

## GARRICK OHLSSON, piano

**Triptych** (1969) (21:23)

- 1) *I. Lento* (7:56)
- 2) *II. Vivace* (5:31)
- 3) *III. Largo e mesto* (7:42)

4) **Shall We Dance** (1994) (9:22)5) **Passacaglia** (1936) (13:16)6) **Handwork** (1986) (13:53)**Sonata** (1951-53) (15:10)

- 7) *I. Maestoso, Allegretto* (7:33)
- 8) *II. Molto grave, ma sempre animando.*  
*Allegretto quasi fugato* (7:17)

**Louis Weingarden**  
(1943-1989)

**Robert Helps**  
(1928-2001)

**Stefan Wolpe**  
(1902-1972)

**William Hibbard**  
(1939-1989)

**Oldřich Korte**  
(b. 1926)

## FIVE COMPOSERS, FIVE CONNECTIONS

*Notes by Garrick Ohlsson*

Each of the five pieces on this recording is a work I have been closely associated with. Two were written for me and I've played all of them frequently. Music of our time always needs advocates; it needs live performance, but it also needs a way to exist for reference beyond the printed score. A young virtuoso at a great international conservatory like the Royal Academy, in London, or The Juilliard School, in New York, is unlikely to come upon (or search for) a work like the Louis Weingarden *Triptych* and say, "Ah, here's a 20-minute, blisteringly difficult piece. Let me spend six months learning it to see if I like it." Without recorded performances it's as if works like these simply don't exist. In writing about the role performers and teachers can play in this respect, Weingarden put it this way, "Great performers are like great teachers, both have found something of value to the world, and both have the powers and the will to communicate that treasure." Each of these five composers has given me an inestimable gift. It's time for me to give thanks, in return.

## LOUIS WEINGARDEN

(Detroit, Michigan, 1943—New York City, 1989)

In 1966, I was a student at White Plains High School, in New York. That was the year that Jonathan Slater, a popular student teacher, using money of his own, brought his friend Louis Weingarden to school to write, as Jonathan promised, “crazy, difficult modern music” for a student production of Edgar Lee Masters’ “Spoon River Anthology.” When Louis arrived to see what sort of ensemble he could put together he found abundant talent at White Plains High, but he’d been told to listen to one kid in particular, a piano prodigy, who studied at Juilliard. “Ha! We’ll see about that,” was his attitude.

At that time in his life Louis weighed more than 350 pounds. He looked old and monstrous to me. The first thing he said when we met was, “So, your teacher is Sascha Gorodnitzki. That means you play loud and fast and have an ugly tone.” Offended, I shot back, “No, it doesn’t!” “Prové it to me,” Louis demanded, so I played some Schubert for him, as well as something more virtuosic. Apparently mollified, he went back to the Slaters and boasted, “I’ll fix that kid. He thinks he’s such hot stuff. I’ll write something he won’t be able to play or even figure out. He’s never played any music like *this!*” I memorized the page of music overnight and from then on we enjoyed a relationship of equals, beneficial to both of us as friends and fellow musicians.

As we both matured as artists we kept in touch. Louis went on to study with Elliott Carter, won the American Academy’s Rome Prize (and many more prizes) and underwent a startling personal transformation by shedding more than half his body weight, becoming, in the process, a different person and earning a place in Larry Kramer’s *roman à clef*, “Faggots,” as Leather Louis, a sexual athlete who quotes Michelangelo’s sonnets—in Italian. Subsequently, I premiered Louis’ piano concerto and his cello and piano sonata, and we shared an apartment for a year in Manhattan. He was a larger-than-life figure in every way, vital and opinionated. I was crazy about his energy.

Jonathan Slater, passionate as ever about music, had gone on to Massachusetts to accept a teaching position, at Newton South High School, where he produced a full-scale arts festival that included lots of contemporary music. He commissioned Louis to write *Triptych*, in memory of Danny Mendelson, a handsome, athletic, all-around-brilliant Newton South student who had died of a rare blood infection, and who Louis had known. I premiered it at Newton South in May 1969 in a recital that included music by Brahms and Chopin and had the good fortune to be reviewed in the Boston Globe by Michael Steinberg, who not only liked *Triptych* but gave me my first review in a big-city newspaper.

Written to evoke three Bible stories\*, *Triptych* is a piece that feels larger in scale than its 20-minute length might suggest. Freely atonal, it nonetheless employs the

resources of the piano in the fullest, Lisztian way, from the lightest, most fragile textures to the heaviest, fiercest gestures. It's also Lisztian in the sense that the piano *sounds* incredible; the sound leaps out of the speakers at you when you hear it in recording. It's a work of remarkable complexity.

\* Louis Weingarden prefaced *Triptych* with these descriptions:

I Abraham and Isaac: Abraham hears the terrible command with breathless suspension of all emotions: "take your son, your only son, Isaac whom you love, and offer him as a burnt sacrifice upon the mountain I shall show you." Even the stones and thorns of the mountain resist the event.

II David guards his sheep, and for amusement takes up his harp and composes a spiritual etude: "If the Lord be my shepherd, then I lack nothing."

III The women make their way through the curtains of early morning mist, moaning and shrieking out the agony of the son and father who was taken from them, they have come to anoint his body. But a gentle angel bars their way, and sings to them of their master's sure and tranquil passage: "He is not here, for he has gone up."

## ROBERT EUGENE HELPS

(*Passaic, New Jersey, 1928—Tampa, Florida, 2001*)

Of the five pieces recorded here, the work with the most charming title is undeniably *Shall We Dance*. The absence of a question mark in the title seems to me to reflect Bob Helps' refusal to be typecast, musically or personally. His whimsical self-appraisal is summed up in a remark made to an interviewer late in life: "At one point, I became a nice American boy for two or three years. And I loved it until I got so bored I thought I would scream." All suspicions that he might have been nothing more than a "nice American boy" were dispelled in 1996 when he was included on the groundbreaking CRI release, "Gay American Composers."

Bob and I met in Manhattan some time in the 1960s at one of those hazy-in-memory events that involved being introduced at someone's house when we were both listening to some contemporary piece by somebody else. Only later did I begin to know his music and to know Bob as a person—and a personality—a connection helped along by our mutual friends Jorja Fleezanis and Michael Steinberg. Hearing him play in recital several times made me realize that here was a pianist to reckon with, a reminder that he had ably championed Sessions, Babbitt, Perle, and others whose music requires skill and understanding beyond the ordinary. As a rare example of that nearly extinct breed, the composer-virtuoso, Bob brought a creator's understanding to just about any music he chose to perform.

*Shall We Dance* is imbued with an aura that's hard to characterize. It reminds me of the most sophisticated cabaret music imaginable. Picture a smoke-filled room in thrall to a pianist of casual genius—although there's nothing “casual” about the piece if you think the word suggests “uncontrolled.” The introduction suggests an almost atonal waltz—Schoenberg without the rigor. This is music richly decorative in its use of the Lisztian three-hands technique, where figuration and accompaniment grow so complex you don't know where the three hands are coming from. Its sense of ease and wit masks phenomenal difficulty of execution. It does not remain charming in a cabaret-like way, but builds to a clangorous climax, tragic and explosive, which leaves a kind of bewildered murmuring in its aftermath. Returning to its waltzy opening it doesn't so much end as it walks off the page, mysteriously (remember that absence of a question mark). Charming, brilliant and slightly enigmatic, it strikes me as a perfect reflection of its creator, who sometimes seemed to come and go and vanish so unexpectedly that you never knew when you'd see him next.

## STEFAN WOLPE

*(Berlin, 1902—New York City, 1972)*

Although Stefan Wolpe was living at Westbeth, the famed artists' housing complex in lower Manhattan, when I was a student at Juilliard, he is the one composer of the five included here that I never met. Nevertheless we did have an important personal connection. From 1976 until about 1980 I studied with Wolpe's

second wife, the Romanian-born pianist and pedagogue Irma Wolpe Rademacher (1902-1984). Soon after we met at the New England Conservatory of Music, where I was giving a master class, Irma became the last of my teachers. Working with her was like pursuing an unofficial post-doctorate, and one of her missions was dragging me back into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for although I had been an enthusiastic performer of Weingarten and other living composers, in my twenties I'd become involved in building a standard concert career and had neglected contemporary music. In working to close what she saw as this gap in my musical education, Irma might have been expected to begin with Wolpe, but she didn't. She started with Schoenberg.

She did ultimately introduce me to a couple of small pieces of Wolpe's and even planted the idea of learning his *Enactments*, so although she adored him she did not force Wolpe on me. *Passacaglia*, finally, was the piece she most encouraged me to play. It appealed to me because it's so compelling in its directness. Although its gestures are visceral, it is also rigorous and tightly organized, something the listener needn't become preoccupied with. Wolpe based it on a free, 12-tone note series that employs increasing intervals—half step, whole step, minor third, major third, and so on—all the material derived from that opening. But where it goes and where it ranges, wildly, is breathtaking, including a climactic section that's angry, defiant, protesting, noisy—music that, despite its fierce atonality, recalls Wolpe's devotion to political causes in Berlin, where he wrote workers' marches and agitprop music.

## WILLIAM ALDEN HIBBARD

(Newton, Massachusetts, 1939—San Francisco, 1989)

William Hibbard, composer, conductor, violist and teacher, joined the University of Iowa Music Composition faculty in 1966, and served as Music Director of the University's Center for New Music from 1966 through 1988. I met Bill through his life partner, James Dixon, conductor of the Quad-City Symphony, with whom I had a lengthy, creative association. In fact, James, Bill and I joined forces to buy a San Francisco house where, separately and together, we spent some of the free time our various music schedules allowed.

Bill was intrigued with the idea of writing a piece for me, and so he did, another fiercely challenging work. I think of *Handwork* as a literal title—it's *work*, for both hands and brain, I would say, because it encompasses dense metrical modulation, a lot of incredibly complex rhythmic stuff that does not sound to the listener as formidable as it is to play; the result is kaleidoscopic, including every possible texture, from gentle to spiky. It's constructed from a series of structures, almost etude-like, of incredible brilliance and unreasonable difficulty. Bill was an impeccable musical craftsman in every way. His dense autograph score for *Handwork*, like all his scores, looks printed, so fine was his hand.

He was also a penetrating diagnostician of performance in music of all eras

and genres—solo, chamber, and orchestral, a skill evident when I recorded this performance (first released on the Music and Arts label) in 1988, under his supervision, at the Center for New Music at the University of Iowa. Bill was already very ill during those sessions. He died the following year, of AIDS, the year that Louis Weingarden succumbed to the same disease.

## OLDŘICH KORTE

(Šala, Slovakia, 1926—)

Oldřich Korte's life story is an astonishing one. It's not my place to relate it in detail here, though it's important to know that he was imprisoned first by the Nazis and then, repeatedly, by the Communists, harassed so consistently in the postwar era that he was compelled to take jobs like fireman, construction worker, and truck driver in order to survive and continue composing. We met, early in this century, in Prague, a city whose love of music has been a constant since Mozart, and where I love to play. On one occasion a dapper, elderly gentleman came to me, rather apologetically, bearing a letter of introduction from the celebrated Czech pianist Ivan Moravec, together with a score and recording of his Piano Sonata, which he hoped I might look at. Now, a lot of people approach me with a lot of music, and there's rarely time to deal with it at all, but the letter from Moravec (as well as his own recording, live from a recital in Prague at the Rudolfinum), convinced me to take on the work. Begun in 1951 and completed in 1953, Korte's Sonata was

premiered by the composer himself, under politically fraught circumstances, and was later taken on by Maurizio Pollini as well as Moravec. Written some fifteen years after Wolpe's *Passacaglia*, its idiom is more tonal and eclectic. The first movement introduces a host of Baroque-sounding procedures and rhetoric energy; the second evokes a mood suggesting darkness giving way to light. I was struck by Korte's command of essentially pianistic qualities, by the genial good nature of the first moment, the searing, tragic aspect of the second, and a convincingly triumphant climax.

I have played the Sonata frequently in North America, and in the Czech Republic under the composer's supervision. The performance preserved here dates from a 2006 Prague recital, which pleased Korte sufficiently for him to approve its release as a live performance. Like all good composers, he had a few things to say, but all good composers and all good teachers and all good artists always have a few things to say. I found him a compelling human being, lively and engaging, and I enjoyed the hospitality lavished on me by him and his wife, Eva Jandejskova, one of whose paintings now hangs in our dining room in San Francisco.



**Garrick Ohlsson** has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Mr. Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, ranging over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Mr. Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. His concerto repertoire alone is unusually wide and eclectic – ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century – and to date he has at his command more than 80 concertos.

This season (2012-2013) features performances of Busoni's rarely performed piano concerto with the European Union Youth Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda, including an appearance at the Edinburgh International Festival. A return to the U.K. later in the season includes two concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra followed by a month-long tour in Australia and a live recording of both Brahms concerti. Mr. Ohlsson returns to Carnegie Hall in the spring as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. Other US appearances include return visits to the orchestras of Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Houston, and Baltimore.

A prolific recording artist, his 10-disc set of the complete Beethoven sonatas on Bridge has garnered considerable critical praise, including a Grammy Award for Volume 3. Forthcoming releases in his ongoing series with Bridge Records include a second disc of works by Liszt, as well as the complete sonatas of Scriabin.

**Weingarden and Helps:** recorded October 3 & 4, 2011, SUNY Purchase, Performing Arts Center, Theater C, Purchase, NY; Boesendorfer Imperial 33808, Fd Court, piano technician; Produced and Engineered by Adam Abeshouse

**Wolpe:** recorded April 14, 2012 SUNY Purchase, Performing Arts Center, Theater C, Purchase, NY; Piano: Boesendorfer Imperial 33808, Fd Court, piano technician; Produced and Engineered by Adam Abeshouse

**Hibbard:** recorded December 1988 at University of Iowa Center for New Music; University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Piano: Steinway D # 499072 Steven Carver, piano technician

**Korte:** recorded in concert, December, 2006 at Prague, Rudolphinum, Dvořák Hall Hamburg Steinway D, piano technician: P. Sokol

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