



# MUSIC BY MY FRIENDS

BENNETT  
LERNER  
PIANIST

Piano Music  
by American  
Composers

Christopher Berg  
Chester Biscardi  
Aaron Copland  
Robert Helps  
Donald Richie  
Tison Street  
Roger Zahab

9 First Recordings



*Throughout my career I have had many close friends who were composers. Many of them wrote pieces for me, some of which I played in their world premiere performances, some of which I played many times, some of which I played only once, and some of which I played for the first time during the world tour of MUSIC BY MY FRIENDS in September-November, 2003. This recording is made up in large part of those pieces. In addition, it includes other works by my composer-friends.*

—Bennett Lerner

CHRISTOPHER BERG (born 1949, Detroit, Michigan; currently living in Paris) is one of a number of American composers of his generation whose principal medium is song. His TWELVE SONGS ON POEMS OF FRANK O'HARA, which are performed frequently, are considered by many to be "definitive" settings, and have prompted the American Record Guide to label Berg "an American Hugo Wolf." Berg's work with the Paris-based vocal-chamber-music ensemble Mirror Visions has led him to

set a variety of French texts. A recording of a number of these settings, under the title UN AMERICAIN À PARIS, is available on the Albany label. Berg has had recent commissions from soprano Judith Bettina and The Joy in Singing. As a pianist, he appears occasionally with singers in his own and others' songs, and in 1988, in New York's Merkin Hall, he participated in the world premiere of Kaikhosru Sorabji's FIRST PIANO QUIN-TET. Berg's opera CYMBELINE, based on Shakespeare, is now complete and available for production. *Chris and I were students of pianist Robert Helps at the Manhattan School of Music and we were active in founding the school's Contemporary Music Ensemble. We are daily e-mail correspondents. Over the years we have shared an amazing simultaneity of interests or, rather, obsessions, such as the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, the recordings of Maria Callas (Chris played the role of the accompanist, Manny, in a production of the stage play MASTER CLASS.), the operas of Richard Strauss, and, most recently, a trio of English novelists, Henry Green, Barbara*

Pym, and Ivy Compton-Burnett. *Chris is a favored piano-duo partner, and we have premiered works for two pianos by Paul Bowles (CROSS-COUNTRY) and Vittorio Rieti (RONDO FOR TWO PIANOS).*

MANIC ETUDE (2003) was commissioned by Bennett Lerner and premiered by him on February 6, 2004, at a three-hour concert called "Etude Mania," a program of etudes performed by students and faculty members of the Music Department of Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The commission specified "no ninths," as Mr. Lerner has smallish hands. *Chris, whose music "lives in the world of ninth chords" (according to composer Jack Beeson), responded, "That's VERY difficult," to which I replied, "If George Perec can write a novel in French without the letter e, you can write a piano piece without ninths." And he did.* In this manic collection of etude bits, the astute listener will hear disguised quotes of numerous piano studies (in a sort of What The Sailor Has Hidden game), including Chopin's etudes Op. 10, No 4, in C# Minor (etude in chromatic passage work), Op. 25, No. 6, in

G# Minor (etude in double thirds), and Op 25, No 7, in C# Minor (the "cello" etude), Debussy's

etude "Pour les octaves," and Liszt's Etude de concert No. 3 ("Un sospiro").

*The composer insists that these references are "completely unconscious. COMPLETELY!" He wrote to me, "This is so interesting. I did not purposely put in these, oh, so very hidden (to me also) references;" yet he admits that they are "absolutely, unquestionably there," adding, "It's a bit embarrassing, but there you are. Don't tell ANYONE!" As for the Poulenc-like chorale near the end of the piece, Chris wrote to me, "It's there for no other reason than that there always has to be a Poulenc section, don't you think so?"*

MONTPARNASSE! BIENVENUE! (MONT-PARNASSE! WELCOME!) (2003), for piano four-hands, is a true *pièce d'occasion*, as it was written especially for an October 29, 2003, Paris concert. The dedication reads, "For Bennett Lerner (to be played with CB)." The subtitle is,



"With apologies to the RATP" (*Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens*), as the title is a reference to the Paris Metro stop Montparnasse-Bienvenüe. (Bienvenüe was one of the designers of the Paris Metro.) About *M! B!* (to use the more-easily-typed short form of the title) the composer e-mailed to me, "Our duet will be noisy and fun. The Primo suits you, being more lyrical, and the Secondo suits me, being more rhythmically inexorable."

OSSESSIONE (OMAGGIO A FERRUCCIO BUSONI) (OBSESSION ((HOMAGE TO FERRUCCIO BUSONI))) (1989-1991) was written for Bennett Lerner, but the composer gave the first performances. Later performances were given by Robert Helps (to whose memory the work was dedicated on publication in 2002). Lerner first played the piece in September, 2003. Explaining the title the composer writes, "Repetitive figures become tics; and complexity becomes a tangled web which must be escaped." The subtitle refers to the visionary, Italo-German composer, Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), whose sonatinas OSSESSIONE somewhat resembles. (OSSESSIONE even contains

a near quote from Busoni's SONATINA SECONDA.) *What intrigues me about OSSESSIONE is that there is almost no repetition. The music only goes forward, through a dazzling array of musical styles, from "alla elevator music" and "tromba di Miles" to "etereo" and "sem-pre mesto."* It's rather like walking down a hotel corridor and opening doors and hearing the different musics that emerge from the various rooms. (In fact, the original title of the piece was *MANY ROOMS*.) Near the end of OSSESSIONE there is an obsessive and ghostly reminiscence (the only backward look; music heard from far down the hallway?) of the earlier, quirky, "ragtime" section. The composer leaves it up to the performer's inspiration of the moment whether the piece will end loudly or softly.

RESTORATION (1982; arr. Berg, 1991) was written at Bennett Lerner's request and he gave the first performance in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1991. It is the composer's transcription of his setting for high voice of Vladimir Nabokov's poem, "Restoration," the text of which is given below. In the piano version, the text is

printed under or over the melody, and the pianist is urged to sing the song to himself while playing the piece. This gives the melody the rhythm of sung words rather than instrumental rhythm. For example, the words, "My little daughter wakes in tears," would not be sung as completely even notes, but rather inflected according to the natural rhythm of the words.

*For a pianist, this is a unique experience, using a vocal rubato rather than an instrumental one. In fact, there is one place—the recitative-like section in the middle of the song—where, singing the word "miraculously" to myself as I play, I feel rather like jazz singer Sarah Vaughan.*

RESTORATION (1952) by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977)

To think that any fool may tear  
By chance the web of when and where.  
O window in the dark! To think  
That every brain is on the brink  
Of nameless bliss no brain can bear,  
Unless there be no great surprise—  
As when you learn to levitate  
And, hardly trying, realize—  
Alone, in a bright room—that weight  
Is but your shadow, and you rise.

My little daughter wakes in tears:  
She fancies that her bed is drawn  
Into a dimness which appears  
To be the deep of all her fears  
But which, in point of fact, is dawn.

I know a poet who can strip  
A William Tell or Golden Pip  
In one uninterrupted peel  
Miraculously to reveal,  
Revolving on his finger tip,

A snowball. So would I unrobe,  
Turn inside out, pry open, probe  
All matter, everything you see,  
The skyline and its saddest tree,  
The whole inexplicable globe,

To find the tune, the ardent core,  
As doctors in old pictures do  
When, rubbing out a distant door  
Or sooty curtain, they restore  
The jewel of a bluish view.

("Restoration" is reprinted by arrangement with the Estate of Vladimir Nabokov. All rights reserved.)

TANGO-MEDITATION (1986) is a meditation on the stasis of the tango rhythm and the violence inherent in the dance. (It must be remembered that the tango began in the brothels of the Buenos Aires *barrio* and was always danced by two

men, probably gangsters.) The composer writes about the middle section, which is marked "really crude," "The apartheid regime in South Africa was going through its most brutal period, and people were getting their heads bashed in at a dance in Soweto, so the piece is kind of a 'Township Tango' meditation." The piece was commissioned by Gerald Lindahl for his audio magazine, "Tellus," and was first heard there as a recording, played by the composer. It is dedicated to composer Phillip Ramey.

CHESTER BISCARDI (born 1948, Kenosha, Wisconsin) received an M. A. in Italian Literature and an M. M. in composition from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and a D. M. A. from Yale University. He is Director of the Music Program at Sarah Lawrence College. Biscardi's music has been featured at the Gaudeamus Festival, Music Today-Japan, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, Piccolo Spoleto, the International Guitar Festival of Morelia, and the Bienal of Sao Paulo. It has been performed by the American Composers Orchestra, the BBC-London, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln

Center, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble, and the Orchestra della



Radiotelevisione Italiana in Rome, among others. Biscardi's works are published by C. F. Peters, Merion Music, Biscardi Music Press, and Classical Vocal Reprints. Recordings appear on the CRI, Intim Musik, New Albion, New Ariel, and North/South Recordings labels. He has received, among other awards, the Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Ives Scholarship (American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters), the Aaron Copland Award, fellowships from the Japan Foundation, the MacDowell Colony, and the Rockefeller Foundation, and grants from the Fromm Music Foundation, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation, Meet the Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. *Chester and I were introduced by our dear mutual friend, the soprano Judith Bettina, whose recorded performance of*

Biscardi's song, "Mama Never Forgets Her Birds," from the song cycle *THE GIFT OF LIFE* (CRI Records), is a treasure. "Mama" is one of Biscardi's "hit tunes," the other being *INCITATION TO DESIRE*. Chester and I were colleagues for a while at Sarah Lawrence College.

*INCITATION TO DESIRE* (TANGO) (1984) was originally part of *THE INTERNATIONAL TANGO COLLECTION* (Quadrivium Press) which included tangos by eighty-eight composers as varied as John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Virgil Thomson. It was first performed by its dedicatee, Yvar Mikhashoff, at the North American New Music Festival in 1985. The title comes from the 1944 *GROVE'S DICTIONARY*: "The movements of the dance are less presentable to a polite audience than those of the habanera, and as now performed in the *cafés chantants* of Madrid and other cities of Spain the tango has become nothing but an incitation to desire." My teacher Arminda Canteros was famous for her tango playing. She always encouraged me to play tangos, but I always felt I didn't have a feeling for the

style. One night, at a party at her house, we sat at her two pianos and played tangos together with great joy and freedom. "You see," she cried, jubilantly, "you CAN play tangos!" (But I was drunk.) *MESTIERE* (MÉTIER) (1979) is, as the composer writes, "a celebration of the contrasting sonorities—incisive and lyrical—which are natural to the piano. The Italian title is translated as 'craft, business, occupation, whatever is necessary to one's profession or art.' Mestiere is what one is and does, what is integral to one's life and work." The work was commissioned by Tulane University for its 1979 Festival of Piano Music and is dedicated to Robert Weirich, who first performed it. *What the composer calls "incisive" and "lyrical," I experience as expressing desperation and yearning. The music is written in a rhythmically complicated—and highly crafted—way that produces a very expressive rubato. My friend and colleague, pianist Kit Young, calls MESTIERE "a whoosh piece."*

NEL GIARDINETTO DELLA VILLA (IN THE LITTLE GARDEN OF THE VILLA) (1994), a set of short pieces for piano four-hands, was written for pianist James Goldsworthy ("Mr. G.") and four of his students. They gave the official first performance (There had been some sneak previews.) on June 19, 1995, at the Summer Music Institute at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota. The pieces were inspired by the daily life in the garden of the Villa Corsi-Salvini in Sesto Fiorentino, Italy. The teacher's part is primo in some pieces and secondo in others. On this recording, however, the primo is played by the composer throughout. *In October, 2003, as part of my MUSIC BY MY FRIENDS tour, Chester and I played these pieces first at Sarah Lawrence College and then at Greenwich House Music School, New York, at a concert to raise money for the scholarship fund named for my beloved teacher German Diez.* English translations of the titles follow:

IN THE LITTLE GARDEN OF THE VILLA

1. Dawn: A Chirping of Birds
2. The Three Ducks and the Lizards in

the Maze

3. The Pond and the Water Lilies
4. The Cat Snow White and the Frog
5. Bruno, the Gardener, on his Bicycle
6. The Mosquitoes and the Bats in the Lemon Tree Greenhouse
7. Twilight: The Cypress Tree and Venus
8. The Sad Moon and the Bonfires

AARON COPLAND (born Brooklyn, NY, 1900; died Peekskill, NY, 1990) hardly needs an introduction. He composed some of American music's most beloved scores, such as the ballets APPALACHIAN SPRING, BILLY THE KID, and RODEO, the orchestral works FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN and LINCOLN PORTRAIT, as well as the two sets of OLD AMERICAN SONGS and the jazzy PIANO CONCERTO. *I first met Aaron Copland on March 18, 1974, through an introduction from Robert Helps, my friend and piano teacher. I played Copland's SONATA for the composer and he made suggestions about my playing. His coaching was of the kindest and most practical sort. He would say, "You play very beautifully, but it's not quite what I had in mind," and then go on to*



*explain what he wanted to the now eager and willing young pianist.*

JAZZY (1921) is the third piece in the set of juvenilia, THREE MOODS (1920-21). It was my friend Christopher Berg, an expert on musical theater, who pointed out that the tune in the middle section is borrowed from a Jerome Kern song, "The Siren's Song," from the 1917 musical show LEAVE IT TO JANE. Perhaps this is why the piece was published so late in the composer's life. *When I pointed this borrowing out to Copland, he raised one eyebrow, winked at me, and said, "You know too much!" The score as published ends loudly, double forté. I suggested to Copland that it might be charming to end the piece softly, pianissimo. He approved the change and wrote his approval into my performance score.*

MIDDAY THOUGHTS (1944; rev. 1982) is Bennett Lerner's transcription of four pages of an unfinished work from 1944

for piano and orchestra called BALLADE. Copland approved the transcription, but said, "It needs something to end it better," and then added the final bass note in what was, perhaps, his last compositional act. *This piece has special meaning for me, being the dedicatee. In addition, the manuscript is dated March 18, 1944, which is only three days before my birth and exactly thirty years to the day of my first meeting with Copland. I gave the first performance of MIDDAY THOUGHTS at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York City, on February 28, 1983. To open a program with MIDDAY THOUGHTS is to invoke Aaron Copland's kind spirit.*

ROBERT HELPS (born 1928, Passaic, New Jersey; died 2001, Tampa, Florida) was one of the most loved and respected American pianists of his generation. He performed the whole piano repertory from classic to contemporary, and his performances of the complete Chopin etudes were legendary. His playing was noted for its wonderfully easy flow, and his pianissimo was unique in its gentleness. As a composer, he wrote songs, symphonies, chamber music, and a large



body of piano music which he played magnificently. *Robert Helps was my teacher when I did my Master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music. (He was also*

*Christopher Berg's teacher.) Before and after that time he was also my close friend and, in many ways, a mentor. As a piano teacher he was primarily interested in the use of a relaxed piano technique in the service of an uninterrupted musical line. A frequent remark about my playing, said in a slow, low, drawl, with one eyebrow lifted, was, "Bennett! SOME-thing is TOO-O-O SLOW!"*

HOMMAGE À FAURÉ (HOMAGE TO FAURÉ) (1972) is one of Helps's 3 HOMMAGES, written in honor of three composers he loved: Fauré, Ravel, and Rachmaninoff. It is a theme with three variations. About the theme itself, the composer wrote "I was a bit out of my mind—a temperature of 104 degrees drove me to the writing table. A 'tune' which normally would have been instantly suppressed took over with extreme consequences." In fact, this piece has turned

out to be Helps's "hit tune." Among its fans was Aaron Copland. The score contains the following performance instructions from the composer: "I would like to urge the performer to feel the piece out a great many different ways and then perhaps let each performance dictate the expressive conditions as it unfolds." *This suggestion reveals, as does HOMMAGE À FAURÉ, itself, Robert Helps's generosity of spirit.*

RECOLLECTIONS (1959) is one of the composer's longest and most intense works. It is both large and intimate in gesture, with a wide variety of pianistic textures. It was premiered in 1960 by William Masselos, another great American pianist. About Masselos's playing, Helps wrote, "Masselos has a wonderful and quite rare ability to feel out the long-line shape of a piece." *My experience with RECOLLECTIONS is that something in the way the piece is written inspires one to play the way Robert Helps played, both technically and musically, with a rhythmical use of the torso and arms to create an ongoing, unbroken, musical statement.*

DONALD RICHIE (born Lima, Ohio, 1924; living mostly in Tokyo, Japan, since 1947), is a novelist, an avant-garde filmmaker, an essayist, and the foremost Western expert on Japanese film. He is the author of more than fifty books, including (among Bennett Lerner's favorites) *THE INLAND SEA* (a classic travel memoir, recently made into a movie), the novels *TOKYO NIGHTS*, *COMPANIONS OF THE HOLIDAY*, and *MEMOIRS OF THE WARRIOR KUMAGAI*, the short stories *ZEN INKLINGS*, the short portraits of *PUBLIC PEOPLE*, *PRIVATE PEOPLE*, and the definitive book on the filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu. In 1968-73, Richie was Curator of Film at the New York Museum of Modern Art, and is himself the subject of a recent documentary film, *SNEAKING IN*. He has also dabbled, and seriously so, in other arts. Richie is an accomplished painter (a pupil of Maurice Grosser) and, it turns out, a composer of wit and charm. His compositions include a number of suites for piano, *NIGHT MUSIC FOR DOUBLE QUARTET* (winds and strings), and *RYUKYU ROUNDS: CANONS AND CADENZAS*

(for two shakuhachis and biwa). *I was introduced to Donald Richie in 1991 by Chester Biscardi. It was instant friendship (Donald has the gift of immediate intimacy.), fostered by mutual admiration (He knew my recordings and I had long loved THE INLAND SEA.) and shared interests, for example, the films of Ozu and European music between the two World Wars, among others. When it comes to giving the appropriate gift, no one is more prescient than Donald.*



*THE ROOM* (1951) (which is actually one part of a diptych, the other part being called *THE FIELD*) is a suite of eight short pieces, each named after a quotidian object, such as a window, a chair, the floor, the ceiling. The composer writes, "It is true *musique d'ameublement*" ("furniture music"). Richie's music recalls, somewhat, the styles of Eric Satie and Virgil Thomson, in its comical use of scale fragments, quirky cross rhythms, the sudden appearance of canons, and much spicy dissonance. First performance: Bennett

Lerner, September 28, 2003, Chiang Mai, Thailand. *I commented to Donald that his music, like Thomson's, was not amenable to interpretation, that is, it must be left as it is. He responded, "Your remark about my music and Virgil's is interesting. We both stem from the French, in particular Satie—another one it is a mistake to interpret."*

TISON STREET (born 1943, Boston) studied violin with Einar Hansen from 1951-1959, and composition with Leon Kirchner and David Del Tredici at Harvard University (B. A., 1965; M. A., 1971). Among his awards and fellowships are the Naumberg Recording Award, an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts grant, the Brandeis Creative Arts Award, a Rome Prize Fellowship, and a Friedheim Award. From 1979 to 1983, he was Associate Professor of Music at Harvard. He has also taught at University of California in Berkeley and Boston University. He presently resides in Boston, where he is active as a violinist and composer.

Street's works have been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the New Hampshire Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, and many other ensembles, as well as by such soloists as Peter Serkin and Ani Kavafian. The New York Philharmonic performed his ADAGIO IN E-FLAT for oboe and strings in 1983, and, in 1993, commissioned BRIGHT SAMBAS for their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Recent projects include ZODIAC BAGATELLES for chamber orchestra, LABYRINTH for solo violin and chamber orchestra, both for the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, the ballet THE JEWEL TREE, and TWO LATIN ANTHEMS for mixed chorus. *Tison and I have known each other since the ninth grade. We used to sneak out of school in the afternoons and go to his house to play sonatas. I was thirteen years old when Tison introduced me to modern, i. e., dissonant music, specifically the Schoenberg VIOLIN CONCERTO. We lost track of*



*each other for some years, but, when I heard Tison's gorgeous STRING QUARTET 1972, I was inspired to contact him, and our friendship was rekindled.*

POEM (IF BY CHANCE) (1990) was commissioned by Bennett Lerner's mother, the late Helen Lerner, in honor of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of her husband, Dr. Henry H. Lerner. It was first performed by Lerner at his father's birthday celebration in Miami on February 18, 1990. Dr. Lerner's copy of the score has the following handwritten dedication from the composer: "For Dr. Lerner. Remember the piece I was supposed to write when Bennett and I were teenagers? Well, here it is! (Only thirty years late!) Happy Birthday and many happy returns." The composer provided the following program note in the form of a poem:

If by chance I were to write a piece  
Based on C A C# F#, themselves  
Chosen by a chance scattering,  
It might be a poem for Autumn—  
Dry leaves scattered before the wind.

In fact, the first four notes of the piece were determined by chance operations: small pieces of paper, each with a note name on it, were thrown in the air and the four closest to a chair leg were used to begin the piece and to generate its style, which is rather Late Romantic in feeling, somewhat as if Mahler had written a piano piece. *This technique of getting a composition started and the Neo-Romantic style (In fact, Street is highly skilled in many styles.) should not distract one from the beauty of the counterpoint and the richness of the harmony. Moreover, POEM (IF BY CHANCE) is distinctly modern in its gestures and in its sudden changes of mood and texture, all very characteristic of the composer.*

ROGER ZAHAB (born 1957, Akron, Ohio) is active as a composer, violinist, conductor, educator, and writer. He has composed chamber, vocal, and orchestral music, as well as dance, theater, and video works. The most recent recordings of his compositions are by Solaris (YOUR OFFENDING KISS, on Capstone Records) and pianist Eric Moe (LEVITATION OF PIANOS DURING A WALTZ). Zahab's



work has been performed internationally, most recently in Baltimore, New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto.

As a violinist, Zahab has given more than a hundred

premieres of works by such composers as John Cage, David Macbride, Steven Mackey, Ursula Mamlok, Eric Moe, Dennis Riley, Tison Street, Orianna Webb, and Christian Wolff. He has recorded for the Albany, Koch International Classics, Neuma, and Truemedialabels. Zahab's version of John Cage's THIRTEEN HARMONIES for violin and keyboard instrument is published by C. F. Peters Corporation. Recent commissions include REACHING AFTER (for 'cellist Lawrence Stomberg), VENICE TRANSPARENCE (a string quartet for a CD ROM of paintings by Sri Lankan artist Isaac Falconer/Saku Gunasegaram), and a trilogy of compositions commemorating the Ohio Bicentennial in 2003: the ghost opera UNCOVERED BY NIGHT, a chamber setting of Sherwood Anderson's WINESBERG, OHIO, and AUGUST SHADE, a multi-media performance work.

*I met Roger in 1983, when Tison Street brought him to a concert at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, in which I played Tison's CHORDS FROM THE NORTH-EAST. Roger and I quickly became fast friends, sharing many adventures. Roger has a genius for titles.*

THE EARTH'S JIG (1987) is a solo piano version of the final section of Zahab's quintet for mixed ensemble, THE SINGLE EARTH (1987), and was arranged at Bennett Lerner's request. It was first performed by Chris Vassiliades in New York City in 1987, and by Lerner in Bangkok in 1991. A jig is a dance in triple time, and THE EARTH'S JIG contains many jigs (including a little tune in homage to the Renaissance composer Guillaume de Machaut and a melodic bit that quotes Mahler's First Symphony). In some places there are as many as three jigs, in different dynamics and tempos, superimposed at the same time. About the end of the piece, the composer writes, "It wanders off in a slower tempo—implying, perhaps, that the earth continues with or without us."

SILENCE ORCHIDS (1988) was composed for three pianists, namely Marcia Eckert, Chris Vassiliades, and Bennett Lerner. It was first performed by Eckert in 1988, and by Vassiliades the same year. Lerner played it for the first time in September, 2003. The composer writes: "SILENCE ORCHIDS is perhaps as much a group portrait of my pianist-friends' actions as it is an evidence of my writing." *In 1983, Roger wrote me, "Here's your new piece. I hope you enjoy its eccentricities." As I experience them, "its eccentricities" are found in the extreme contrasts in tempo, dynamics, and style, as well as in the frequent superimposition of dynamics (sometimes three levels at one time) and tempos (different voices proceeding at different speeds).*

BENNETT LERNER (born 1944, Boston, Massachusetts; currently living in Chiang Mai, Thailand) is well known in the USA as a performer of new music, and has premiered music by major American composers such as Aaron Copland (MIDDAY THOUGHTS, written especially for Lerner, PROCLAMATION FOR PIANO, and TWO BALLADS for violin and piano, with violin-

ist-composer Roger Zahab), Paul Bowles (CROSS COUNTRY for two pianos, with composer-pianist Christopher Berg, and TIERRA MOJADA), Irving Fine (DIVERSIONS FOR PIANO), Vittorio Rieti (TOCCATA, SECOND AVENUE WALTZES, in the chamber concerto version, RONDO FOR TWO PIANOS, with Christopher Berg, and the duet TWENTY-FINGERS WALTZ, which Lerner premiered with the composer joining him at the piano), David Diamond (A PORTRAIT OF VIRGIL AT 90), Virgil Thomson (TWO SENTIMENTAL TANGOS, WALKING SONG, in the original solo piano version, and the musical portraits SENZA ESPRESSIONE: BENNETT LERNER and PHILLIP RAMEY THINKING), Phillip Ramey (EPIGRAMS, CANZONA), Marc Blitzstein (three pieces from THE GUESTS), Christopher Berg (RESTORATION and MANIC ETUDE), Roy Harris (American Ballads LI'L BOY DAVID and WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME), Otto Leuning (three SONATINAS), Roger Zahab (THE EARTH'S JIG), Alexander Tcherepnin (OPIVOCHKI), Tison Street (POEM: IF BY CHANCE), and Samuel Barber (THREE

SKETCHES: "Love Song," "To My Steinway," and "Minuet").

Highlights of Lerner's career include a 1985 performance of Aaron Copland's PIANO CONCERTO with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta, which was broadcast nationally on LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER (in a celebration of Copland's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, in which Lerner was Copland's chosen soloist), performances with the Los Angeles Symphony in the Hollywood Bowl and with the Boston Pops Orchestra (under Arthur Fiedler). Lerner's performance of the Copland PIANO CONCERTO with the New York Philharmonic led to further performances with the Indianapolis Symphony, the Minnesota Symphony (Stravinsky's PIANO CONCERTO), the Richmond Symphony, the Charleston Symphony, the Berkeley Chamber Players of Yale University (Britten's YOUNG APOLLO), the Sand Point Music Festival (Grieg's PIANO CONCERTO, with Gunther Schuller conducting), and the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Italy (Gershwin's RHAPSODY IN BLUE). In 1992, he played RHAPSODY IN BLUE

with the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, and in August, 2002, was piano soloist with the National



Symphony of Thailand in the world premiere performance of BHAWANKHA, a piano concerto written especially for Lerner by young Thai composer Narong Prangchareon (as was Prangchareon's piano solo THE TEMPLE IN THE MIST).

Lerner's 1987 FOUR-HOUR PIANO EXTRAVAGANZA (which featured 11 world premieres) at New York's 92<sup>nd</sup> St. Y received great acclaim, and in 1988 he was featured in the PIANORAMA festival at New York's Merkin Hall, playing Charles Ives's FIRST SONATA. In 1990, Lerner appeared on German television playing music by Paul Bowles and Hans Helfritz. In 1995-96, Lerner performed the complete piano music of Claude Debussy in four recitals, in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. In November, 2002, he played all-Debussy programs in Miami, Tokyo, Kyoto, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur,

Johor Bahru, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai. In April, 2003, Lerner participated in a celebration of Claudio Arrau's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at Greenwich House Music School, New York, and was featured in an all-Debussy recital.

In September, October, and November, 2003, Lerner performed MUSIC BY MY FRIENDS, in Chiang Mai (AUA Auditorium), Bangkok (AMA Studio), Miami (Lincoln Theater), Bronxville (Sarah Lawrence College), Pittsburgh (University of Pittsburgh), Boston (Lasell Village), New York City (Greenwich House Music School), Kansas City (University of Missouri in Kansas City), Paris (L'Atelier de la main d'or), and Tokyo (Senzoku College of Music), featuring music composed for him by his composer-friends Aaron Copland, Christopher Berg, Narong Prangcharoen (world premiere of THREE MINDS), Tison Street, and Roger Zahab, as well as works by composer-friends, Chester Biscardi, Robert Helps (one of Lerner's mentors), Donald Richie (the foremost Western expert on Japanese film; the premiere performance of Richie's THE ROOM), and Thorsten Wollmann. In

February, 2004, Lerner played this program in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

As a chamber musician Lerner has appeared in the USA with the Group for Contemporary Music, The New Music Consort, the Alliance for American Song, the ISCM, and in Thailand at the Lanna Music Festival. As an accompanist he performed with the late tenor Franco Corelli, flutists Louis Moyse, Carol Wincenc, and Harvey Sollberger, and many singers, including Judith Bettina and Sheilagh Angpiroj.

Lerner has four recordings on the ETCETERA label, including two recordings of contemporary American music (AMERICAN PIANO MUSIC, Vols. 1 and 2), one of European music from 1937 (PARIS: EXPOSITION 1937), and a disc of the piano music of Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnin.

Lerner has edited Irving Fine's DIVERSIONS FOR PIANO and Aaron Copland's VARIATIONS ON A SHAKER MELODY (FROM APPALACHIAN SPRING) for piano duet and TWO BALLADS for violin and piano; all published by Boosey

and Hawkes. His articles on American piano music and Paul Bowles have appeared in the magazines Keyboard Classics, Keynote, and Perspectives on Music.

Lerner's primary teachers were the Chilean virtuoso Claudio Arrau (through whose teacher Martin Krause can be traced a direct lineage to Liszt), Arrau's assistant Rafael de Silva, the famous Cuban pedagogue German Diez, the American pianist-composer Robert Helps, and the Argentine virtuosa, famous for her tango playing, Arminda Canteros (a friend and pupil of the great German Debussy-player Walter Gieseking).

Lerner received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from City University of New York in October, 2001, in piano performance and music history. His dissertation was a performing edition with commentary of previously-unpublished piano pieces by Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Irving Fine, and Roy Harris. Lerner received his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in piano performance from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with Zenon Fishbein and Robert Helps. He

also attended Columbia University and the Dalcroze School of Music. Lerner was the recipient of a Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music Award. He is a Steinway Artist.

Lerner has taught at the Manhattan School of Music Preparatory Division, Brooklyn College Conservatory, Brooklyn College Preparatory Center, Sarah Lawrence College, and the Greenwich House Music School. In recent years he has given piano recitals and workshops for Alfred Music Publisher in many Asian countries (Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Hong Kong).

Lerner has lived in Thailand for the past 14 years. He was formerly Head of the Piano Department of the Chintakarn School of Music in Bangkok and is currently a lecturer in the Music Department of Payap University in Chiang Mai.

**Publishers:**

Berg: Manic Etude, Montparnassel Bienvenuél, Ossessione, Restoration, and Tango-Meditation are published by Tender Tender Music.

Biscardi: Incitation to Desire is published by C. F. Peters.

Biscardi: Nel giardinetto della villa is available from the composer.

Biscardi: Mestiere is published by Merion Music.

Copland: Jazzy and Midday Thoughts are published by Boosey and Hawkes.

Helps: Recollections and Hommage à Fauré are published by C. F. Peters.

Richie: The Room is available from Bennett Lerner.

Street: Poem (If By Chance) is available from the composer.

Zahab: Silence Orchids and The Earth's Jig are available from the composer.

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Chester Biscardi and Bennett Lerner, recording session, 4/19/04. Photo credit: Judith Sherman. (pg. 5)

Aaron Copland and Bennett Lerner, c.1988.

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Donald Richie and Bennett Lerner, 12/6/02.

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