

ABOUT THOMAS HECHT

He has given master classes at renowned institutions such as the Royal Academy, Royal Northern and Royal Welsh Colleges of Music, the Paris, Eastman, Oberlin, Peabody, Sydney, Beijing and Sichuan Conservatories and the Hong Kong Academy of the Performing Arts. He recently served as Visiting Professor at the Peabody Institute under the auspices of the first YST-Peabody faculty exchange programme, while other guest residency invitations have included the Conservatoire de Paris, Guildhall College of Music & Drama the University of Trossingen and the Western Australia Academy for the Performing Arts.

His highly sought after piano class, which has nurtured young talents for over twenty five on three continents-- has produced concerto soloists with the Singapore, New Zealand, Christchurch, Lamont, Lima, Kaunas, Artsakh and Peabody Symphony Orchestras, the Cleveland, Philippines, Singapore and Dnipropetrovsk Philharmonic Orchestras, the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra, the Melbourne and Wellington Youth Orchestras, the Auckland Philharmonia, the Singapore Festival Orchestra and Orchestra of the Music Makers. Throughout his career he has represented USA, New Zealand and Singapore on jury panels of the Gina Bachauer, Geneva, Isangyun, Ibiza and Paralympic International Piano Competitions in addition to the national piano competitions of Japan, Thailand, Australia and South Africa. He receives regular invitations to summer piano festivals, including performances in Sydney, Beijing, Wellington, Lausanne, Chethams, Taichung, Bavaria, Artsakh and Brasov (where he is Honorary Professor of Piano at the University of Transylvania), and continues to be in demand for workshops and pedagogy conferences throughout the world. Thomas Hecht is a Steinway Artist and records for the Azica, Elysium and Atoll labels.

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Season 115, Program 25



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON

SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DANCE

GUEST ARTIST Thomas Hecht, piano

Thomas Hecht is a Steinway Artist
Recordings on the Azica, Elysium & Atoll
Labels ThomasHechtpiano.com

Beall Concert Hall

Thursday, December 3, 2015 | 7:30 p.m.



CHARLES IVES

Piano Sonata No. 2 (1915)
("Concord, Mass., 1840-1860")
III. The Alcotts

BENJAMIN PESETSKY

Piano Sonata (2014)
I. Moderato
II. Presto
III. Andante sostenuto ("For the New Year")
IV. Finale: Vivo giusto

EDWARD MACDOWELL

Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 50 ("Eroica") (1895)
I. Slow, with nobility
II. Elf-like
III. Tenderly, longingly
IV. Fiercely, very fast

Intermission (10 mins)**CHARLES GRIFFES**

The Lake at Evening, Op. 5, No. 1 (1910)
The White Peacock, Op. 7, No. 1 (1915)
Scherzo, Op. 6, No. 3 (1913)

AARON COPLAND/LEONARD BERNSTEIN

El Salón Mexico (1936)

A native of Baltimore, pianist Thomas Hecht immigrated to Singapore as one of the original "pioneers" of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, founded in 2003 as joint collaboration with the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. Over the span of nearly three decades he has concertized internationally as concerto soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and as a member of the acclaimed duo-piano team Hecht & Shapiro, winners of the Munich International Two Piano Competition and USA National Duo Piano Competition. He is currently the Head of Piano Department at the Conservatory and was the former Head of Piano Studies and Artist-In-Residence at the School of Music at Victoria University in New Zealand. Prior to that, he served for many years as Professor of Piano and Artist-In-Residence at the Cleveland Institute of Music (USA).

Professor Hecht has performed in many of the world's cultural centres, appearing with leading orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony, Stuttgart Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Johannesburg Festival Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Artsakh Symphony Orchestra and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Highlights of recent tours include performances at the Lincoln Center in New York, Berlin Philharmonic Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington, and recitals in Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, Germany, Armenia, South Africa, and throughout all the major centres of Australia and New Zealand. Thomas Hecht is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory where he won first prize in the concerto competition and the Kaufmann Award for excellence in chamber music.

Later he was accepted for graduate studies at the Peabody Institute as a student of Leon Fleisher, who was so impressed with the young pianist's abilities that was soon asked to become his mentor's teaching assistant, an honor which Fleisher - one of the great pianists of our time - had never before bestowed on any pianist. His merits and many noteworthy achievements were recently celebrated at Peabody where he was presented with the coveted "Young" Maestro Award, honoring alumni who have distinguished themselves in their performing careers. Dr. Hecht also enjoys a well-deserved reputation as one of the leading teachers of his generation, having produced a multitude of first prizewinners in solo and two piano competitions throughout the United States, Europe and Australasia.

rhythmic vitality and “easy on the ear” potpourri of tunes continue to appeal to concert artists and audiences alike. The title of the tone poem refers to the name of a popular dance hall in Mexico City, although Copland’s inspiration did not come from the popular songs he heard during his trip to Mexico in the early 1930s but rather from a two-volume collection of Mexican folk tunes he had received entitled *El Folklore y la Musica Mexicana*. These included *La Jesusita, El Mosco, El Malacate and El Palo Verde*, which appears three times in the work as a powerful refrain. There are also appearances of the familiar “Mexican Hat Dance” as well. Copland explains it best: “I present the folk tunes simultaneously in their original keys and rhythms. The result is a kind of polytonality that achieves the frenetic whirl I had in mind before the end, when all is resolved with a plain unadorned triad.

Notes by Thomas Hecht



Benjamin Pesetsky is an American composer of dramatic instrumental and vocal music. NOW Magazine called his opera scene *Love Redux* “one of the best episodes” staged by Tapestry New Opera in Toronto, and the American Symphony Orchestra, Albany Symphony Orchestra and New England Conservatory’s Jordan Winds

have performed his works. His Piano Sonata (2014) was commissioned by Thomas Hecht and is receiving premiers on his recital tours throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. Additionally, the Phonochrome Collective and the Guerrilla Composers Guild will premiere *An Illusory Image* in San Francisco this spring. Recently he was an artist-in-residence at the Banff Centre and was also a featured composer at the Rivers School Seminar on Contemporary Music. He studied with Joan Tower, George Tsontakis, and Howard Frazin, and holds degrees in composition and philosophy from Bard College Conservatory and Bard College.

“American Piano Classics: 100 years and then some...”

Charles Ives was one of the most pivotal and revered of all American composers. His monumental Piano Sonata No. 2, written a century ago this year, is entitled the *Concord Sonata* and pays homage to four of America’s “transcendentalist” figures during the years 1840-1860: Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau and Alcott. It is the Alcott family (whose four daughters included Louisa May, renowned authoress of *Little Women*), which is depicted here in the sonata’s third movement. Distinctively Ivesian, discordant textures result when Scottish folk tunes, church hymns and Steven Foster songs are blended together with quotations from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, all of which recall the music that featured in the daily entertainment provided by family members as they gathered around the spinet piano in their Concord home.

Tonight I have the pleasure of presenting the Asian premiere of **Benjamin Pesetsky’s** Piano Sonata, after giving its world premiere at 2014 International Galliate Piano Festival (Italy) and the US premiere at Texas State University. I commissioned the work from this promising young composer (b. 1989) after meeting him at the Banff Centre and hearing his wonderful music, which evoked for me not only the classic “American” sound but—just as importantly—the craft of other great American composers such as Barber, Copland and Rorem. The first movement serves as a prelude to the work and offers a flowing, mantra-like repetition of a simple chorale tune. The second movement, a very witty and charming little scherzo, reminds one of Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, whereas *the Andante sostenuto*, based on a poem entitled *For the New Year* by American poet Charles Wright, is the emotional nucleus of the work and offers a deep, probing lyricism. The finale is a light-hearted, jazzy toccata, which eventually evaporates away at its conclusion.

Edward Mac Dowell (1861-1908) was the first major composer whom the United States could boast was on equal terms with European contemporaries. In 1882 he met and played his Piano Concerto No. 1 for none other than Franz Liszt in Weimar, who was apparently quite taken with the 21-year old’s bravura and technical mastery. MacDowell wrote four piano sonatas, the “Eroica” enjoying the most popularity in concert halls today. Those hearing his music for the first time might well think

it sounds very much like Edward Grieg, and indeed the two men were highly active correspondents, although they never actually met. Like his Norwegian namesake, MacDowell's music shows great fondness for the outdoors and woodlands, where depiction of frolicking spirits and elves roaming the haunted forests of Europe takes on a whole new flavour. This is evidenced by the work's second movement (*Elflike*), which, like many of the etudes and character pieces MacDowell composed, could be aptly described as "elegantly puckish". There is moreover a special pianistic flare and pathos to the piano writing that ensures his piano music is as gratifying to perform as it is to listen to. The Sonata No. 2 is not only boldly convincing in its symphonic conception, it is also cyclical in nature, as material from the introduction (*Slow, with nobility*) reappears in each of the subsequent movements to help "narrate" the epic drama of the work. Throughout the "hero's" journey brooding themes, dazzling passagework and even the foreshadowing of the popular American song idiom (*Tenderly, longingly, yet with passion*) feature largely. The composer's Scottish roots can also be discerned in the opening movement's second theme as well. The excitement of the breathless finale (*Fiercely, very fast*) eventually dissipates as the work comes to a sublime, restful close. MacDowell's wife, Marian, an accomplished pianist in her own right, later founded the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, which to this day remains an important center where artists of every discipline congregate to hone their crafts. Indeed, a great deal of the music of later composers including Copland (who stayed four times), Harris and Sessions—was created at the colony, which remains a lasting tribute to America's first world-class composer.

One of the great tragedies to befall the steadily emerging presence of American music onwards from MacDowell and Ives came in the early part of the last century when **Charles Tomlinson Griffes** (1884-1920) died at the tender age of 35 from lung disease. Ten years the junior of Ives, he was without doubt the most important American composer of his generation whose promise in developing into a major compositional "force" was cut far too short. His works, although certainly not forgotten, remain largely and inexplicably neglected. His was a "voice" so singular, so original and daring that the labels "American Impressionist" and (even less satisfactory) "American Debussy" cannot do full justice to his legacy, given the vast array of wildly imaginative tone poems he composed for both piano and symphony orchestra. Had he lived longer, his innovative

sensibilities—which included a peculiar attraction to hybrid tonalities and dissonance— would surely have taken American music to even greater heights. Like much of his orchestral output, Griffes' piano music derived inspiration from poetry and literary sources, as is the case with the three works on tonight's programme. *The Lake at Evening* bears the inscription "...for always...I hear the lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore" from *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (William Butler Yeats). *The White Peacock*, the most iconic of all Griffes' compositions (also enjoying its one hundredth anniversary year) depicts the third of William Sharp's collection of poems, *Sospiri Di Roma* (1891). The peafowl's pristine beauty—the result of a genetic mutation, where peachicks are born yellow and become fully white as they mature— has indeed captured the imagination of many artists over the years, and Griffes was no exception. His colourful harmonies, however, luxuriate with such vivid intensity that any preoccupation with pigmentation loss soon wanes as we find ourselves swept away by writhing sensualities and Griffes' voluptuous, intoxicating sound world. *The Scherzo*, the last of the *Fantasy Pieces*, Op. 6 is perhaps his most well-known piano piece and is often employed for the development of maturing young pianists. I have indeed taught the piece dozens of times and find it enjoyable to be delving further into its phantasmal soundscape, intrigued by the fanciful inscription Griffes himself penned at the outset of the work: "*From the Palace of Enchantment there issued into the night-sounds of unearthly revelry. Troops of genii and other fantastic spirits danced grotesquely to a music now weird and mysterious, now wild and joyous.*" Later, as was true with many of his piano pieces, he orchestrated the work, renamed it *Bacchanale*, and wrote just prior to the 1919 premiere with Leopold Stokowski and Philadelphia Orchestra: "*The piece is wholly fantastic as a fairy tale, with a wild climax at the end.*"

In 1937, **Aaron Copland** (1900-1990) met the 19-year old Leonard Bernstein while the latter was a student at Harvard. It was the same year *El Salon Mexico* was premiered in Mexico City under the baton of Carlos Chavez, by which time Bernstein was already an avid follower of Copland. Two years later Bernstein was commissioned to make a two piano arrangement of the score, cementing an important life-long friendship between two of America's musical "giants" in which Copland often served as mentor. Bernstein also took up the task of a solo piano arrangement, which enjoys equal popularity with the orchestral prototype, no doubt as its infectious