

Producer and Engineer: Joel Gordon

Producers: Martin Boykan and Donald Berman

Assistant Engineers: Livia Lin

Piano Technician: Mary P. Logue

Graphic Design: Casey Siu

Executive Producers: Becky and David Starobin

Martin Boykan Photographs: Susan Schwalb

Donald Berman Cover Photograph: Gil Gilbert

Donald Berman Booklet Photograph: Alonso Nichols

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For Bridge Records: Barbara Bersito, Brian C. Carter, Douglas Holly
Doron Schächter, Casey Siu, Allegra Starobin and Robert Starobin

Bradley Napoliello, webmaster
Email: bridgerec@bridgerecords.com

Bridge Records, Inc. 200 Clinton Ave.
New Rochelle, NY • 10801
www.BridgeRecords.com

MARTIN BOYKAN

MUSIC FOR PIANO
(1986-2007)

DONALD
BERMAN
PIANO

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MARTIN BOYKAN

(b. 1931)

Usurpations (1997) (14:33)

- | | | | |
|----|------|----------------------------------|--------|
| 1) | I. | For Richard Swift | (2:25) |
| 2) | II. | For David Rakowski | (2:18) |
| 3) | III. | For Edward Cohen | (3:43) |
| 4) | IV. | For Ross Bauer | (2:14) |
| 5) | V. | To the memory of Seymour Shifrin | (3:52) |

Sonata No. 3: to the memory of Edward Cohen (2007) (19:22)

- | | | | |
|----|------|------------|--------|
| 6) | I. | Eulogy | (4:30) |
| 7) | II. | Fantasy | (3:38) |
| 8) | III. | Lament | (5:03) |
| 9) | IV. | Invocation | (6:10) |



Pianist **Donald Berman** is recognized as a chief exponent of new works by living composers, overlooked music by 20th century masters, and recitals that link classical and modern repertoires. His 2-volume *The Unknown Ives* and *The Uncovered Ruggles* represents the only recordings of the complete short piano works of Charles Ives and Carl Ruggles extant. Other recordings include the 4-CD set *Americans in Rome: Music by Fellows of the American Academy in Rome*, *The Light That Is Felt: Songs of Charles Ives* (with Susan Narucki, soprano),

Wasting the Night: Songs of Scott Wheeler and CDs of music by Su Lian Tan (Arsis), Arthur Levering (New World), Martin Boykan (New World; Bridge), Tamar Diesendruck (Centaur), and Aaron Jay Kernis (Koch).

donaldbermanpiano.com

At present Boykan is an Emeritus Professor of Music, Brandeis University. He has been Composer in Residence at the Composer's Conference in Wellesley and the University of Utah, Visiting Professor at Columbia University, New York University and Bar Ilan University (Israel) and has lectured widely in institutions including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and The American Academy in Berlin. He has served on many panels, including the Rome Prize, the Fromm Commission, the New York Council for the Arts (CAPS) and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. His numerous students include such well known composers as Steve Mackey, Peter Lieberon, Marjorie Merryman and Ross Bauer.

Boykan's music is recorded by CRI (available through New World Records or Amazon.com), Albany Records, and Boston Music Orchestra Project (BMOP). Scores are published by Mobart Music Press, and C.F. Peters, NYC. In 2004 a volume of essays entitled *Silence and Slow Time: Studies in Musical Narrative* was published by Scarecrow Press (Rowman and Littlefield). In 2011 a second volume of essays entitled *The Power of the Moment* was published by Pendragon Press. Martin Boykan's works are also available from ACA (American Composer's Alliance)

www.martinboykan.com

Towards the Horizon (2007) (14:14)

- | | | | |
|-----|------|-----------------------------|--------|
| 10) | I. | Moment of Angels | (2:52) |
| 11) | II. | Pastorale | (2:15) |
| 12) | III. | Atmospheric Disturbances | (2:09) |
| 13) | IV. | Arlene Zallman: In Memoriam | (3:01) |
| 14) | V. | Horizon Line | (3:56) |

Fantasy-Sonata (1986) (16:24)

- 15) *Un poco largamente, con rubato - Quasi Lento - Subito più mosso*

DONALD BERMAN
PIANO

There are many ways of expressing our humanity, but music, it seems to me, has a particular spiritual mission, and I cannot imagine we will ever want to live without an art that focuses our attention on the inexorable passage of time, even as it reconciles us to it.

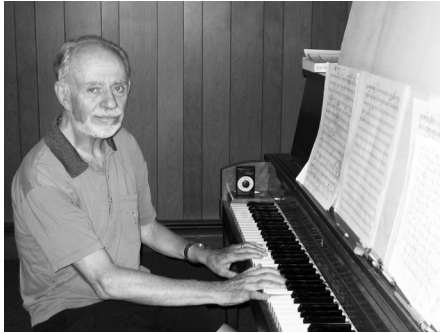
*-Martin Boykan, Silence and Slow Time.
(Scarecrow Press, 2004)*

I first encountered Martin Boykan's music in performances with the Boston-based new music ensembles Dinosaur Annex (*Sonata for Violin and Piano; Piano Trio No. 2: Flume*) and Collage (*Elegy*) in the 1990s. Later, I collaborated with the superb mezzo-soprano Pamela Dellal on three major song cycles by Boykan (*Second Chances; A Packet for Susan; Soliloquies for an Insomniac*). Around 2008, Marty approached me about recording a CD of his piano music.

I entered the project slowly. Marty's music is extremely gratifying – once it is learned. Or, as my mentor John Kirkpatrick used to call the process, “lived into.” Each of the chamber works I had already performed followed a similar arc of learning. At the start I would be awed by the diamond-like purity of individual moments, daunted by the complex counterpoint, and grasping for a way to “live into” its organic whole. I knew it was worth

Boykan has written for a wide variety of instrumental combinations including 4 string quartets, a concerto for large ensemble, many trios, duos and solo works, song cycles for voice and piano as well as instrumental ensembles and choral music. His symphony for orchestra and baritone solo was premiered by the Utah Symphony in 1993, and his concerto for violin and orchestra was premiered by Curtis Macomber in 2008 with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project conducted by Gil Rose. His work is widely performed and has been presented by ensembles including the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, The New York New Music Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the League ISCM, Earplay, Musica Viva and Collage New Music.

He received the Jeunesse Musicales award for his *String Quartet No.1* in 1967 and the League ISCM award for *Elegy* in 1982. Other awards include a Rockefeller grant, NEA award, Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright, as well as a recording award and the Walter Hinrichsen Publication Award from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1994 he was awarded a Senior Fulbright to Israel. He has received numerous commissions from chamber ensembles as well as commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, and the Fromm Foundation. In 2011 Boykan was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.



Martin Boykan studied composition with Walter Piston, Aaron Copland and Paul Hindemith, and piano with Eduard Steuermann. He received a BA from Harvard University, 1951, and an MM from Yale University, 1953. In 1953–55 he was in Vienna on a Fulbright Fellowship, and upon his return founded the Brandeis Chamber Ensemble whose other members included Robert Koff (Juilliard Quartet), Nancy Cirillo (Wellesley College), Eugene Lehner (Kolisch Quartet) and Madeline Foley (Marlboro Music Festival). This ensemble performed widely with a repertory divided equally between contemporary music and the tradition. At the same time Boykan appeared regularly as a pianist with soloists such as Joseph Silverstein and Jan DeGaetani. In 1964–65, he was the pianist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

pursuing. Each of the aforementioned concerts included contemporary repertoire pieces that grabbed me from the start and, perhaps, lost a little of their immediacy as we approached performance. Marty's music became deeper, more ingrained, until I yearned to express its intimate expressivity in performance. It was music that lived in my head for a long time after performing it. It is deeply personal.

The music is lyrical, yet atonal; melodic, yet with wide leaps in register; it sustains over large expanses, yet has quick inner pulsing. I had to first learn to hear the music as evocative of distantly related sound worlds before bringing it back to the unique voice of Boykan himself. His own words were helpful guides:

If the diatonic set [tonal music] is really the natural musical language, where does that leave "Tristan und Isolde?" Where does it leave non-Western cultures that use nondiatonic scales, or the isolated Slonim Hassidim in Jerusalem, who chant some of the Hebrew liturgy chromatically? And where does it leave those of us - performers, composers, listeners – who have been moved by some atonal or serial music?

Boykan's music allowed me to spring off these kinds of eclectic suggestions. Opera, Hebrew chant. Non-diatonic scales. The close-celled

oscillations, repetitions, and ruminations suggested to me a kind of atonal minimalism within the larger flow of his (non-minimalist) organic works.

Further raising the stakes was the fact that Boykan was a master pianist himself. He was pianist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1964-5 and performed regularly with eminent soloists such as violinist Joseph Silverstein and soprano Jan DeGaetani. When mass media cared about such things, Boykan appeared on Public Broadcast Television performing Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. His wing-span hands are massive, and he can play through entire orchestral scores, singing the parts his busy ten fingers can't quite access. When I went to his house to get a copy of his new Piano Trio No. 2 he unforgettably played through the entire piece – piano, violin, and cello parts all in his grasp. His piano compositions are a distillation of this great facility. They are ingrained with laser-like specificities. But they operate in the arena of virtuosity as a given.

Paradoxically, the works are so honed and natural that they do not sound hard. Certainly there is no gratuitous flash. What is challenging is finding the connective tissue between high phrases in the stratosphere and melodies in the lowest bass octave, the decoding and following of lyrical lines as they jump across hands, the sly character that shifts from witticism to sublimity.

was beautiful and extremely lyrical, and formally it was crystal clear. I could hear passages where intervals were distinctly being emphasized, each time a different interval. And the piano writing was quite natural and personal. Never before, or since, have I heard myself uttering such a gushing phrase about a piece as I did to a friend at intermission: *the piece caressed its intervals.*”

The *Fantasy-Sonata* is comprised of three movements played without pause. They are marked *Un poco largamente, con rubato – Quasi Lento – Subito più mosso*. The opening of the work is a 4-note gesture that ascends over two and a half octaves: D-B-A-G#. The gestures that develop out of this primary motif accumulate and combine. The music thickens and clears away in each movement. The tunes become familiar and are “remembered” in the final pages, as its classical-form title would suggest. The outer movements have the feeling of a capriccioso. The middle movement is quiet and slow, building to its own impassioned climax. I am indebted to four virtuoso pianists before me that have performed the work – Martin Boykan, Eric Moe, Aleck Karis, and Sally Pinkas.

– Donald Berman

The work is evanescent. Single strands wind reverentially through the five movements in gestures that reach upwards to high lyrical treble lines that gradually dissipate to hover slowly above the musical threads that continue below. The lyrical gestures of *Towards the Horizon* transmute. They repeat, chant-like, and, at times, come to rest in chorales. At other times they disappear into thin air. The melodic themes are augmented – stretched out – to give the work a feeling of timelessness. The diffusion of these lines into the widely-spaced chords embracing the entire seven octave range of the piano present a kind of “everythingness” by work’s close. The music arrives at its astonishing resting place not as a foregone conclusion. Rather, as Boykan has asserted, “we only listen intently when we are in suspense, and that even when we have a goal we can never be sure it will be realized.” It is in that spirit that one can approach the sprightly tunes that flutter haltingly in Movement 4, a remembrance of another contemporary composer colleague, Arlene Zallman (1934-2006).

The *Fantasy-Sonata* of 1986 is the earliest work on the CD, composed when Boykan was 55. David Rakowski recalls in *For Martin Boykan’s Birthday Festschrift* (Perspectives of New Music 2000):

“I first got to know Marty Boykan through his music. I heard Eric Moe perform Marty’s *Fantasy Sonata* on an Earplay concert in San Francisco, and I was bowled over. The piece

The first piano work I learned was *Usurpations* (*Five Bagatelles for Piano*, “with a little help from my friends.”) Each piece in the set of five begins with a quote from a separate work composed by its dedicatee. That other composer (colleague or former student) provided the hook that is an entrée into the music that follows. Boykan develops that composer’s motif, and sets it forth in developing variation. In return, the pieces become something of a portrait of the composers that inspired them. The first movement, dedicated to Richard Swift (a quote “usurped” from *Music for a While*, V), is lofty and poetic. The second, for David Rakowski (from *Psalm of the Wind-Dweller*), crackles with prodigious finesse. The third (and the first piece that grabbed me because its opening is reminiscent of Carl Ruggles’s *Evocations*), is an open-spaced sequence of perfect fifths, an elevated homage to Edward Cohen (from his clarinet quintet). Piece number 4 is a poker-faced scherzo for Ross Bauer (*Stone Soup*). The final movement, dedicated to Seymour Shifrin (1926-1980), contains two quotes from his canon. The first is lifted from an instrumental quintet entitled *In Eius Memoriam*. The second appears, tenderly isolated, towards the close of the movement; it is taken from Shifrin’s setting of a poem by Thomas Hardy written in memory of his wife Emma (*Waiting Both*, part of a cycle entitled *Satires of Circumstance*). Boykan does not usurp the entire song, but here is the text in full: “A star looks down at me, And says: ‘Here I and you Stand, each in our degree: What do you mean to do, – Mean to do?’”

For Marty's 80th birthday concert, in 2011, he asked me to learn his **Sonata No. 3: to the memory of Edward Cohen** (1940 – 2002). A large-scale sonata dedicated to the loss of a dear friend, the work begins with notes that spell the initials of Cohen's name (E-C). These are followed by the note B, perhaps an acknowledgement of [B]oykan's close proximity to a cherished colleague? The first movement is subtitled "Eulogy" and stakes out the majestic territory set forth by the low C. Like the other works on this disc, it is freely atonal. Instead of strictly following a dodecaphonic edict of not repeating a note until all 12 are presented, it ruminates on subsets - groups of 2,3,4 notes - that oscillate before spinning like a centrifuge toward a climax. The *Eulogy* reaches an impassioned center section before a tranquil winding down to a dolce close. Movement II is titled *Fantasy*. It is a perpetual motion of repeated notes, containing clever repartee between voices, and sweeping flights from the lowest to highest registers on the keyboard. Movement III is a slow *Lament*. It is meditative, spare, and marked by hushed *cantandos*. The final movement is titled *Invocation* and marked Andante tranquillo. The movement is set in a lilting 9/8 meter, reminiscent of a barcarolle and what one might coin "late late Brahms." Toward the end, it pauses to quote a song of Cohen's, also titled "Invocation". The snippet of the song's text (by Wallace Stevens) is written in the score: *The song of the great space of your age[...]pierces the fresh night.*

Towards the Horizon is subtitled "Novella in five chapters." This idea of music as narrative is a concept Boykan has explored in his own writings:

"Musical structure is not a map, even one that gradually unfolds. Or to put it another way, the synchronic model, in which everything somehow is seen together, fundamentally distorts the way the music is perceived.

Paul Anderson paraphrases Marty's meaning further in *Perspectives in New Music* (2000):

A piece of music does not resemble a sculpture or a painting nearly so closely as it resembles a play or a novel, in which the ordering of events, and to a certain extent their pacing, govern the aesthetic experience.

The titles of the five movements of *Towards the Horizon* describe a spiritual narrative: *Moment of Angels – Pastorale – Atmospheric Disturbances – Arlene Zallman: In Memoriam – Horizon Line*. Anderson clarifies, "Boykan's "narrative" is not identical to a musical "program." The characters in his drama are the musical entities themselves – pitches, figurations, harmonies."