

SONOKLECT '97-'98

A Concert Series of Twentieth-Century Music
Terry Vosbein, Director

Christopher Taylor
pianist

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY
KELLER THEATRE • 8:00 P.M. • 24 JANUARY 1998

PROGRAM

Turning (1995)

Song for B
Nightmares and Chickens
Kowil at Dawn
Passage
Carnaval Noir
Coda

Derek Bermel

(b. 1967)

Piano Sonata

Maestoso
Andante

Elliott Carter

(b. 1908)

— INTERMISSION —

Twelve New Etudes

1. Fast, furious
2. Récitatif
3. Mirrors
4. Scène d'opéra
5. Butterflies, hummingbirds
6. Nocturne
7. Premonitions
8. Rag infernal
9. Invention
10. Vers le silence
11. Hi-jinks
12. Hymne à l'amour

William Bolcom

(b. 1938)

Christopher Taylor is represented by Jonathan Wentworth Associates, Ltd.



CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

Christopher Taylor was recently propelled into the music pages of the nation's newspapers when he became the first American to reach the finals in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition since 1981. He then went on to win the Bronze Medal, and his resulting CD has won much critical acclaim. In April of 1996 Mr. Taylor joined the ranks of numerous other preeminent musicians when he received an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Mr. Taylor has been honored by several other prominent piano competitions. In the summer of 1990 he was one of the first four recipients of the Gilmore Young Artists Award, a scholarship for exceptionally promising American pianists aged 22 or younger. Shortly thereafter he took first prize in the William Kapell International Piano competition held at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

Since his first solo recital at ten, he has performed in many cities, including New York (at both Carnegie and Alice Tully Halls), Boston, Washington, Denver, and Los Angeles, as well as in Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. He has appeared with the Saint Louis Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the Houston Symphony, the National Symphony, the Boston Pops, the Seoul Philharmonic, and numerous other orchestras.

Mr. Taylor began his piano studies in his native Boulder, Colorado, under Julie Bees, and has since studied with Francisco Aybar, Russell Sherman, and Maria Curcio Diamand. While pursuing his musical career he also attended Harvard University, graduating summa cum laude in mathematics in 1992. Mr. Taylor maintains many other active interests, including composition (a field in which he has won several awards), music theory, linguistics, bicycling, and hiking.

Christopher Taylor is a Steinway Artist.

DEREK BERMEL

Derek Bermel (b. 1967, New York City) attended Yale University, the University of Michigan, and the Royal Conservatory in the Hague, Netherlands. He studied composition with William Albright, Louis Andriessen, William Bolcom, and Michael Tenzer, and clarinet with Ben Armato and Fred Ormand. He has also studied ethnomusicology in Jerusalem with Andre Hajdu, and Lobi xylophone music in Ghana with Ngmen Baaru. Among other awards, he is the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, a Javits Fellowship, an NEH grant, Banff, Bowdoin, and Tanglewood Summer Festival Fellowships, and three ASCAP awards.

He has received commissions from the American Composers' Orchestra, the Albany Symphony (*Dogs of Desire*), the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, the Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players, the New York Youth Symphony, organist William Albright, baritone Timothy Jones, and the University of Michigan Chamber Choir. His works are published by E. B. Marks, Inc.

As a clarinetist, Bermel has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "a truly exceptional talent." He has performed as a soloist in recitals and orchestras throughout the United States and Europe, and has commissioned and premiered over twenty new works for clarinet. He regularly performs recitals of contemporary music hosted by St. Peter's Church/Citicorp in New York City.

"I wrote *Turning* during the summer of 1995 at the Tanglewood Music Center, where I had the opportunity to work with, and get to know, the composer Henri Dutilleux. The piece is thus dedicated to M. Dutilleux, and to pianist Christopher Taylor, for whom it was written. The form is essentially a theme and variations in six sections. The opening theme is a rather simple song in the key of B major, followed by a pentatonic echo. This juxtaposition reflects an aspect of my musical consciousness (Western music overlaid with Eastern influence) since I returned from West Africa, where I studied Lobi xylophone music.

"The first variation, *Nightmares and Chickens*, is a schizophrenic frenzy of pointillistic clucking. *Kowil at Dawn* is a picture of this small Sissala village in northwest Ghana. A brief *Passage*, in which a ghost of the opening theme is resurrected, leads to *Carnaval Noir*, a sort of funky Latin dance variation with bits of ragtime thrown in; finally the work spirals backwards in the final *Coda*. *Turning* was premiered in June 1996 by Christopher Taylor at Studio Raspail in Paris."

— *Derek Bermel*

WILLIAM BOLCOM

William Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes*, written between the years of 1977 and 1986, received the Pulitzer Prize two years after their completion and promise to become staples of the contemporary piano repertoire.

A professor of composition at the University of Michigan since 1973, William Bolcom (b. 1938) has achieved renown as a leader in the revival of ragtime. Along with his wife, mezzo soprano Joan Morris, Bolcom is also a familiar presence on the American stage, performing popular American repertoire from the early part of this century. His interest in American music of all stripes shows through in many of his compositions, including these etudes.

The *Twelve New Etudes* refer to a wide variety of musical styles, creating a synthesis that is uniquely Bolcomesque. As an accomplished pianist himself, Bolcom taxes the performer's resources to the utmost, demanding numerous unorthodox techniques: tone clusters, wide leaps, and difficult-to-control sonorities at the extreme ends of the keyboard are found everywhere. Yet like every earlier great etude cycle (such as those by Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy) these works ultimately require that pianists become so technically fluent that they can ignore their fingers altogether and focus instead on making the drama and lyricism of the music come to life.

Following are brief descriptions of each etude:

1. **Fast, furious**

The rapid passage work, sudden halts, and elbow-clusters that punctuate this etude make an arresting initial impression on the listener.

2. **Récitatif**

A quite lyrical etude, strongly contrasting with its predecessor. The pianist must create a sense of absolute metrical freedom, a task that is much more difficult than one might initially suppose.

3. **Mirrors**

A brief movement in which the left hand part is exactly the same as the right, but upside-down. Every wide leap that goes upward in one hand corresponds to a downward leap in the other. A rather erratic, even disturbing atmosphere results.

4. **Scène d'opéra**

Bolcom divides the twelve etudes into four books of three. Thus the fourth etude opens a new book and represents a fresh start of sorts. A rather melodramatic line in the bass permeates this piece, while in the right hand various figures scamper about in rather irregular rhythmic patterns.

5. **Butterflies, hummingbirds**
Reminiscent of Ravel's *Miroirs*, this etude affords remarkable, shimmering timbres. A notable effect is the use of tone-cluster tremolos, where groups of four or five white notes alternate very rapidly with similar groups of black notes.
6. **Nocturne**
Above figures reminiscent of a distant banjo's lazy strumming, a single line in the foreground asserts itself, passionate at first, but eventually subdued.
7. **Premonitions**
A rather sinister work, where the pianist uses the middle pedal to sustain the piano's three bottommost notes and create ghostly harmonics in the notes above.
8. **Rag infernal**
Certainly lives up to its name. The left hand plays a particularly important role, employing the stride technique at tremendous speed. One's sense of aim is sorely tested by this etude.
9. **Invention**
Three voices noodle about introspectively. The challenge is to keep all three distinct, each with an interesting personality and a convincing shape.
10. **Vers le silence**
Again Bolcom employs the piano's sonorities in a very imaginative fashion, and all three pedals play an active role. At the end a single chant-like motto repeats seven times, each time more quietly than before. At the end the dynamic "*ppppppp*" (possibly a record number of *p*'s) can be found.
11. **Hi-jinks**
The pianist is confined almost entirely to the piano's top two octaves, a region that even on the best instruments makes comprehensible melodies and shapes difficult to produce. However, great humor is possible in this movement if one times things right.
12. **Hymne à l'amour**
In this grand finale, Bolcom again displays a great flair for creating unusual, striking colors. Finally a triumphant chorale takes charge, and brings matters to a stirring conclusion.