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Albany
RECORDS

HASKELL SMALL

SYMPHONY FOR
SOLO PIANO
AND OTHER
PIANO WORKS

HASKELL SMALL, PIANO

Krusztler

HASKELL SMALL

Creators of music — whether notated, improvised, or somewhere in between — have been drawn to the piano from its earliest days. Its symmetrical division of musical space, large range, ease of tonal production, and polyrhythmic potential are a natural inspiration for musical ideas, and an invitation to their actualization. Incapable of true legato, the piano can suggest the most exquisite binding of one tone to another through adroit manipulation of infinite shades of grey (provided that the manipulator is sufficiently endowed with imagination and digital control.) It's no surprise that the majority of the great composers of the Western classical tradition of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were pianists, many of them capable of offering virtuoso performances of their own works. Composer/pianists had arguably become a bit scarcer by the end of the previous millennium than at its beginning, no doubt a product of the twentieth century's tendency towards specialization in all forms of human endeavor. Nevertheless, the death of the composer/pianist is more than a Twainian exaggeration — it is an impossibility. One sign of the continued health and vitality of the breed is the program you're about to hear on this compact disc.

The musical output of its creator, Haskell Small, is difficult to categorize with ease (thank God!). Nevertheless, it's clear that Small is a throwback to the great composer/pianist tradition of the past four centuries. For almost three decades he's been performing internationally as a soloist, including appearances at New York's Carnegie and Alice Tully Halls, Washington's John F. Kennedy Center and Phillips Gallery, London's Royal Festival Hall, and major recital venues in Germany, Holland, and Italy. Adept at playing various jazz and rock styles by ear throughout his teen years, he did not

life review, reliving and wondering whether I did worthwhile things, a summary." When asked for an explanation of the title *Symphony for Solo Piano*, its composer replied, "I think of it as symphonic in the sense of a narrative, of taking you somewhere. When I'm using the title 'symphony' I don't mean that it's emulating orchestral instruments or orchestral textures. It's symphonic in the sense of using the instrument to the fullest." Segments of this work have also been performed as part of the ballet *Subterranean*; in its complete form, *Symphony for Solo Piano* is currently available through MMB Music, Inc.

With the ending of the *Symphony* slowly and quietly resonating in one's ears (shades of the finale of the *Sonata in B Minor* of Franz Liszt!), the listener is presented with a work with the promise of a "standard" sonata layout. Or so it might appear at first; according to the composer, "My *Sonata Number 3* begins with a fairly hefty movement and a passacaglia section which fizzles out. Then there's a short rondo, which dovetails with the first to form essentially one long movement. I originally planned to end it this way but found it too abrupt, so I added the final *Mesto*." Small's organic concept of form is evident from the opening, in which a high grace note motive is answered by a "misterioso" section. After a brief development, this latter idea returns to accompany the "real" first theme (which also comes up at the end of the second movement.) The short slow finale provides relief and, in its reference to the passacaglia section of the first movement, crystallizes our perception of the character of the work as a whole. (Another example of Small's fascination with passacaglia form is the opening theme in the *Symphony*, which provides the structural design of the entire piece.) One feature of the *Sonata* found in much of his writing is a form of bitonality that relates dissonant

excitement. This performance, like those of the Sonata No. 3 and the Three Impressions, is reissued from *The Music of Haskell Small*, an LP originally on the Orion label. (The remaining Small works are appearing for the first time in recorded form; none of these compositions have been previously issued in a digital format.)

The title page of Haskell Small's *60-Second Puzzle* bears the following inscription: "this miniature contains a hidden mathematical puzzle involving the missing parts of a twelve-tone sequence." Upon further questioning, Small fessed up: "I'm not a serially oriented composer, let me put that on the table to start. But I just got fascinated with the thought of this thing as an exercise, that I could vary every note as I went. So it's strictly 12 tone immediately, and then the puzzle basically involves bookkeeping, where I'm strict, and where it's later made up for. But it's not a complex puzzle, just a kind of mathematical exercise within a short piece of enigmatic character. It's kind of an antidote to the *Symphony* — I won't say 'offset' but it kind of makes one wonder 'What's this guy doing with something mammoth and then this little speck at the end?'"

—David M. Carp

HASKELL SMALL

Hailed by England's *Musical Times* for his "dazzlingly prodigious technique," Haskell Small first came to public attention after winning the Pittsburgh Concert Society auditions at the age of 21. A recipient of a solo recitalist grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and of a top prize at the Johann Sebastian Bach International Piano Competition, Mr. Small's concerts throughout the United States, including Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, National Gallery of Art, Kennedy Center, and the Spoleto

Currently a faculty member of the Washington Conservatory, Haskell Small received his musical training at the San Francisco Conservatory and Carnegie-Mellon University. He has studied piano with Leon Fleisher, William Masselos, Robert Sheldon, Harry Franklin and Jeanne Behrend, and composition with Roland Leich and Vincent Persichetti.

Sonata No. 3, Three Impressions, and Introduction and Fugue originally appeared on an LP recording, *The Music of Haskell Small* (Orion, 1983).

Symphony for Solo Piano is published by MMB Music, Inc. *Three Impressions* is published by Elkan-Vogel. *Sixty-Second Puzzle* is published by Brazinmusikanta.

Symphony for Solo Piano and *Sixty-Second Puzzle* were recorded by Joanna Nickrenz and Marc Aubort (Elite Recordings) on June 7-8, 1999 at St. Peters Historic Church, New York City. All other works were recorded by David B. Hancock in 1983 in New York City.

Editing by Haskell Small and Joanna Nickrenz.

Mastering by Joanna Nickrenz.

Steinway Piano

Mr. Small is represented by Jane Music Management, New York, New York and Jeffrey James Arts Consulting, Massapequa Park, New York.

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