New Waltzes for Piano

Eric Moe Piano

The Waltz Project Revisited
The Waltz as Anti-gravity Generator

The waltz traffics in weightlessness. By adding an extra step to the one-two/left-right of pedestrian movement, it forces the waltzer and listener off the ground and into the air (left-right-up). Some of these waltzes tackle gravity head on (Roger Zahab's levitation of pianos during a waltz), others are more insinuatingly buoyant, but all share this attribute. These new waltzes are not exclusively American – there are contributions from Poland (Zygmunt Krauze’s Music Box Waltz) and Nigeria (Akin Euba’s Study in African Jazz 3) – but they are indebted to vernacular American rhythms which add even more bounce. Their distinguished European ancestry is recognizable, but these waltzes are very much of our time - only lighter.

At the suggestion of Howard Stokar, I have revisited Robert Helps’ and Robert Moran’s Waltz Project of the mid-
1970s – half of the 22 waltzes on this CD are from the collection published by C.F. Peters. They include works that have become standards of the repertoire, such as Milton Babbitt’s *Minute Waltz* and Philip Glass’ *Modern Love Waltz*, as well as other gems. The remaining 11 waltzes are new, ten composed especially for this recording, with Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Waltz* a happy discovery.

The variety is enormous. Some have a direct connection with jazz: Anthony Cornicello’s *PostModern Waltz* deconstructs a famous McCoy Tyner solo; my own *Pulaski Skyway Waltz* begins with a quotation from Mal Waldron’s *Firewaltz*. Akin Euba’s “African Jazz” study draws from the musical wells of Africa and Vienna, while Andrew Imbrie infuses a one-to-the-bar waltz with the headlong energy of bebop. Lee Hyla’s *One Moe Time (Waltz for Eric)* has an improvisational feel, eventually cutting loose ecstatically before returning to its senses.

Other waltzes comment trenchantly on the genre itself, like Ron Caltabiano’s *Character Sketch: About a Waltz*. Virgil Thomson’s birthday card to Mrs. Efrem Zimbalist subverts the waltz rhythm with a thumping duple cross-rhythm in the process of quoting “Happy Birthday.” Charles Wuorinen’s *Self-Similar Waltz* operates on a deeper level of wit, reflecting its muscular self in myriad ways; the listening experience is like walking through a set of fun-house mirrors.

Some use specific compositional terrains as points of departure. Roger Sessions and Karl Kohn take a hard look at Viennese and Second Viennese School antecedents in crafting their dynamic and distinctly individual waltzes, while Joan Tower mines Debussy for referents and *brume* to forge her *Red Garnet Waltz*. Wayne Peterson, in his elegant *Valse Subliminale*, invokes Debussy as
well (and also Brahms) in an exploration of, among other things, the four-against-three polyrhythm. Robert Helps traverses Chopinesque territory, musing on diminution of all kinds in his *Valse Mirage*. Hayes Biggs takes a Rachmaninoffian pianistic idiom and makes it over into a Biggsian one.

Others push at the boundaries — Mathew Rosenblum's *Shadow Waltz* uses an auxiliary keyboard to expand the pitch palette beyond equal temperament to startling effect, while Lou Karchin uses a plethora of tempo changes to summon up the ectoplasm in his *Ghost Waltz*. And Lou Harrison's *Waltz for Evelyn Hinrichsen* is as simple and sublime as can be.

This endeavor is dedicated to the memory of the late Robert Helps, extraordinary pianist, composer, and citizen of the musical world.

—Eric Moe, April 2005, Brooklyn, NY

Eric Moe (1954-), composer of what the New York Times calls “music of winning exuberance,” has received numerous grants and awards for his work, including the Lakond Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a Guggenheim Fellowship; commissions from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Fromm Foundation, the Koussevitzky Foundation, and Meet-the-Composer USA; fellowships from the Wellesley Composer's Conference and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; and residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Bellagio, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Millay Colony, the Ragdale Foundation, the Montana Artists Refuge, and the American Dance Festival. His *Sonnets to Orpheus* was featured on the Works & Process series at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and is currently available on a Koch International Classics CD which also includes his
Siren Songs. Another all-Moe CD, Kicking and Screaming, has been released by Albany Records, joining his Up & At 'Em on the same label. Compact disc recordings of other works are available from Centaur (On the Tip of My Tongue: Chamber and Electroacoustic Music of Eric Moe; and Lions Gate Trio: Four American Trios), CRI, New World, and others.

As a pianist and keyboard player, Moe has performed works by hundreds of composers, from Anthony Davis to Stefan Wolpe. His playing can be heard on the Koch, Mode, and AK/Coburg labels in the music of John Cage, Roger Zahab, Marc-Antonio Consoli, Mathew Rosenblum, and Felix Draeseke. A founding member of the San Francisco-based EARPLAY ensemble, he currently co-directs the Music on the Edge new music concert series in Pittsburgh.

Mr. Moe was educated at the University of California at Berkeley (M.A., Ph.D.) and at Princeton University (A.B.). He is currently Professor of Composition and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh, where he directs the graduate program in composition and the department's electroacoustic music studio. (http://www.ericmoe.net/)

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