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BERNSTEIN: *Piano Pieces, all*
Andrew Cooperstock
Bridge 9485 [2CD] 104 minutes

Bernstein had it all—a brilliant mind, unerring musical instincts (some might disagree with me), a distinguished career as a conductor, many gifts as a performer, and an important voice as a composer. The compositional aspect of Bernstein's career has been recognized more slowly than the others, perhaps (with a few exceptions like *West Side Story*). Like his beloved Mahler, he listened widely and almost everything found a place in his compositions. But unlike Mahler, the nature of Bernstein's particular *weltanschauungsmusik* has not yet been well articulated. (A friend who's a Bernstein scholar says that Paul Laird's work offers a starting point.) Possibly as more and more listeners become omnivorous—like many younger musicians and composers today—Bernstein will be better understood and appreciated than he is now. One important starting point would be to savor his easy traversal of popular music, jazz, and classical music—well illustrated in the theme and opening few variations of his 1980 work *Touches*.

Of Bernstein's piano music, I knew primarily the many Anniversaries (four collections published from 1944 to 1988)—delightful miniatures written to celebrate friends and weddings or sometimes intended as memorials. I should like to think these little miniatures are portraits much like the harpsichord pieces of Francois Couperin—none wears out its welcome. A marvelous surprise for me, though, was the early sonata (in two movements), written while he was still a Harvard undergraduate. It's at turns restless and lyrical, violent and introspective. Sometimes the echoes of other music peek thru: a little Prokofieff here, a little Barber there. But other moments—the opening of the second-movement complex, for instance—show his great gift for haunting, unforgettable melody. The set includes a few other early pieces and even includes for good measure his excellent solo piano arrangement of Copland's *Salon Mexico*.

Andrew Cooperstock plays this music very well: the performance is technically assured, musically adventuresome, and bristling with conviction and commitment. Bridge's sonics are simple but agreeable. Altogether, a lovely and important release.

HASKINS