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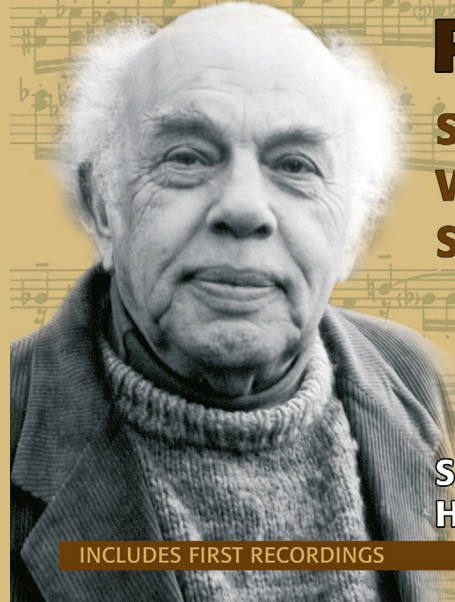
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Harold SHAPERO

Piano Music

Sonata in F minor
Variations in C minor
Sonata for Four Hands



Sally Pinkas, piano
Hirsch-Pinkas Piano Duo

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

HAROLD SHAPERO: THREE EARLY PIANO WORKS

by R. James Tobin

Born on 29 April 1920 in Lynn, Massachusetts, Harold Shapero spent most of his life in the Boston area. By age sixteen he was studying with the brilliant Nicolas Slonimsky, who taught him counterpoint as well as classical harmony. His next teacher was the Vienna-born composer Ernst Krenek (who for a time was married to Gustav Mahler's daughter Anna). At seventeen Shapero won a scholarship to the small Malkin Conservatory in Boston, where Slonimsky had also taught. Shapero became Krenek's only student, after a second student dropped out, and he began writing music more seriously.

A year after studying with Krenek, Shapero became a student at Harvard, where his composition teacher was now Walter Piston, who taught most of the theory courses. With him Shapero focused on advanced harmony, composition and fugue. He also studied Piston's own works, and he was to write a major section of his undergraduate honours thesis on Piston's music. During the summer of 1940 Shapero studied at Tanglewood with Paul Hindemith, who kept him on at the end of the summer session and set him to writing melodies. After an enormous number of rejected efforts at this task, Shapero submitted one he had already written in an early work. It earned the strong approval of Hindemith, because it seemed to originate somewhere deep within Shapero – who was to remain committed to melodic, as well as tonal, music.

Shapero was considered the most brilliant young musician of his generation and his contemporaries felt free to call him a genius. By the time he graduated, in 1941, he had written several compositions and won several prizes, including the *Prix de Rome* for his *Nine Minute Overture* and his String Quartet. All of his college-era works have been recorded, some more than once. While at Harvard he also made the acquaintance of Stravinsky, who was Norton Professor of Poetics during his third year there. His honours thesis also dealt with Stravinsky, and this portion of it was used for several years as required study in the Harvard music programme.

Daniel Pinkham for the Albany, Arsis and Otherminds labels. Their close friendship with George Rochberg (1918–2005) culminated in the commission of his monumental *Circles of Fire* for two pianos, which they premiered and recorded for Naxos, along with three more discs featuring Rochberg's solo-piano works.

Pinkas and Hirsch enjoy interacting with their audience and with young musicians and encourage presenters to schedule master-classes and open rehearsals in conjunction with their concerts. They reside in Medford, Massachusetts.

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Evan Hirsch performs extensively as both recitalist and chamber musician, in venues as far apart as Jordan Hall (Boston), the Muson Centre (Lagos) and the Palazzo Savelli Chigi (Ariccia). He has commissioned, premiered and recorded works by Martin Pearlman, Kui Dong, Peter Child and Robert Kyr for the New Albion, Otherminds and Albany labels. His recording of selections from Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* was recently released on MSR (MSR 1433). Summer festival credits include Kfar Blum (Israel), Masters de Pontlevoy (France), ppIANISSIMO (Bulgaria), and Music Ninety-Eight (Cincinnati).

He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from SUNY Purchase and a Master of Music from New England Conservatory. He teaches piano and chamber music at Brandeis University (Waltham, Massachusetts), and has held visiting-professor appointments at Dartmouth College in 2012 and 2014.

The Hirsch-Pinkas Piano Duo had its unintended debut at a Valentine's Day Concert at Dartmouth College. Their audience's enthusiasm convinced the two, already married and pursuing separate careers, to continue their collaboration. Pinkas and Hirsch made their European debut as a duo at the Officina Musicale Scotese in Abruzzo, Italy, and have since toured Bulgaria, China, Israel, Italy, Nigeria, Russia and south-east Asia. Most recently, in 2013, they participated in the International Piano Festival of the Conservatory of Music in Ho Chi Minh City.

Sally and Evan have performed most of the masterpieces for the genre, including works by Bartók, Brahms, Debussy, Mozart, Rachmaninov, Ravel and Schubert, as well as less-often-heard works such as Messiaen's *Visions de l'amen* and Milhaud's *La création du monde*. The Duo has collaborated with, and recorded the works of American composers Peter Child, Kui Dong, Thomas Oboe Lee and



Photo: Rob Strong



Photo: Rob Strong

As he could not take up residence in Rome, a benefit of the *Prix de Rome*, because of the war in Europe,¹ after his graduation Shapero proceeded to study with Nadia Boulanger at the Longy Conservatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she had located, also because of the war. She was to prove his most influential teacher. He was enormously impressed with the way she presented the late quartets and piano sonatas of Beethoven, who was to become one of the strongest influences on his music.

Shapero's instrument was the piano, and the degree of his skill at the keyboard, as well as his musical development in general, can be measured against that of another master of the piano, Leonard Bernstein, a close friend of Shapero's in the 1940s, when the three works on this recording were written. When the young Lenny learned that Shapero was a good pianist, he suggested playing two-piano concerts together. Bernstein secured the jobs, but whenever a piece was difficult Lenny made Shapero play the *primo* part. The lively nerve, musical and personal, and the brilliant skill of both men, as well as their sense of humour, often emerged during these concerts. As Shapero later recalled,² while preparing to play Mozart for one local group of nice but musically unsophisticated people who 'didn't know one note from another', Shapero said to Bernstein, 'This is boring... Let's flat all the dominants!...' [and they] went through with the whole concert that way! Flatted all the dominants; nobody knew anything'. Indeed, Shapero thought the result sounded a bit like Grieg, who also flatted some dominants. On another occasion, when they were undergraduates at Harvard, they performed in New York for 'some culture group' of Shapero's mother, which would give these students a free trip. They announced a programme of Prokofiev and Shostakovich. On the train each confessed that he had not practised for the concert, and so Shapero said to Bernstein, "OK, you do the Prokofiev and I'll do the Shostakovich and we'll make it up, OK?" Which is what we did', Shapero related, 'I played fake Shostakovich and he played fake Prokofiev'.

Four-Hand Sonata for Piano (1941)

Composed shortly before Shapero graduated from Harvard, the *Four-Hand Sonata for Piano*, as he labelled it, was one of the pieces he played with Bernstein along with other four-hand piano pieces, and he dedicated it to the two of them, a gesture he hoped would not be misunderstood.

¹ That opportunity came later, in 1951, when he was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome.

² Shapero, 'Lenny at Harvard (Reminiscence)', in Claudia Swan (ed.), *Leonard Bernstein: The Harvard Years, 1935-1939*. Eos Orchestra, New York, 1999, pp. 47-70.

In 1942 they played it at a Composers' League concert in New York. In 1953 Shapero recorded it for Columbia Records, with Leo Smit playing the second part. Others have performed and recorded it as well – clearly it is a piece pianists enjoy playing.³

It has the form of a Classical sonata and its idiom is in the Neoclassical tradition of Stravinsky and Hindemith. Above all, it is a youthful work. Much of it is whimsical, playful and exuberant. There is some delightful melody and some unusual accents. The very slow opening of the *Allegro moderato* first movement [5] is mellow before becoming more sharp-edged and ending with a catchy tune. The slow middle movement, marked *Arioso* [6], includes a surprise. The fast – and faster – final movement, *Allegro assai* [7], has angular melody and some interestingly accented phrases.

Variations in C minor (1947)

One of Shapero's most appealing works, his C minor set of variations [4] is also one of his gentlest. Its manner and mood are the antithesis of the *Symphony for Classical Orchestra*, written the same year, and which is Shapero's best, and best-known, work. Whereas the *Symphony* is exciting, the variations are profoundly restful. The reasons include its slow pace – it is *adagio* throughout – and its generally limited dynamics. Although the dynamic range stretches from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, these extremes are rare; more frequently it ranges from *mp* to *mf*. Structurally, too, it avoids sharp contrasts, with the start and finish of each variation blurred, so that they flow into one another seamlessly.

The work is unabashedly tonal, and there are only a few changes of key or mood. The most striking change, halfway through its twenty minutes, is a sudden shift from a rapid *brillante* passage in C minor, ending fortissimo, to a solemn (*maestoso*) – and quieter – C major. This variation is followed by one in G major and another in C major before a return to C minor for the very gentle concluding part in the initial key.

The mostly subtle and gentle expressiveness of the work is indicated by instructions in the score, among them *tranquillo*, *semplice*, *delicato*, *cantabile*, *dolce cantabile*, *dolcissimo ma mosso*, *lyrico*, *con molto sentimento*, *con affeto* and *molto adagio con gran espressivo*. More vigour from time

³ Shapero's and Smit's recording was released on Columbia ML-4841. The two modern recordings currently available are by David Kopp and Rodney Lister on New World Records (80536-2, released in 1999) and the Zofu Duo on Sono Luminus (PSL-92151, released in 2012).

After her debut, which took place in the Wigmore Hall, the Israeli-born pianist Sally Pinkas has been heard as recitalist and chamber musician throughout the world. Described by Gramophone as 'an artist who melds lucid textures with subtle expressive detailing, minus hints of bombast or mannerism', she has appeared as soloist with the Boston Pops, the Aspen Philharmonia, Jupiter Symphony and the Bulgarian Chamber Orchestra. Summer credits include the festivals at Monadnock, Apple Hill, Rockport, Marlboro, Tanglewood and Aspen, as well as Kfar Blum in Israel, Officina Scotese in Italy and Masters de Pontlevoy in France.

She commands a wide range of repertoire. Her solo discography includes *Debussy: Etudes and Estampes* (on Centaur), *Bread and Roses: Piano works by Christian Wolff* (Mode), two CDs of the piano music of George Rochberg (Naxos) and works by Robert Schumann (MSR). Following her release of Fauré's thirteen *Nocturnes* (Musica Omnia), she recorded the Fauré Piano Quartets with the Adaskin String Trio, and most recently released Fauré's thirteen *Barcarolles* and *Dolly Suite* (both with MSR). With the flautist Fenwick Smith, she has recorded a three-CD set of Philippe Gaubert, as well as a Martinů disc, for Naxos. She is a member of the Trio Tre Monti (with the violinist Saul Bitrán and cellist Jan Müller-Szeraws) and the Ensemble Schumann (with the oboist Tom Gallant and violist Steve Larson), and appears regularly with the Adaskin String Trio.

She holds performance degrees from Indiana University and the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Ph.D. in Composition from Brandeis University. Her principal teachers were Russell Sherman, György Sebök, Luise Vosgerchian and Genia Bar-Niv (piano), Sergiu Natra (composition), and Robert Koff (chamber music). Pianist-in-residence at the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College (Hanover, New Hampshire), she is Professor of Music in the Music Department there.



Photo: Rob Strong

A recent formal analysis by Christopher Fulkerson compares Shapero's Sonata in F minor to Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata.⁹ Although finding some modern elements in Shapero's piano music, he makes structural comparisons with some sonatas by Beethoven, even commonality of keys (the 'Appassionata' is also in F minor). A comparable, and even more extreme, case of a composer modelling his work on a piece by Beethoven is reported by Jan Swafford, in his biography of Brahms. Amplifying a point of Charles Rosen's, Swafford suggests that Brahms modelled the finale of his D minor Piano Concerto on the finale of Beethoven's C minor Piano Concerto: 'cribbing [...] not unscrupulously but creatively, as true artists steal'. Swafford cites Rosen, who writes of the Beethoven and Brahms Concertos that the effect of this structural modelling 'may be described and analyzed to a great extent as if they were the same piece'. But Rosen adds that 'the two pieces sound so different that even the most cultivated listener is unlikely to be reminded of one by the other'. Such modelling, he observes, is something to 'add to the appreciation of the connoisseurs'; a full appreciation of Brahms' music, he contends, requires awareness of his influences. The same may be said of Shapero's music. Except to anticipate the question in the essay cited above, Shapero never spoke of the matter of his influences, especially following the premiere of the Sonata in F minor. Here, too, he maintained a dignified silence.

R. James Tobin is a long-standing reviewer for classical.net and the author of Neoclassical Music in America: Voices of Clarity and Restraint (Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (Maryland), forthcoming 2014). His doctoral dissertation from the University of Wisconsin dealt with the avant-garde in the arts. He is retired from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁹ Christopher Fulkerson, 'Neo-Classicism, Quotation, and Paraphrase in the Piano Music of Harold Shapero. Program Notes to the Album of Computer Realizations by John Casten', online at <http://christopherfulkerson.com/shaperonote.html>.

to time is commanded by *ben articolato, con forza, brillante* and *energico assai*; some angular and *staccato* playing is also required.

In the summer of 1947, when Shapero was working on this piece at the MacDowell Colony, the composer Irving Fine, who knew him there, wrote to his wife: 'As you might expect, he is also playing a lot of Beethoven's sonatas'.⁴ Beethoven – the piano sonatas and late quartets in particular – had been an important influence on Shapero since his studies with Nadia Boulanger after his graduation from Harvard and this influence is clearly discernible in the C minor Variations.

Shapero's Variations have not been widely performed. One early performance, the Los Angeles premiere, took place as part of the International Society for Contemporary Music on 29 November 1954. Shapero's fellow composer Ingolf Dahl also played Shapero's piano music on occasion and is likely to have included the Variations in his concert programmes, although no details have survived.

Sally Pinkas wrote the following programme note for a memorial concert for Harold Shapero at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, on 28 September 2013:

The theme, an angular *Adagio* in the dark key of C minor, uses extreme registers in slow-to-resolve dissonant intervals. The first three variations present an initially sweet, eventually fast and explosive dialogue between the two hands. This comes to a halt with a return to the gestural music of the theme, now in C major, followed by a *tranquillo, dolcissimo ma mosso* section. A few more variations are presented: a jaunty E minor variation, a *semplice* one in C major, and the most complex one in A minor. The slow theme returns in C minor, and the work concludes with an expansive *cantabile, dolce* section and a cadenza. Individual variations are not identified by title, and there is no tempo change throughout. Shapero uses the contrast between busy and sparse textures to form a symmetrical structure, a novel approach to a classical Variations movement.

Sonata for Piano in F minor (1948)

Shapero's F minor Piano Sonata is clearly in a Classical style: it is tonal, with a sonata-allegro first movement (*Allegro moderato*) [1], followed by a slow movement with six variations (*Arioso*) [2] and a rondo finale (*Allegro assai*) [3]. There are no big tunes and both development and variations are subtle. The music of the *Arioso* is particularly beautiful, and is as profoundly restful as the

⁴ Quoted in Phillip Ramey, *Irving Fine, An American Composer in His Time*, Pendragon Press, Hillsdale, New York, p. 85.

Variations, in complete contrast to the rousing excitement of the outer movements, as well as the *Symphony for Classical Orchestra*, although all three works were composed in close proximity.

Sally Pinkas has written:

The first movement [1] elaborates on two contrasting ideas, leading to a development which combines both materials brilliantly, and a recapitulation which starts jubilantly but then interpolates a dreamy section, foreshadowing the second movement, *Arioso* [2]. The transitions are unexpected and challenging technically and conceptually. The *Arioso* in D-flat Major, is a set of variations which, again, are not identified, although the tempi markings are numerous and minutely notated. The theme follows a simple tonal scheme, alternating tonic and dominant, and at the end resting on the subdominant. The first two variations elaborate on a rhythmic upbeat flourish, while the third and fourth are extroverted. A soft transition leads to the decisive fifth variation (back in D-flat Major), followed by a nocturne-like final sixth variation (in B flat Minor). By the end the entire theme is repeated verbatim. The structure of the *Arioso* is less clear than that of the Variations in C Minor, but it is more daring and nuanced, and its serenity is the heart-center of the entire Sonata. The sizeable last movement, *Allegro assai* [3], acts as an extended *Rondo*, alternating three textures: shimmering figuration in both hands, syncopated chords against single melodic lines, and running figuration against melodic lines.⁵

The Sonata in F minor was premiered by Beveridge Webster in New York in 1948 and was not played in public again until 2013. The reason for this long delay is simple: at the premiere this rather gentle work was booed and hissed, with the taunt, 'Hurrah for Beethoven!' uttered by the young serialist composer George Perle (Shapero never identified Perle in public but when I stayed with him in 2011 he told me *sotto voce* that it was him; as both parties are now dead, no confidence is betrayed by recording the fact in print). This rudeness – a sign of the intolerant times: Stravinsky had recently been similarly booed by a clique led by Pierre Boulez in Paris – was enough for Shapero to lapse into creative silence for many years. Instead, this brilliant composer retreated into academic life, teaching at Brandeis University, in Waltham, Mass. (just inland from Boston), from 1951 until his retirement in 1988. His disappearance from the public eye was so complete that when in 1986 André Previn revived the *Symphony for Classical Orchestra*, recording it and giving several

⁵ Programme note for the memorial concert at Brandeis University on 28 September 2013.

public performances, its quality was a source of surprise: the musical world had long forgotten its composer. Martin Bernheimer, writing in *The Los Angeles Times*, pulled no punches: 'Shapero reveals himself here as a superb craftsman, an artist totally in control of the grandiose variables at hand'; Shapero's writing was 'clever, subtle, elegant' and the work 'affecting in spite of the inherent anachronisms, but because of them.'⁶ The warmth of the reception was enough to persuade Shapero to begin composing again, his late works including *Three Hebrew Songs* for tenor, piano and strings (1988), *Six for Five* for wind quintet (1995), a large-scale Trumpet Concerto (1995) and the *Whittier Songs* for soprano, tenor, flute, cello and piano (2005–7). He died on 17 May 2013.

Bernheimer's defensive comments about Shapero's 'anachronisms', in discussion of a work which obviously refers to models of the past, raise the question of influence – one which came up when these works were new. In 1948, the year of the premiere of the F minor Sonata, Aaron Copland observed:

Stylistically, Shapero seems to feel a compulsion to fashion his music after some great model. Thus his five-movement *Serenade* for string orchestra (a remarkable work in many ways), is founded upon neoclassic Stravinskian principles, his *Three Amateur Piano Sonatas* on Haydnesque principles, and his recent long symphony is modelled after Beethoven. For the present he seems to be suffering from a hero-worship complex – or perhaps it is a freakish attack of false modesty [...].⁷

In fact, Shapero had already examined the issue of musical models in an article in 1946,⁸ writing of the effect of music memory on the composing subconscious:

In the metamorphosis which has taken place, the original tonal material has become compounded with remembered emotional experiences, and it is this action of the creative unconscious which renders music more than an acoustical series of tones, which gives to music its humanistic aspect [...].

⁶ 'A Belated Premiere for Shapero', *The Los Angeles Times*, 6 December 1986.

⁷ 'The New School of American Composers', *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 March 1948, reprinted in *Copland on Music*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1960, pp. 164–75.

⁸ 'The Musical Mind', *Modern Music*, No. 23, Winter 1946, pp. 31–35; reprinted in Brewster Ghiselin (ed.), *The Creative Process: A Symposium*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952, pp. 41–45.