

A painting of a river scene with trees and a bird in flight. The scene is rendered in a painterly style with visible brushstrokes. The colors are muted, with a palette of greens, blues, and browns. A single bird is seen in flight in the upper center of the frame. The river flows from the foreground towards the background, reflecting the sky and the surrounding trees.

MUSIC FOR KEYBOARD INSTRUMENTS  
**ALLEN BRINGS**



As a composer **Allen Brings** has written for orchestra, band, chorus, a wide variety of chamber ensembles, piano, organ, harpsichord, guitar, and voice. He has twice served as chairman of the eastern region of the American Society of University Composers and is currently vice-president of Connecticut Composers, Inc. His music has been recorded by Navona Records, Capstone, Centaur, Grenadilla, Contemporary Record Society, North/South Recordings, Arizona University Recordings, and Vienna Modern Masters. As a pianist he has performed extensively both here and abroad especially in programs of music for piano, four-hands, with Genevieve Chinn, with whom he has recorded for Orion, CRI, and Centaur. He is also co-author of *A New Approach to Keyboard Harmony*, published by W. W. Norton, and has contributed articles to *College Music Symposium*, *Contemporary Music Newsletter*, *New Music Connoisseur*, *Society of Composers Newsletter*, *New Oxford Review*, *ComposerUSA*, *sounding board*, and *The Adoremus Bulletin*. Brings is currently Professor Emeritus of Music at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College of the City University of New York.



### *Five Pieces (1980)* for piano

As a composer whose earliest training was as a pianist and who still remains an active performer, I have always been keenly aware that among pianist-composers there have been many Kalkbrenners for every Chopin, musicians, that is, whose fingers rather than whose imagination have controlled whatever found its way onto paper. Despite my close identification with the piano then, I have composed comparatively little for it and, in order to discourage merely rewriting the previous opus, each time only after intervals of several years. The composition of *Five Pieces (1980)* was approached with the usual trepidation, but, with the additional time placed at my disposal by the granting of a sabbatical leave of absence from Queens College, I decided once more to “have a go at it.” The results are five pieces in which I believe that I have revealed more of my innermost thoughts than in anything else I have written.

Although they represent a collection from which a pianist may draw one or more pieces as suitable, together, in the order in which they are found, *Five Pieces (1980)* constitutes a suite or perhaps a very serious *divertimento*. The outer pieces are tempestuous, the last a true *finale*; the second and fourth are very intimate, and the middle is a *scherzo*. All are based, each in its own distinctive way, on the ternary principle of statement, departure, and modified return. All are in varying degrees chromatic, but the extent to which diatonicism influences the language significantly alters the expressivity of the music. The harmonic language employed in these pieces is the result of the greater awareness of this much neglected element of music which I have experienced in recent years. Because this language is shaped according to what I



determine are the intentions of each passage, it would be futile to look for a system hidden among the notes.

Intending at first to compose a set of pieces for myself to play, there soon emerged a work which, if I were to give it its due, would only divert time from composing—for which there never seems to be adequate time. I leave then the performance of *Five Pieces (1980)* to others, who, I hope, will behave toward them as I would have.

The first performance of *Five Pieces (1980)* was given by Genevieve Chinn in New York City on April 30, 1982.

### *Tre esercizi*

The title for *Tre esercizi* was taken from the name that Domenico Scarlatti gave to his first published collection of sonatas for *gravicembalo*. Inspired by these but no less by the works of Purcell, the French *clavecinistes*, and, of course, the keyboard works of Bach and Handel, *Tre esercizi* exploits the harpsichord's eminent ability to sharply differentiate contrapuntal lines, be resonant and somber at one moment, cold and scintillating at another, to be a vehicle for virtuosity at all times. The first and third *esercizi* resemble in their textures and imitative beginnings the two-part inventions of Bach although the rhythm and tempo of the first are also reminiscent of the Baroque *allemande*. Each is based on two contrasting motives and is basically ternary in form. Both are expanded by methods having their roots in the eighteenth century though the prevailing chromaticism, which is almost total, and the ways in which pitches are combined harmonically betray an undeniable twentieth century bias. The slow, second piece is a set of variations over—and later



also under—a ground bass, a device suggested by so many of Henry Purcell’s successful essays in that genre and one which I had not used since my *Passacaglia, Interlude and Fugue* for organ (or piano, four-hands) of 1956.

If the music of *Tre esercizi* and these remarks express both an awareness of and an admiration for the accomplishments of certain of my predecessors, these should not be interpreted as indicating an interest in the antique for its own sake. The harpsichord which I imagined while composing *Tre esercizi* was not, whatever the origins of any particular instrument on which it might be played, an *ancient* instrument but rather an instrument newly invented, fully capable of enunciating the musical language of my own time. The compositional techniques, too, seemed to me to be among those limited by neither time nor place.

*Tre esercizi* was completed in February 1986 and given its first performance by Charles Brewer at a concert of the Society of Composers at the University of Alabama on March 11, 1992.

### *Sonatine*

In its external features the formal plan of *Sonatine* for piano strongly resembles that of many similarly entitled compositions for piano composed throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The work is in three movements, a slow, quite meditative and very sustained, movement flanked by two very quick movements. Each movement places great emphasis on textural clarity and continuity. The prevailing tessitura, at least in the outer movements, is high rather than low.



The first movement is set in three clearly delineated sections corresponding to the exposition, development, and recapitulation sections of classical *sonata-allegro* form. Within the continuous fabric of the first section a number of closely related motives evolve from the six-tone opening theme played by the right hand, a theme characterized by dotted rhythms and leaps of the third and the sixth. After a momentary interruption the music resumes with a restatement of this theme, developing it with ever increasing intensity. After another interruption of the otherwise continuous flow, a recapitulation ensues which further elaborates on the points already made in the manner of a peroration. The movement concludes with a brief coda of three measures.

The lyrical slow movement, which functions as the keystone of the piece, is itself in the form of an arch. Written almost exclusively in a treble dominated texture of three-part counterpoint, this movement consists of a series of balanced phrases whose lengths gradually increase until a climax is reached in the seventeenth measure. The progress of the movement is aided by a process comparable to the harmonic movement achieved by the “harmonic functions” found in music exhibiting tonality.

After a slow introduction designed to dissipate the atmosphere created by the second movement, the first principal section of the third movement commences with the statement of a theme in quintuple meter, characterized by sharp, heavy attacks and intervallically related to the first movement. A second, contrasting theme is then introduced, the shape of which is derived in part by the linearization of the dominant harmonic intervals of the opening theme. The salient features of these themes are combined and recombined in a brief development section, which is followed by a recapitulation in which both themes reappear in reverse order and on different pitch levels. The move-



ment concludes with a final appearance of the opening theme slightly altered rhythmically but now on the same pitch level as at first.

Composed for pianist Genevieve Chinn, *Sonatine* was completed during the summer of 1972 and first performed by the composer in New York City on April 17, 1975.

### *Six Praeludia*

The first of the *Six Praeludia* for organ was composed as a gift to Don and Jean Hazard for their wedding at the United Methodist Church in Westport, CT on April 13, 1991; it was performed on that occasion by Edward Thompson. The remaining pieces were written between February 1992 and January 1993 in an effort to provide church organists with music that could be played before, during, and after the liturgy when music of a particular character is needed, meditative during the distribution of Holy Communion, for example, or festive after the dismissal. The six together were also conceived as a collection of short pieces that could be compiled into a suite for performance on a recital-program; the order then might be either the one already suggested by the composer or one determined by the performer. In this way five of them were first performed by Robert Fertitta at a concert at Queens College on October 4, 1993.

While everything that I have written for more than the last thirty years reveals my special concern for the expressive and structural functions of harmony in an avowedly late twentieth-century idiom, the *Six Praeludia* might almost be considered—though I never intended for them to be understood that way—as illustrations to young composers of how tones may be



combined so that they contribute to a kind of harmonic motion similar to that found in music of the tonal system.

Although I have never consciously been influenced by the styles of other composers, the achievements of such masters of the organ as Bach and Messiaen are unavoidable; nor would I ever wish to avoid them. My only hope in having composed these *praeludia* is that in time they may earn a modest place in the shadows of those masterpieces.

#### *Concerto da camera No. 4*

*Concerto da camera No. 4* for harpsichord and strings is the most recent of a series of chamber concertos begun in 1973, the others being for piano and chamber orchestra, violin and percussion, and flute and strings. The possibility of composing a concerto for harpsichord and strings occurred to me as I listened to the English harpsichordist George Malcolm perform several of Bach's concertos during a concert at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice in 1974. The difficulties that I had imagined in balancing the solo instrument with even a small body of strings seemed to evaporate in the acoustical environment of La Fenice and by how Bach had accommodated the allegedly weak instrument to the orchestra by manipulating textures and articulation. Having already composed *Tre esercizi* as well as two earlier works that included harpsichord in their ensembles, I set out in 1994 to write a more ambitious three-movement work based on the traditional order of fast-slow-fast.

As one might expect in a concerto, there is a friendly air of competition as each participant is given leave to do what it does best. The strings, for example, are often allowed to play long, sustained lines with many expres-



sive changes in dynamics against the harpsichord's lively, running commentary. The harpsichord too has its own expressivity, different though it may be, and it achieves this by either thickening or thinning textures, varying registers, or by playing alone in brilliant cadenzas or lyrical meditations. On still other occasions both harpsichord and strings play in a percussive manner that many listeners might find atypical for these instruments. In such passages, particularly in the last movement, both participants often seem to contend with one another, yet finally agree to make up at the end.

The form of the first movement is a special amalgam of ternary form (ABA) in which the first A section is like the exposition of *sonata-allegro* form with its two theme-groups, and the third section is a development section similar to that also found in *sonata-allegro* form. The second movement is a variation movement but not in the familiar sense of a theme followed by a succession of restatements of that theme, the basic structure of which remains the same while the surface continually changes. The movement begins with the promise of being a passacaglia by stating an eight-measure theme in the bass. The harpsichord then enters as if to begin the first varied restatement over that theme, introducing, meanwhile, an ornamental neighbor-tone figure that will be frequently heard both now and again at the end of the movement in a section that sounds not only like a return-section but also like a coda. From here on, however, there is constant variation of the intervals contained in the first four measures of the bass theme but never again the clear presentation of a "theme." One might therefore more accurately refer to this movement as a set of "through-composed" variations, comparing it to songs that are neither strophic nor familiarly sectional but that respond throughout their lengths to the constantly fluctuating meanings of their texts.



Because of the way in which one dance-like theme always recurs, the last movement resembles the rondo of the classical sonata. The themes on which the intervening sections are based are also all more or less based on motives contained in that theme. What especially characterizes the treatment of the rondo-theme is the carefree manner in which motives are often tossed from orchestra to soloist and back again to orchestra as if the participants were playing a ballgame. It is only in this final movement, too, that both “players” are given extended passages to perform by themselves. The importance given to the harpsichord’s solo makes this passage rather the center piece of the movement, suggesting perhaps that the harpsichord has won the contest between forces of apparently unequal size and power.

Allen Brings

**Genevieve Chinn** made her debut with Leopold Stokowski and the NBC Symphony at the age of eight. Since then she has made many appearances both as soloist and chamber player in this country and in Europe. She is especially known for her performances of music for piano, four-hands, with Allen Brings and, as part of the duo, has recorded for Centaur, CRI and Orion. She also appears as pianist in the Centaur compact disc recordings of Allen Brings’ Sonata for Piano and Trio for clarinet, cello and piano.

Among her awards are the French Government Prize in piano, the Chopin Fellowship for composers awarded by the Kosciuszko Foundation, the Young Composers’ Award of the New York Philharmonic Society, and two Danforth Teacher Grants awarded by the Danforth Foundation. In 1988 she was cited as an Outstanding Connecticut Woman of the Year by the United Nations



Association of the United States of America. She holds a doctorate in musicology from Columbia University and is Professor of Music at the C. W. Post campus of Long Island University. In addition, Dr. Chinn is a director of the Weston Music Center and School of the Performing Arts in Weston, Connecticut.

**Stephen Tharp** is a concert organist based in New York City, where he currently holds the position of assistant organist for St. Bartholomew's Church, having previously served as Associate Organist and Director of Cathedral Concerts for New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Mr. Tharp holds an M. M. degree in organ performance from Northwestern University, where he studied with Wolfgang Rübsam, and a bachelor's degree *magna cum laude* from Illinois College in Jacksonville, IL, where he studied organ with Rudolf Zuiderveld and piano with Garrett Allman.

Since 1987 Mr. Tharp has performed extensively throughout the United States, Canada and Europe including at The Royal Albert Hall in London; St. Sulpice and St. Eustache in Paris; the Hong Kong Cultural Centre; St. Bavo in Haarlem, The Netherlands; the Jakobikirche in Hamburg; the Thomaskirche in Leipzig; the Cathedrals in Berlin, Frankfurt, Passau, Weingarten and Würzburg, Germany; the Basilica of the national Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington; and The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

A champion of new music, Mr. Tharp commissioned and gave the first performance of *Instants*, op. 57, by Jean Guillou at King's College Chapel, Cambridge University, and gave the first British performance of Naji Hakim's *Variations on two themes* at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, and the first French



performance of Hakim's *Te Deum* at St. Sernin, Toulouse. His recordings consist of the six sonatas of Mendelssohn and two Ethereal Recordings compact discs entitled, *Legendary Organ Works vol. 1* and *World Premieres and Transcriptions vol. 1*.

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**Bradley Brookshire** has recorded two of Handel's Suites for harpsichord as well as Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* for Vox Records and the French Suites and the entire *The Art of the Fugue* of Bach for Bach Harpsichord, Inc. His work also appears on the labels of Music and Arts, Opus 111 (Paris), Newport Classics, Koch International, and BBC Records (London). He has appeared as a harpsichordist on radio broadcasts worldwide including those of National Public Radio, American Public Radio, Radio France, Radio España, Radio Free Berlin, and Hungarian State Radio. He also makes a musical appearance in Al Pacino's film *Looking for Richard*.



## FIVE PIECES (1980) for piano (ASCAP)

Genevieve Chinn **piano**

- 1 | 2:24
- 2 II 2:47
- 3 III 3:02
- 4 IV 3:58
- 5 V 2:49

## TRE ESERCIZI for harpsichord (1986) (ASCAP)

Bradley Brookshire **harpsichord**

- 6 | 2:41
- 7 II 5:16
- 8 III 2:47

## SONATINE for piano (1972) (ASCAP)

Allen Brings **piano**

- 9 FIRST MOVEMENT 1:47
- 10 SECOND MOVEMENT 2:26
- 11 THIRD MOVEMENT 2:19

## SIX PRAELUDIA for organ (ASCAP)

Stephen Tharp **organ**

- 12 PRAELUDIUM (IN G) (1991) 1:40
- 13 PRAELUDIUM I (EN FORME D'UNE MÉDITATION) (1992) 3:01
- 14 PRAELUDIUM (NEL STILE D'UNA TOCCATA) (1992) 1:07
- 15 PRAELUDIUM II (EN FORME D'UNE MÉDITATION) (1993) 2:22
- 16 PRAELUDIUM (AS PROCESSIONAL) (1992) 1:34
- 17 PRAELUDIUM (AS RECESSIONAL) (1993) 1:42

## CONCERTO DA CAMERA No. 4

for harpsichord & strings (1994) (ASCAP)

Bradley Brookshire **harpsichord**

Sebu Sirinian, Robin Bushman, Mitsuru Tsubota **violins I**

Lisa Tipton, Vivienne Kim, Chris Lee **violins II**

Lih-Wen Ting, Sally Shumway **violas**

Wolfram Koessel, Wanda Glowacka **cellos**

Jack Kulowitsch **double bass**

Allen Brings **conductor**

- 18 FIRST MOVEMENT 4:31
- 19 SECOND MOVEMENT 8:01
- 20 THIRD MOVEMENT 4:43

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All of the music on this recording is published by Mira Music Associates (ASCAP), 199 Mountain Road, Wilton, CT 06897-1526.

*Five Pieces (1980)* and *Sonatine* were recorded at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, New York City; the recording engineer and editor was David Hancock. *Six Praeludia*, *Tre esercizi* and *Concerto da camera No. 4* were recorded in LeFrak Hall at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College of the City University of New York; the recording engineer was Rick Krahn, and the editor was Christina Rovics.

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