

Andrew Willis

Plays American Piano Music

Martin Amlin

SONATA NO. 7

EIGHT VARIATIONS

SONATA NO. 6

FIVE PRELUDES

Irving Fine

MUSIC FOR PIANO

Aaron Copland

FOUR PIANO BLUES



A Composer of Distinction

Martin Amlin's musical ideas are firmly grounded in their own logic, yet they are pianistic in a way that only a player of high caliber could devise. In 1991, Amlin's performance of a group of his own songs with soprano Judith Kellock won the admiration of pianist Andrew Willis, who immediately inquired about solo piano works and was presented with the scores of several preludes and the one-movement *Sonata No. 6*. A perusal of these works convinced Willis that Amlin's music was among the best-wrought and most powerfully expressive of its time. When the opportunity arose for Willis to commission a work to be premiered in 2000, he instantly asked Amlin for a piece in any form and with a duration of 5 to 30 minutes.

In response, Amlin poured his energies into a challenging large-scale work, the *Sonata No. 7*, which demands an interpreter of intellect, virtuosity, and depth. Taking this as confirmation that Amlin's was piano music of the first rank, Willis devoted himself to the study of several Amlin works, eager to bring them to the attention of a wider audience.

This recording premieres Amlin's two most recent sonatas, a variation set, and five preludes, linking them with works of two composers, Aaron Copland and Irving Fine, with whom he shares formative influences. Though

of different generations, all three came under the distinguished tutelage of Nadia Boulanger at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, and all three frequently drew inspiration from the creative atmosphere of Tanglewood, the legendary summer music center in the Berkshires. Thus, Amlin's voice, while uniquely personal, speaks within a tradition which demands uncompromising compositional integrity and stylistic conviction. A comparison of his music with that of his eminent forebears amply justifies the association.

Martin Amlin: Sonata No. 7 (1999)

Fantasia

The opening fantasia speaks not of an imagination in reverie but of one coruscating with energy. Marked "very freely," its cascading fifths and fourths draw the listener along a path of constant fluctuation and contrast, in which ideas succeed each other seemingly by whim. Yet—and here is the essence of Amlin's style—though utterly unpredictable, his music is at the same time unmistakably coherent. Even as the ear is beguiled by harmonious sonorities (the major-seventh chord is one of Amlin's favorites), analysis reveals that the entire piece develops out of a specific ordering of the twelve-note continuum (a "row" if you will, but one unencumbered by the baggage of pervasive dissonance and dry calculation).

wit, sweetness, and energy to be discovered in the music. The opening movements exploit dance-like rhythms, modernized with changing meters and jazz-inspired harmonizations. By contrast, introspection is permitted in the leisurely variation set, allowing Fine to display a remarkable gift for lyrical melody. The final variation is especially admirable in its restraint; stripped of all ornament, it exposes the distilled essence of the music. Then, by way of a transition which alludes to the opening prelude, the inclination to dance revives, propelling the finale to a brilliant conclusion.

Martin Amlin: Sonata No. 6 (1987)

In this extended single-movement essay, musical events arise, flow, develop, metamorphose, evolve, interact, and collide completely unconstrained by bar-line meter. Often, long-breathed phrases disclose local rhythmic groupings; at other times, events effervesce at the pace of the sixteenth-note. This flexibility generates a sense of fantasia-like improvisation, which is allowed to unfold within an overlying three-part design true to the sonata tradition. The febrile toccata energy of the first and last sections encloses a quiet, reflective center. The closing section is no formulaic recapitulation: all the ideas of the first part

the opening recurs near the center of the movement and again at the close. As the story began, so it ends, with minor-seventh harmony resonating in the ether—open, unresolved, evocative.

Aaron Copland: Four Piano Blues (1947, 1934, 1948, 1926)

The idioms of the American blues tradition attracted Copland's attention to the piano on four separate occasions. The resulting pieces form a nicely balanced small suite, ranging in mood from wistful to svelte, from warm to bouncy. Though aimed at amusement, these vignettes are painstakingly crafted and exquisitely detailed.

Martin Amlin: Five Preludes

Variations (1989)

A flowing theme with modal flavor ascends through four increasingly active cycles, then takes flight to the very top of the keyboard.

Elegy (1989)

Composed in memory of Amlin's friend Jan Elizabeth Benson, this elegy begins and ends in stillness. The opening slow, quiet chords, harmonized in fourths, are destined to return in passion atop a tumult of sweeping arpeggios. In the interim, a succession of jagged fanfare-like outbursts and smoothly keening melodies sus-

tion, pianist Andrew Willis, and clarinetist Michael Webster.

Amlin studied with Nadia Boulanger at the Ecoles d'Art Américaines in Fontainebleau and the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. He received masters and doctoral degrees as well as the Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied piano with Frank Glazer and composition with Joseph Schwantner, Samuel Adler, and Warren Benson.

Formerly an instructor at the Phillips Exeter Academy and an Affiliate Artist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Martin Amlin is currently Associate Professor of Theory and Composition in the College of Fine Arts at Boston University, where he was recipient of the 2002 Kahn Award for his *Piano Sonata No. 7*. He has been rehearsal pianist for the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the Boston Pops Orchestra, and has appeared as soloist with the Pops on many occasions. He has often performed on the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Prelude concerts at both Symphony Hall and Tanglewood and was pianist for concerts at Tanglewood in honor of Leonard Bernstein, Phyllis Curtin, and the 50th anniversary of the Tanglewood Music Center. He has also performed on the FleetBoston Celebrity Series and the International Artists Series, and has been

pianist for the M.I.T. Experimental Music Studio and the New England Ragtime Ensemble. He has appeared frequently live on Boston's WGBH radio station as both performer and composer, and has given the world premiere of many new pieces. Martin Amlin has recorded for the Hyperion, Koch International, Centaur, Crystal, Titanic, Opus One, Ashmont, Folkways, and Wergo labels.

Described by Philip Ramey as "a perfectionist on the order of Copland and Stravinsky," **Irving Fine's** mentors included Walter Piston at Harvard, Nadia Boulanger at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, and Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood, where he himself taught between 1946 and 1957. In a brief span of time his style evolved from the neo-classicism found in *Music for Piano* through a more Romantic style represented by *Serious Song* for string orchestra, his best-known work, to the incorporation of serialism in works such as the *String Quartet* of 1952 and his last work, the *Symphony* of 1962. In that year a heart attack ended a brilliant career in mid-course.

Among American composers of the twentieth century, **Aaron Copland** is almost certainly familiar to the widest audience. Pieces like "Appalachian Spring," "Billy the Kid," and "Fanfare for the Common Man" have resonated with the nation's sense of its own identity to

Horszowski at The Curtis Institute of Music, with George Sementovsky and Lambert Orkis at Temple University, and with Malcolm Bilson at Cornell University. For a number of years, his multifaceted musical career was based in Philadelphia, where he served as keyboardist of The Philadelphia Orchestra for several seasons.

Cover Art: Quilt, Constructions #58, 2002 © Nancy Crow, 76 inches wide by 87 inches tall

Photograph of image: Kevin Fitzsimons

Cover Design: Bates Miyamoto Design

Recorded in the Recital Hall of the School of Music at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, June 11-13 and June 25, 2001.

Producer: Evan Richey

Recording Engineer: Dennis Hopson

Piano Technician: Evelyn Smith

Piano: Kawai EX Concert Grand

Martin Amlin's Sonata No. 7 and Preludes are published by Theodore Presser. Irving Fine's Music for Piano is published by G. Schirmer, Inc. Aaron Copland's Four Piano Blues is published by Boosey & Hawkes. Martin Amlin's Sonata No. 6 and Eight Variations are available directly from the composer.

The support of this recording through a Faculty Grant and a Publication Subsidy from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Research Grants Committee is gratefully acknowledged.

TROY674

ALBANY RECORDS U.S.
915 BROADWAY, ALBANY, NY 12207
TEL: 518.436.8814 FAX: 518.436.0643 WWW.ALBANYRECORDS.COM

ALBANY RECORDS U.K.
BOX 137, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA8 0XD
TEL: 01539 824008



MADE IN THE USA

© 2004 ALBANY RECORDS



COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

WARNING: COPYRIGHT SUBSISTS IN ALL RECORDINGS ISSUED UNDER THIS LABEL.