



IMAN: ALBUM III

JAMES W. IMAN

PLAYS HUBER ♦ BERG ♦ FELDMAN ♦ JOLAS



IMAN:ALBUM III

James W. Iman, *piano*

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|----|--------------------------------|-------|
| | Klaus Huber (1924-2017) | |
| 1. | Ein Hauch von Unzeit II | 18:39 |
| | Alban Berg (1885-1935) | |
| 2. | Sonata, Op. I | 15:20 |
| | Morton Feldman (1926-1987) | |
| | Last Pieces | |
| 3. | I. | 2:51 |
| 4. | II. | 5:20 |
| 5. | III. | 2:51 |
| 6. | IV. | 7:14 |
| | Betsy Jolas (b. 1926) | |
| 7. | B for Sonata | 21:16 |

Total playing time 73:44

THE MUSIC

Description:

This album took shape during the COVID-19 pandemic and was planned to be recorded prior to the United States going into lockdown. This didn't happen, for a variety of reasons, and the delay in realizing this project gave me lots of time to think and rethink about the program. This is, admittedly, an unusual program, but each of the works is, in some way, in conversation with the others. Each piece compliments some trait in each of the other works, and contrasts others. As such, there is no overarching narrative within the design of the program, rather there are tendrils of musical abstracta throughout.

Klaus Huber is perhaps best known for his students—notable among them, Brian Ferneyhough, Toisho Hosakawa, and Kaija Saariaho—than his own work. Nevertheless, his own work is undeniably unique and innovative. The work represented here, *Ein Hauch von Unzeit II* (“A Breath of the Untimely”), was written almost simultaneously with the first version of the work, scored for unaccompanied flute, and quotes Dido's Lament from Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*.

The initial statement of the theme is elaborated, briefly, and then gradually pulled apart through a series of transformations that reduce the material to increasingly terse gestures, interspersed with ever growing spans of silence. In Huber's own words, “The most important requirement for the whole piece is absolute stillness, which should[,] as far as possible[,] emanate from the performer. The pauses are occasionally in this respect the most important element. These may, if one can find the necessary stillness, become very long [...] time almost dissolves.”

What is remarkable about this work is how fleeting the references to the theme can be, while still thoroughly evoking it. Put succinctly, his work feels like it is a continual reminiscence.

Alban Berg's Piano Sonata Op. 1 is an exemplar of turn of the century chromaticism and counterpoint, and it is a richly dissonant and chaotic work. Berg masterfully balances the extremes of conventional harmony with the whole tone and octatonic scales, as well as quartal harmonies—idioms that would become defining traits of early twentieth century music. For a composer at any stage in their career, this sonata would be a towering achievement, making the fact that Berg wrote this as a student in his twenties almost unfathomable.

The importance of counterpoint in this sonata cannot be overstated. Much like the rich harmonies of Schoenberg's romantic works, many of Berg's most progressive harmonies emerge from brilliantly woven motivic lines. In particular, Berg's sonata bears remarkable similarities to Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Indeed, many of my choices in interpreting this work stem from familiarizing myself with Heime Müller's arrangement for string sextet—specifically, allowing the counterpoint to drive the tension.

The complexity of this work lies not only in the density of the counterpoint, but also in the level of detail regarding expression. Scarcely a measure passes without some subtle modification of tempo or dynamic—the work is in constant flux. This poses incredibly nuanced challenges to the performer; and it is tempting to gloss over some of these details, as handling them poorly can cause threads to unravel.

Morton Feldman's *Last Pieces* offer the performer nearly complete freedom. Feldman's early works employ precise (i.e. conventional) notation, and he eventually returned to precise notation in his later works. In between, Feldman would experiment with giving performers varying degrees of discretion. His first experiments came in the form of literal graph notation (rather than graphic), where he would indicate the number of pitches to fall within a given register (distinguished only as high, middle, and low), and within a discrete period of time—though, not necessarily simultaneously. In *Last Pieces* see a return to explicitly notated pitch, but with the performance instruction that the durations are free (the four pieces in the set alternate slow-fast-slow-fast, but what this means in a context where “durations are free” is possibly a very open question).

Feldman used both of these approaches in many works, even in ensemble works where coordination between parts is generally important. The intention in the ensemble works is that the sounds don't coincide, and so the exact placement of any note in time and in combination with the others is random. While in the work represented here, the notation places sounds in coincidence with others, I wanted to emulate the randomness that is inherent in Feldman ensemble works, so you will hear very few simultaneous occurrences of pitch.

These pieces are formless, there is nothing to remember here—no reminiscing to be done.

Betsy Jolas avoided writing for the piano for a long time—waiting until she was nearly 50 to confront the instrument. “Avoided” is, in fact, the right word, as Jolas expressed certain anxieties about writing for the instrument. In her words, writing for the piano meant “dealing with [the] plain naked truth and therefore using no more than the bare necessities of music.” *B for Sonata* is her second work for the instrument, the first being a shorter work, *Chanson d’approche* (recorded on *Divine Art* by Roderick Chadwick on *Souvenir d’oiseaux* DDA 21240) which—to some degree—served as a proving ground for idioms she would further develop in *B for Sonata*. Perhaps the most interesting of these innovations are the different rhythmic freedoms she offers the performer: durations measured in clock-time, unspecified repetitions of patterns, and fairly constant fluctuations in tempo based on whether beams angle upwards or downwards.

This work, of course, is not a sonata in the conventional sense, rather Jolas’s approach to form is reminiscent of Schoenberg’s concept of “developing variation.” The “exposition” consists of a little over one page of freely played material, the embryo of which is an unadorned tone-row (though Jolas was not a twelve-tone composer). This row goes through a series of transformations and elaborations, where previously heard material is pulled apart and layered (so much so, that most of the work is written across four staves). Eventually, the material thins out, and we hear a brief reminiscence of the beginning of the “development,” and the work returns to the silence from which it emerged.

There are truly no other works like *B for Sonata* within the piano repertoire, even within Jolas’s output it is something of an enigma. Perhaps the biggest mystery is just what the “B” is, which Jolas only faintly defined: “it stands for [...] all I hope this piece contains that cannot be described, freedom, fantasy, magic perhaps...”

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 canonic 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 LGB TQI A+ 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.

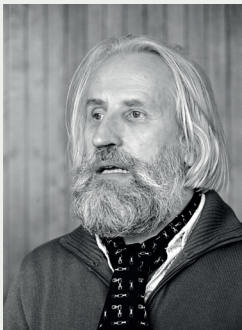
James has given world premieres of works by Charlie Wilmoth, David Dies, and Everette Minchew and United States premieres of works by Gilbert Amy, Alwynne Pritchard, Raphaël Languillat, and Soe Tjen Marching. In April of 2017, James gave the World Premiere of “People,” a concert-length work he commissioned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



Klaus Huber (1924-2017)



Alban Berg (1885-1935)



Morton Feldman (1926-1987)



Betsy Jolas (b.1926)

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.

Recorded at Reichgut Concert Hall, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, PA

Producer/engineer: Jason Allison

Engineer: Dave Hidek

Photos of James VV. Iman: Christopher Ruth

Betsy Jolas, Heugel H. 32432, 1974; Klaus Huber, Breitkopf & Hartel BG 1003, 1973; Morton Feldman, C.F. Peters 1963; Alban Berg, Universal Edition S 9593, 1926

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Also by James W. Iman on Métier



IMAN: ALBUM I

Schoenberg, Boulez, Webern and Amy

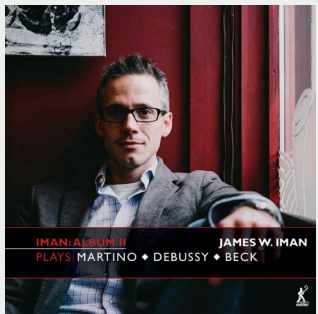
Fanfare

"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

MSV 28627



IMAN: ALBUM II

Martino, Debussy, Beck

Art Muse London

"[Iman] displays a remarkable appreciation of Debussy's music which I really enjoyed, allowing me to hear these well-known pieces afresh. Jenny Beck's 'Stand Still Here' provides an extraordinary contrast. Iman is able to achieve a wonderful sense of spontaneity and improvisation: notes linger, vibrate, shimmer and fade. It's a deeply absorbing interlude. Iman gives a masterful performance of this collection of pieces [by Martino] which combine virtuosity and expression, improvisation and structure, making them the perfect complement to Debussy." —Frances Wilson

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