

## Clipper Erickson

Clipper Erickson made his orchestra debut in Los Angeles at the age of 19, under the baton of the late Calvin Simmons, and has continued to thrill audiences since, being described recently as a "true heroic pianist" by the Washington Post. He is featured in recital and with orchestras throughout the United States each year and is one of a handful of pianists chosen for the roster of Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour.

Clipper Erickson studied piano with John Ogdon at Indiana University, where the magic of Ogdon's virtuosity and interpretations exerted a great influence. He also studied at The Juilliard School, and Yale University. He is the recipient of many honors throughout his career and a prize winner at international competitions including the Busoni Competition, and the Tchaikovsky Competition. Mr. Erickson resides with his family in historic Bucks County, outside Philadelphia, finding time in his busy performing schedule to perform for the benefit of local charities as well as his church.

His previous DTR releases include *American Journey* (DTR9807), featuring music composed entirely by American composers, *An Orchestra of One* (DTR2012), and *Woven Images* (DTR2003), including the premiere recording of *Without Borders* written by Philadelphia area composer Allen Krantz especially for him. *Woven Images* presents music inspired by the visual arts including weaving and painting. *American Record Guide* wrote of *American Journey*: "A delightful disc...Clipper Erickson's playing has a winning vitality and exuberance...fresh and youthful".

## Acknowledgements

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**Producer and engineer: Bob Sellman**  
**Associate producer: William Marsh**  
Recorded January 2004 at Bristol Chapel, Westminster Choir College, New Jersey.

## Direct-to-Tape Recordings

**This Direct-to-Tape Recording** was made using two Earthworks QTC1MP microphones and an Earthworks LAB102 mike preamp. It was recorded at a 96kHz/24 bit sampling rate.

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**DTR2015**

*American Eclectic*  
an American Journey  
volume 2

*Clipper Erickson*  
Piano

Most cultures and societies are reflected in some way in the music they produce. It is only natural that the amazing variety of the people and culture of America is found also in its music. America has given its composers an opportunity to put together influences from just about everywhere on earth and create new kinds of music – uniquely American. The music on this release attempts to show the astonishing breadth of these musics. Each composer represented is highly original in their own way, because of who they were (are) and because of their creations, always new.

Bostonian Amy Marcy Cheney Beach was a true American original; not so much because of her style but because of who she was. She did not follow the usual late 19<sup>th</sup> century path of study in Europe (most often Germany) but was largely self-taught in composition. She was the first female composer from America to achieve international recognition and one of the very first anywhere who was not the spouse or sister of a famous male musician. A prodigious talent as a child, she was known also as a great pianist. She gave up her performing career upon being married to Dr. Henry Beach but resumed it after his death 25 years later. Her style is greatly influenced by late 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism and the Ballad shines with Victorian opulence. It is a pianistic fantasy on her vocal setting of Robert Burns “A Red, Red Rose”. The first section is a transcription of the original song, showing her wonderful melodic gifts. After its conclusion the piece continues with violent and heroic music recalling the apocalyptic visions in the poem (“till the seas go dry, my dear, and the rocks melt with the sun”). Dreamy music follows with evocative pianistic effects, then the initial theme reappears transfigured, building to a passionate climax, suggesting the lover’s return. The piece is rich and honest in its romanticism, unapologetic without any self-consciousness.

While Europe was self-destructing in the middle of World War I, Charles Griffes was developing his own style of impressionistic music with such diverse influences as German Romanticism, Debussy, Scriabin and

music of Asia. A native of Elmira, NY, he studied in Germany until the death of his father forced him to return and take a position teaching music at a private boarding school. In this comparative isolation he created a highly original and advanced harmonic language for his piano, vocal and orchestral works. More than a trace of Eastern religion and mysticism influenced his choice of poetry to provide his inspiration or texts. When his music finally began to be appreciated and praised an illness took his life untimely at the age of 35. Both “*The Fountain of the Acqua Paola*” and “*Clouds*”, from the suite “*Roman Sketches*”, are prefaced by poetry of William Sharp with a mystically picturesque bent.

James Johnson is known as the “Father of Stride Piano” and is regarded as the most important figure in the transition from ragtime to jazz piano styles. After taking piano lessons as a child he worked in vaudeville and bars and was known for his dazzling technical tricks. He took the earlier ragtime style, played it considerably faster and added other elements influenced by folk dances, cakewalks and call-and-response patterns in black religious music. This last, in which the shout of the preacher is answered ecstatically by the congregation, is where “Shout” comes from; the style itself is also sometimes known as “Shout”. The frenetic impression of the music mirrors the fast pace of life in the big Northeastern cities where Johnson and his followers worked. Carolina Shout became a test piece for every aspiring jazz pianist in the 1920’s. Events, called rent parties, were held where pianists would play in competition with each other; money collected from the audience would go toward the host’s rent. Johnson was also best known as the composer of the *Charleston*, one of the biggest musical hits of the 1920’s.

Fats Waller was a pupil of Johnson and initially aspired to a classical concert career (he studied also with the great pianist Godowsky) but was prevented from pursuing it because of racism. He became one of the most famous of jazz entertainers and also developed a highly original style. *Numb Fumblin’* consists of five

choruses of 12 bar blues plus a short introduction and a wonderful pentatonic waterfall in the top of the piano as a coda. Tenth stretches in the left hand, sonorous chords and capricious ornamentation are some of the features of his delightful style.

Aaron Copland, born of Russian Jewish parent, played jazz as a young man; jazz and blues were important influences throughout his life. He studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in the 1920’s along with many other Americans of the period. The *Four Piano Blues* are not formally blues pieces but they certainly have a great deal of blues feel. The left hand tenths, ornaments and harmonies as well as the contemplative moods make these truly blues pieces in spirit. The yearning and striving nature of the first and third capture perfectly the American spirit. The striving is not without pain though, as the occasional strong dissonances express. The dreamy and simple motion of the second and the bouncy quirkiness (with its humorous hiccups in the return of the opening!) round out a mini-tour of the rich blues style.

Along with Aaron Copland, Roy Harris is credited with creating a truly American style of music, influenced by folk music, fresh, open harmonies and vibrant rhythms. His origins were almost stereotypically American – born in the Oklahoma Territory he grew up in California where he later worked as a truck driver. The landscape and culture of the West later influenced his style even after studying in Paris. The *Toccata* (1950) is a short and brilliant piece, full of the confidence and optimism of America after the Second World War. Neoclassicism has an influence as well since the piece follows the plan of the baroque toccata with its bravura opening suggesting an improvisation followed by more lyrical material and finishing with a fugato complete with a long pedal note in the bass.

George Crumb, born in West Virginia, writes in a style with a tremendous variety of influences. Relentless experimentation with making very non-traditional sounds with traditional instruments is a feature of most

of his music. In many of his works he mixes traditional classical forms and instruments with non-Western and occult subjects. Often he uses unusual performing techniques to imitate other, often non-Western, instruments.

In *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979*, as in all of his enormous output of piano music, he asks the player to pluck, strum, mute and strike the piano strings from inside the instrument. The Nativity frescoes of Renaissance artist Giotto di Bondone, which depict the biblical account of the life of Jesus, inspired the work. It features a quotation of the well known Coventry Carol (1591), strummed on the piano strings like an autoharp, in the sixth movement. A bit like the music of Messiaen, the vast silences and long ringing sonorities evoke a meditative and mystical approach to its religious subject. Piano effects suggesting drums and ethnic stringed instruments decorate every movement while the final movement is filled with fantastic bell like effects.

Daniel Barta

— Clipper Erickson

DTR2015

American Eclectic -- American Journey Vol. 2  
Clipper Erickson, piano

Clipper Erickson explores the almost incredible variety of American piano styles from the rich 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism of Amy Beach to the bold and fresh music of Daniel Barta. Along the way is heard the unique impressionism of Charles Griffes and the frenetic stride music of Johnson and Waller from the 1920's. America's coming of age during the depression and World War II is reflected in the striving and yearning of Aaron Copland's "Four Piano Blues". Roy Harris captures the strength and confidence of the post-war period in his brilliant "Toccata". A new unconventional spirituality and colorful mysticism growing out of the 1960's is the essence of George Crumb's fantastic piano writing. Daniel Barta shows that wonderful new music continues to be written in our new century; his music combines many different feelings and styles in a quintessentially American eclecticism.

1. Ballad, Op. 6 (1894) – Amy Cheney-Beach (1867-1944) 9:07
2. The Fountain of the Acqua Paola Op. 7, No. 3 (1916) – Charles Griffes 3:23
3. Clouds Op. 7, No. 4 (1916) – Charles Griffes (1884-1920) 4:30
4. Numb Fumblin' – Thomas (Fats) Waller (1904-1943) 2:55
5. Carolina Shout – James P. Johnson (1891-1955) 3:35
- Four Piano Blues** – Aaron Copland (1900-1990)
  6. Freely Poetic (1947) 2:33
  7. Soft and Languid (1934) 2:22
  8. Muted and Sensuous (1948) 2:55
  9. With Bounce (1926) 1:19
10. Toccata (1950) – Roy Harris (1898-1979) 4:14
11. **A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979** – George Crumb (1929-) 13:36
  - The Visitation
  - Berceuse for the Infant Jesu
  - The Shepherd's Noel
  - Adoration of the Magi
  - Nativity Dance
  - Canticle of the Holy Night
  - Carol of the Bells
- Suite for Piano** (2001) – Daniel Barta (1953-)
  12. I. With conviction – Driving, with bounce 2:07
  13. II. Playful 2:01
  14. III. Gracious, with liberty 4:05
  15. IV. Subtle, steady 1:49
  16. V. Steady 1:57

This project is partially supported by a grant from



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Producer & engineer: Bob Sellman  
Recorded March 2005 at Bristol Chapel,  
Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey

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