GEORGE WALKER
GREAT AMERICAN CONCERT MUSIC

LEON BATES PIANO
ROBERT POLLOCK PIANO
GEORGE WALKER PIANO
GREGORY WALKER VIOLIN
RITZ CHAMBER PLAYERS
ALISON BUCHANAN SOPRANO

TROY1370

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THE MUSIC

The **Piano Sonata No. 3** was commissioned by the Washington Performing Arts Society. The premiere was given in the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1976 by Leon Bates. The sonata comprises three movements entitled Fantoms, Bell, Chorale and Fughetta. The first movement is a fantasia that begins with an arpeggiated motive. The return of a similar figuration constitutes an unconventional reprise.

The second movement consists of one chord that is repeated seventeen times with different durations and dynamics. It was intended to replicate the sound of a bell heard over Lake Como in Italy when the composer was residing in the Rockefeller Foundation in Bellagio. The third movement emerging from the second begins with an original chorale melody supported by staccato chords. The first phrase is separated from the succeeding one by a four measure interlude. The fughetta subject with accompanying intervals begins in the bass and is freely imitated. A contrasting section contains playful and explosive figurations that lead quietly into a return of the fughetta subject in augmentation. The chorale melody returns, punctuated with more massive chordal support.

Music for 3 is a piano trio in one movement that was commissioned by the University of Maryland Piano Trio. It received its premiere in the Mellon Art Gallery, now the National Gallery of Art, in 1971. A statement by the piano in the extended introduction contains a tremolando that recurs in the violin and cello later in the work. After another piano solo a motive of three repeated notes is played by the violin. The violin and and cello are paired throughout the work in an atonal context against the aggressive piano part in which the material is constantly being transformed. Repeated notes become progressively intense throughout the development of the work. This performance of Music for 3 by members of the Ritz Chamber Players was recorded live in Jacksonville, Florida.

The songs of George Walker have been called “among the finest by an American composer” in a review by the *New York Times* of a C.R. I. recording. *Response*, the earliest of these songs, was composed in 1940 when the composer was 18 years of age. *The Bereaved Maid*, set to a 15th century text, was deemed a “masterpiece” by Nadia Boulanger when it was first shown to her. She suggested that a choral arrangement be made of it. This arrangement for chorus and piano is included in the Three Lyrics for Chorus by George Walker.

The poet, Emily Dickinson, is represented by a cycle of four songs, *Wild Nights, What If I Say I Shall Not Wait, Bequest* and a fifth song, *I Went To Heaven*. A quotation of the Appalachian melody, *I Wonder As I Wander*, appears as a canon in the concluding measures of *I Have No Life But This*.

Sweet Let Me Go and *Hey, Nonny No* are set to anonymous texts. Poems by three English poets, Lord Byron, Robert Burns and A.E. Housman and *In Time of Silver Rain*, a lovely poem by the American poet, Langston Hughes, are distinctive in both the vocal writing and in the piano accompaniments. *In Time Of Silver Rain* originated from a hymn that was commissioned by the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Several accompaniments in these songs pose pianistic challenges. They have a greater independence from the vocal line than is characteristic of most songs in the lieder tradition. *Leaving* was composed on an original text by George Walker. *I Got A Letter From Jesus*, one of three spiritual arrangements, was discovered in an anthology. Its melody was virtually unknown until this arrangement was made. The text consists of only five words. The extraordinarily concise accompaniment is derived from a two note motive.

The **Piano Sonata No. 5** was composed in 2003. It is in one movement. The principal theme is comprised mostly of thirds that are supported by other intervals- octaves, sevenths, seconds and fourths. It reappears with preparatory ascending seconds in various guises between figurative connections. The Piano Sonatas No. 3, 4 and 5 have been infrequently performed. They present figurative and rhythmic challenges that are not found in the earlier sonatas. The second movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3, consisting of one chord, can only be played by a pianist capable of stretching a tenth in both hands. The huge sonorities in the Piano Sonatas No. 3, 4 and 5 and the Piano Concerto cannot readily be found in any major works for this instrument. These works by George Walker offer a unique organization of striking material that make greater musical demands of the performer than many of the piano works of the late 20th century.

THE COMPOSER

George Walker is an acknowledged American Master whose orchestral works have been played by every major American orchestra. He has also been called one of the finest pianists in the generation of performers that include William Kapell, Leon Fleischer and Eugene Istomin. His Piano Sonatas No. 1 and 2 have been played countless times since 1953 by many pianists and are a significant addition to piano literature. The frequency of their programming rivals that of his famous Lyric for Strings.

George Walker is the recipient of seven honorary doctorate degrees, three from the premier music schools in the United States— the Eastman School of Music, Oberlin College and the Curtis Institute of Music. His autobiography, *George Walker: American Composer and Pianist*, is published by the Scarecrow Press. In 2000 he was inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame. In 2012 he received the Aaron Copland Award from ASCAP.

THE PERFORMERS

Leon Bates, a native of Philadelphia, is a splendid American pianist. He has performed with many major U.S. orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and with numerous European orchestras. His performances have been acclaimed for their power, warmth and skill. He has made significant contributions to music education through master classes and residency programs.

Robert Pollock, a graduate of Swarthmore College and Princeton University, is the founder and director of Ebb & Flow Arts in Maui, Hawaii. He was previously the founder of the Composers Guild of New Jersey. In addition to being a superb performer of contemporary piano music, he is a prolific composer and an ardent supporter of the music of George Walker.

Gregory Walker is the concertmaster of the Boulder Philharmonic in Boulder, Colorado. and a professor at the University of Colorado in Denver. He is also an interdisciplinary musician and composer who has recorded all of the works for violin and piano and violin and orchestra by his father, George Walker. His extraordinary recording of the Violin Concerto by George Walker was selected by NPR as one of the five best cds of contemporary American Music for 2010. He made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Neeme Jarvi in the world premiere of the Violin Concerto by George Walker in 2009.

Alison Buchanan, a British soprano, received her vocal training at the Guildhall School of Music in London and the Curtis Institute of Music. She has received awards in the Maggie Teyte Competition, the Pavarotti and Kathleen Ferrier and Washington International Competitions. Her operatic and concert appearances include performances with the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the London Symphony with Sir Colin Davis, the BBC Concert Orchestra, Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Ritz Chamber Players.

Kelly Hall Tompkins, violinist, is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music who received her Master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. She is a member of the New Jersey Symphony, the Ritz Chamber Players and has toured with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. She is the founder of the Music Kitchen-Food for the Soul, a charity series that brings music to the homeless in New York City. Her cds of music from the standard violin repertoire released by MSR Classics have been highly praised.

Kevin Sharpe is an Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Florida. He is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he studied piano with Frances Walker, the sister of George Walker. He received a Masters Degree and a Doctorate Degree from Indiana University. Among his awards was the first prize in the Johann Sebastian Bach International Competition.

Kenneth Law, cellist, is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He is currently on the music faculty of George Mason University. He has appeared in recitals and chamber music in New York, Washington, DC, and as a member of the Converse Trio in England, France, Scotland, Panama and Puerto Rico. Both he and Kevin Sharpe are members of the Ritz Chamber Players.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

William Anderson, Cygnus Ensemble
Composers Guild of New Jersey
Roger Shapiro Fund for New Music
Ebb & Flow Arts
Maui Arts & Cultural Center
John Messersmith, engineer for the Piano Sonata No. 5
Jeremy Tressler, engineer for the Piano Sonata No. 3 and the songs
Samuel A. McGuire, engineer for Bleu
Ron Conor, piano technician, Steinway & Sons
Liner notes: George Walker
Piano Sonata No. 3, Piano Sonata No. 5, Music for 3 and Songs are published by Lauren Keiser Music.
Bleu is published by Bellegrove Music

PHOTOS

Cover Photo: Jeremy Tessler
Leon Bates, Rile Management
Gregory Walker by Lori Walker
Alison Buchanan by Devon Cass
Robert Pollock by Klazine Pollock

GEORGE WALKER
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1 Piano Sonata No. 3 [13:31]
LEON BATES PIANO

2 Music for 3 [6:54]
RITZ CHAMBER TRIO

3 The Bereaved Maid (Anonymous) [4:32]

4 Hey Nonny No (Anonymous) [1:11]

5 Sweet, Let Me Go (Anonymous) [1:50]

6 So We'll Go No More A-Roving (Lord Byron) [2:17]

7 With Rue My Heart Is Laden (A.E. Houseman) [2:11]

8 Wild Nights (Emily Dickinson) [1:18]

9 What If I Say I Shall Not Wait (Emily Dickinson) [2:48]

10 I Have No Life But This (Emily Dickinson) [1:27]

11 Bequest (Emily Dickinson) [1:28]

12 I Went To Heaven (Emily Dickinson) [1:21]

13 Response (Paul Lawrence Dunbar) [2:30]

14 A Red Red Rose (Robert Burns) [3:58]

15 In Time Of Silver Rain (Langston Hughes) [2:42]

16 Leaving (George Walker) [2:41]

17 Ev'ry Time I Feel De Spirit (Spiritual) [2:28]

18 I Got A Letter From Jesus (Spiritual) [3:25]

19 Mary Wore Three Links of Chain (Spiritual) [2:50]
ALISON BUCHANAN SOPRANO
GEORGE WALKER PIANO

20 Bleu for Unaccompanied Violin [4:25]
GREGORY WALKER VIOLIN

21 Piano Sonata No. 5 [5:32]
ROBERT POLLOCK PIANO

Total Time 71:31

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