

Rebecca Penneys & Steinway – liner notes

Instruments make it possible for musicians to speak the language of sound. For some artists, music feels like a native tongue. This is how I feel. This CD is about Steinway and me. It's about the choices one makes out of love for music and art. It's also about giving thanks.

Great instruments bring the visions of composer and performer together into a personal focus and envelop the listener in a magical charisma of richly detailed musical storytelling. The only way to convey the importance of the quality of a musical instrument is to reiterate what seems obvious —that the better the instrument is, the greater the possibility of artistic expression. This is true for both practice and performance.

Throughout history different piano manufacturers have selected particular characteristics to emphasize in their vision of sound, design and mechanics. From this potpourri a pianist chooses a piano from which to develop a personal and unique voice. I made my choice many years ago. I chose Steinway because for me, a good Steinway does everything. It dreams with me and teaches me, it never tires, and it's always there, responsive and reliable.

I used my own absolutely gorgeous American Steinway concert grand built in 1891 for this CD. In particular, I want students to know that even the greatest pianos need the best possible care and maintenance. Lucky for me, I have two very fine technicians. My "D" is like a member of the family; it gets daily love and care.

Ted Kostakis has taught me so many things! He is my mentor. I have had the privilege and pleasure of working with him for more than thirty years. He has realized my innermost dreams by refining the sound, voicing, and regulation of my piano beyond perfection. He is a master craftsman who enables my piano to do anything and everything. Sometimes it is smarter and more creative than I am —faster, more sensitive and responsive. It teaches me new nuances in color, expression, and even pedaling.

Marvin Rus has been my tuner for about ten years. It was like love at first sight. My piano just melted. When Marvin tunes my piano it smiles from end to end, keyboard to tail. The sound is open, happy, and singing; the whole instrument rings beautifully in perfect balance. It stays comfortably in tune; I have more range of expression because the sound is clearer and cleaner.

The piano music on this CD is a survey of beautiful keyboard works from many styles. These are all pieces that my piano and I enjoy together and that show off Steinway.

Chopin Nocturne

Appropriately, Chopin's first Nocturnes were dedicated to pianist Camille Pleyel, son of the piano manufacturer Ignace Pleyel, who made Chopin's piano of choice. Between 1830 and 1846 Chopin wrote eighteen Nocturnes. Published in the order in which they were written they afford ample opportunity to contrast the early inspired, original works with the emotional maturity he developed later on. This Nocturne is a beauty; it is intimate, intricate and very ingenious. It is the Nocturne from Michael Fokine's ballet *Les Sylphides*.

Chopin Barcarolle

The word barcarolle comes from the Italian *barca* ("boat"), originally the name of a song identified with Venetian gondoliers. For me, this is a truly transcendent work. Chopin loved it too, and considered it among his finest compositions. Its lyricism is eloquent and poetic. Its harmonies are complex and sophisticated. Its underlying, undulating rhythm affords the perfect departure point for innovations in sound, color and nuance. Chopin played the premiere of this piece in Paris in 1847.

Beethoven Andante Favori

Beethoven originally intended this piece as the second movement for his "Waldstein" Sonata, opus 53, but he replaced the Andante with a short Adagio, a more contrasting, dark, and meditative movement. The Andante was published separately with no opus indication. It is a remarkable and large Rondo, full of song and wit. Its elaborate figurations and technical feats resemble the outer two movements of the sonata. The nickname Andante Favori was given by Beethoven himself: "I can't walk down the street without hearing it coming from one window or another!"

Saint Saens - Siloti Swan

Alexander Siloti was as gifted a pianist as Russia has ever produced. He was a prize student and devoted disciple of Liszt and teacher of Rachmaninoff, his younger cousin. Siloti's work as arranger, transcriber, and editor is inspired by his years with Liszt. With astounding ingenuity he revoices chords, redistributes pedal figures, recasts melodic lines, uses mid-keyboard thumb lines for counter melodies, honoring the grand 19th century tradition of broad gesture and heightened effect. His transcriptions are recital gems.

Liszt Un Sospiro

Un sospiro 'A Sigh' is the third and best loved of the Three Concert Etudes, 1848. In this etude Liszt explores his fascination with the pleasures and problems of continual crossing of hands while articulating beautiful and poetic melody. Liszt wrote out some little cadenza-like passages for his students in his last years, and these give inspiration and permission for ornamentation by the performer in appropriate places. This is a great and sprawling piece, one that calls for a graceful legato and the highest command of voicing, color, and balance.

Galuppi Sonata

Baldassare Galuppi was a remarkable keyboard player, the last Venetian harpsichord master. Like most sonata composers, he composed many operas and his fame spread across Europe. His sonatas were quite well known during his lifetime. As a young man he played continuo for Vivaldi and visited C.P.E. Bach. About 130 of his keyboard sonatas exist. This particular sonata excels in 18th century lyricism, charm, wit, and elegance.

Kodaly Dances of Marosszek

Zoltan Kodaly was a composer, ethnomusicologist, and advocate of music education for children. His educational ideas are known worldwide as the Kodaly Method. The Dances of Marosszek (1927), based on 17th century Hungarian folk dances, grew out of Kodály's folksong-collecting expeditions in Transylvania (Marosszek is now in Romania). My former teacher, Gyorgy Sebok, introduced me to this underplayed virtuoso piano piece. In Laszlo Eosze's book, Kodaly says: "Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* are typical of urban Hungary in about 1860. My *Dances of Marosszek* have their roots in a much more remote past, and represent a fairyland that has disappeared." Kodaly orchestrated them in 1930.

Gershwin - Wild Virtuoso Etudes

George Gershwin published piano arrangements of his popular songs in the 1930's. In the preface he says that they were "printed for mass sales and arranged with an eye to simplicity" but any pianist who looks at them can tell that Gershwin wrote for himself, at the level of his own incredible and sophisticated abilities as a piano player. Earl Wild has taken these wonderful songs and has transformed them, in the tradition of Liszt, into dazzling concert etudes. Wild is an amazing pianist and has published many other unique and beautiful transcriptions for piano. He is a marvel of our century. I have adapted these transcriptions to my own playing style, freely adding further harmonic changes and improvisation.

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