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Piano: Steinway D

Piano Technician: Michael Riffle

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Photo of Jacob Druckman courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes, photographer Vincent P. Oneppo

Photo of Marga Richter courtesy of photographer Reginald Smith



Persichetti  
*and*  
Pupils

RICHARD ZIMDARS, PIANO



PIANO MUSIC OF  
VINCENT PERSICHELLI  
MARGA RICHTER  
JACOB DRUCKMAN



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## This recording presents solo piano music by **Vincent Persichetti** and two of his composition students at the Juilliard School of Music, Marga Richter and Jacob Druckman.

The music was written between 1952 and 1987, with the earliest and latest works coming from Persichetti's pen. The pieces from 1952–1955 in large forms of sonata and variations offer a focused look at the early work of three important American composers. Four works receive their first recorded performances.

Vincent Persichetti's compositions have enriched the entire musical literature. Born in Philadelphia in 1915, Persichetti studied piano, then organ, double bass, tuba, theory, and composition. By the age of eleven, he was performing professionally as an accompanist, radio staff pianist, orchestra member, and church organist. At sixteen, he was appointed organist and choir director for the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He earned a Mus. B. degree in 1935 from Combs College of Music where, at age twenty, he was made head of the theory and composition departments. He was a conducting major with Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute and a piano major with Olga Samaroff at the Philadelphia Conservatory. He received a Diploma in Conducting from the Curtis Institute and Mus. M. and Mus. D. degrees from the Philadelphia Conservatory. In 1941 Persichetti became head of the theory and composition departments at the Philadelphia Conservatory. In 1947 he joined the faculty of the Juilliard School of Music, becoming chairman of the Composition Department in 1963. He taught at Juilliard until his death in 1987. An influential teacher and theorist, his students included Jacob Druckman, Marga Richter, Phillip Glass, Steve Reich, Lowell Liebermann, Peter Schickele, Thelonius Monk, Frank Zappa, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

Persichetti received three Guggenheim Fellowships, two National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities grants, and one grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, of which he was a member. He received the first Kennedy Center Friedheim Award and the Medal of Honor from the Italian Government. Among some 100 commissions were those from the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and the St. Louis and Louisville Symphony Orchestras.

Persichetti composed for almost every musical medium. More than 120 of his works are published, and many are recorded. His huge output reflects his desire to integrate the large variety of material made available to composers by the expansion of musical language in the 20th century. Persichetti used a wide range of expres-

sive possibilities, from simple diatonicism to complex atonal polyphony. The variety of moods, styles, and levels of difficulty in Persichetti's works do not allow easy labeling of his musical personality or tracing of a conventional chronological pattern of compositional development.

Walter Simmons, in his article on Persichetti in the *Grove Music Online*, states that Persichetti's "early works show the influence of Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith, and Copland; not until the 1950s did he truly achieve his own distinctive voice. Within that decade alone, however, he produced nearly fifty compositions." During this period, he also developed a formal design particularly well suited to his creative inclinations. This design took short sections usually based on a single theme and wove them into a large formal structure. Quoting Simmons again: "Persichetti identified two main currents within his creativity: one 'graceful' and the other 'gritty.'" Also found in his music are clear textures, short gestures, pandiatonic and polytonal harmony, lively rhythms, and frequently a gentle tone. Composer and Persichetti pupil Bruce Adolphe wrote that Persichetti's music reflects the "high-spirited, witty, mercurial, eclectic, spontaneous" aspects of his personality. Adolphe also mentions a "pensive and nostalgic" side of Persichetti.

As noted by Walter Simmons in his *Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin*, Joseph Bloch suggested a "kinship" between Persichetti and Muzio Clementi because of the skilled piano writing found in their sonatas. Persichetti's Ninth Piano Sonata, composed in 1952, was premiered in 1962 by David Burge at the Music Teachers National Association convention in Madison, Wisconsin. The sonata, in four distinct sections, at times has a Mozartean effervescence. The writing is generally light and transparent, setting off the few strong chordal passages. The last page of the sonata (tr. 1, 9:36) repeats material from the earlier sections, and closes with an abrupt burst of energy. Persichetti's pianist wife, Dorothea, thought the sonata contained satire and a sly tone of derision.

*Winter Solstice*, written in 1986, is Persichetti's last completed composition. Walter Simmons reports that its first public performance "is believed to have taken place in Philadelphia" in 1996. In the absence of any comments on *Winter Solstice* from Persichetti, the thoughts of Persichetti's editor, Daniel Dorff, are worth considering. Dorff "often wondered whether Persichetti knew he was dying and wrote *Winter Solstice* as his requiem..." The piece might be considered a tone poem with the title providing the only clue to its content. The opening three-note motive returns in various guises throughout. Extended melodies are placed in resonant, pedaled textures, producing what Adolphe referred to as the "nostalgic" character in Persichetti's writing. Vigorous sections contrast with the gentler portions of the narrative. The conclusion is launched on a delicate E-Major broken chord (tr. 2, 11:50) followed by reminiscences of the opening motive.

**MARGA RICHTER** (b. Wisconsin, 1926), daughter of American soprano Inez Chandler and granddaughter of German composer/conductor Richard Richter, received her early musical training in Minneapolis. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School, majoring in piano with Rosalyn Tureck and composition with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. She was the first woman to graduate with a composition degree from Juilliard. During her student days, Richter's main compositional influences were Guillaume de Machaut, J. S. Bach, Beethoven, Bartók, Hovhanness, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky. After graduation, a source of inspiration was often her many virtuoso friends who lived in New York City in the 1950s. Later, visual experiences and nature became her primary inspirations for composition. Sources as varied as paintings by Georgia O'Keefe, a New England winter scene, and the exotic landscape of Tibet have all served to activate her creative responses.

Richter's work includes every compositional medium: opera, solo, chamber, choral, band, and orchestral works. Much of her music is tonally organized, but uses a chord vocabulary far beyond traditional tonal harmony. She has said that melody, mystery, and logic are qualities she aims for in her works.

Richter's music has been played by more than 50 orchestras, including the Atlanta and Milwaukee Symphonies, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and recorded by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and the Czech Radio and Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestras. Her ballet, *Abys*, has been performed on five continents by the Harkness Ballet, which commissioned it, and by the Joffrey, Boston, and Pennsylvania Ballets. Among the artists who have performed her music are soprano Jessye Norman; pianists Menahem Pressler, William Masselos, and Natalie Hinderas; violist Walter Trampler; and violinist Daniel Heifetz, who commissioned her *Landscapes of the Mind II* for violin and piano.

Richter's music is published by Carl Fischer, G. Schirmer, Broude Brothers, Presser, Vivace, and Shrewsbury Press. She has received grants, fellowships, commissions, and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, National Federation of Music Clubs, Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund, Meet The Composer, and ASCAP. She is included in the Major Figures in American Music Oral History Series at Yale University, *Women and Music in America Since 1900—An Encyclopedia*, Grove, and Baker's. You Ju Lee has written a doctoral dissertation entitled *Marga Richter: A Biographical Sketch and Study of her Piano Works with Emphasis on Sonata for Piano*, and musicologist Sharon Mirchandani has profiled Richter in a chapter in *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music*. A full-length biography, *Marga Richter*, by Mirchandani, is forthcoming from University of Illinois Press.

Richter's Sonata for Piano, a major contribution to the piano repertoire, was composed in 1954, published in 1956 by Carl Fischer, recorded in 1956 for MGM Records by Menahem Pressler, and premiered in 1964 by Lenore

Egdahl in New York City's Town Hall. Reviewing Pressler's recording in *High Fidelity*, Alfred Frankenstein wrote: "The sonata is a huge, formidable, complex and highly dramatic work, but one in which every usage is logically accounted for, and the whole adds up to an extremely vital and rewarding musical communication." E.S. Leigh, reviewing Peter Basquin's 1978 recording of the sonata in *The New Records*, stated: "It is a stark, lean, graceful work absolutely bare of gimmicks or attractive contrivances, linear but yet savagely imaginative in pure, vibrant colors and dramatic, often angry, rhythms. Not only is there musical insight here, but poetic insight as well." Vivan Taylor gave the European premiere of the sonata in 1981 at her recital in London's Wigmore Hall. *The Daily Telegraph* reported: "Pride of place had to go to Marga Richter's magnificent Sonata."

In her dissertation mentioned above, You Ju Lee writes that the sonata's first movement opens with "a long, slow, melodic introduction containing the motivic cells of all the material for the first movement." The material is developed and "culminates in a climactic statement of the theme in canonic fashion (tr. 3, 9:14)." The second movement presents a quiet, mesmerizing melody accompanied by a pattern in minor ninths. The mood evolves, arriving at a ferocious transformation of the opening melody and accompaniment (tr. 4, 6:20). A gradual relaxation follows, evaporating in a last ascent of soft minor ninths. Marked "furioso," the third movement opens with melodic material similar to that of the first movement. An energetic swiftness is interrupted four times. A final burst of alternating octaves (tr. 5, 3:17) leads to a grand restatement of the first movement's opening melodic material closing on the note E, the note with which the sonata began.

You Ju Lee tells us that *Remembrances* was written for the seventh anniversary of radio host Robert Sherman's "The Listening Room," broadcast on WQXR, New York. Its second theme (Tr. 6, 1:00) was taken from the theme song of "The Listening Room," an excerpt from Jacques Ibert's *Divertissement*. It was premiered on January 4, 1978. A gentle nocturne in neo-romantic style, at times it sounds like a very slow waltz. Richter carefully notated the use of pedal and flexibility of pacing in her score.

In Spring 1961, Richter rapidly wrote Eight Pieces for Piano. In an interview with Frances Harmeyer, Richter said: "So, I thought I'd try something different. That's why I wrote those Eight Pieces. I just sat down, and wrote whatever came to my head. As soon as it wasn't in my head anymore, or my fingers, I quit. . . . I thought: 'Well, that's fun. That's really fun. You know, you can really say a lot.'" Sharon Mirchandani has this to say about the Eight Pieces: "A recurring three-note motive in several of the pieces, consisting of an ascending minor third followed by either an ascending or descending minor second (or with slight variations) is used to haunting effect and unifies the set. The pieces are dissonant and pointillistic in style."

**JACOB DRUCKMAN** was born in Philadelphia in 1928. He studied piano and violin, played trumpet in jazz ensembles, and was composing by the age of 15. In 1949 he was accepted into Aaron Copland's summer composition class at the Berkshire Music Center. Then he attended the Juilliard School of Music and studied composition with Peter Mennin and Vincent Persichetti. A Fulbright Fellowship took him to Paris in 1954 for study at the École Normale de Musique. From 1956 to 1972 he taught at Juilliard. Appointed chair of the composition department and director of the electronic music studio at Yale University in 1976, he taught at Yale until his death in 1996.

Druckman wrote orchestral, chamber, and vocal works, and also composed electronic music. His orchestral work *Windows* received the 1972 Pulitzer Prize. He served as composer-in-residence for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (1982–6) and was appointed president of the Koussevitzky Foundation in 1980 and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music in 1991. Commissions came to him from the following symphony orchestras: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Radio France, and St. Louis. Druckman's works have been recorded by the New York Philharmonic and the St. Louis Symphony.

*The Seven Deadly Sins* was completed in Paris in early 1955 and premiered there that spring by Juilliard graduate Donald Nold, an American pianist who toured as accompanist for artists such as Michael Rabin, Walter Trampler, and Grace Bumbry. *The Seven Deadly Sins* is Druckman's only work for solo piano,

In the Christian tradition, the sources of sin are pride and carnality. The seven deadly sins is a classification emanating from the early history of Christian monasticism. A sin was classified as deadly not only because it was a serious offense morally but because it could lead or motivate one to other sins. They were grouped together as early as the sixth century by Pope Gregory the Great, and were a popular theme in the morality plays of the Middle Ages. Dante used the seven deadly sins to create the main divisions of "The Inferno" and "Purgatory" in his *Divine Comedy*.

*The Seven Deadly Sins* is a set of seven variations placed in three separate movements. Druckman composed clever, expressive reactions to each sin:

Pride: bombastic chords marked "imperioso"

Envy: nervous scampering and obsessive dotted rhythms

Anger: a build up to a return of Pride's bombast

Sloth: a lazy melody that won't get moving despite two attempts to launch itself into a waltz

Avarice: the sound of tinkling coins and relentless desire for wealth

Gluttony: a simple melody transformed thrice into a fugue that feeds on itself

Carnality: slow buildup to a progressively more agitated habañera, closing with a reference to the opening chords of *Pride*

### *The Performer*

Described by the Cologne Stadt-Anzeiger as "the prototype of a sensitive pianist who not only has a dazzling technique at his disposal, but also proved himself a brilliant architect of the musical construction of individual works," **RICHARD ZIMDARS** has performed and broadcast in England, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Brazil, and throughout the United States. Zimdars' discography includes solo piano music of Ives, Copland, Cowell, Dane Rudhyar, Roy Harris, Randall Thompson, the violin sonatas of Ives and Harris, and chamber music works of Leslie Bassett, Bernard Heiden, Claude Baker, and Tommy Joe Anderson.

Zimdars is Despy Karlas Professor of Piano at the University of Georgia. His students have won national prizes, received the Fulbright Grant for piano study in Germany, and hold college positions in the United States, Brazil, and South Korea. He has given master classes at London's Royal Academy of Music, Dublin's Royal Irish Academy of Music, the Stuttgart Hochschule für Musik, Oberlin and San Francisco Conservatories, etc. From 2006–08 he served on the National Fulbright Screening Committee for piano. He has published in *Clavier*, *The Piano Quarterly*, *American Music Teacher*, *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, and *Clavier Companion*, for which he is a contributing editor. Indiana University Press publishes his translations titled *The Piano Master Classes of Hans von Bülow* and *The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt*. He has lectured on Liszt's teaching in Europe and North America. He was artistic director of the 2011 American Liszt Society Festival, North America's largest celebration of the bicentennial of the birth of Franz Liszt.

Critical Acclaim for Richard Zimdars' Previous Release on Albany Records: American Piano Music: 1900–1930

"He displays breathtaking chops...Bringing this music to life is an even stronger form of musical virtuosity. Of the several pianists who have essayed it [Ives' Piano Sonata No. 1] on records, only Joanna MacGregor...has come close to Zimdars...her performance does not leave us shaking our heads in wonder, as this one does... Zimdars approaches [the Copland Piano Variations] with a measured tread; the piece makes more sense in this thoughtful performance—even compared to Copland's own 1935 recording." (*Fanfare Magazine*, James North)

**RICHARD ZIMDARS, PIANO****VINCENT PERSICHELLI**

- 1 Ninth Piano Sonata, op. 58 [10:56]  
Moderato — Allegro agilitè — Larghetto — Allegro risoluto
- 2 Winter Solstice, op. 165\* [13:40]

**MARGA RICHTER**

- Sonata for Piano [24:25]
- 3 Slow — Very fast [11:25]
- 4 Slow [8:21]
- 5 Fast — Slower, very broad [4:27]
- 6 Remembrances\* [4:19]

## Eight Pieces for Piano\* [5:29]

- 7 Slow [:49]
- 8 Fast [:20]
- 9 Slow [:39]
- 10 Barbarously [:19]
- 11 Slowly [:30]
- 12 Fast [:34]
- 13 Veiled, misty [1:02]
- 14 Slow [1:16]

**JACOB DRUCKMAN**

- The Seven Deadly Sins\* [17:13]
- 15 Pride [1:35]
- 16 Envy [1:32]
- 17 Anger [2:30]
- 18 Sloth [4:12]
- 19 Avarice [1:56]
- 20 Gluttony [2:45]
- 21 Carnality [2:43]

Total Time = 76:32

*\*world premiere recording*

Following up on his critically acclaimed 2009 Albany CD of Ives, Copland, Cowell, and Rudhyar, pianist Richard Zimdars offers works by three American composers — Vincent Persichetti and two of his composition students at the Juilliard School of Music — Marga Richter and Jacob Druckman. The pieces from 1952-1955 in large forms of sonata and variation offer a focused look at the early work of three important American composers and include four world premiere recordings. Commenting on this CD and Zimdars' previous release on Albany Records, Pulitzer Prize winning composer William Bolcom wrote: "What is rare about Zimdars is his showing of many levels of musical poetry beneath the surface."



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