

Hall's Weill Hall as winner of the Presser Music Award. She has appeared at such venues as the Berlin Philharmonie, Carnegie's Zankel Hall, Miller Theatre, Kaufmann Concert Hall, the Phillips Collection, Guggenheim Museum, Bruno Walter Auditorium, Austrian Cultural Forum, Italian Academy, Bargemusic, Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Marlboro, Bridgehampton, Bodensee, Kilkenny, Whynote, Salon des Arts Sofia, Roaring Hooves, and Lincoln Center Summer festivals. A passionate exponent of contemporary music, she has worked with composers such as Henri Dutilleux, Elliott Carter, John Adams, Salvatore Sciarrino, Mario Davidovsky and Helmut Lachenmann, and she is involved in organizations including the Argento Chamber Ensemble, Sequitur, and ACME.



Ms. Cuckson studied at The Juilliard School, where her teachers included Robert Mann, Dorothy DeLay, and Felix Galimir, and she recently received her doctorate. She teaches at the Mannes College of Music.

Blair McMillen has established himself as one of the most sought-after and versatile pianists today. His repertoire spans from late-medieval keyboard manuscripts to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Recent recitals include Miller Theatre's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary "Piano Revolution" series, the Caramoor Festival, Dartmouth University, CalArts, the Institute for Advanced Study (in Princeton NJ), and "Music for the New Century" at Columbia University. Mr. McMillen recently made his Carnegie Hall debut as soloist, under the baton of David Robertson. Raised in San Francisco and Charlotte NC, he holds degrees from Oberlin College, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School. In addition to the Naumburg Award-winning Da Capo Chamber Players, Blair McMillen is pianist for the composer/performer collective *counterinduction*, the American Modern Ensemble, and the downtown NYC-based Avian Orchestra. An active educator, improviser, and self-taught jazz pianist, he serves on the piano faculty at Bard College and Conservatory.



Music by Donald Martino  
Miranda Cuckson, piano  
Blair McMillen, piano



CRC 2955  
DDD

<b>Sonata for Solo Violin</b> (2003)	(22:28)
1 I Maestoso brillante	7:27
2 II Adagio molto	5:35
3 III Intermezzo: Fughetta in omaggio	2:04
4 IV Pesante-Presto	7:22
 <b>Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano</b> (2004)	 (15:28)
5 I Deciso-Animato-	4:53
6 II Lento-	5:32
7 III Presto-	1:01
8 IV Largamente-Animato	4:00
 9 <b>Romanza for Solo Violin</b> (2002)	 9:27
 10 <b>Fantasy-Variations for Violin</b> (1962)	 12:49
 <b>Total Duration:</b>	 <b>60:15</b>

Recorded December 9, 12, 28, 2007 and January 4, 2008, at Patrych Sound Studios, New York City. Produced and Engineered by Joseph Patrych. Edited by Daniel Cassin. Executive Producer: Victor E. Sachse. Photographs of Miranda Cuckson by Christoph Bösch. Photo of Blair McMillen by Keiko Nagata.

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Music by  
Donald Martino

Sonata for Solo Violin

Sonata No. 2  
for Violin and Piano

Romanza for Solo Violin

Fantasy-Variations  
for Violin

Miranda Cuckson,  
violin  
Blair McMillen,  
piano



While planning this CD, I had the most fleeting of exchanges with Donald Martino. Having decided to apply for a Copland Fund grant to make a recording of his music, I wrote him a letter asking if I could obtain scores to two of his recent works: the Sonata for Solo Violin, and *Romanza*. He emailed me in return, saying he was sending the pieces. He thanked me for my interest in his work and suggested we talk in a few weeks, after he returned from his vacation. About a week later, I was looking at his website, dantalian.com, and I was shocked to read there a notice that he had just passed away while on a cruise ship in the Caribbean.

Though haunted by an eerie feeling of sadness, I soon continued with my plans. As I looked through his violin music, I realized I should also obtain his Sonata No. 2 for violin and piano. I contacted his wife, Lora, who kindly found a copy of it in his office and mailed it to me. Some months later, the Copland grant came through.

I regret very much not having met Donald Martino in person, and not having his reactions and ideas during my process of working on his music. Exploring his work has been an engrossing experience and I am gratified to be able to present these pieces to listeners. Martino's music appears to provoke a range of responses. Enthusiasts extol the Romantic qualities of his music, with its rhapsodic freedom and large, elegant gestures. People also praise his inspiring mastery of craft: his handling of complex but

clear textures, cohesive but free-sounding structures, and vibrant instrumental color.

At times one hears criticism of his work as dry or hard to follow. I believe this may stem from several factors. Martino was a highly learned musician who was thoroughly engaged by the techniques of the Second Viennese School, and who studied with the most probing exponents of serialism: Roger Sessions, Milton Babbitt, and Luigi Dallapiccola. Like Babbitt and Sessions especially, he was known for his vast knowledge and a cerebral mastery of mathematical processes. His reputation as an "academic" was reinforced by his many professorial positions at prestigious universities. In aesthetic terms, his music's tendency to proceed in a stream of notes can perhaps make it seem amorphous and difficult to follow.

It is important therefore, for the listener but especially for the performer, to recognize that in Martino's music, intellectual control forms the underpinning for a freewheeling Romantic sensibility. His cerebral interests aside, he had a deep love for styles of music that embrace intensity of emotion, impulsiveness, and virtuosity. These included jazz (he was a jazz clarinetist and arranger), Italian Baroque music, the Romantic piano works of Schumann, Chopin, and Liszt, and the Expressionist music of Berg and Schoenberg. His music should therefore come across as serious, committed and thoughtfully created, but also flamboyant and dazzling, full of sensual movement, aural color, volatile mood

changes, and jazz-influenced improvisatory flair.

This CD offers three previously unrecorded works that were written in the last few years of Martino's life, as well as a piece from an earlier period. Whereas the *Fantasy-Variations* of 1962 is a striking example of his extremely detailed writing at the time, in his late music his writing became more streamlined and simplified. Though still filled with an abundance of notes and gestures, there are fewer symbol markings than before, and material is spun out into longer sections.

Like the solo violin sonatas of Bartók and Sessions, Martino's Sonata for Solo Violin (2003) is a large-scale, majestically sweeping, fiery work in four movements. The *fff* 7ths that open it recur at the close like pillars of a temple. In the highly rhapsodic first movement, *Maestoso brillante*, extensive, elaborate virtuosic outbursts settle into lyrical episodes. The second movement, *Adagio molto*, has a soulful melancholy that recalls the slow movement of Bartók's solo sonata. After a sighing opening, a single-lined melody becomes increasingly lively, turning first into an ornate, waltz-like passage full of élan, and then into a spiky, flamboyant scherzando, before fading out mysteriously. The third movement, *Intermezzo: Fughetta in omaggio*, is a four-voice fugue played entirely pizzicato. Measured and resolute, it is a clear successor to the fugue in Bartók's sonata. Intriguingly, Martino wrote out his "ideal" polyphonic vision on two staves, leav-

ing it up to the performer to figure out which notes to actually play. (The score provides one possible version, fingered by dedicatee Robert Mann.) The fourth movement is sectional, *Presto* or *Andante* in character, with strongly defined reprises and passages of quickly alternating pizzicatos and bowed elements. The brilliant coda is a scurrying whirl of notes that broadens into a triumphant close.

Based on a twelve-tone row, the Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano (2004) opens with a firmly striding pulse before unleashing a cascade of contrapuntal, virtuosic runs that essentially flows onward through the piece, tumbling over unexpected polyrhythms and meter changes, and occasionally taking on a dance-like character. While the instruments are equal partners, the violin often takes flight in extravagant roulades, which the piano punctuates with strong injected chords. In the second movement, *Lento*, the violin part settles into spacious, cantabile melody, while the piano adopts a Lisztian character with ornamental, sweeping passagework. The third movement is a very quick scherzo with a tipsy-sounding middle section. The final movement brings a return of the opening, with its declarative start and its dizzying stream of notes barrel-ling to the finish. Martino indicated that the movements should follow each other *attacca*, and the work has the feel of an extended single movement: the excitable *Animato* first movement trails off suddenly from its peak, to be succeeded by the sweetly singing *Lento*, and the brief *Presto*

vanishes from the scene, to be followed by the impassioned final movement.

The *Romanza* for Violin Solo (2002) is a relatively brief work of lyrical fantasy. Recalling the instrumental romances of the 18th-19th centuries, the predominantly cantabile music sometimes takes flight into elegant, *capriccioso* gestures and brilliant episodes. A quality of informal, but intense, lyricism is illustrated by the expressive markings, including *Adagio flessibile*, *Con moto*, *Con anima*, *Andante cantabile*, *Comodo*; *liberamente*, and *Andantino*. The material announced at the outset features large, languorously Romantic leaps and consonant intervals, establishing a sweet, genial atmosphere that later turns more passionate and emphatic.

The *Fantasy-Variations* for Violin (1962) presents a veritable encyclopedia of violin effects, ranging from many sorts of *pizzicato* to harmonics, *glissandi*, varied bowing styles, and combinations thereof. Martino indicated in minute detail not only the desired dynamics, but in many cases, extremely specific nuances of phrasing and pacing. The work has the feeling of a *scherzo*, with brief phrases and different characters succeeding each other abruptly, and a nervous intensity which pervades the piece. Recurrences of the bold opening 10th mark the start of some of the variations, but other variations are obscured by discursive elaborations. In the work's middle section, marked *Il più presto possibile*, the mute is quickly applied and removed amid hushed *scor-*

*revole* murmurings. Following a climax, the *scherzando* variations resume. As the work draws to an end, gestures become more relaxed, melodic and almost elegiac. A last confident flourish provides the close.

—Miranda Cuckson

Recently lauded by the New York Times as "a brilliant young performer who plays daunting contemporary music with insight, honesty, and temperament," violinist **Miranda Cuckson** has a fast-growing reputation as a soloist and chamber musician. Acclaimed for her performances in the United States, Europe, and the Far East, she has appeared as soloist with orchestras including the Indianapolis Symphony, Virginia Symphony, Long Beach Symphony, Aspen Festival Orchestra, Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, Shanghai Symphony, Beijing Radio Orchestra, and on tour in Germany and Poland. She was featured as the surprise performer at a gala benefit for the American Composers Orchestra. In 2008, she made her concerto debut with the Jerusalem Symphony and Leon Botstein.

Her three previous CDs - concertos by Korngold and Ponce with the Czech National Symphony, and violin works by Ralph Shapey and Ross Lee Finney - were released by Centaur Records to much praise. She is the recipient of several grants from the Aaron Copland and Ditson Funds.

Ms. Cuckson made her recital debut at Carnegie