene, an enthusiastic but poor Broadway composer and his irrepressible girlfriend, are in his garret. The rent is due, but there's no money. It's decided that the girlfriend will plead with the landlord to delay the payment. As she leaves on her task, the composer turns from the piano, and says to her: "Serve your beef with tears." Bland transforms this surreal slang image into a Latin caprice. In some respects more a rhapsody than a rag, the movement is nonetheless highly syncopated in the concert ragtime style, intensifying throughout. The third movement, "Goodbye, My Fancy" Rag, based on a verse by Walt Whitman, is an homage to Bland's close friend, the composer Ronald Roxbury, who died at age 39 in 1986. Roxbury's last composition was a set-

ting for baritone, flute and guitar of this final poem from the last version of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass". If the first and second movements of Bland's sonata are equivalent to the traditional sonata allegro followed by a dance movement, this 3rd movement is the sonata's adagio (incorporating a faster interior section). Beginning in the key of B Major there follow five sections, each differing in style, and each in a consecutively lowered key of the circle of fifths. In one of the sections, (A Major), there is a small "rag within a rag", which bears the title "Heavenly" Rag. A final restatement of the opening concludes the movement, also in B Major, thus signing the movement "BB" (the composer's initials). Bland writes that "the sonata's last movement was suggested to me in a conversation with a friend, the poet Laurence Glass. I mentioned how I wanted to encapsulate the feelings of change at the millennium- to review the past century with all its admixtures of horror and hope, and to celebrate the coming of the new. Larry simply asked; 'Why don't you call it "Kiss the Millennium Goodbye"', and voila, there it was." The sonata was finished at the stroke of midnight, 1999/2000.

The three short pieces collected here are transcriptions of works that Bland has composed for other media- the *Air de Ballet* and *Nouveau Rag* originally appearing in his *Dance Book* (1995) (12 Dances for guitar), and the *Pastorale* a reworking of the second movement of his *Piano Concerto* (1993). *Air de Ballet* was composed for Bland's step-daughter Ashley, then a committed dance

student. The piece has a brief introduction, allowing the dancer to take center stage, and unfolds in two parts. Bland's *Air* is a simple unadorned song whose title is borrowed from turn-of-the-century piano works such as the *Air de Ballet* of Cecile Chaminade (1857-1944). *Nouveau Rag* takes as its model the familiar rag form of Scott Joplin. Its title is capriciously named for the French 6th which occurs in the first section. Bland's *Pastorale*, composed after a memorable walk in the south of French with his then-wife, bears the descriptive sub-title 'Barbara and I walking in the countryside before sunset; picking wildflowers'. The work is an unabashed liebeslied, building in intensity until its quiet resolution. This piece also exists in a transcription Bland made for flute and piano.

*Sonata #14, in B-flat Major* was completed in 2003, and revised in 2005. This sonata is more traditionally classical in design, with its first movement bearing no extra-musical references, and its second and third movements stemming from specific musical inspirations. In the words of the composer, "It is more like a classical sonata, and less like an imaginative journey." The language, however, is firmly rooted in the key of B-flat, though it veers between expansive romanticism and more acerbic atonality. The first movement introduces a strident first theme, followed by a contrasting, slower, second subject. These are developed, interrupted by a contrasting and static section of trills, which after further musical elaboration of the initial themes lead to a coda. The second movement, marked "Andante cantabile," is subtitled "suggested by a theme by Massenet," and is based on the Massenet's famous "Meditation", from "Thaïs". Massenet's theme is not quoted, but is paid admiring homage in perhaps the most oblique music

on this disc. The ending of this rhapsodic movement leads "attaca" into the third movement, a fascinatingly eclectic and wryly humorous set of variations on a theme by Handel. The theme and its 11 variations use the same B-flat theme varied by Brahms in his Variations and Fugue on a theme by Handel, Op. 24. The longest movement of the sonata, it is also the most exploratory in terms of extreme piano textures and stylistic discontinuity.

**W**illiam Bland (b. 1947, West Virginia), studied at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Md., graduating in 1973 with a DMA in musical composition. His composition teachers were Benjamin Lees, Ernst Krenek, Earle Brown and Richard Rodney Bennett. After serving as an assistant to Peabody's Director, Richard Franko Goldman, Bland moved to New York City, where he performed and taught, thereafter returning to West Virginia, where for many years he worked as a community musician, before retiring to concentrate completely on composition. William Bland has produced a sizable catalog of solo, chamber and orchestral music, and his music has been performed, published and broadcast widely in the USA and Europe. Recordings of music by William Bland have been issued on Bridge, Dorian and Deutsche Grammophon. His *Warm, Country Night* is on Bridge 9013.

## William Bland: Piano Sonatas, 1998-2006

- Sonata #1, in G Major
- Sonata #2, in f minor
- Sonata #3, in A-flat Major
- Sonata #4, in E-flat Major – 4 'Goodbye' Concert Rags
- Sonata #5, in B Major
- Sonata #6, in C minor – 'Bestiary, con amore'
- Sonata #7, in A Major
- Sonata #8, in d minor
- Sonata #9, in F Major – 'Spring'
- Sonata #10, in e minor
- Sonata #11, in b minor
- Sonata #12, in D-flat Major
- Sonata #13, in c-sharp minor
- Sonata #14, in B-flat Major
- Sonata #15, in e-flat minor
- Sonata #16, in b-flat minor
- Sonata #17, in a minor – in progress...

### Projected Sonatas:

- Sonata #18, in g minor
- Sonata #19, in E Major
- Sonata #20, in f-sharp minor
- Sonata #21, in g-sharp minor
- Sonata #22, in G-flat Major
- Sonata #23, in D Major
- Sonata #24, in C major

Producer: David Starobin  
Engineer: David Merrill  
Editor: Charlie Post  
Annotator: David Starobin

Designer: Douglas H. Holly  
Cover painting: Antonio J. Mendez  
"Portrait of William Bland", 1999  
Executive Producer: Becky Starobin  
Mastering Engineer: Adam Abeshouse

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*Air de Ballet, Nouveau Rag, and Pastorale* are published by Editions ChelleRo (BMI),  
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For Bridge Records: Ashley Arrington, Douglas H. Holly,  
Brad Napoliello, Charlie Post, and Robert Starobin.

Bridge Records, Inc.  
200 Clinton Avenue  
New Rochelle, NY 10801

[www.BridgeRecords.com](http://www.BridgeRecords.com)

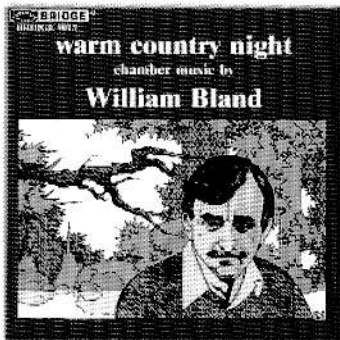
## sonnet

I was searching through my local chord quarry  
the other day,  
and came across some fragments  
that still seemed intact enough to use.  
Gathering these Up (carefully balanced -  
for some were heavy,  
others light),  
I carried my load happily -  
inner-tained by the transforming patterns,  
self-viewed.  
Along my path,  
chaoi grew exactly as botanical weeds do,  
but that didn't affect me -  
nor any of my much anticipated harmonic pleasures -  
at All.

-William Bland

(poem #564 of "Poems accompanying Sonatas" 2001-2006)

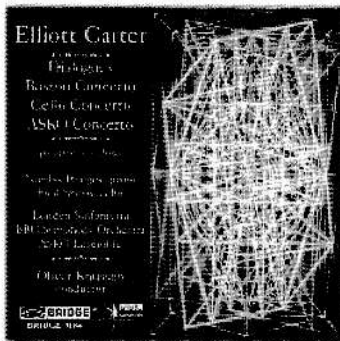
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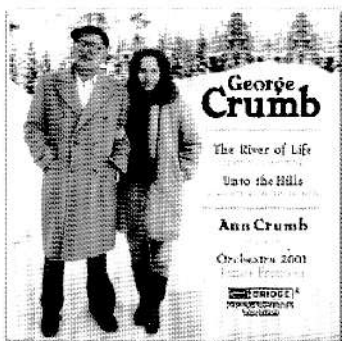
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