



**CLOSE
TO HOME:**

Music
of American
Composers

Michael Rowlett, *clarinet*
Stacy Rodgers, *piano*

Leonard Bernstein SONATA | Jeanne Singer NOCTURNE | Eric Mandat RROWZER!
Valerie Coleman SONATINE | Aaron Copland SONATA | Steve Reich NEW YORK COUNTERPOINT

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CLOSE TO HOME began when I met two composers whose works, while quite different from each other, engaged and intrigued me. I encountered Valerie Coleman, flutist in the Imani Woodwind Quintet, at the premiere of her trio for flute, clarinet and piano. When I discovered that she had written an equally dynamic, powerful solo piece for clarinetist Mariam Adam, I leapt at the chance to learn it. Soon after, I heard Eric Mandat perform a program of his own compositions, which were witty, exciting and thoroughly delightful. When I spoke to him after the concert, his friendly enthusiasm convinced me to attempt to learn one of my favorite numbers from the program. One of the great pleasures of this project was the opportunity to work with these fine composers and performers.

As I gathered works by other American composers for this collection, I began to find similarities among the diverse pieces, like a familiar accent in different voices. One common theme is the development of simple, repeated melodic cells. This process is perhaps most noticeable in Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint*, scored for eleven clarinets and bass clarinets, but it can also be found in *Rowzer!*, which allows the solo clarinetist to decide how many times to repeat individual measures. In a similar vein, Copland wrote that his *Sonata*, written for violin and piano in 1942 and then

arranged by the composer for clarinet in the 1980s, was "an uncomplicated and direct statement of rather uncomplicated and direct musical ideas that I enjoyed developing." Like many of the composers represented here, Copland's *Sonata* is intimate but unsentimental in its lyricism, a quality I find echoed in the interludes of Coleman's *Sonatine* and in the slow passages of Bernstein's youthful *Sonata*.

The inspiration for many of these compositions comes from a particular place, a moment or a memory. Copland's *Sonata* was written in memory of a friend killed in World War II, its elegiac character expressed by its spare, solemn slow movement. Jeanne Singer wrote in the liner notes to her CD, *Of Times Past*, that her *Nocturne* combines the sounds of her cousin's clarinet practice and her own piano practice from the time when they were children, a mixture of the styles of Brahms' clarinet sonatas and Chopin's nocturnes. In our meetings, Coleman described how she was inspired by "the energy when a jazz musician plays at nighttime . . . It's a spiritual wind, a spiritual fire, and that's what this piece is all about." More whimsically, Mandat writes in a note in the score of *Rrowzer!* that the inspiration for the piece came from the image of "an old dog lying by the side of the road, barking at passers-by." Mandat employs a variety of timbral effects that include quarter-tones, multiphonics, and a wild vibrato, many of which sound particularly canine. While I was intrigued to explore the musical connections between these pieces, all composed in a relatively short span of time in a single country, certainly the most rewarding aspect of this project was the chance to meet and collaborate with other musicians and friends. Through their generosity and artistic insight, I found in each one of these works a place close to my heart, close to home.

— MICHAEL ROWLETT

The Performers



MICHAEL ROWLETT is Assistant Professor of Clarinet at The University of Mississippi, where he has taught since 2002. He has been invited to perform at conventions of the International Clarinet Association and the National Flute Association, and he was a semi-finalist in the ICA's 1998 Young Artist competition. He has appeared as a concerto soloist with the Germantown (TN) and Durham (NC) Symphony Orchestras and has performed with the Memphis, North Carolina, and Tupelo Symphony Orchestras and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. He holds a D.M. in clarinet performance from The Florida State University and degrees from The University of Iowa and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His teachers include Frank Kowalsky, Maurita Murphy Mead, Freddy Arteel and Donald Oehler.



STACY RODGERS is a Professor at The University of Mississippi where he is Head of Keyboard Studies and Collaborative Piano. He earned a Bachelors degree in Piano Performance from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and a Masters degree in Piano Pedagogy and Literature at The University of Texas in Austin. He performs frequently with his wife Diane Wang as a piano duo and with faculty colleagues from all performance areas. At the national level, Mr. Rodgers has performed with soprano Kallen Esperian, members of the New York Philharmonic and University of Michigan wind faculty, violinist Scott St. John, Rolf Smedvig, founder and lead trumpet of the Empire Brass Quintet, and many others. In a typical year, he performs more than 20 different full-length programs.

Acknowledgments

It has been a great joy to collaborate with so many fantastic artists, both old friends and new ones. My deepest gratitude goes to pianist Stacy Rodgers, as our collaboration has been truly one of the highlights of my musical career. Thanks to Valerie Coleman, Mariam Adam and Evelyn Ulex for sharing their seemingly boundless energies in rehearsals and correspondence as I prepared the Sonatine. Eric Mandat generously welcomed me to his office and his home, and was friendly and patient as I coaxed dog-like sounds from my clarinet. Thanks to Donald Oehler, who introduced me to Jeanne Singer's Nocturne and provided me with the music, and to Pamela Blevins, Ruth Johnson and most of all Anya Laurence for their assistance in learning more about Ms. Singer and her works. Evan Ziporyn provided invaluable advice and commentary as I planned to record New York Counterpoint, and Nobuko Igarashi helped me immensely as I prepared the bass clarinet parts. Thanks to Michael McFee, long my editor, for his helpful suggestions on the program notes, and thanks to Whitney Davidson for her excellent photographs. Joseph Garrison, Denise Faust and the staff of First Presbyterian Church in Oxford, Mississippi, generously made it possible for us to record in their church sanctuary. Thanks to the University of Mississippi Department of Music and its chair, Charles Gates, for support, motivation and advice. Thanks also to the University of Mississippi College of Liberal Arts, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, all of which provided material assistance. Finally, thanks to Jeffrey Reed at Taproot Audio Design, whose recording expertise and trained ear helped shape this project from first note to last.

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Jeffrey Reed, Taproot Audio Design, Oxford, Mississippi

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Mandat, Rrowzer!
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Valerie Coleman, Sonatine
is available direct from the composer
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LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Sonata

- 1 I. Grazioso [3:51]
- 2 II. Andantino—Vivace e leggiero [7:00]

JEANNE SINGER

- 3 *Nocturne* [6:16]

ERIC MANDAT

- 4 *Rrowzer!* [8:35]

VALERIE COLEMAN

- 5 *Sonatine* [8:08]

AARON COPLAND

Sonata

- 6 I. Andante semplice—Allegro [7:45]
- 7 II. Lento [4:59]
- 8 III. Allegretto giusto [6:59]

STEVE REICH

- 9 *New York Counterpoint* III:07
(I. Fast; II. Slow; III. Fast)

Total Time = 64:41

