



WILLIAM BOLCOM

Music for Two Pianos Recuerdos • Frescoes • Sonata

Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann



William Bolcom (b. 1938)

Music for Two Pianos

William Bolcom was born in Seattle, Washington. He studied composition with Milhaud at Mills College in Oakland, California from 1958 to 1961, continuing with him and Messiaen in Paris. While teaching at Queens College in New York City in the late 1960s, he developed an interest in ragtime piano performance that helped spur a renewed interest in the music, leading to the composition of rags such as *Graceful Ghost*. Since 1973 he has taught at the University of Michigan. Bolcom is best known for his many recitals and recordings of historical American popular song with his wife, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. His early compositions are serial, reflecting Boulez, Stockhausen and Berio. With his discovery of ragtime, he found his mature style that melds popular and classical idioms in a distinctively American eclecticism.

Perusing a collection of late nineteenth-century Latin American dances inspired *Recuerdos (Reminiscences)*. Bolcom saw the continuity between American ragtime and the larger world tradition of light piano music, writing his own tribute and evocations of that era. *Chôro*, the genre of Brazilian street folk-song, is in the style of Ernesto Nazareth, its creator. *Paseo* reflects the melding of Latin and North American musics in Civil War-era New Orleans in the music of America's first classical virtuoso pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk. *Valse Venezolano* is a Venezuelan waltz in the style of Ramón Delgado Palacios. It makes use of many of the stylistic elements of Palacios, including unexpected leaps, modulations and phrase lengths as well as excursions into 5/8 metre. *Recuerdos* was written for and first given at the Murray Dranoff Two-Piano Competition in 1991.

Frescoes is one of Bolcom's most powerful works in its scope and colours. In the detailed preface, Bolcom, inspired by the brief sketching, rapid painting and grand vision of fresco technique, wrote *Frescoes* in similar style. The pianists also double on harpsichord and harmonium. The score itself, typical of many works of

the late 1960s and early 1970s, is visual "eye music" incorporating aleatoric improvisation, unsynchronized playing, tone clusters and plucking of the strings. The work is in two movements, *War in Heaven* and *The Caves of Orcus*. It was first performed in 1971 in Toronto by Bruce Mather and Pierrette LePage.

The *Sonata for Two Pianos in One Movement* displays the focus resulting from the condensation of a three-movement form into a single movement. The first movement *Gaia*, the earth mother creatrix and sustainer of life on Earth, explores a nearly orchestral range of colours through a sonata-form structure of themes in which a lyrical third theme, in Bolcom's words, "set(s) up a conflict that proves to be irresolvable except by continuing into the other two movements". *Night Diversion* uses two pedal tones from *Gaia* which leads to a third (B flat); this note brackets two quotations, the first from Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* and the second the first ten notes from Debussy's *Brouillards*. *Ancient Dances* grew from an early Bolcom fragment. The conflicts of the previous two movements return to be resolved in a clear D major with the lyrical third theme of the first movement in apotheosis to end the work. Bolcom combines ancient Greek rhythms with a dancing blues, creating unforeseen connections. The *Sonata* was commissioned for the Paratore brothers' piano duo who gave the première in 1994.

Interlude dates from the early 1960s and the composer's "total chromatic period", which took place in Paris and at Stanford and includes the first dozen piano études and works such as *Décalage for cello and piano*.

Bolcom's suite *The Garden of Eden*, originally for solo piano, uses the ragtime idiom to tell the biblical story of the Fall from Genesis. It consists of four movements, each a self-contained "rag". Bolcom arranged the third and fourth rags, *The Serpent's Kiss* and *Through Eden's Gates*, for two pianos in 1994 for their première recording by Richard and John Contigula.

The Serpent's Kiss uses various ragtime effects such as heel stomping and knocking on the wood of the piano in addition to aptly appropriate tongue clicking. *Through Eden's Gates*, in Bolcom's words, "conjures the image of Adam and Eve calmly cakewalking their way out of Paradise".

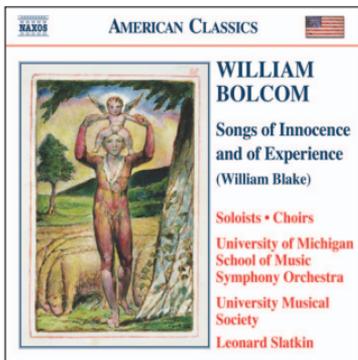
David Ciucevich

Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann



Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann have been performing together as a duo since 1989. They studied with Arie Vardi at the Hanover Hochschule für Musik und Theater, and with Jean-Eudes Vaillancourt at the Université de Montréal. The duo received first prize at the International Chamber Music Competition in Caltanissetta, Italy, and were laureates of The Fourth Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition. In 1993 they became members of the young artists' roster of Yehudi Menuhin-Live Music Now. Their recitals and concerts with orchestra have taken them to many parts of the world, including the United States, Italy, Germany, Holland, Greece and Canada. They have appeared at the celebrated Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, the Banff Arts Festival, the Royal Bank Calgary International Organ Festival and Competition, the International Two Piano Symposium and Schubertiade, Miami, the Tage für neue Musik, Darmstadt, the Braunschweiger Kammermusik Podium and at EXPO 2000, Hanover. Recordings have been made for CBC, for several stations of ARD in Germany and for National Public Radio in the United States. In 1997 they recorded their first CD with twentieth-century works for two pianos. The duo's most recent recordings appear on the Arktos label featuring works by Rachmaninov, Bernstein, Debussy, Liszt and Gershwin. As founding members of the International Piano Quartet they had the opportunity to record Stravinsky's *Les Noces* under the direction of Robert Craft at the Abbey Road Studios in London, recently re-released on Naxos (8.557499). Currently on faculty at The Mount Royal College Conservatory in Calgary, Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann have also been involved in various musical activities at The Banff Centre for the Arts and were recently appointed as Artistic Directors of The Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition and Foundation in Miami. They are members of the Calgary based group Land's End Chamber Ensemble and have recently appeared as soloists with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and the Red Deer and Lethbridge Symphonic Orchestras. Their extensive repertoire ranges from the baroque to the contemporary and includes many of their own arrangements and compositions.

Also available from Naxos:



8.559216-18



8.559249



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This recording was made possible thanks to a grant
from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Playing
Time:
72:15

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WILLIAM BOLCOM

(b. 1938)

- Recuerdos (1991) 13:22**
1 Chôro (Homage to Nazareth) 3:28
2 Paseo
 (à la mémoire de Louis-Moreau Gottschalk) 5:23
3 Valse Venezolano
 (à la mémoire de Ramón Delgado Palacios) 4:31
**Frescoes for two pianos, harmonium
 and harpsichord (1971) 28:18**
4 War in Heaven 13:24
5 The Caves of Orcus 14:55
6 Sonata for Two Pianos
 in One Movement (1993) 15:40
7 Interlude (1963, rev. 1965) 4:03
8 The Serpent's Kiss (Ragtime)
 (1969, arr. 1994) 5:37
9 Through Eden's Gates (Cakewalk)
 (1969, arr. 1994) 5:13

**Elizabeth Bergmann, Piano and Harpsichord
 Marcel Bergmann, Piano and Harmonium**

Recorded at Rolston Recital Hall, The Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta, Canada from 7th to 10th January, 2005.

Publishers: E.B. Marks Music Comp. (Tracks 1-5 and 7-9);
 E.B. Marks Music Comp. and Bolcom Music (Track 6)

Producer: Harold Gillis • Engineer: Brian Richards

Assistant Engineer: Julia Havenstein • Editors: Brian Richards
 and Julia Havenstein • Piano Technician: Robert Haist

Booklet notes: David Ciucevich

Cover painting: *Detail of Sistine Chapel Ceiling (1508-12):*

The Fall of Man, 1510 by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)
 (Vatican Museums and Galleries / www.bridgeman.co.uk)

American flag, folk artist, 1880s.



AMERICAN CLASSICS

In the late 1960s, William Bolcom developed an interest in ragtime piano that helped spur a renewal of interest in the music. With this discovery he found his mature style, a distinctively American eclecticism. Included on this recording are *Recuerdos* (Reminiscences), an evocation of late nineteenth-century Latin American dances, and *Frescoes*, one of Bolcom's most powerful works in its scope and colours. Concluding this selection is Bolcom's suite *The Garden of Eden*, which uses the ragtime idiom to tell the biblical story of the Fall. *Through Eden's Gates*, its final movement, "conjures the image of Adam and Eve calmly cakewalking their way out of Paradise".

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