



FESTIVAL FOR CREATIVE PIANISTS
GARY SMART, PIANO
April 12, 2012

Sonata in C Major, Hoboken XVI: 48 (1790)

Franz Joseph Haydn

I Andante con espressione
II Presto

Rhapsody in F# minor, Op. 11, no.2 (1903)

Ernst von Dohnanyi

Four Preludes (1913-15)

Claude Debussy

The Gate of Wine, Book II
The Interrupted Serenade, Book I
Ondine, Book II
The Engulfed Cathedral, Book I

Piano Variations (1930)

Aaron Copland

-----Intermission-----

Two Rags

Gary Smart

Laramie Rag
Two Flowers Rag

Improvisations

*"I love music passionately. And because I love it I try to free it
from barren traditions that stifle it." - Debussy*

Gary Smart's career has encompassed a wide range of activities as composer, classical and jazz pianist, and teacher.

A true American pluralist, Dr. Smart composes and improvises a music that reflects an abiding interest in Americana, jazz, and world musics, as well as the Western classical tradition.

Smart's compositions have been supported by the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Music Educator's National Conference, the Music Teacher's National Association, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Program Notes by Gary Smart

The **Sonata in C Major, Hoboken XVI: 48**, by Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was written in mid-career, as the great composer prepared for his first triumphant visit to London. The work has only two movements, but they are so very different in character and technique, that the complete format is very satisfying.

The first movement had always puzzled me. It seemed somehow not fully formed, too repetitive. But last summer it hit me: the first movement demands more of the performer. It is almost a written-out improvisation. It is a set of double variations, full of small repeated sections, notated with repeat signs. Obviously (to me) the many ornamentations and patterned figurations were varied (improvised) in Haydn's own performances of the movement. So, this is how I now play the piece. Please imagine Haydn himself creating the music in the moment as you listen to this opening movement. It will come alive.

The Rondo, on the other hand, is a perfectly formed composition. This little movement is in fact a wonderful example of Haydn's mastery. It is intelligent, witty and elegant. I take only a few liberties here, extending the keyboard range slightly, adding a few notes here and there. It is a strange truth that only by looking for the personal in another's work, can we find the universal.

Ernst von Dohnányi (1870-1960) was one of those many European artists who immigrated to America before and during WW II. He was a wonderful composer-pianist, teacher of Béla Bartók (in Hungary before the war), and founder of the music department at Florida State University. His early **Rhapsody in F# minor, Op. 11, No.2** (1903) evokes the romantic's view of Hungarian folk music. This improvisatory work is reminiscent of Liszt, but the harmonic language is even richer.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was a fine pianist and an equally fine improviser. He said that much of his music came out of his piano improvisations. The few recordings I have heard show him to be not only wonderfully musical, but also capable of a sensitive, colorful, evocative pianism. I bear this in mind always when I play his Preludes. The first two Preludes here evoke Spain's Moroccan heritage, the second two deal with water imagery. The best known, **The Engulfed Cathedral**, is based on an old folk tale from Brittany. The wayward congregation of a seaside cathedral is cursed to sink into the ocean, then to rise up – a ghost cathedral - on Easter morning each year with the sunrise, only to sink again into the deep at sunset.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) is one of America's greatest composers. His best-known works are associated with the use of American folk music and traditional American materials. His Appalachian Spring and Fanfare for the Common Man seem to be ubiquitous on symphony programs. However, there is another side to Mr. Copland. Throughout his career Copland wrote music of a more abstract nature that was more challenging to the listener. His masterful **Piano Variations** fall into this second category.

The variations are based on a four-note motive (E-C-D#-C#) that is declaimed somberly at the opening of the work. There follow many short variations of extremely contrasting character. I find the spirit of Beethoven here. This is "no nonsense" music. It is sometimes consonant, sometimes polytonal, sometimes quite dissonant, always direct and dramatic, rarely charming, often serious, sometimes playful and jazzy. The stunning, aggressive, ringing Coda is as confident and joyfully triumphant as anything in the repertoire for solo piano. It could be argued that this powerful music is also, after all, quite uniquely American in character.

I have written ragtime music for at least forty years. It is in my blood I guess. My first musical memories are of ragtime played on our upright in my central Illinois home. The **Laramie Rag** is dedicated to the university town of Laramie, Wyoming, where I spent twenty years with my family. The **Two Flowers Rag** is a sentimental portrait of my two daughters, Molly and Kate.

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GARY SMART
Piano

blossoms



GARY SMART BLOSSOMS

unedited abstract
improvisations

*“ Truly a delightful concoction.
Almost Nancarrow-like virtuosity.
Induces outright mirth in the listener. ”*

— CANFIELD/FANFARE MAGAZINE

*“ His protean music is utterly unique . . . defies categorization.
The more I listened, the more I enjoyed it . . . a ton of fun.
Smart plays with astonishing facility and ebullience.
I highly recommend this recording to readers who have an interest
in experimental music, to anyone with an open mind. ”*

— LELUTIU/ FANFARE MAGAZINE



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TURTLE DREAMS OF FLIGHT

“ Smart's music is informed by a lifetime of influences, with a delightful indifference to any single tradition, except, perhaps, a kind of American tradition of iconoclasm. His is a distinctive voice. ”

— BURWASSER/ FANFARE MAGAZINE

HOT SONATAS

“ Interesting listening, a fantasy-like eclecticism. ”

— BECKER/AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

“ Superb. Very effective . . . would make Dizzy and Charlie proud. The last movement reaches a shouting climax, and a climax indeed! (I have to repair some peeling paint in my office.) ”

— NICHOLS/“THE CLARINET” MAGAZINE



AMERICAN BEAUTY: A RAGTIME BOUQUET

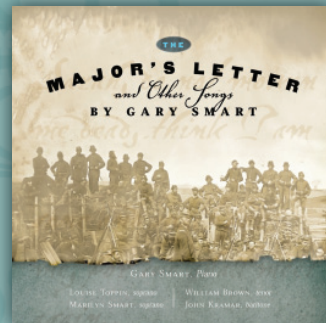
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THE MAJOR'S LETTER AND OTHER SONGS

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— CANFIELD/FANFARE MAGAZINE



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