

A portrait of a man with short, spiky grey hair and black-rimmed glasses. He is wearing a grey blazer over a blue and white checkered shirt with a red grid pattern. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a dark red wall with vertical wood paneling. A black and white abstract painting is visible in the top left corner. A white chair with a circular backrest is partially visible on the right side.

IMAN:ALBUM II

PLAYS MARTINO ♦ DEBUSSY ♦ BECK

JAMES W. IMAN

IMAN:ALBUM II

James W. Iman, *piano*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Images, Book I

19:38

- | | | |
|---------|--------------------|------|
| 1. I. | Reflets dans l'eau | 6:13 |
| 2. II. | Hommage à Rameau | 8:43 |
| 3. III. | Mouvement | 4:36 |

Images, Book 2

17:08

- | | | |
|---------|--|------|
| 4. I. | Cloches à travers les feuilles | 5:40 |
| 5. II. | Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut | 6:29 |
| 6. III. | Poissons d'or | 4:51 |

Jenny Beck

Stand Still Here

12:53

- | | | |
|---------|--|------|
| 7. I. | | 2:40 |
| 8. II. | | 1:51 |
| 9. III. | | 2:31 |
| 10. IV | | 3:58 |
| 11. V | | 1:40 |

Donald Martino (1931-2005)

Fantasies and Impromptus

33:31

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------------|-------|
| 12. I. | Fantasy – | |
| II. | Impromptu – | |
| III. | Impromptu – | |
| IV. | Impromptu (omaggio) | 12:58 |
| 13. V. | Fantasy | 8:20 |
| 14. VI. | Impromptu – | |
| VII. | Impromptu (omaggio) – | |
| VIII. | Impromptu – | |
| IX. | Fantasy | 12:05 |

Total playing time

83:19

THE MUSIC

Images I & II

Several composers throughout history have received acclaim for their ability to improvise — Beethoven and Liszt were both famous for participating in improvisation “duels”— and it was a skill all musicians were expected to have. While a student at the Paris Conservatoire, Claude Debussy would improvise for his fellow students before class. Thereafter, he would improvise for the entertainment of his friends for hours at a time, oftentimes improvising material that was wholly new and occasionally improvising on sketches of works in progress.

For Debussy, though, improvisation was not merely a skill, it was also an aesthetic ethos. Debussy expressed his wish to write music that sounded as though it were being improvised. He sought this as a means to free himself and his music from the strictures of musical convention. It was often remarked that when he played his own pieces, they sounded as if they were being improvised. This was an essential aspect of his playing style.

The priority Debussy gave to improvisation gained a whole new relevance in light of the CD release of Debussy's *Welte-Soehne* piano roll recordings. Some of his performances can only be described as wild. The freedom with which he approaches his own works would be unthinkable to most pianists today. Hearing how he played his own pieces was a revelation for me, and it was important to me to capture not only the notes Debussy wrote, but the spirit of his improvisatory approach.

The year 1901 marks the beginning of a prolific period for Debussy. He was nearly finished with the orchestration of his opera *Péleas et Mélisande*, and he began to write the first book of *Images*, with the second book following in 1907. These two collections (as well as his *Estampes*) are regarded as Debussy's effort to translate the discoveries he made while working on *Péleas* into his piano writing. Whereas his earlier works have generic titles, such as “prelude,” “arabesque,” and “toccata,” in *Images*, Debussy moves decisively toward writing works that are visually conceived, with poetic and evocative titles—an approach that reached its zenith in his two subsequent books of preludes.

If Debussy had composed nothing else for the piano, *Images* would undoubtedly secure his reputation as one of the most revolutionary composers for the piano.

Stand Still Here

Music, as an artform, exists in time. Its structure is revealed from moment to moment, passing into our memory as we experience it, and we perceive music as having movement and direction. Some composers are able to create works whose shape is static and that seem to have extension in space, rather than extension in time.

For Jenny Beck, a musical work is a space to be filled, and to the extent that it has duration, that duration is contingent on the limits of our perception. In *Stand Still Here*, Beck fills the musical space with a series of terse musical gestures. What is remarkable about this is not the means by which she creates a musical structure, but that she is able to create emotions, not evoke them. That is to say, Beck does not take us on an emotional journey through carefully deployed narrative structures, but the pieces that comprise this suite have emotional presence. We experience them as an entirety. In some sense, I experience *Stand Still Here* in much the same way I experience a painting by Mark Rothko—the smallest interaction of parts emerges as a visceral sensation.

Beck stands in a long line of composers that have drawn inspiration from literature. For *Stand Still Here*, Beck draws inspiration from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*:

“In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said.”

Written while a fellow at Tanglewood, *Stand Still Here* is her most intimate and is the result of a period of doubt and deep introspection, Beck has said. I am fortunate to have found this work and am privileged to offer here the premiere recording of *Stand Still Here*.

Fantasies and Impromptus

Twelve-tone compositions was, for better or worse, one of the most important musical developments of the 20th century. Despite the apparent dominance of the idea, it never predominated as a compositional method. Even the word *method* is something of a misnomer.

There was never a singular approach to twelve-tone composition. In fact, there were several composers who were experimenting with similar “methods” around the same time as Schoenberg, and even among Schoenberg’s students there were different approaches.

The importance of twelve-tone composition lies in its provision of a rational system for compositional unity apart from the conventions of tonality. Moreover, the logical implications of the mere existence of such a rational system opened the door for other such systems.

Most composers never adopted twelve-tone as a compositional method. This was the case for Donald Martino, who, despite studying with Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt (two of America’s foremost twelve-tone composers), didn’t adopt the practice until his studies in Italy with Luigi Dallapiccola. In fact, Martino would never call himself a twelve-tone composer.

Dallapiccola’s lyrical approach to twelve-tone composition made an impression on Martino, who saw it as a means to control the ever increasing chromaticism of his music at the time. However, it would take Martino approximately three years to devise his own approach to twelve-tone composition, which he would employ in his *Fantasies and Impromptus*.

Regardless of Martino’s objections, he was a twelve-tone composer, albeit incredibly distinct. One of the things that sets Martino’s music apart from many of his cohort is his insistence on writing melodically driven music that is deeply expressive. He was more of a Schumann than a Stockhausen.

His *Fantasies and Impromptus* are the epitome of his lyrical, romantic style, and are easily one of the most significant (if largely overlooked) contributions to the piano repertoire to come out of the late 20th century.

THE PIANIST

Pianist James Iman plays the usual and the unusual, by composers known and unknown. As a specialist in music written since 1900—with an emphasis on music written since 1945—his repertoire spans many stylistic developments since Debussy. He is meticulous in his study of the scores and the aesthetic concepts behind each of the works he plays. This allows him to find fresh approaches to established canon warhorses and to make complex contemporary works engaging and immediately clear to audiences.

Frances Wilson of *The Cross-Eyed Pianist* heralded James as among the few pianists who can “rise to the challenge of this music and meet it head on with conviction, musicality, and a supreme alertness to its myriad details and quirks” and as a performer he gives “a very clear sense of his total commitment to this music, and also how comfortable he feels in this repertoire.”

James is constantly looking for new and interesting works to add to his repertoire and curates his programs with an interest in diversity, contrast, and continuity. He is a vocal advocate of underrepresented composers and frequently performs music by women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ composers. He has appeared on Chatham University's Friday Afternoon Musicales concert series in which he has presented four programs of works by female composers.

James has given world premieres of works by Charlie Wilmoth, David Dies, and Everette Minchew and United States premieres of works by Gilbert Amy, Alwynne Pritchard, Raphaël Languillat, and Soe Tjen Marching. In April of 2017, James gave the World Premiere of “People,” a concert-length work he commissioned from composer Lowell Fuchs.

In addition to his activities as a performer, James is active as a lecturer and clinician. He is a frequent guest lecturer on contemporary music at Shenandoah Conservatory, and has been a resident at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and at Grand Valley State University giving master classes for pianists and clinics with composition students.

As a graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, James holds an MA in Piano Performance and a BA in Music History and Piano Performance. While at IUP, he studied piano with Judith Radell and James Staples. In 2015, James worked with Steve Drury as a fellow at New England Conservatory's Summer Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice.

More information at: www.jameswiman.net



THE COMPOSERS



Donald Martino (1931-2005)



Jenny Beck



Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This album would not have been possible without the gracious support of Jacob Fiorelli and Matthew Petrowski, inestimable friends both. Likewise, this album has been made possible by generous donations of many friends and colleagues, Paul Vest, Kaitlyn Vest, William Miranda, Grace Hom, and Karanhar Singh. These are among many, many more friends, colleagues, and students whose material contributions allowed this program to be put to disc. As ever, I am fortunate and grateful to have the unwavering support and encouragement of my wife Kate.

This album is dedicated to the memory of my mother.

James W. Iman

Recorded at Reichgut Concert Hall, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, PA
Producer/engineer: Jason Allison

Beck and Martino: Copyright Control

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Also by James W. Iman on Métier



IMAN:ALBUM I

Schoenberg, Boulez, Webern and Amy

This is the first of three recordings by Iman to be released by Métier and is a remastered re-issue of a disc from short-lived Belgian label ZeD (The other two albums are new, recorded in the summer of 2022) and focuses on two composers of the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg and Webern); one from the Darmstadt School (Boulez) and French composer Gilbert Amy, a contemporary follower of the serialist movement, and greatly inspired by Webern though writing on a larger scale. His Piano Sonata provides a fitting yet distinct counterpoint to the granitic Third Sonata of Boulez, and with strong contrast provided by the relatively early work by Schoenberg and the typically concise miniatures by Webern.

Fanfare

"Listener-friendly performance, filled with warmth and color, on a superbly recorded Steinway & Sons Model D." —James H. North

The Art Music Lounge

"An outstanding and imaginative artist. From the very first notes, one is aware of the fact that Iman is an artist and not just a technician. His phrasing and subtle use of dynamics (as well as occasional use of the hold pedal) mold and shape this music in ways I've never quite heard before." —Lynn René Bayley

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