

## ORION WEISS, piano

- 1) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 6 (*Poco allegretto*) (4:16)  
2) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 5 (*Vivace*) (3:19)

Antonín Dvořák  
(1841-1904)

### Visions Fugitives, Op. 22 (23:58)

- 3) I. Lentamente (1:25)  
4) II. Andante (1:26)  
5) III. Allegretto (0:55)  
6) IV. Animato (1:00)  
7) V. Molto giocoso (0:24)  
8) VI. Con eleganza (0:36)  
9) VII. Pittoresco (Arpa) (1:31)  
10) VIII. Commodo (1:45)  
11) IX. Allegretto tranquillo (1:11)  
12) X. Ridicolosamente (0:58)  
13) XI. Con vivacità (1:27)  
14) XII. Assai moderato (1:26)  
15) XIII. Allegretto (0:39)  
16) XIV. Feroce (1:02)  
17) XV. Allegretto (0:55)  
18) XVI. Dolente (1:52)  
19) XVII. Poetico (1:05)  
20) XVIII. Con una dolce lentezza (1:34)  
21) XIX. Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato (0:41)  
22) XX. Lento irrealmente (2:07)

Sergei Prokofiev  
(1891-1953)

- 23) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 2 (*Poco andante*) (2:39) Antonín Dvořák  
24) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 3 (*Poco andante e molto cantabile*) (4:23)  
25) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 4 (*Poco andante*) (2:53)

### 14 Bagatelles, Op. 6 (26:16)

- 26) I. Molto sostenuto (1:21) Béla Bartók (1881-1945)  
27) II. Allegro giocoso (0:52)  
28) III. Andante (1:13)  
29) IV. Grave (1:20)  
30) V. Vivo (1:10)  
31) VI. Lento (1:56)  
32) VII. Allegretto molto capriccioso (2:19)  
33) VIII. Andante sostenuto (1:56)  
34) IX. Allegretto grazioso (1:50)  
35) X. Allegro (2:21)  
36) XI. Allegretto molto rubato (1:51)  
37) XII. Rubato (3:36)  
38) XIII. 'She is dead': Lento funebre (2:28)  
39) XIV. Waltz 'My dancing sweetheart': Presto (1:56)

- 40) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 1 (*Vivace*) (2:37) Antonín Dvořák  
41) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 8 (*Poco andante*) (3:19)  
42) Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 7 (*Poco lento e grazioso*) (3:36)

## ORION WEISS

### *Dvořák – Bartók – Prokofiev*

The music heard on this CD was written within a time span of little more than twenty years, but what twenty years! During this short period, the "world of yesterday" (the golden age described with such nostalgia by Stefan Zweig) fell into a deep crisis and finally vanished forever in the conflagration of World War I. Antonín Dvořák was near the end of his career when all of this was beginning to happen, while Bartók and Prokofiev were just starting out. In the year 1900, Dvořák was 59, Bartók 19, and Prokofiev just 9 years old. The first two were subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, belonging to minority nations fighting for their cultural (and, eventually, political) independence. For his part, Prokofiev—who, like Bartók, became a brilliant pianist—was born in the Russian Empire, which at the time

was set on a collision course with Austria-Hungary that would result in the demise of both empires.

It is interesting to see how these three composers, so different in age, temperament and musical orientation, were each drawn to the genre of the piano miniature. The brevity of the pieces made it possible for them to try out new approaches to harmony, pianistic texture, as well as musical style and character in general. In Dvořák's case, the Humoresques may have been little more than a brief diversion, a kind of respite between weightier works like the Cello Concerto and the last string quartets. But for the two younger composers, these early piano pieces were important milestones on the journey towards the emergence of their unmistakable personal voices.

## DVOŘÁK

### *Eight Humoresques, Op. 101 (1894)*

The word "humor" is one whose meaning has changed repeatedly over the centuries. Nowadays, it normally stands for language or behavior that inspires laughter. Originally, however, the four "humors" of the human body were the four fluids (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood) whose balance was believed to be responsible for our physical and mental health. Later on, "humor" became a synonym of "mood," as in "being in good (or bad) humor." Finally, setting a laudable example of positive thinking, "good humor" was shortened simply to "humor," and since there is nothing like a joke to put you in a good mood, the word became more specifically associated with hilarity.

Even after completing his eight piano pieces later published as Op.

101, Dvořák wasn't sure what to call them, as he admitted in a letter to his publisher Fritz Simrock. When he finally settled on the name *Humoresques*, he probably had the earlier, broader meaning of the word in mind, and may well have remembered Schumann's great *Humoreske*, Op. 20 (1839). Less capricious than his German predecessor, Dvořák follows a fairly stable format in his humoresques. All eight of them are in the same meter (2/4), and while the tempo markings vary, the metronome indications stay identical: 72 beats to the minute, providing the entire cycle with a constant pulse. Each piece is in ABA or rondo form, with main themes returning after contrasting episodes according to well-established, essentially unchanging patterns. Yet behind this apparent uniformity, there is an astonishing variety of moods

("humors"), from martial to wistful and, indeed, humorous, as well as many shades and nuances in between. The composer also explores a wide range of accompaniment textures and pianistic timbres, as in the third Humoresque which exploits the contrast between passages played with and without the sustaining pedal.

From 1892 to 1895, Dvořák lived in the United States, as the Director of the new National Conservatory of Music in New York City. It was there that he first sketched the themes of the Humoresques; the works were written in Bohemia during the summer of 1894, while the composer was at home, on vacation from New York. The pieces are filled with echoes of tunes heard in America: for instance, a snatch of Stephen Foster's "Oh Susanna" appears in the fifth Humoresque, and the ever-popular seventh piece seems to have a secret kinship with "Old Folks at Home." There are some syncopated figures in the third Humoresque and some harmonic

progressions, especially in the fourth piece, that definitely sound American, without being directly traceable to a known source. In his book *New Worlds of Dvořák*, Michael Beckerman shows that the composer owned an edition of minstrel songs in which he had marked one particular song in blue pencil; and there are definite connections between this song and Dvořák's music. The fourth Humoresque appears in Dvořák's sketchbook with the notation "Hiawatha's child theme," indicating that it had originally been intended for a never-to-be-completed opera based on Longfellow's epic poem.

The majority of the Humoresques consist of fairly straightforward, symmetrical four- and eight-bar phrases. Yet the last movement ends abruptly with a two-bar phrase oddly left hanging in midair, without a second pair of measures to complement it. Could one ever imagine a better punchline for a "humoresque"?

## BARTÓK

### *Fourteen Bagatelles, Op. 6 (1908)*

"Eendlich etwas wirklich Neues!" ("At last, something really new!")—exclaimed Ferruccio Busoni when he first saw the score of the 27-year-old Bartók's piano bagatelles. Although some of these pieces are quite short, others are rather more extended than the designation "Bagatelle" might lead one to believe. A few may be called "experimental," in the sense that the Hungarian composer was trying out techniques and procedures that he would develop further in his later works; for example, No. 4 is one of the first instances of a Hungarian folk song harmonized in a modern style. Some of the other bagatelles are full-fledged character pieces, like No. 7 and No. 14.

All in all, the Fourteen Bagatelles represent a breakthrough in Bartók's output. These piano pieces are the first works where the composer completely transcended 19th-century Romantic influences. They also established a model for his later piano cycles, including the *Mikrokosmos*, where each piece sets a

compositional "agenda" that it then proceeds to carry out. These "agendas" are of different types, having to do with tonality, the handling of folk melodies, pianistic textures such as ostinatos, unisons, etc.; but there is always one particular musical concept or figure that is central to each piece.

#### *No. 1*

This bagatelle has received a lot of attention on account of its unconventional notation: the right hand has four sharps, the left hand four flats. Bartók, however, insisted that the tonal center of the piece is C, with a Phrygian coloring (that is, a prominent D-flat and E-flat, also written as C-sharp and D-sharp).

#### *No. 2*

A rhythmically vibrant and chromatically expanding theme is heard against a steady eighth-note ostinato.

*No. 3*

A different kind of ostinato, involving a fast-moving figure in the right hand and set against an expressive quasi-folksong.

*No. 4*

Simple but utterly novel harmonization of a folksong collected by Bartók in Western Hungary.

*No. 5*

A Slovak folksong collected by Bartók, arranged in a somewhat more elaborate manner with rhythmic ostinatos, alternating hands, introduction and postlude.

*No. 6*

A pseudo-folksong using a folklike phrase structure but a distinctly un-folklike harmonic idiom.

*No. 7*

A study in abrupt tempo changes (there are about 20 different metronome markings in the piece). It is a scherzo movement that could have been added to Bartók's *Three Burlesques*.

*No. 8*

A descending chromatic melody, harmonized with harsh minor-second clashes that (aside from a short, agitated right-hand solo) becomes gradually slower and more melancholy as the piece wears on.

*No. 9*

The two hands play in parallel octaves throughout, but the numerous grace notes and short rhythmic values create an illusion of harmony.

*No. 10*

The most complex piece in the set. Its relentless rhythmic drive anticipates *Allegro barbaro* (1911), but the piece is richer in contrasts than most of the other bagatelles: the eighth-note ostinato alternates with a characteristic syncopated figure and there is also a brief *espressivo* episode.

*No. 11*

Repeats the principal rhythmic patterns of No. 7 and treats tempo with the same freedom as the earlier piece. The scherzando movement has a more serious middle section, with a slow Hungarian melody in dotted rhythm.

*No. 12*

Expressive note repetitions and a delicate combination of the chromatic and whole-tone scales create an elegiac mood in the longest slow movement of the set.

*No. 13*

Bartók wrote the French words "Elle est morte..." ("She is dead...") in parentheses over the piece. The reference is to the violinist Stefi Geyer who was very much alive, but she had broken up with Bartók, who had been passionately in love with her, on February 13, 1908. Over an ostinato of alternating E-flat minor and A-minor chords, a mournful melody unfolds, rises to a brief climax (the motif we hear, made up of a major triad and a major seventh, is known as Bartók's "Stefi Geyer" love theme), and then collapses.

*No. 14*

Bartók gave this bagatelle the title "Valse (Ma mie qui danse)" ("Waltz: My dancing sweetheart"). It is based on the Stefi Geyer motif turned into a caricature by the distorted waltz accompaniment. Bartók had used the same theme in the first movement of his early violin concerto, written for Geyer, treating it in a lyrical manner. Bartók only ever published the first movement of the concerto, paired with the orchestrated version of Bagatelle No. 14, under the title *Two Portraits*: "The Ideal" and "The Grotesque"—two aspects of the same theme, the same woman, the same feeling.



## PROKOFIEV

### *Visions fugitives, Op. 22 (1915-17)*

The original Russian title of these twenty intriguing miniatures is *Mimolyotnosti*, which literally translates as "things flying by." Prokofiev took the word from Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont (1867-1942), who had written in his poems "I Do Not Know Wisdom":

*In every fugitive vision  
I see whole worlds;  
They change endlessly  
Flashing in playful rainbow colors.*

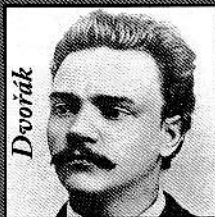
Striking harmonic experiments and unusual rhythmic combinations abound in these cryptic musical statements. No. 1, according to the composer, has to be played "with an expressive simplicity," with a characteristic low-register section marked "misterioso." This slow introduction is followed by several fast movements: No. 2 contains a great deal

of whimsical passagework, No. 3 some agitated syncopations and No. 4 some breathless runs. No. 5 is the prototype of many a playful march melody in Prokofiev's later works, in which entirely unrelated keys are abruptly juxtaposed. After No. 6, an animated movement in tarantella rhythm, No. 7 brings a respite with its leisurely arpeggios (broken chords). Subtitled "Harp," the movement bears the unusual tempo marking "Pittoresco."

In No. 8, a wistful melody plays hide-and-seek, moving back and forth from the top to the inner voice, surrounded by figurations. No. 9 is agile, No. 10 sarcastic and No. 11 delightfully perky, establishing moods that will be revisited in later works by Prokofiev. No. 12 is a slow waltz, No. 13 an unassuming and deceptively simple piece with quite a few harmonic

surprises; its quiet demeanor does little to prepare us for the volcanic eruption of No. 14. No. 15, marked "inquieta," is a chromatic whirlwind ending with some pounding ostinatos. Three gentle pieces follow, in turn sorrowful (No. 16), extremely soft and delicate (No. 17) and languid (No. 18), inducing a sweet reverie that will be mercilessly shattered in No. 19. This is the only piece in the set for which Prokofiev disclosed an extra-musical source of inspiration. In his autobiography, he claimed that this agitated and turbulent movement was a response to the February revolution in 1917, which ended the reign of the Czars. The cycle ends with an enigmatic slow movement: a wide-spaced melody with odd underlying harmonies, ending without a resolution, with the musical equivalent of three suspension dots.

Dvořák



Bartók



Prokofiev



*"I was once a little bit of a science fiction nerd, though I didn't fulfill the early promise I showed in that regard. Now I'm slightly more successful as a scary movie buff or maybe an 'aspiring alt-culture aficionado' (like any classical musician). I also passed through really passionate phases of 'fantasy geek' and 'playing video-games.' But for a few of my most formative years, I read only Asimov, Bradbury and Douglas Adams. Star Trek was the whole excitement of my world, and I had enough glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling that I could lie in bed and read in the dark. And so, light-years later, all grown-up and impeccably well-read, I counted this CD's tracks and immediately knew something was up.*

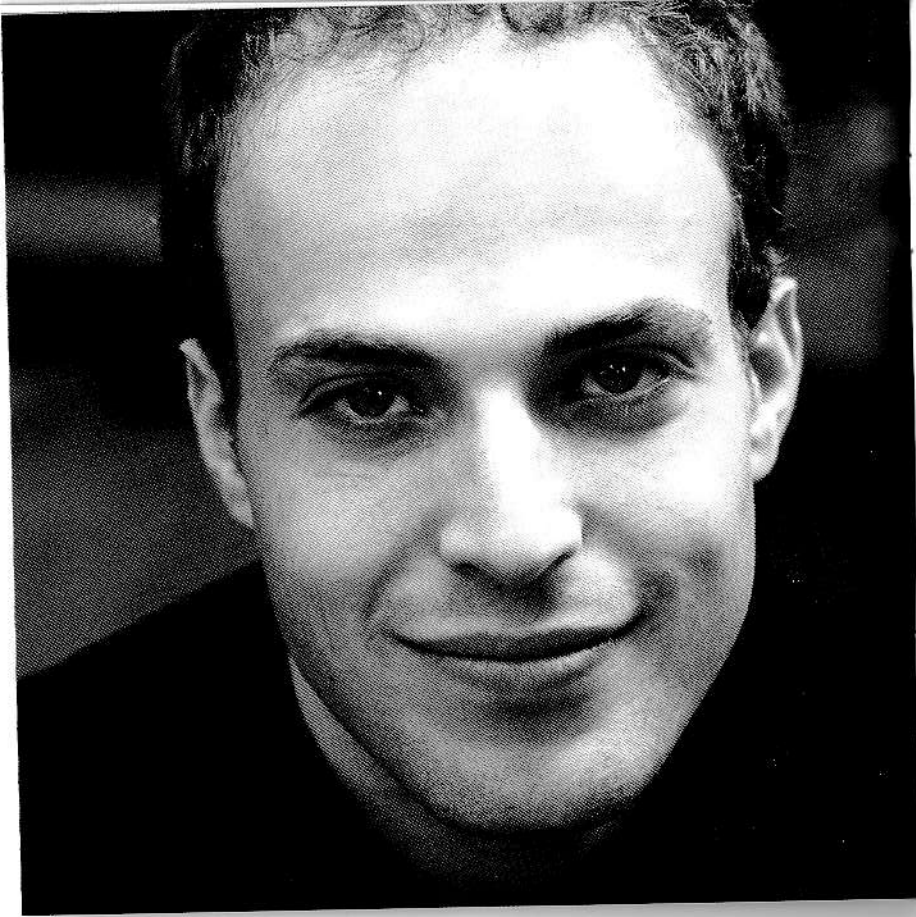
*To be clear, I chose these three multi-movement pieces for purely musical reasons: for their additive properties programmatically, not arithmetically. It was a shocking coincidence that the total number of movements was 42! I don't have to tell you why this random number triggered my red alert: "42" is the answer to the "Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything", according to (sci-fi gospel) Douglas Adams' **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**. It was derived after seven and a half million years of intense computation by the universe's greatest supercomputer, "Deep Thought"; its mystery and meaning have puzzled humanoids (nerds) for Mercurian centuries (about 30 years since the book was published).*

*OK, maybe you already knew that, but perhaps you didn't know this next bit. On March 4th, 1769, the French astronomer Charles Messier added a 42nd object to his catalog of astronomical fixed objects, "the beautiful nebula in the sword of Orion." M42 (M for Messier) is the Orion Nebula, and Orion, this computer-age son of space-age parents, is me. I'll admit, the name took some growing into, but I got there.*

*Life and the Universe communicate their concerns through obvious coincidences: the people we run into in elevators, the objects that fall on our heads, the sums of things we decide to add together. I began to wonder: Is something trying to tell me something? Is this CD a sign, have these three pieces formed some kind of piano-music syzygy? Is it possible that 42 isn't just the answer to the universe, but also the answer to me, specifically?*

*So... that's the whole story. My contribution to a long and august tradition of musical numerology (from Bach's obsession with the golden mean, Mozart and his masonic codes, all the way through to serialism and computer programs) is a funny little coincidence. Maybe that's all it is. A comic cosmic fluke, with no deeper earth-shattering personal and universal meaning, none at all. Still. One can wonder . . ."*

*— Orion Weiss*



Pianist Orion Weiss is one of the most sought-after soloists and collaborators in his generation of young American musicians. His deeply felt and exceptionally crafted performances go far beyond his technical mastery and have won him acclaim from audiences, critics and colleagues in a wide range of repertoire and formats.

Mr. Weiss has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood, and in duo summer concerts with the New York Philharmonic at both Lincoln Center and the Bravo! Vail Valley Festival. He has toured with the Orchester der Klangverwaltung Munich and with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Itzhak Perlman.

As a recitalist and chamber musician, Mr. Weiss has appeared across the US at venues and festivals including Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, the Ravinia Festival, Sheldon Concert Hall, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society Summerfest, Chamber Music Northwest, the Bard Music Festival, the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, and Spivey Hall.

Mr. Weiss's impressive list of awards include the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year, the Gilmore Young Artist Award, the Juilliard William Petschek Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Gina Bachauer Scholarship at the Juilliard School and the Mieczyslaw Munz Scholarship.

A native of Lyndhurst, OH, Mr. Weiss attended the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with Paul Schenly. Other teachers include Daniel Shapiro, Sergei Babayan, Kathryn Brown, and Edith Reed. Mr. Weiss graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax.

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