

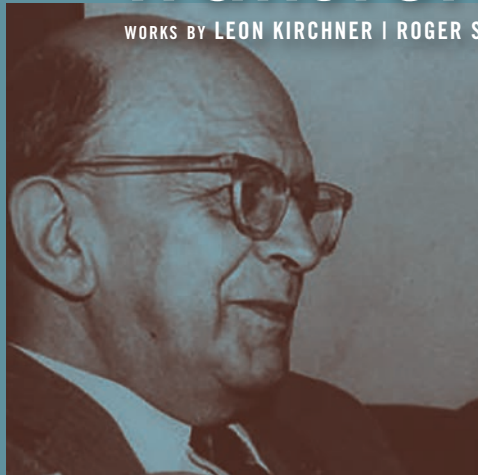
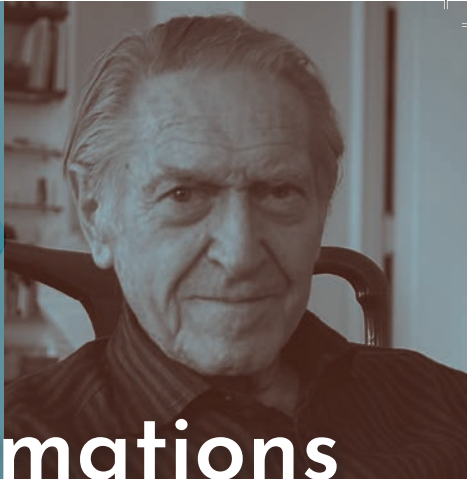


Elizabeth Chang, violin

Steven Beck, piano
Alberto Parrini, cello

Transformations

WORKS BY LEON KIRCHNER | ROGER SESSIONS | ARNOLD SCHOENBERG



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THE MUSIC

Leon Kirchner (1919–2009): Duo No. 2 for Violin and Piano (2002)

Although born in Brooklyn to Russian-Jewish parents, Leon Kirchner spent his formative years soaking up the Central-European musical tradition from mostly Jewish émigré musicians in California—first in Los Angeles where his family moved when he was nine, then in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he attended graduate school and later taught at UC Berkeley and at Mills College. In Los Angeles his connection to Central Europe began with the Viennese-born composer and pianist Ernest Toch at Los Angeles City College and continued with Toch's friend and colleague Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA. At Berkeley, Kirchner was a student of the Swiss-born and German-trained Ernest Bloch (composition) and the German-born and trained Bernhard Abramowitsch (piano); later, as a professor at Mills College in Oakland—a post for which he was recommended by Igor Stravinsky—he was a colleague of Darius Milhaud. While a graduate student at Berkeley, a fellowship intended to send him to France was paralyzed because of WW II into four years on the East Coast. Another Central-European professor of Kirchner's, the German-born and trained musicologist Manfred Bukofzer, provided the introduction necessary for Kirchner to study with Bukofzer's own teacher Paul Hindemith. Unfortunately, Hindemith's requirement that Kirchner move to New Haven to work with him was incompatible with Kirchner's war-time military obligations. In New York and again upon his return to Berkeley in 1946, Kirchner worked with Roger Sessions, himself a student of Ernest Bloch, and perhaps the American composer of his generation who most embodied the Central-

I have often had occasion to reflect on the relationships I have formed with my own students, on the lasting influences both subtle and momentous that we have had on one another, and on the ways in which the particularity of the teacher/student relationship in this art form bears fruit in our evolution as human beings and as musicians.

This selection of composers derives its rationale from my own artistic heritage and the profound artistic and pedagogical influence Leon Kirchner had on me when I was an undergraduate at Harvard. Many eminent musicians of our time have attested to the legendary clarity with which Kirchner could lay bare the structural underpinnings of a musical work and its consequently inevitable emotional logic. Kirchner, in turn, was a student of two of the most influential composers of the twentieth century, Roger Sessions and Arnold Schoenberg. Both Sessions and Schoenberg were pioneers in seeking a new compositional language in the post-tonal world while being deeply rooted in the Germanic tradition. Kirchner's voice reflects both the thorny complexity of modernism while palpably reaching for the sensuality of the musical language of a previous era.

—Elizabeth Chang, December 2020

European tradition. (From an old New England family, Sessions is the only teacher not of Jewish origin to have had a profound effect on Kirchner's development.)

Among the values Kirchner seems to have absorbed from his teachers were a belief in composition as profound inner utterance, and a strong connection to the Central-European canon. Unlike Sessions and many composers of his own generation, Kirchner never turned to compositional systems such as serialism. Instead, he seems to have embodied Schoenberg's individualistic philosophy that "if a composer doesn't write from the heart, he simply can't produce good music," or, in Kirchner's own words, "[music is] the expression of the human spirit." Kirchner's music, while modernist, is highly personal in a manner that eschews easy classification: not tonal, but rarely atonal in the manner in which the term is often understood, and highly complex, but non-systematic. This aesthetic made him a natural fit for the likes of Rudolf Serkin and his colleagues at the Marlboro Music Festival, the post-WW II haven for European refugees and their American proteges, at which Kirchner was a regular guest beginning in 1959, two years before his permanent return to the East Coast to teach at Harvard. At Marlboro, Kirchner befriended the violinist Felix Galimir, a stalwart of the Festival from 1954 until his death in 1999.

Kirchner's *Duo No. 2* for violin and piano (2002) was commissioned as a tribute to Galimir by the violinist's nephew Richard Hurtig and niece Viola Morse—the children of Galimir's sister, the violist Renée Galimir-Hurtig—and their spouses. The choice of Kirchner as the composer to memorialize the Austrian-born and trained violinist stemmed not only from the personal relationship between the two, but also from their shared

interest in the music and aesthetics of Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern. (Galimir's relationship to Berg was particularly strong, having made the first recording of *Lyric Suite* with his all-sibling quartet under the supervision of the composer in 1936.)

Duo No. 2 is a single movement that unfolds rhapsodically over several sections in the course of its 15-minute span. The work opens *pianissimo* with a four-bar introduction that begins with the piano alone in a high register. Kirchner then plants a low E pedal in the piano above which rise two arpeggios in the violin and piano. The musical materials of the passage consist primarily of minor thirds and perfect fourths (played as double-stops in the violin). These elements—including the tritones, diminished triads, and dominant seventh chords of which the minor thirds are constituent parts—combine with the clearer perfect fourths to give birth to the sound world of the work.

Throughout the music, Kirchner calls for rapid changes of mood achieved by quick switches between arco and pizzicato, double stops and single lines, passages of complex counterpoint juxtaposed with homorhythmic and even unison passages, and by the embellishment of longer lines with virtuosic arabesques. The work ends *fortissimo* with the violin rising forcefully to its highest register over a low F# pedal in the piano. The range and intensity of the final chord give the sense of striving to enter another world. Those familiar with Berg's Violin Concerto, which depicts the birth and death of the work's dedicatee, Manon Gropius, in its opening and closing gestures, will recognize that Kirchner's opening and closing in the *Duo* are in dialogue with Berg, as well as with the Schoenbergian tradition writ large. The resonance between the *Duo* and Berg's Concerto is all the more

intense by virtue of both being works of memorial, Kirchner's not only for Galimir, but also for his own wife of fifty years, Gertrude Schoenberg (no relation to the composer), who, like Galimir, died in 1999.

Roger Sessions: Sonata for Violin (1953)

Like his student Leon Kirchner, Roger Sessions (1896–1985) was born in Brooklyn, was a student of Ernest Bloch, won the Pulitzer Prize in music (1974 and 1982), served on the faculty of a women's college early in his career (Smith College), held appointments at UC Berkeley and an Ivy League university, taught generations of important composers, and was deeply influenced by Arnold Schoenberg. Like Kirchner's, Sessions's plans to study in France (with Ravel) were also prevented by a world war (WWI).

A *Wunderkind*, Sessions entered Harvard University at the age of 14, and continued his studies at Yale with Horatio Parker. At 23, while teaching at Smith (just across the river from his family's historical home and his later burial place in Hadley, MA), Sessions sought out the recent immigrant Ernest Bloch for instruction. His association with Bloch proved fruitful. He served as Bloch's assistant at the Cleveland Institute of Music and his later association with UC Berkeley (first as a summer-school instructor, later as a full professor and honored lecturer) came through Boch. In 1925 Sessions moved to Europe. Unlike the majority of American expatriate composers, he did not live in Paris, but immersed himself in the musical life of Rome, Florence, and Berlin. He returned permanently to the U.S. in 1933 (the same year as Schoenberg's emigration) and in 1936 began teaching at Princeton. Between 1945 and 1953 he taught at Berkeley where he came into close contact with the community of exiled German intellectuals and

artists in California including Schoenberg and Thomas Mann. In 1953 he returned to Princeton until his retirement in 1965, after which he was associated with the Julliard School.

Sessions's monumentally virtuosic ("difficult as hell," in his words) Sonata for Violin was the last work he completed in Berkeley. This was his first work in which he adopted Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, albeit in his own idiomatic, non-dogmatic manner. He wrote the Sonata for Robert Arthur Gross, a violinist who studied composition with both him and Schoenberg, and who gave the first performance of Sessions's Violin Concerto. Initially Sessions was hesitant about writing for unaccompanied violin and composing with a 12-tone row. He grew into the idea gradually by "toying with fragments" that he imagined would work well on the violin, and which he discovered upon reflection were well suited to 12-tone treatment. What follows are the composer's own notes:

The Sonata consists of four movements, ideally to be played without pause. The first movement, with the indication "Tempo moderato, con ampiezza, e liberamente," is rhapsodic in character; it consists of three contrasting episodes, of which the second is most animated. Each episode is introduced by a variant of the opening phrase of the movement—rising briefly before the second episode, falling from the high register before the third, and at length, in very slow tones, at the close.

The second movement, "Molto vivo," embraces three sections, of which the third is virtually an exact repetition of the first—the only complete instance of this procedure in all of my music, but one which seemed thoroughly appropriate here. The middle, contrasting section—"un poco meno mosso, ma sempre appassionato,"—is somewhat more rhapsodical in character.

The third movement, “Adagio e dolcemente,” brings four statements, each time a little more expansive, of the idea with which the movement opens. These statements are separated from each other by declamatory passages (“quasi recitativo”), each in its turn more expansive than the preceding one. The fourth statement of the principal idea develops into a freer melodic line, and closes with a foreshadowing, three times repeated, of the opening notes of the last movement.

The final movement, “Alla Marcia vivace,” is the shortest of the four. The quick march rhythm gives way, towards the middle of the movement, to a short contrasting passage in 3/4 time; it then returns, somewhat more elaborately, leading to a quiet passage, recalling the rhapsodic mood of the first movement. The whole closes with a very brief reference to the opening measures of the “Alla Marcia.”

Roger Sessions: Duo for Violin and Cello (1978)

Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951): Phantasy for Violin with Piano Accompaniment, Op. 47 (1949)

Sessions wrote his Duo for Violin and Cello at the age of eighty-two, the same age at which Kirchner wrote his Duo No. 2. Sessions’s last work of chamber music, it was not published in his lifetime but found among his papers after his death in 1985. A draft of a few measures of a slow movement suggest that Sessions had intended the work to be longer. He apparently put the Duo aside when he received a commission from the Boston Symphony for what would become his Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Concerto for Orchestra* (1981). The Duo bears the dedication “for John, Giovina, and Teresa with love,” that is, to his son, a long-time professor of cello at Smith

College, John’s wife, a professional violinist, and their daughter.

The Duo begins *Tranquillo* with the violin alone playing a motto in double stops: a consonant major third (E-G#) that moves to more dissonant intervals, first collapsing into a minor second (F#-G) then expanding to a major seventh (C-B). The entrance of the cello propels the music into a contrasting *Allegro con spirito* in which the violin and cello dance and spar. These two moods—tranquil and spirited—alternate (sometimes quite rapidly) throughout the work until a final *Tranquillo molto* brings the movement to a close. This last section finds the violin and cello in their most intimate collaboration. The final sonority, in which the E and G# that had initially belonged to the violin alone are shared between the two instruments, exemplifies the melding of the contrasting forces into a single unity—an apt ending for a piece written for performance by a husband and wife.

As Arnold Schoenberg is in many respects the spiritual grandfather of the other music on this recording, it is only fitting to have one of his own works also represented. Like Sessions’s Duo for Violin and Cello, Schoenberg’s *Phantasy* is the composer’s last work of chamber music, and, like Session’s Sonata for Violin, is dedicated to a violinist friend of the composer, Adolph Koldofsky. A European-trained Canadian violinist, Koldofsky came to Los Angeles to play in Hollywood studio orchestras in 1946 after a stint as concertmaster of the Vancouver Symphony. In Los Angeles he established a chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music and was active in the promotion of new music until his untimely death (3 months prior to Schoenberg’s) in 1951. Koldofsky gave the premieres of both Schoenberg’s String Trio and *Phantasy*, the latter with the pianist Leon Stein on the composer’s seventy-fifth birthday.

Schoenberg wrote the *Phantasy* “for violin with piano accompaniment” to de-emphasize the role of the piano. He completed the violin part before turning to the relatively sparse piano part, which he considered purely secondary, explaining to an over-eager pianist: “This is not a duo, but a piece for solo violin with accompaniment, which must never make a bid for independence.”

As is the case with much of Schoenberg’s music, one can detect the imprint of his Central-European musical heritage on several levels. The first four pitches of the violin part (Bb-A-C#-B) are a variant of the Bach cipher (H being the German designation for the note we call B natural). Another nod to tradition is Schoenberg’s breaking up the one-movement work into five subsections (Grave–Lento–Grazioso–Scherzando–Tempo I) in the manner of a fantasy by the likes of Mozart, Schubert, or Beethoven. The faint echoes of waltzes in the Grazioso and Scherzando sections suggest Schoenberg’s Viennese heritage—a heritage shared in musical spirit if not by birth by all of the composers on this recording.

—David E. Schneider, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Music,
Amherst College

THE PERFORMERS

Elizabeth Chang, violin



Elizabeth Chang, violinist, enjoys a multi-faceted career as performer, teacher, and arts administrator. Her performing career has taken her to more than twenty countries and her chamber music appearances have included collaborations with many of today’s leading artists. She is currently Professor of Violin at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a member of the violin and viola faculties of the Pre-College Division of the Juilliard School. In the sum-

mers she serves on the faculties of Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival (Vermont) and Brancaloneoni International Music Festival (Italy).

Ms. Chang is Artistic Director and co-founder of the Lighthouse Chamber Players (Cape Cod) as well as co-founder and co-organizer of the Five College New Music Festival, the UMass Amherst Bach Festival and Symposium and *Musique de Chambre en Val Lamartinien* (Burgundy, France). She also co-founded the NYU Intensive Quartet Workshop in the summer of 2002 and founded and directed The School for Strings Intensive Chamber Music Workshop from 2003-2007.

Ms. Chang has worked with a number of composers on new works for violin and including violin, most notably and extensively with Salvatore Macchia, Eric Sawyer, and Lewis Spratlan. Prior to her appointment to UMass, Ms. Chang toured and recorded extensively with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and performed with a

number of new music groups based in New York City. She was formerly an Artist Faculty member of New York University and of the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University; for many years she also served as head of chamber music and violin faculty member at The School for Strings and as a member of the faculty of the Harlem School of the Arts.

She was a student of Louise Behrend, Joseph Fuchs, Roman Totenberg, Max Rostal, Leon Kirchner and Luise Vosgerchian. She is a graduate of Harvard College and was a recipient of the Presidential Scholar in the Arts award.

Steven Beck, piano



A recent New York concert by pianist Steven Beck was described as “exemplary” and “deeply satisfying” by Anthony Tommasini in the *New York Times*. Mr. Beck is an experienced performer of new music, having worked with Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, Henri Dutilleux, Charles Wuorinen, George Crumb, George Perle, and Fred Lerdahl, and performed with ensembles such as Speculum Musicae and the New York New Music Ensemble. He is a member of the Knights, the Talea Ensemble, and the Da Capo Chamber Players. He is also a member of Quattro Mani, a piano duo specializing in contemporary music. As an orchestral musician he has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, the New York City Ballet Orchestra, Orpheus, the Mariinsky Orchestra and many others. Recent performances include *Carnival of the Animals* with the New York Philharmonic and Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with the Princeton Symphony. Mr. Beck gives an annual Christmas Eve

performance of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* at Bargemusic; this has become a New York institution.

Mr. Beck’s discography includes Peter Lieberman’s third piano concerto (for Bridge Records) and a recording of Elliott Carter’s *Double Concerto* on Albany Records. He is a Steinway Artist.

Alberto Parrini



Alberto Parrini has toured North America, Europe and Asia with Mikhail Baryshnikov and the White Oak Dance Project and performed with Arco Ensemble, Concertante, Continuum, Mark Morris Dance Group, Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Mirror Visions, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Proteus Ensemble and Sinfonietta of Riverdale. His festival appearances include Evian, Tanglewood, Taos, Verbier, Ottawa, Montreal, San Miguel de Allende, Spoleto U.S.A., Music@Menlo, Windham, The Weekend of Chamber Music and the Piatigorsky seminar. He is principal cellist of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic and a member of the American Symphony and Orchestra of St. Luke’s. He also performs regularly with East Coast Chamber Orchestra, Lenape Chamber Ensemble, Lighthouse Chamber Players, Richardson Chamber Players, New Jersey Symphony and New York Philharmonic. He has been guest principal cellist with the American Symphony, Cecilia Chorus, New York Symphonic Ensemble, Performance Santa Fe, Stamford Symphony and Teatro Grattacielo.

As a founding member of the Zukofsky Quartet he gave performances of the complete string quartets of Milton Babbitt in New York and Chicago. He performed throughout the U.S. with the American Chamber Players from 2004 to 2010, was the cellist of the St. Lawrence String Quartet in 2002-03 and spent one season as assistant principal cellist with the Richmond Symphony. His principal studies were with Timothy Eddy, Joel Krosnick, David Soyer, Colin Carr and Enrico Egano; he is a graduate of the Curtis Institute and the Juilliard School.

Mr. Parrini teaches cello at Princeton University and at The College of New Jersey. In the summer, he teaches at Kinhaven Music School, where he is also co-director of the Adult Chamber Music Workshop.

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Transformations

Elizabeth Chang, *violin* | Steven Beck, *piano* | Alberto Parrini, *cello*



Leon Kirchner

- 1 *Duo No. 2 for Violin and Piano* [15:04]

Roger Sessions

Solo Sonata

- 2 *Tempo Moderato* [10:47]
 3 *Molto Vivo* [6:30]
 4 *Adagio e dolcemente* [9:14]
 5 *Alla marcia vivace* [4:34]

Roger Sessions

- 6 *Duo for Violin and Cello* [8:21]

Alberto Parrini, cello

Arnold Schoenberg

- 7 *Phantasy* [8:20]

Total Time = 62:54

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