



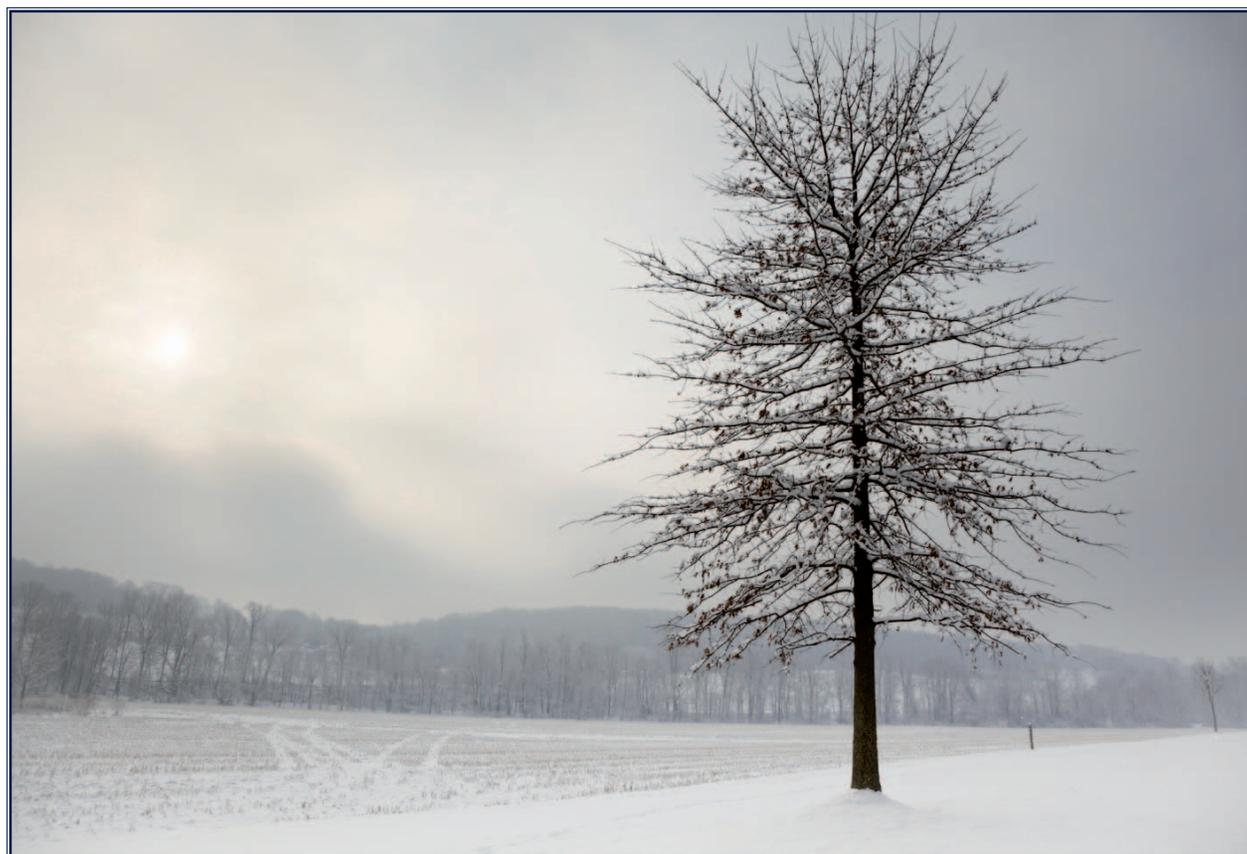
AMERICAN CLASSICS



Norman
LLOYD Peter
MENNIN

Piano Music

Myron Silberstein



Norman Lloyd (1909-1980)

Three Scenes from Memory

- 1 Winter Landscape
- 2 Sad Carrousel
- 3 City Street

Five Pieces for Dance (1935-38)

- 4 Puritan Hymn: Dance for Five
- 5 Blues
- 6 Piping Tune – Tune for the Open Air
- 7 Dance Hall Study
- 8 Theme and Variations

Episodes for Piano

- 9 No. 1. Slowly, but with motion
- 10 No. 2. Lento
- 11 No. 3. Whimsically
- 12 No. 4. Slowly
- 13 No. 5. Gaily

Sonata for Piano (1958)

- 14 Allegro
- 15 Slowly and freely
- 16 Roughly; With a rhythmic drive

Peter Mennin (1923-1983)

Five Pieces for Piano (1949)

- 17 Prelude
- 18 Aria
- 19 Variation-Canzona
- 20 Canto
- 21 Toccata

Sonata for Piano (1963)

- 22 Poco moderato; Allegro
- 23 Adagio
- 24 Veloce

3:50

11:36

9:06

14:31

1:24

1:19

1:07

3:16

1:23

1:15

1:23

4:20

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1:27

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13:49

1:13

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4:15

2:55

17:00

6:37

6:08

4:15

Norman Lloyd (1909-1980) • Peter Mennin (1923-1983)

Piano Music

Norman Lloyd (1909-1980) and Peter Mennin (1923-1983) are apt discmates. Both were Pennsylvania-born composers who also devoted substantial portions of their careers to teaching as well as educational administration. Both served together on the faculties of The Juilliard School from 1947 until 1958. And Lloyd was one of the figures considered as possible successor to William Schuman when he stepped down as president of the Juilliard in 1962, although Mennin was ultimately chosen for this position. But despite these points of overlap, the careers of the two men were distinguished by markedly different emphases.

Norman Lloyd played a significant rôle in many facets of American musical life in the 20th century, although neither his name nor his music is often heard today. Born in Pottsville, PA, Lloyd received his undergraduate and graduate training in music at New York University (1932; 1936). His career owed much to his relationship with William Schuman during the 1930s and 40s. In 1936 he joined the music faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, where Schuman was already experimenting with his own ideas regarding music pedagogy. When Schuman assumed the presidency of The Juilliard School in 1945, he took Lloyd with him, and the two men, in consultation with Vincent Persichetti and Richard Franko Goldman, developed the Literature and Materials Program, which revolutionized music education in America.

But during those early years Lloyd had other interests as well. One of these was modern dance. After accompanying Martha Hill's classes at NYU, he spent his summers at Bennington College (1934-42), where, as accompanist, he became acquainted with a number of distinguished choreographers, chief among them Martha Graham, as well as Doris Humphrey and José Limón. In fact, in 1935 Graham commissioned him to compose music for *Panorama*, Bennington's first major dance production, which included *Puritan Hymn* (heard on this recording). It is thus no surprise that it was Lloyd who developed the dance department at Juilliard in 1951.

During the Depression he and his wife Ruth performed jazz and popular music as a piano duo. Lloyd also became interested in film, and composed music for more than 30 documentaries before and during World War II. Perhaps the accomplishment for which he was best known was providing the musical arrangements for *The Fireside Book of Folksongs* (1947), as well as for several other popular collections of folksongs that graced the pianos in thousands of American homes during the late 1940s and 50s.

Upon earning his doctorate from the Philadelphia Conservatory in 1963, Lloyd accepted the position of dean of the Oberlin College Conservatory. While there he co-authored – along with Arnold Fish – the widely used textbook *Fundamentals of Sight Singing and Ear Training* (1964). In 1965 he was invited to join the Rockefeller Foundation as director of arts programming. During this period he found the time to write the *Golden Encyclopedia of Music* (1968). He remained at Rockefeller until his retirement in 1972, and died of leukemia in July 1980.

Lloyd did not regard himself primarily as a composer, thus much of his music remained unpublished, and dates of composition are not always available. For example, it is not certain exactly when he composed his *Three Scenes from Memory*, short piano pieces simple enough for elementary students to play. Each piece was dedicated to one of his early music teachers at the Braun School in Pottsville, PA. The gently pandiatonic *Winter Landscape* was dedicated to Carrie Lou Betz. *Sad Carrousel*, wistful and waltz-like, was dedicated to Mrs. Robert Braun. In *City Street*, quartal harmony predominates, although the piece ends with reiterated triads, in a manner reminiscent of much of Schuman's music. This piece was dedicated to Florence Stephens.

Five Pieces for Dance were composed during the period 1935-38, when Lloyd was actively involved in the dance program at Bennington. As noted, *Puritan Hymn* was written for Martha Graham's *Panorama*. Though simple to play, it displays polytonal dissonance and

changing meters, while evincing a heavy tread. *Blues* was dedicated to Louis Horst. It is relaxed and idiomatic, following the standard twelve-bar blues prototype. *Piping Tune – Tune for the Open Air* is a charming pentatonic melody with a distinctly Celtic flavor. *Dance Hall Study* was written for Anna Sokolow, and is a somewhat clown-like treatment of irregular rhythmic groupings over a constant duple-meter accompaniment. It is a little more difficult and complex than the preceding pieces. *Theme and Variations*, dedicated to Martha Hill, is the longest, most difficult, and most elaborate piece of the group, though the variations are clear and easy to follow.

Episodes, dedicated to Stanley Lock, a longtime member of the Sarah Lawrence music faculty, were most likely composed during the 1940s. Suitable for an intermediate-level pianist, they are more substantial than the previous pieces, and reveal a greater compositional security. American in flavor, they inhabit a language reminiscent of composers such as Aaron Copland and Vincent Persichetti. No. 1 has a wistful, nostalgic feeling; No. 2 is similar, but a trifle sunnier; No. 3 is perky, displaying a light touch and pandiatonic harmony; No. 4 is austere and meditative; No. 5, more complex and difficult than the others, is sprightly and lighthearted, with delightful rhythmic twists.

The *Sonata for Piano* is Lloyd's most ambitious composition for the instrument. Composed in 1958, it was dedicated to pianist Joseph Bloch and his wife Dana. Bloch gave the work's première in 1966. The sonata is a compelling, convincingly developed abstract work in three movements, and features nervous, heavily-accented rhythmic syncopations, pandiatonic and polytonal harmony, and much intervallic parallelism and contrary motion – all of which represented something of a *lingua franca* among American composers during the 1950s, especially those associated with The Juilliard School.

The first movement, a driving *Allegro*, is based on a descending motif of gradually expanding intervals. A lyrical, contrasting middle section is based on the same motif. The second movement, *Slowly and freely*, is wistful and reflective, and is based on a descending scalar motif and its inversion. The third movement opens with an

introduction marked *Roughly*, with rapid running figurations that recall the motifs from both preceding movements. This leads directly into the Finale, *With a rhythmic drive*. The briskly energetic movement opens with a playful, jazzy motif of its own, but with hints of the thematic material from the two previous movements. This lively movement culminates in an exultant conclusion.

While composition was one of many musical activities that engaged the interest and involvement of Norman Lloyd, the life of Peter Mennin revealed a different emphasis. Although he too spent much of his career in musical administration, composition was unquestionably the endeavor that was most important to him. His responsibilities as president of the Peabody Conservatory (1958-1962) and The Juilliard School (1962-1983) occupied much of his time and attention, with the result that his *oeuvre* is small. But he compensated for that by producing works that were major statements almost exclusively (nine symphonies, three concertos, sonatas for piano and for violin and piano, and a large-scale cantata head the list), with little in the way of peripheral or diverting fare.

Born in Erie, PA, Mennin (*né* Mennini) was drawn to music by the age of five, when he began rigorous formal training with a European teacher of the "old school." This early exposure led to his subsequent embrace of some of the more orthodox disciplines than were in favor during the mid-20th century, rejecting "the American tendency to look for an easy way. *There is no easy way*," he insisted. After completing high school, he entered Oberlin, where he remained for only two years, as he did not get along with his teacher, Normand Lockwood. However, he did complete his *First Symphony* there, before volunteering for a stint in the military. Attracted by their policy of performing student works, Mennin entered the Eastman School in 1944, where he worked under Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers, although he bristled at any interference in his aesthetic intentions. While there he completed a *Symphony No. 2*, which won two awards, although he subsequently withdrew the work, as he did its predecessor. For his doctorate he wrote his *Symphony No. 3*, which was premièred by the New York

Philharmonic in 1946, before it had even been accepted by the Eastman doctoral committee. The following year William Schuman invited him to join the Juilliard faculty, along with Norman Lloyd.

The successful première of his *Symphony No. 3* led to a recording by the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos. By the 1950s Mennin was recognized as one of the leading American symphonic composers of his generation, winning honors and awards throughout the decades to follow. His *Symphony No. 7* (1963) is considered by many to be one of the greatest of all American symphonies.

In 1982, Mennin was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, but kept this fact secret from most of those around him, devoting the time that remained to his responsibilities at Juilliard, and to the completion of a *Flute Concerto*. He died in June 1983.

Mennin's own music reflected concerns that appeared early on, and continued to evolve throughout his career. The most salient characteristic of his music is a continuous unfolding of polyphonic lines through imitative counterpoint, rather than the more conventional dialectical opposition and integration of contrasting themes. Indeed, he emphasized counterpoint above all other elements, almost to the point of obsession. Mennin believed that the most important quality for a composer is individuality, and his own work readily illustrates that conviction. His mature compositions seem to reflect the sober contemplation of ferocious conflict among wild, massive forces in ceaseless turbulence, escalating in intensity toward cataclysmic explosions of almost manic brutality – all articulated through clear musical logic and meticulous craftsmanship. Over the course of decades, the linear aspect of Mennin's music became increasingly chromatic, the harmony increasingly dissonant, and the rhythm increasingly irregular. This evolution may be heard clearly in the two works presented on this recording, one from his earlier years, the other one of his later compositions. His body of work thus stands as an inexorable progression, each entry grimmer, harsher, and more severe than the last.

Five Piano Pieces, originally entitled *Partita*, were

composed in 1949, and received their first performance at the hands of Grant Johannesen. The title *Partita* would have implied a connection to the Baroque suite, which the individual movement titles still suggest: *Prelude, Aria, Variation-Canzona, Canto*, and *Toccata*. The pieces comprising the "suite" follow the composer's general procedures at this point in his creative development, although their impact is somewhat less distinctive than that left by his larger works. The odd-numbered movements are torrential perpetual-motion affairs – *toccata*-like, despite their different titles – largely in two voices, with irregularly grouped patterns and phrases, and prominent use of *ostinato* in the third movement. The two even-numbered movements are slow and somber, with long-breathed lyricism, and build to powerful climaxes. Several of the movements are written in the Phrygian mode.

Mennin's *Piano Sonata* was commissioned by the Ford Foundation on behalf of pianist Claudette Sorel. Completed in 1963, the work displays a much harsher, more dissonant harmonic language than is found in his previous works, as well as linear writing that is much more freely chromatic. Although each of its three movements is clearly anchored in a tonal center, each is largely atonal throughout its course of development, while the meter changes with virtually every measure.

The first movement, *Poco moderato*, opens with a slow introduction that presents the movement's primary thematic material, which includes several motifs that will figure significantly later in the work as well. The first is a descending motif that ends in an accented mordent – a characteristic Mennin gesture. This motif recurs throughout the movement for brief moments of repose, and suggests the shape of the motifs that dominate the remaining movements. Another motif, a four-note figure consisting of two descending minor-seconds, is the chief focus of development once the vigorous *Allegro* commences, and is transformed several times through octave-displacement. As the movement proceeds, the tempo changes a number of times, linear counterpoint becomes highly dissonant, and textures quite dense; the emotional temperature is tense and grim. By the time it reaches its resolute conclusion, a tonal center of C has been affirmed.

The second movement, *Adagio*, displays a deeply searching, improvisatory quality. It revolves around a lofty melody of somewhat melancholy cast, which eventually builds to a powerful, dissonant climax. Again, despite its highly chromatic linear writing and extremely harsh harmonic language, a tonal center of C-sharp minor clearly frames the movement.

The finale, *Veloce*, is a tremendously propulsive movement in perpetual motion, with a constant figuration, but ever-changing meter, suggesting the general feeling of a *rondo*. Again, although the harmony is quite dissonant, the tonality is clearly B-flat minor. Before it reaches its grimly decisive conclusion, motifs from the first movement make their appearance. Some commentators have remarked on a similarity to the finale of Prokofiev's *Seventh Sonata*, while the coda of the movement has provoked comparisons with the corresponding passage in the last movement of Barber's *Piano Sonata*. However, the aggressive energy and ceaseless drive of this movement are far more characteristic of Mennin's body of work than of Prokofiev's or Barber's.

Mennin's *Piano Sonata* is an extremely difficult work to render effectively, and few pianists have taken on the challenge. But, as this recording illustrates, it ranks among the great American contributions to the genre.

Walter Simmons

Author, Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of Schuman, Persichetti, and Mennin (Scarecrow Press, 2011)

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Myron Silberstein



Myron Silberstein's professional performance career began at the age of seventeen, when he won first prize at the 26th annual Giornate Musicali International Piano Competition, Sperlonga, Italy in 1991. He made his full-scale European debut at the Giornate Musicali Festival the following summer. Silberstein's 1993 United States debut at the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall was hailed for its inventive programming and virtuoso playing. Silberstein's debut recording on Connoisseur Society included a critically-acclaimed performance of Ernest Bloch's rarely-heard *Piano Sonata* and first recordings of pieces by American composer Vittorio Giannini. Most recently, his musical direction of Chicago Opera Vanguard's production of Martin Wesley-Smith's opera *Boojum* was nominated for a Joseph Jefferson Award. Myron Silberstein resides in Chicago, where he serves as General Manager for VOX 3 Vocal Music Collective, an organization devoted to the performance of overlooked art-song repertoire.

Norman
LLOYD
(1909-80)

- 1-3 Three Scenes from Memory*** 3:50
4-8 Five Pieces for Dance (1935-38)* 11:36
9-13 Episodes for Piano* 9:06
14-16 Sonata for Piano (1958)* 14:31

Peter
MENNIN
(1923-83)

- 17-21 Five Pieces for Piano (1949)** 13:49
22-24 Sonata for Piano (1963)* 17:00

***WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS**

Myron Silberstein, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.
Recorded at Patrych Sound Studios, Bronx, New York,
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Producers: Myron Silberstein and Walter Simmons
Engineer and editor: Joseph Patrych
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Booklet notes: Walter Simmons
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Both Norman Lloyd and Peter Mennin were born in Pennsylvania and contributed substantially to music education, though their compositional careers took different paths. Lloyd's *Three Scenes from Memory* are simple pieces suitable for elementary students, while the *Five Pieces for Dance* include music written for Martha Graham. The *Sonata* is a compelling and convincingly developed abstract work and Lloyd's most ambitious for piano. Peter Mennin was one of the leading symphonic composers of his generation. His remarkable *Sonata for Piano* ranks among the great American contributions to the genre. Mennin's *Symphonies Nos. 3 and 7* can be heard on Naxos 8.559718.

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Playing
Time:
69:53