The American Piano

Anthony de Mare and Steven Mayer, piano
Joseph Horowitz, artistic director

Studio Classics: American Piano Project Series
Saturday, February 27, 2010 • 8 PM
Sunday, February 28, 2010 • 2 PM
Vanderhoef Studio Theatre, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

The artists and your fellow audience members appreciate silence during the performance. Please be sure that you have switched off cellular phones, watch alarms, and pager signals. Videotaping, photographing, and audio recording are strictly forbidden. Violators are subject to removal.
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PART ONE: American Mavericks
Anthony de Mare, piano

Two Pieces (1935)       Cage
A Room from She is Asleep (1943)
The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs (1942)
Nowth Upon Nach (1984)

Piano Piece No. 3 (1977)       Rzewski
Piano Piece No. 4 (1977)
De Profundis (1992)

Intermission

PART TWO: The Black Virtuoso Tradition
Steven Mayer, piano

Bamboula
Souvenir de Porto Rico

Pine Apple Rag
T’Aint Nobody’s Bizzness
Humoresque in G-flat Major
Humoresque

Tea for Two
I Know that You Know

For Program Notes See p. 16
Sunday, February 28, 2010 • 2 PM
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COPLAND AND THE COLD WAR
Commentary by Kathryn Olmstead
Joseph Horowitz, Producer and Host

Co-produced with the UC Davis Department of Music

The Cat and the Mouse (1920) Copland
Karen Rosenak, piano

Piano Variations (1930)
Karen Rosenak, piano

The City (excerpts from the 1939 film)
  Cinematography: Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke
  Script: Lewis Mumford

Intermission

“Into the Streets May First” (1934)
  Department of Music singers with audience sing-along
  Karen Rosenak, piano

The Popular Front and the Red Scare
Kathryn Olmstead

Selections from Copland's testimony before the McCarthy subcommittee
  Barry Melton as Senator Joseph McCarthy
  Prof. Ari Kellman as Aaron Copland
  Prof. D. Kern Holoman as Roy Cohn

Piano Quartet (1950)
  Adagio serio
  Allegro giusto
  Non troppo lento
  Hrabba Atladottir, violin
  Ellen Ruth Rose, viola
  Leighton Fong, cello
  Karen Rosenak, piano

The audience is invited to participate in a post-performance discussion.

For Program Notes See p. 17
Nikon Regained the GIFT of SIGHT

Nikon Sandulyak was 34 years old when an industrial accident in his native Ukraine left him blind.

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Dr. Mark J. Mannis is an internationally recognized leader in the field of corneal transplantation and director of the UC Davis Health System Eye Center.
THE AMERICAN PIANO
by Joseph Horowitz

Classical music in the United States has focused disproportionately on European masterworks, to the neglect of native repertoire. And no native repertoire has been more unfairly neglected than the concert keyboard literature Americans have produced in quantity for a century and a half.

Whatever one makes of the quest for the Great American Symphony or Great American Opera, or of the relative paucity of important American chamber music, there exists a Great American Piano Sonata (‘Concord’) by Charles Ives. Far afield from Ives, Aaron Copland’s modernist Piano Variations, with its stark sonic pillars and skittering urban rhythms, is an emblematic American piano landmark too little heard. Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the first American pianist to establish an international reputation, was a cosmopolitan hedonist raised on Caribbean fare in nineteenth century New Orleans—and the first in a long line of virtuoso composer/pianists inspired by the black vernacular, an amazing list also including Scott Joplin, George Gershwin, and Art Tatum.

Henry Cowell was internationally celebrated as a piano renegade, pounding the keys with his fists. The Banshee, in which keyboard strings scraped and plucked produce echoing cries and wailings, is a signature piece. More recently, composers as varied as Lou Harrison and Frederic Rzewski have produced important piano compositions only an American could have written. Cowell’s American pianist uses fists and forearms; Rzewski’s must recite political slogans.

One reason the piano is such a protean medium for the American experience is that—unlike the symphony orchestra, the opera house, or the string quartet—it is not weighted toward Europe. Rather, it is a neutral and democratic instrument, as amenable to Joplin as to Beethoven, as comfortable in the night-club as the concert hall. More than our mainstream classical music institutions of performance, the piano readily encompasses the many worlds of American classical music. Few American orchestras even make the attempt. For every 10 performances of Appalachian Spring or the Barber Violin Concerto might there not be a single hearing of George Chadwick’s Jubilee, or a few outings of Gershwin’s An American in Paris (on something other than a pops program), or a suitably ceremonial air of Ives’s Second Symphony or Carl Ruggles’s Sun-Treader. To a surprising degree—surprising because American institutions of performance have understood so little—American composers have partaken in the diversity of American music as a whole. It is, in the aggregate, a defining attribute.

In the largest historical context, “The American Piano”—a touring residency now four years old—explores the ways in which music has been used to investigate and inform notions of who we are. We forego the music of Edward MacDowell, a century ago the most eminent of all American composers. In 1900, a prominent critic extolled MacDowell’s piano sonatas as “far the best since Beethoven.” If today these same sonatas gather dust, it is not least because they fail to resonate with any sustained notion of shared American identity. All the music we hear at these concerts is to some degree identifiable “American.”

The larger uses of culture were never more explicit than in polyglot New York—then as now, a city of immigrants—at the turn of the 20th century. Writers, painters, and musicians of the late Gilded Age fashioned a necessary response to the travails of industrialization and urbanization. In the face of declining religiosity and other certainties of belief (a decline memorably chronicled by the cultural historian Jackson Lears in his No Place of Grace), Americans experienced a blurring of purpose. William Dean Howells, Winslow Homer, Mark Twain, and Henry James all valuably contributed to an anchoring exercise in defining American character and destiny. For American composers, especially, the late Gilded Age was a period of unprecedented national self-consciousness. They ripened later than did American writers and painters.

When Jeannette Thurber invited Antonín Dvořák (whose music we hear Saturday afternoon) to head her National Conservatory in Manhattan, her stated purpose was to enlist his counsel in pursuit of an American musical voice for the concert hall. For countless American composers, Dvořák in New York (1892–95) became a beacon or goad, a model or irritant. A one-man cultural resonator, he was intoxicated with Longfellow’s Song of Hiawatha, which inspired the middle movements of his New World Symphony. He adored Stephen Foster’s “Old Folks at Home,” which he transcribed for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. He inspired his African-American assistant Harry Burleigh to turn “Deep River” and other plantation songs into a species of art song, co-equal with Schubert or Brahms. In his own American music, he sought to embrace strains and moods Americans could call their own.

Charles Ives, too, was engaged in a conscious national enterprise. Unlike his contemporaries, he disdained sailing to Europe for first-hand instruction. Rather, he regarded his father, a renegade Yankee bandmaster, as his principal teacher. He remained steeped in the sounds of his Connecticut boyhood, of chapel hymns and corny theater tunes. Such is the fragmentation of American classical music that Copland, again, consciously sought a new American voice. Unaware of Ives, indifferent to Dvořák, he found no usable past after which to model an up-to-date American style. In his music, in his writings, he espoused a vigorous and unpretentious New World, “plain and bare.” Gershwin, by comparison, wrote of a “Machine Age America” impacting on notions of “tempo, speed, and sound,” of a range of American folk music—including southern mountain songs, cowboy songs, spirituals, and most especially jazz—applicable to the creation of American art music. The driving syncopated pulse of his keyboard style (think of the opening of the finale of the Concerto in F) is about jackhammers and jazz.

The American Piano is a marker and a mirror, a vehicle for self-examination and self-disclosure.
**PART ONE: AMERICAN MAVERICKS**

February 27, 2010

John Cage (1912-92) studied at UCLA with Arnold Schoenberg and there learned what sort of composer he did not wish to become. Schoenberg’s 12-tone system had spawned (however accidentally) music controlled in every parameter by an ordered series of events. Cage’s antidote was to “compose” a kind of music that happened by itself. As with other West Coast composers—Cowell, Lou Harrison, Harry Partch all come to mind—he was immediately attracted to Eastern thought. He reasoned that any affinity for Eastern thought predisposed him to suppress the ego as a catalyst to creativity or enlightenment. He reasoned that any sound, in and of itself, constituted “music.”

Anthony de Mare observes that tonight’s *Two Pieces* (1935) were among the first keyboard works Cage wrote during the period of his study with Schoenberg in L.A. during the 1930s. “They are very short—the first is marked ‘Slowly’ and the second ‘Quite Fast’—and are based completely on slow- and fast-moving interrelationships. The fast piece sounds almost like an atonal Bach two-part invention. A *Room* is the third and final movement from a trio of works entitled *She is Asleep* (1943) for percussion ensemble and prepared piano. Though it is scored for solo prepared piano, this particular movement can also be performed without the preparations. The piece aligns with the other prepared piano dance works that Cage created during the 1940s, combining a series of rhythmic units to meet the requirements of the dance.”

Cage’s *The Wonderful World of Eighteen Springs* calls for a singer and a pianist. The words are adapted from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. The singer is instructed to “sing without vibrato, as in folk-singing.” The pianist is instructed to close the piano completely. Letters and notes indicate what outer parts of the instruments are to be played “with fingers” or “with knuckles of closed hand.”

With the composer’s approval, Anthony de Mare performs *The Wonderful World of Eighteen Springs* as a solo piece, and with the piano lid open. *Nowth Upon Nacht* is a sequel, to be sung at the same tempo.

Though Frederic Rzewski, born in Massachusetts in 1938, studied with Walter Piston and Milton Babbitt at Harvard and Princeton, his music took a direction utterly different from theirs. In the 1960s he moved to Europe, where he was associated with such avant-gardists as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. At the same time, he emerged as a virtuoso composer/pianist of pronounced political inclinations. Anthony de Mare writes of tonight’s *Piano Pieces No. 3 & 4*:

Christian Wolff has stated that Rzewski’s *Four Pieces* from 1977 “continues the tradition he identifies as ‘humanist realism’—the fusion of elements of European art music with North and South American folk music. The pieces are parts of a whole of continuum.”

The work is structured loosely in the form of a sonata with a single theme that keeps returning in different forms and moods, vaguely reminiscent of traditional music of the Andes but without actually quoting anything. Other stylistic elements also appear, and in *Piano Piece No. 3* one hears the Schoenbergian atonality of the op. 11 period as well as a Shostakovich-like melody. *Piano Piece No. 4* is built on repeated notes that form repeated chords. The composer states: “The notes should be ‘stroked’ rather than struck, as if one were exciting a large gong; the object being to allow the instrument to speak throughout its entire spectrum. The final notes should not have the character of a cadence, but rather the contrary, of something unfinished; it should not be clear whether another sound is coming, until all sound has in fact, died away—a suggestion that the story is not over.” The music as a whole, in all four Pieces, remains firmly attached to the west coast of South America, a meditation on Chile four years after the *coup d’etat*.

Of tonight’s *De Profundis*, the composer writes:

*De Profundis* is a 30-minute composition for piano solo, in which the pianist recites a text consisting of selected passages adapted from Oscar Wilde’s letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, written during the author’s imprisonment for “gross indecency” in Reading Gaol. The piece could be described as a melodramatic oratorio, in which eight sections with text are preceded by eight instrumental preludes.

My composition was inspired by Luke Theodore, an old friend from the Living Theatre to whom the piece is also dedicated. Luke went out to San Diego in the early 80s to start his own theatre. When I visited him in 1984 he was performing a play he and his group had put together on the subject of prisons. It included some material from the Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein* and a very lyrical and moving reading of episodes from Oscar Wilde. I had read the play’s book, but in Luke’s performance I was struck by the power of the writing.

In 1989, the filmmaker Larry Brose asked me to write a piece for the pianist Anthony de Mare that could serve as the basis for a film. I knew Tony’s abilities both as pianist and actor. Remembering Luke’s performance of the Wilde texts, I suggested these as a possible source. The music demands a combination of virtuoso technique and a total lack of inhibition on stage, thus virtually guaranteeing that no mediocre or conventional performer will dare to go near it.

**PART TWO: THE BLACK VIRTUOSO TRADITION**

Speaking to a reporter for the *New York Herald* in May 1893, Antonín Dvořák said: “I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies.”

This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States...In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay or what you will. It is music that suits itself to any mood or any purpose. There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot be supplied with themes from this source.
By “Negro melodies,” Dvořák mainly meant the songs we today call spirituals. He found them protean. If The American Piano, too, is a protean instrument of expression, one reason is the influence of these same Negro melodies. Tonight’s concert explores the impact of African-American music on a range of American piano composers, old and new, black and white.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) is by far the most famous and accomplished of all mid-19th century American concert composers and the most audibly a product of the New World. Raised on saucy Caribbean musical delicacies, he flouts Europe not primitively and aggressively, like his contemporaries William Henry Fry and Anthony Philip Heinrich, but with sublime insouciance and practiced finesse. This is because he was in part a cultivated European. He was born in New Orleans—a city semi-French, semi-Spanish, semi-American, with a thriving operatic culture. His mother was a white Creole of upper-class French descent. From the age of 13 he studied in Paris, where he became a celebrated pianist/composer whose admirers included Berlioz and Hugo. Gottschalk’s Bamboula absorbs Caribbean and possibly African influences. Need sentence about Souvenir de Porto Rico and Hugo. Gottschalk’s Bamboula absorbs Caribbean and possibly African influences.

The Maple Leaf Rag of Scott Joplin (1868–1917) sold 1,000,000 copies in ten years. Joplin also composed an opera, Gorilla. Fats Waller (1904–43) and Art Tatum (1909–56) populate a lineage of jazz keyboard wizards. Waller, trained with the stride piano genius James P. Johnson, also writes the present-day jazz pianist Marcus Roberts. “If you want to be a real Harlem stride pianist, combining the virtuosic performance style of his teacher with the down-home swing of Jelly Roll Morton.” Tatum, a one-of-a-kind virtuoso, self-taught pianist, brandishes his “populist” style and in an acutely sardonic mode, suggests how his burgeoning social conscience shaded into the realm of “Popular Front” activities bonding with Soviet Russia. (The communal scenes of happy workers remind my wife of the propaganda films she saw growing up in Communist Hungary.) At tonight’s concert, we sample Post-Classical Ensemble’s Naxos DVD presenting The City with a freshly recorded sound-track.

Copland’s activities as a fellow-traveler on the left peaked with his award-winning worker’s song “Into the Streets May First.” Composed for the Marxist New Masses, it sets a poem by Alfred Hayes reading in part: “Up with the sickle and hammer, comrades!” Copland never included “Into the Streets” in his catalog; during the McCarthy era, he publicly disowned it as “the silliest thing I did.” Copland’s constant intent was to direct contemporary American listeners to new and American works, rather than the canonized European masters. His frustration was great. In fact, Copland could not counteract the American “culture of performance,” with its fixation on the “world’s greatest” conductor (Arturo Toscanini), pianist (Vladimir Horowitz) and violinist (Jascha Heifetz), all foreign-born. With such non-tonal serial works as the Piano Quartet (1930) and Piano Fantasy (1937), he effectively ended his compositional search for an idiom satisfying “both us and them.”

Copland once commented that he opted for serial composition—composing, that is, with a fixed sequence of pitches after the fashion of Arnold Schoenberg’s 12-tone rows—because he “needed more chords.” The result, in the Piano Quartet, is music more dissonant than the Copland we know best. At the same time, there are tonal tendencies not to be found in the 12-tone music of Schoenberg, Webern, and other hard-core practitioners. Copland’s way of using a “tone row” has little in common with Schoenberg’s precise methodology. And the music still sounds like Copland. But the tone is, arguably, something new. Copland’s friend on the left, Harold Clurman, called the Piano Quartet “disquieting, as if it described the quiet preceding or following an atom bomb attack.” Clurman also discerned “the voice of our inner fear, an echo of the
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secret trepidations in all our hearts as we look out upon the bleak horizon of a world in bondage to its illusions.”

A fresh perspective on this interesting tale had recently been provoked by such young Copland scholars as Elizabeth Bergmann and Jennifer deLapp Birkett, who have investigated the impact of the Cold War on Copland’s abandonment of his populist agenda. Tonight’s concert explores how Copland’s brush with Senator Joseph McCarthy may have impelled him toward a more esoteric compositional style.

Anthony de Mare, piano
Anthony de Mare has premiered new works by composers of all generations and styles, and has commissioned and collaborated with such artists as Frederic Rzewski, Meredith Monk, John Zorn, Paul Moravec, David Del Tredici, and Fred Hersch. He is known for his solo and concerto performances as well as his pioneering achievements in concert-theater and has often been credited for fueling the explosive recent popularity of compositions written for the speaking pianist. Praised for his “muscularly virtuosic, remarkably uninhibited performance [and] impressive talents” (New York Times), de Mare was awarded First Prize and Audience Prize at the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition (the Netherlands) and the International Competition of Contemporary Piano Music (France).

He is presently engaged in the creation and performance of his most ambitious project to date, Liaisons: Re-Imagining Sondheim from the Piano. This concert series will premiere in the 2010–11 season, and feature the work of 30 leading contemporary composers commissioned to create new pieces based on the inspirational source material of Sondheim’s melodies. In 2010, El Entertainment (formerly Koch) will release de Mare’s newest recording: Speak!, the first disc devoted exclusively to the speaking/singing pianist genre that de Mare created 20 years ago. Of his two most recent recordings, Out of My Hands: Piano Works of David Del Tredici and Aaron Jay Kernis was short-listed for a 2006 Grammy nomination, and Wizards and Wildmen: Piano Music of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison was named one of the 10 best releases by American Record Guide in 2000. De Mare is currently Professor of Piano at New York University and in the Contemporary Performance Program at the Manhattan School of Music.

Steven Mayer, piano
Credited with “piano playing at its most awesome” (New York Times), pianist Steven Mayer has brought his unique repertoire of jazz icons Art Tatum and Jelly Roll Morton, alongside music from Mozart to Ives, to thousands of listeners worldwide. Mayer has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony under Edo de Waart and Herbert Blomstedt, Rotterdam Philharmonic under James Conlon, Leipzig Gewandhaus under Emmanuel Krivine, Minnesota Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin, and Boston Pops under Keith Lockhart. He was winner of the Grand Prix du Disque Liszt for his ASV world premiere recording of Liszt’s Concerto Opus Posthumous and De Profundis with the London Symphony under Tamas Varsay.

Mayer’s album Liszt vs. Thalberg, also for ASV Records, was featured as Recording of the Month in Classical CD Magazine. In 2002, Mayer began an association with Naxos. Releases for this label include Ives’s Concord Sonata and Art Tatum’s Improvisations. Future releases include Liszt’s Wagner Transcriptions, as well as music by Anthony Philip Heinrich and Gottschalk. Since his prize-winning performance of Leon Kirchner’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with the American Composers’ Orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies at the Third Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition, Mayer has appeared at New York’s Jazz in July at the 92nd Street Y and From Gospel to Gershwin at BAM, among other festivals, and has toured nationally with The American Piano and the Adams Foundation Recital Series. Formerly Professor of Piano at the Manhattan School of Music, Mayer is currently professor at the International Keyboard Institute and Festival at Mannes, as well as associate professor at the University of Denver Lamont School of Music.

Joseph Horowitz, artistic director
Joseph Horowitz, who conceived The American Piano and serves as artistic director, is most recently the author of Classical Music in the United States: A History of its Rise and Fall and Artists in Exile: How Refugees from Twentieth Century War and Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts—both of which were named best books of the year by The Economist. His six other books include the award-winning Conversations with Arreau and The Ivory Trade: Piano Competitions and the Business of Music. He is a pioneer in creating new concert formats as an orchestral administrator and artistic advisor. As Executive Director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic in the 1990s, Horowitz was a creator of humanities-infused public programming. His current clients include the New York Philharmonic and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Horowitz’s own Post-Classic Ensemble, which he co-founded in 2002, is a Washington, D.C. chamber orchestra specializing in the music of the Americas. The orchestra maintains an “educational partnership” with Georgetown University, forging linkage across the curriculum.

As an advisor to Naxos’s “American Classics” series, Horowitz has produced DVD versions of the films The City, The River, and The Plow that Broke the Plains with newly recorded soundtracks (Copland and Thomson). He has produced The American Piano and Copland and the Cold War projects on four university campuses. He serves as director of an NEH National Education Project on “Dvořák and America,” resulting in a young readers book and an interactive DVD—materials that will be employed at an NEH teacher-training workshop he will direct next summer, hosted by the Pittsburgh Symphony. He has mounted seven festivals exploring the topic of Dvořák’s American sojourn, and is the recipient of a commendation from the Czech Parliament. He has also received a Guggenheim fellowship, two NEH fellowships, a Columbia University arts journalism fellowship, and two ASCAP/Deems Taylor awards. The New York Times has called him “a force in classical music today, a force and an agitator.” His website is www.josephhorowitz.com. His blog is “The Unanswered Question”—www.artsjournal.com/aq.