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Piano technician: Ed Court

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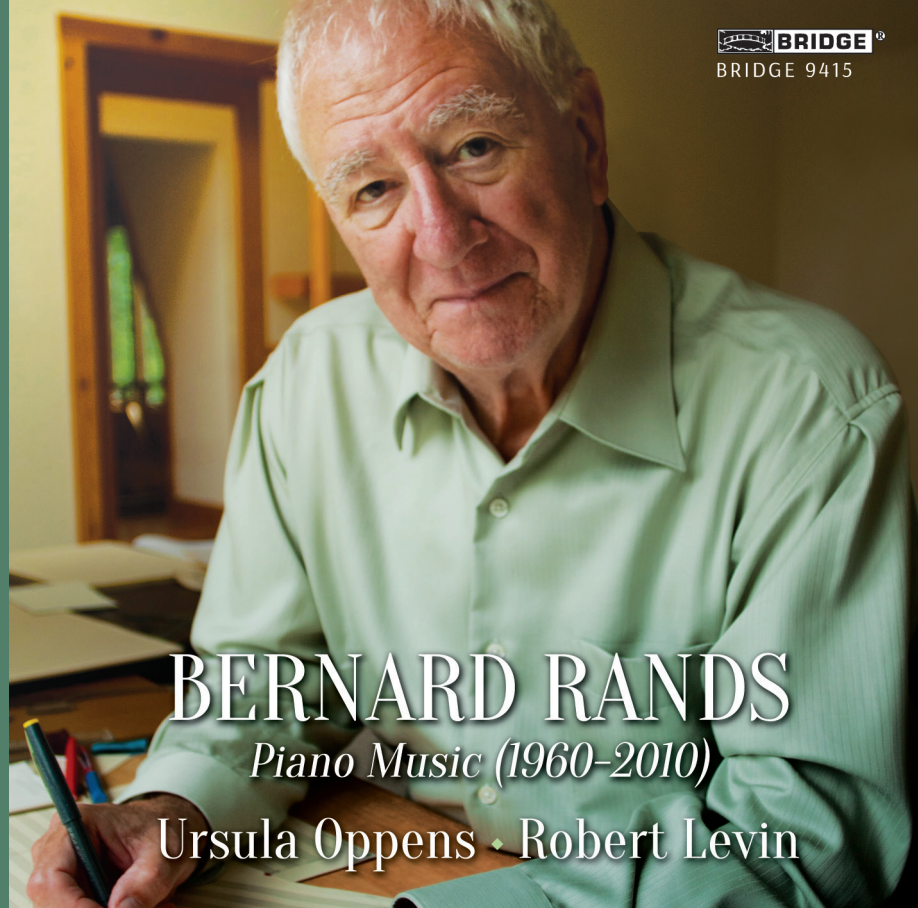
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BERNARD RANDS

Piano Music (1960–2010)

Ursula Oppens • Robert Levin

*This recording is dedicated to the memory
of Dr. Samuel M. Paley, distinguished
archaeologist, devoted teacher and
delightful friend.*

- B. R.

United Will Never Be Defeated!, by Frederic Rzewski on Vanguard.

Ms. Oppens has premièred works by such leading composers as Luciano Berio, William Bolcom, John Harbison, Julius Hemphill, Tania León, György Ligeti, Witold Lutosławski, Harold Meltzer, Conlon Nancarrow, Tobias Picker, Frederic Rzewski, Joan Tower, Amy Williams, Christian Wolff, Amnon Wolman, and Charles Wuorinen.

Ms. Oppens has performed with virtually all of the world's major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and abroad with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She has also performed with the Arditti, Juilliard, Pacifica, and Rosetti quartets, among others.

Ursula Oppens is a Distinguished Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. From 1994 through the end of the 2007–08 academic year she served as John Evans Distinguished Professor of Music at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. Ms. Oppens lives in New York City.



Ursula Oppens has long been recognized as the leading champion of contemporary American piano music. Her original and perceptive readings of other music, old and new, have earned her a place among the elect of today's performing musicians.

In 2012, Ms. Oppens captured her fourth Grammy Award nomination in the coveted category of Best Classical Instrumental Solo for the album *Wing-ing It: Piano Music of John Corigliano*, released in April 2011 on Cedille

Records. Tom Huizenga of the *Washington Post* wrote, 'Her rigorous, unforced performances again prove that few pianists of any era can claim a hold on contemporary piano music as she does' (August 2011).

Earlier Grammy nominations were for *Oppens Plays Carter*, a recording of the complete piano works of Elliott Carter for Cedille Records (also named a "Best of the Year" selection by *The New York Times*' music critic Allan Kozinn), her *Piano Music of Our Time* featuring compositions by John Adams, Elliott Carter, Julius Hemphill, and Conlon Nancarrow for the Music and Arts label, and her legendary cult classic *The People*

BERNARD RANDS

(b. 1934)

Piano Music (1960–2010)

Ursula Oppens & Robert Levin, pianos

❶ *Tre Espressioni* for piano (1960) [8:56]

Ursula Oppens, piano

❷ *Espressione IV* for 2 pianos (1964) [9:11]

Robert Levin & Ursula Oppens, pianos

❸ *Memo 5* for piano (1975) [10:48]

Ursula Oppens, piano

Preludes for piano (2007) [40:42]

④ *Ricercare* [3:28]

⑤ *Ostinato* [2:49]

⑥ *Bordone* [1:44]

⑦ *Elegia (In memoriam Luciano Berio)* [3:09]

⑧ *Ritornello - Rallentando* [3:27]

⑨ *Toccata* [3:20]

⑩ *Durezza* [4:28]

⑪ *Lamento* [2:09]

⑫ *Emiolia* [5:33]

⑬ *Villanella* [4:13]

⑭ *Istampita* [2:48]

⑮ *Notturmo (In memoriam Don Martino)* [3:29]

Robert Levin, piano

⑯ *Impromptu* for piano (2010) [2:18]

Robert Levin, piano

for DG Archiv; and the complete piano music of Dutilleux for ECM.

A passionate advocate of new music, Robert Levin has commissioned and premièred a large number of works, including Joshua Fineberg's *Veils* (2001), John Harbison's *Second Sonata* (2003), Yehudi Wyner's piano concerto *Chiavi in mano* (Pulitzer Prize, 2006), Bernard Rands' *Preludes* (2007), Thomas Oboe Lee's *Piano Concerto* (2007), and Hans Peter Türk's *Träume* (2014).

Robert Levin appears frequently with his wife, pianist Ya-Fei Chuang, in duo recitals and with orchestra, and with violist Kim Kashkashian. A noted Mozart scholar, Mr. Levin's completions of Mozart's *Requiem* and other unfinished works have been recorded and performed throughout the world. In 2005 his completion of the Mozart *C-minor Mass*, commissioned by Carnegie Hall, was premiered there and has since been widely heard in the United States and Europe.

After more than a quarter-century as an artist teacher at the Sarasota Music Festival he succeeded Paul Wolfe as Artistic Director in 2007. President of the International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition (Leipzig, Germany), he was Dwight P. Robinson, Jr. Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University from 1993 to 2013.



Robert Levin has performed throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia, appearing with the orchestras of Atlanta, Berlin, Birmingham, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Montréal, Philadelphia, Toronto, Utah, and Vienna on the Steinway and with the Academy of Ancient Music, the English Baroque Soloists, the Handel & Haydn Society, the London Classical Players, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique on period pianos.

Renowned for his improvised cadenzas in Classical period repertoire, Robert Levin has made recordings of a wide range of repertoire for DG Archiv, Decca/London, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, ECM, Hänssler, New York Philomusica, Philips, and SONY Classical. His recordings include Bach's complete keyboard concertos, the six English Suites and both books of the Well-Tempered Clavier (Hänssler Edition Bachakademie); a Mozart concerto cycle with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music for Decca/L'Oiseau Lyre; the Beethoven concertos with Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique

BERNARD RANDS: *Piano Music (1960–2010)*

Bernard Rands, most prolific in the realm of orchestral and vocal music, had not displayed much of a preoccupation with the genre of solo piano until the last decade, which has seen the centerpiece of the present recording, the *Preludes* (2007), as well as works too recent to appear here. What is conspicuous about the trajectory of his occasional engagement with the medium, however, are the features that resemble the approach of his contemporaries and the ways in which he is at odds with prevailing fashions, then and now.

Rands is slightly too young ever to have been a doctrinaire serialist yet he is of the right age, and was in the right place, to have the newest developments happening around him, evolutions that split post-war music into two camps, seemingly irreconcilable. Rands' output for piano charts a course that marks clearly a gradual broadening of his aesthetics while falling in line neither with pure modernism nor the looser models of its antitheses. His music, while drawing influence from varied sources, eschews the tendency of postmodernism to treat all musics and all styles as equally valid. Rather, he aims at homogeneity, at the integration of a craftsman, at music borne of *both* the heart and the mind.

The earliest work on this CD, and indeed the earliest to remain in the catalogue of the composer, is *Tre Espressioni*. It was finished in Florence

in 1960 and the composer himself gave the première in Rome later that year. The composer was then in his mid-20s, ready to study with Luigi Dallapiccola.

This set of three *expressions*, the title alone setting the work apart from modernist circles, is a balancing act between expansive freedom and rigid structuralism, the dominant axes of the American and European avant-garde at the time. Concessions to the former are clear in the third *expression*, which loses its bar lines and thus verges toward *time notation*, while the first leans toward the latter; the second displays elements of both. Though the composer allows the first and third *expression* to be interchanged in performance, generating a sequence of either *I–II–III* or *III–II–I*, this CD adopts the sequence *I–II–III*. As aleatory music goes, this amount of indeterminacy is rather slight.

As the title suggests, the work encompasses a broad range of *expressions* within its brief span, where no aspect seems to be constant for very long: Dynamics fluctuate from bar to bar; the static interleaves with the frenetic; and tempi undergo radical shifts. One feature introduced here in *II* and *III*, and to recur throughout Rands' career, is an extensive use of the *acciaccatura*, the long strings of grace notes in this case 'to be played as quickly as possible'.

many international festivals and composer-in-residence at the Aspen and Tanglewood festivals and was Walter Bigelow Rosen Professor of Music at Harvard University.

Recent works include the opera *Vincent*, commissioned by Indiana University School of Music to celebrate its 100th anniversary and produced at IU Opera Theater in April 2011, as well as the *Piano Concerto*, for Jonathan Biss, set for première in Boston in April 2014.

For more information, visit <http://www.bernardrands.com/>.

Bernard Rands' music is published exclusively by Schott Helicon Music Corporation, New York (BMI).

for seven years, from 1989–95, as part of the Meet the Composer Residency Program for the first three years, with four years of continued funding by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Rands' works are widely performed and frequently recorded. His work *Canti d'Amor*, recorded by Chanticleer, won a Grammy Award in 2000.

Born in England, Rands emigrated to the United States in 1975, becoming an American citizen in 1983. He has been honored by the American Academy and Institute of the Arts and Letters; Broadcast Music, Inc.; the Guggenheim Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; and Meet the Composer; the Barlow, Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, among many others. In 2004, Rands was inducted into the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

Recent commissions have come from the Suntory Concert Hall in Tokyo; the New York Philharmonic; Carnegie Hall; the Boston Symphony Orchestra; the Cincinnati Symphony; the Los Angeles Philharmonic; the Philadelphia Orchestra; the BBC Symphony Orchestra; the National Symphony Orchestra; the Internationale Bach Akademie; the Eastman Wind Ensemble; and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Many chamber works have resulted from commissions from major ensembles and festivals from around the world. His chamber opera *Belladonna* was commissioned by the Aspen Festival for its fiftieth anniversary in 1999. A dedicated and passionate teacher, Rands has been guest composer at

II is the fulcrum of the set, not only because of its placement but also due to the fact that it acts as transitional space between its own strict notation and the more relaxed presentation of *III*, in which pitches and rhythms, but not their durations, are specified.

Espressione IV (1964) is Rands' only work for two pianos and was composed for the brothers Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky, who were fixtures in the world of contemporary music in mainland Europe from the 1950s into the '70s. The Kontarskys gave the première at the summer courses in Darmstadt in 1964 and thereafter played the piece extensively in Europe.

The structure of the piece, cast in a single movement, could be described as a steady rapprochement among initial enemies. Commencing at maximum opposition, with piano 1 playing softly and piano 2 playing brusquely, and with the notation as conventional as possible, the piece is a journey toward a unified instrument achieved by lessening the rigidity of its notation.

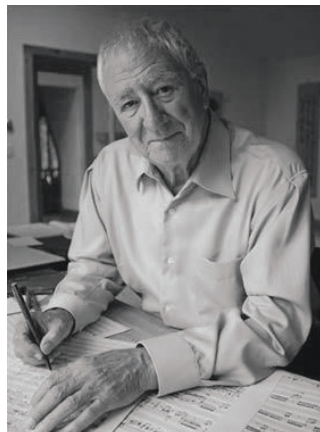
When the two pianos are locked into precise notation, their musics are antagonistic; when elements of asynchronicity are introduced, with 'the element of noise ... predominant', their commonality is rediscovered, with each pianist imitating the characteristics of the material that the other plays. As a logical consequence of the conceptual unity of form

and instrumentation, the two pianos play almost identical material by work's end.

A condensation of the solo part of *Mésalliance* for piano and small orchestra (1972), *Memo 5* (1975) is the densest work on the CD, a work almost filled to the point of supersaturation. *Mésalliance*, down to the title, is founded on an uneasy entente between unwilling partners, a piano and an orchestral group. Even without the orchestral backdrop, *Memo 5* is a precarious, jagged adventure.

It is also part of an ongoing series of works for solo instrument/voice, grouped under the collective title *Memo*, the aim of each of which is to push a virtuoso performer toward the limits of possibility in music that avoids the standard means of traditional showpieces.

This avoidance is especially evident in *Memo 5*, a reaction against what Rands deemed, 'PPP – pretty piano pieces!'. What predominates in the piece is therefore sonority, not harmony, melody or rhythm. The 'musical objects', in lieu of themes, are of a mercurial nature, with abrupt changes in temperament and with forced coexistence among unlikely ideas, for instance when clusters alternate with filigree passagework in the final half of the work. As the final 'cadenza' winds down, with *pp* and *ppp* finally conquering *ff*, almost the entirety of the instrument resounds.



Schuller, Schwarz, Silverstein, Sinopoli, Slatkin, Spano, von Dohnányi, and Zinman have programmed his music.

The originality and distinctive character of his music have been variously described as 'plangent lyricism' with a 'dramatic intensity' and a 'musicality and clarity of idea allied to a sophisticated and elegant technical mastery' – qualities developed from his studies with Dallapiccola and Berio.

Rands served as composer-in-residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra

Through more than a hundred published works and many recordings, **Bernard Rands** is established as a major figure in contemporary music. His work *Canti del Sole*, premièred by Paul Sperry, Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic, won the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for Music. His large orchestral suites *Le Tambourin* won the 1986 Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. Conductors including Barenboim, Berio, Boulez, Eschenbach, Maazel, Maderna, Marriner, Mehta, Muti, Ozawa, Rilling, Salonen, Sawallisch, Schiff,

theme from *Istampita* in the *Preludes*. Apart from two iterations of a brief *corale*-like gesture, the work is unabashed in its playfulness.

Dan Albertson, August 2013

Dan Albertson, based in Chicago, is active in the fields of musicology, poetry and translation.

(All quotations within the text are derived from the scores of the works in question, or supplementary material.)

The twelve *Preludes*, completed in 2007, constitute a double homage, to its dedicatee Robert Levin and to the keyboard suite of the 17th and 18th century, without a hint of pastiche or faux nostalgia. Levin, a specialist in period-performance praxis, often playing on fortepiano and harpsichord instead of the modern piano, is further celebrated in the piece through an acrostic: The first letter of each prelude spells out Robert D. Levin. The work was a commission for Levin from Maria and Robert A. Skirnick in New York and the Ruhr International Piano Festival in Essen, Germany.

In this series of preludes, the composer was concerned to find a way for each prelude to have an individual character while maintaining the impression of a unified whole, making a complete performance easier to follow and enabling individual preludes to stand as self-sufficient concert pieces. He settled on a thematic link underpinning each prelude. The sequence is as follows, though not always heard consecutively: D – C – B-flat – E – C-sharp – B.

In the opening *Ricercare*, slow and soft, the left hand plays almost exclusively chordal interjections to the right hand, whose isolated notes gradually evolve into duplets, triplets, etc.

Ostinato is, per its tempo indication, *Rigorous ma espressivo e calmo*. It features ubiquitous use of pedal and a limited range of two octaves in the right hand.

Bordone is the first fast music in the set, dry and propulsive. Its title is taken from the use of a pedal point that recurs for the duration of the prelude.

Elegia–In memoriam Luciano Berio commemorates Berio, the erstwhile teacher and longstanding friend of the composer, from its opening and closing notes A – B-flat, which a mixture of Italian and English could render either as *La B* or *A Berio*. The prelude is plaintive but not maudlin, with the pedal adding a haze to the music, described in the score as *cantabile*.

True to its title, *Ritornello–Rallentando* interleaves melodic fragments that are almost jazzy in provenance with six variations on a *corale*, each one progressively slowing. The *corale* assumes a different expressive and harmonic guise with each appearance, almost turning the prelude into a set of character pieces. Arpeggios become increasingly prominent as the texture thickens.

The *Toccata* is a stubborn prelude whose rhythms, for the most part composed of triplets and septuplets, relent only to give them added momentum on the inevitable rebound.

Durezza is, like *Elegia–In memoriam Luciano Berio*, a cantilena, this time with less certainty in its progress. The prelude consists almost

entirely of single notes, with isolated chords. The tempo is constant and the dynamics subdued. After the *Toccata*, this prelude and the *Lamento* that follows, the shortest prelude in terms of bars and with an expanding and contracting of intervals, could be heard as isles of repose.

Emiolia exploits a technique that the composer has often cherished in his music, the hemiola, moving beyond the standard 3:2 to 4:3 and 5:4. Another salient feature is the use of a varying six-note appoggiatura as a preface to long volleys of quintuplets and sextuplets, all similar in tone, but also varying. This prelude is the longest of the collection and the most taxing manually.

A regular rhythm in which one beat, two beats and three beats rotate lies at the core of the *Villanella*, while *Istampita* explores the ramifications of trills and grace notes.

Notturmo–In memoriam Don Martino remembers the composer's colleague from Harvard University, who adored Florence, with sounds meant to evoke the myriad of bells heard there.

Impromptu (2010) was Rands' contribution to the *Petrushka Project*, an anthology of dances presented to Dr. Peter Hanser-Strecker, the president of his publisher, Schott Music, on the occasion of his 70th birthday. The composer here deals principally with a response to trills, picking up a