

BENJAMIN LEES

Piano Sonata No. 4

Mirrors

Fantasy Variations

IAN HOBSON, piano



Benjamin Lees

Benjamin Lees was born on January 8, 1924 and spent his early years in San Francisco, moving to Los Angeles with his family in 1939. He began piano studies at the age of five with K.I. Rodetsky, continuing with Marguerite Bitter in Los Angeles. He attended the University of Southern California after military service in World War II and later began four years of intensive private study with George Antheil. Following a Fromm Foundation Award in 1953 and his first Guggenheim Fellowship in 1954 the composer and his wife left for Europe. He remained there for seven years, creating new works in a village near Paris. During this period his compositions were performed on RTF, Paris and the BBC, London.

Lees returned to the United States in 1962, joining the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore as the W. Alton Jones Professor of Composition. In the years following, major performances of his works were given by the Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Lees is particularly admired for his works featuring concertante group and orchestra: his *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra* (1964) has been performed by more than 35 ensembles. Other works in this series include his *Concerto for Woodwind quintet and Orchestra* (1976) commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and his *Concerto for Brass Choir and Orchestra*, commissioned and premiered by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra in 1983. Another frequently heard score is the *Passacaglia for Orchestra*, a 1976 piece commissioned by Antal Dorati for the National Symphony Orchestra.

Lees' scores often make intensive use of particular intervals and their inversions; this technique combines with the presence of contrapuntal

commemorated by Lees' newest orchestral work, *Celebration*, commissioned by the Lancaster Symphony Orchestra in honor of the ensemble's semicentennial. The new score was premiered October 19, 1996. The composer has also been commissioned to write a new work for the Orchestra of Monte-Carlo on the occasion of Monaco's 700th anniversary. It will be premiered July 16, 1997.

In addition to his post at the Peabody Conservatory, Lees has taught composition at Queens College, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School. Mr. Lees has been awarded, among other prizes, two Guggenheim Fellowships; the UNESCO Award (Paris) for *String Quartet No. 2*; the Sir Arnold Bax Medal; Copley Foundation Award; and a Fulbright Fellowship. Major articles on his works have been written for *Tempo* magazine by Deryck Cooke, Nicolas Slonimsky, Niall O'Loughlin and Bret Johnson.

Piano Sonata No. 4

Completed in the summer of 1963, the *Piano Sonata No. 4* consists of three movements: Allegro con energico, Adagio, and Allegro deciso. Although Mr. Lees has been composing other piano works, this is the first in sonata form since the *Sonata Breve*, written in 1956 and premiered that year in New York. In the *Piano Sonata No. 4* there are certain deviations from the formal sonata structure. The opening movement, for example, while consisting of two major subjects, has a number of subsidiary figures that are interwoven into the general fabric. Tempo changes are abrupt, dynamic levels fluctuate sharply, and the meter shifts constantly. The feeling of tonality is vague. In the second movement there is only one major subject, yet other figures appear. The whole is treated almost in the manner of a

the variation may become.

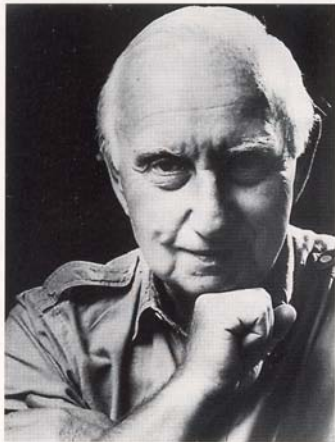
This work tries to explore specific areas of variation: harmonic, rhythmic and metric, combining these with augmentation and diminution. Various pianistic avenues have been explored as, for example, in Variation X where the left hand must play *pianissimo* while the right hand hammers out a *sforzando*. Or Variation IX, where both hands separated by an interval of an augmented fourth, play simultaneously in a fast tempo. And Variation III, which calls for constant alternation of hands over the entire range of the keyboard in a quick, turbulent tempo. These and other examples become evident as the work unfolds and progresses.

But all this is technical. In the end one hopes that what emerges and holds the listener's attention is the music itself. For myself, at least, the focus is on clarity of thought, tension, emotion, lyricism, visceral excitement, logical exposition and a "face" or profile. I have always considered these the basic building blocks of music.

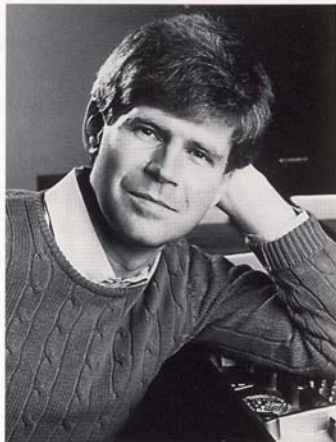
The world premiere of *Fantasy Variations* was given by Emanuel Ax on February 1, 1984 at Kaufmann Concert Hall, New York.

Ian Hobson

Ian Hobson is a musician of tremendous versatility who has earned an international reputation as a pianist, conductor, and teacher. Born in Wolverhampton, England, Hobson studied music at the Royal Academy of Music and Cambridge University in England, and at Yale University in the United States. His international career was launched in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, having already



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