

# Elliott Carter

## The Complete Music for Piano

Charles Rosen, piano

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# ELLIOTT CARTER

## THE COMPLETE MUSIC for PIANO

*CHARLES ROSEN, piano*

❶ 90+ (1994) (6:13)

PIANO SONATA (1945-46, revised 1982) (22:41)

❷ I. Maestoso (10:14)

❸ II. Andante (12:25)

❹ NIGHT FANTASIES (1980) (21:00)

❺ *Elliott Carter and Charles Rosen in conversation* (6:40)

Total Time 56:55

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## Notes by Charles Rosen

### 90+

*90+* was written in 1994 for Goffredo Petrassi's ninetieth birthday, and the first performance was given at the Pontino Music Festival. The composer writes that it "is built around ninety short, accented notes played in a slow regular beat." (A few more notes are added at the end, no doubt for "Many Happy Returns", to be played in a tempo freely accelerating at the pleasure of the performer.) Around the ninety notes are a series of continuously altered textures, starting with softly changing harmonies. Then a series of rapid arabesques are succeeded by more dramatic, rhetorical gestures and a page of pointillistic staccato figures. A long sustained melodic line, marked *molto espressivo* and *appassionato*, covers the range of the keyboard from treble to bass over a background of what seems like pizzicato notes. The slowly changing soft harmonies return, punctuated by individual repeated pitches in a double rhythmic series, out of phase one with the other. The final page reaches an impressive fortissimo climax, followed by the coda freely accelerating and dying away.

### Piano Sonata

The *Piano Sonata* [1945-46] is a revolutionary work. In its first movement in particular, it represents a new departure in piano writing that has few analogies in the literature of the past. And in the complexity and integration of its harmony and its texture, it was a radical change in the music of Carter—perhaps not as great a change as we had thought, now that we can see so

much of what came later embedded in the earlier works. The sonata is built upon, and constructed out of, the overtone possibilities of the piano. But the sonata of Elliott Carter exploits this device far more radically than had ever been done before. The melodies are built out of overtones, so to speak; the climax of the phrase occurs at the point of greatest brilliance in sonority.

The second, and perhaps more important revolutionary quality of the work is its rhythm. The changes in time signature are so frequent (on an average, there is a change every two or three measures) that they were finally left out of the score as being confusing, and the first movement has no time signature. The rhythm of this movement, is, however, beautifully natural, even the passages in odd rhythms like 11/16.

## **Night Fantasies**

About *Night Fantasies*, written in 1980, Elliott Carter has written:

*"Night Fantasies* is a piano piece of continuously changing moods, suggesting the fleeting thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind during a period of wakefulness at night. The quiet, nocturnal evocation with which it begins and returns occasionally, is suddenly broken by a flighty series of short phrases that emerge and disappear. This episode is followed by many others of contrasting characters and lengths that sometimes break in abruptly, and at other times, develop smoothly out of what has gone before. The work culminates in a loud, obsessive, periodic repetition of an emphatic chord that, as it dies away, brings the work to its conclusion.

In this score, I wanted to capture the fanciful, changeable quality of our inner life at a time when it is not dominated by strong, directive intentions or desires--to capture the poetic moodiness that, in an earlier romantic context, I enjoy in works of Robert Schumann like *Kreislarian*, *Carnaval* and *Davidbündlertänze*.

The work is dedicated to the four pianists who jointly commissioned it: Paul Jacobs, Gilbert Kalish, Ursula Oppens and Charles Rosen."

To this, I might add just a few observations. *Night Fantasies* is full of melody, even some long melodic lines, but it has no themes, and no motifs--no tune is ever played twice. Textures recur, however, and so do certain intervals and chords, each with a recognizable periodic interval of its own. The rhythms belong to two sequences, which are almost incompatible with each other: the basic ratio is 24 to 25; we hear rhythms that begin together, draw gradually apart, and then return. This means that the rhythm of the bar lines can never be heard in this piece, and that gives the work its impression of improvisation and freedom. In its variety of moods and expression--lyric, satiric, brutal, dramatic, contemplative and light-hearted--it is perhaps the most extraordinary large keyboard work written since the death of Ravel.



**Elliott Carter**, born in New York City in 1908, is the first American to be awarded the Ernst-von-Siemens-Musikpreis (1981) previously given to Fischer-Dieskau, Serkin, Boulez, Messiaen and Britten. He is also the recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes and the Gold Medal for Music of the Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters.



Photo Credit: Don Mustakis

**Charles Rosen** is one of the foremost pianists of our time, renowned for his performances, on record and in concert, of Beethoven, Schumann, and from this century, Boulez and Carter. He is also the author of several widely-read and critically-acclaimed books, including *The Classical Tradition*.

Producers: Klaas A. Posthuma, David Starobin  
Engineers: Klaas A. Posthuma, David Merrill  
Editing: Silas Brown  
Mastering Engineer: Adam Abeshouse  
Cover Photographs: Becky Starobin  
Design: Ross Hudson, Intermedia Design

*Sonata and Night Fantasies* recorded in Holland, 1982  
*90+* and *Conversation* recorded at MasterSound Astoria, December, 1996  
Piano for *Sonata and Night Fantasies*: Steinway D  
Piano for *90+* : Hamburg Steinway provided by Mary Schwendeman  
Executive Producers: David and Becky Starobin

*90+* is published by Boosey & Hawkes; *Piano Sonata* is published by Mercury Music Corporation (Theodore Presser Co.); *Night Fantasies* is published by AMP (Music Sales Group)

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**Also available: Elliott Carter: The Vocal Works (1975-1981) BRIDGE 9014**  
**Elliott Carter: Eight Compositions (1948-1993) BRIDGE 9044**

*This recording is for Helen*





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- 1 90+ (6:13)
- 2 3 Piano Sonata (22:41)
- 4 Night Fantasies (21:00)  
Charles Rosen, piano
- 5 Elliott Carter in conversation  
with Charles Rosen (6:40)

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