

Arnold ROSNER

CHAMBER MUSIC

SONATA NO. 1 FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 18

SONATA NO. 2 FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 89

DANSES À LA MODE FOR CELLO SOLO, OP. 101

SONATA FOR BASSOON AND PIANO, OP. 121

Curtis Macomber, violin
Maxine Neuman, cello
David Richmond, bassoon
Margaret Kampmeier, piano
Carson Cooman, piano

CHAMBER MUSIC BY ARNOLD ROSNER

by Walter Simmons

During his fifty-year compositional career, the American composer Arnold Rosner (1945–2013) produced a body of work that combined diverse influences into a powerful, distinctly personal musical voice. His catalogue contains compositions in nearly every genre, including three operas, eight symphonies, numerous works for orchestra and band, several large-scale choral works and many chamber, solo and vocal pieces.

Rosner's musical language was founded upon the harmonic and rhythmic devices of pre-Baroque modal polyphony, and this source can be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in virtually all his music. To this he added a twentieth-century freedom of modality and triadicism, intensified in some works by moderate dissonance, combining this harmonic language with the lavish orchestration and emotional drama of nineteenth-century Romanticism. What makes Rosner's music worthy of serious consideration, rather than being merely an integration of earlier styles, is the way he shaped his unusual language to embrace an enormous expressive range – far broader than one might imagine possible – from serene beauty to violent rage. And despite its fusion of seemingly incongruous elements, most of his music is readily accessible even to untutored listeners.

Born in New York City in 1945, Rosner took piano lessons as a boy, and soon developed a voracious interest in classical music. Some sounds in particular appealed to him – juxtapositions of major and minor triads, as well as modal melodies – and before long he was working these sounds into music of his own. His family, fully aware of the remote prospects of success offered by a career in the composition of classical music, encouraged him to pursue more practical endeavours, and so he attended the Bronx High School of Science, whence he graduated at the age of fifteen, and then New York University with a major in mathematics. But all the while he was

composing: sonatas, symphonies, concertos and more – not that anyone was especially interested in hearing the fruits of his labours. His composer-heroes at the time were Hovhanness, Vaughan Williams and Nielsen, and their influence is evident in much of his creative work.

Graduating from NYU before he turned twenty, Rosner then spent a year at the Belfer Graduate School of Science, continuing his studies in mathematics. But, no longer able to resist the inner drive to pursue musical composition as his primary activity, he entered the University of Buffalo the following September, with a major in music composition. This was in 1966, when serialism was the dominating style in university music departments, and young composers were often coerced into adopting it, directly or indirectly. Rosner often recounted how the Buffalo faculty dismissed his creative efforts with varying degrees of contempt. Later, in describing his educational experience there, he would say that he ‘learned almost nothing’ from these pedants. Although most of his peers capitulated to the pressure to embrace the style *du jour*, Rosner was adamantly opposed to serialism and stubbornly refused to accept a view of music that violated his most fervently held artistic values. And so, in response, his department repeatedly rejected the large orchestral work he had submitted as his dissertation. Realising that they would never accept the kind of music he considered meaningful, he gave up the notion of a doctorate in composition, and decided instead to pursue a degree in music theory, with a dissertation – the first ever – on the music of Alan Hovhanness. He completed this task successfully, and in the process became the first recipient of a doctorate in music granted by the State University of New York.

He devoted the rest of his life to writing the music that represented his personal aesthetic ideals, supporting himself through academic positions at colleges in and around the New York City area. His most enduring position was as Professor of Music at Kingsborough Community College (of the City University of New York), which he held for thirty years, until his death. During the course of his compositional career, his musical language gradually expanded from its idiosyncratic and intuitive beginnings, broadening and deepening its expressive range. Arnold Rosner died in Brooklyn, in 2013, on his 68th birthday.

Rosner composed his **Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Op. 18**, in 1963, when he was eighteen years old. (The Sonata No. 2 dates from 1972, and serves alternately as his Sonata for Oboe and Piano.) As with a number of his early works, he later felt that the Sonata No. 1 could be improved without changing its overall character. In undertaking such retrospective revisions, Rosner was somewhat unusual. Many composers revise their works shortly after completing them, often after a first performance or in anticipation of a second. Revisions much later are less common, as most composers' styles evolve to the point where they no longer feel comfortable re-entering works from an earlier period. Rosner's style evolved over time as well, as may be readily gleaned from this recording. But he never repudiated his earlier approach, and so his revisions remain fully within the language of the original work. For example, when he returned to the Violin Sonata No. 1 more than forty years after completing it, he retained all the original thematic materials, developing them more subtly and sophisticatedly. But there are no disjunctions in the basic musical language, which remains largely modal and consonant, as was the original version. In this way he was able to retain the freshness and innocence that characterised his earlier music, while providing a developmental complexity that gives the music added depth and interest. He dedicated the revised version to Emily Adele Vanderwerf, whose father had written the first academic dissertation on Rosner's music.

The first public performance of either version of Rosner's Violin Sonata No. 1 did not take place until 2014, at a memorial concert in New York City on the first anniversary of his death. The violinist was Owen Dalby and the pianist Margaret Kampmeier.

Rosner often asserted that his music was not 'tonal', by which he meant that he rejected the notion of 'functional tonality', that is, the traditional view applied to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music that tonality served as a primary unifying device within which deviations from the tonal centre were understood as fundamental elements of the structure of a work. Most of Rosner's music displays tonal centres that modulate freely throughout a composition without serving such structural functions. In his earlier works especially, some movements exhibit a central tonic and others do not. The Violin Sonata No. 1 is an especially clear illustration of this practice. The vigorous

first movement, *Allegro molto* [1], is freely modal and largely consonant, featuring the use of unrelated triads that was an enduring element of Rosner's style. The movement is structured as a modified sonata allegro. Though it begins with a suggestion of D Dorian, that mode is contradicted freely by the second bar. This first theme introduces a profusion of motifs that provide the main material of the movement. A second theme is briefly suggested, introduced by sequences of perfect fourths, but the development focuses primarily on the motifs within the first theme. A third thematic idea characterised by repeated crotchets (quarter-notes) is introduced during the development. The recapitulation features the first theme in rhythmic augmentation in the piano, while the violin continues developing the main motivic material of the movement, until the final cadence in C sharp.

The second movement, *Lento* [2], is fervently lyrical and somewhat solemn in character. Most notable is an emphasis on the major-minor dichotomy, another harmonic feature that may be found in Rosner's music throughout his *œuvre*. The opening melody, freely modal, is accompanied by triads and perfect fifths, lending a slightly religious quality. A series of bell-like notes in the piano introduces a more unstable second section that ends with bell-like notes in the violin. The melody from the first section returns with a more elaborate accompaniment, followed by a return of the second-section material, also accompanied by more active figuration. This pattern continues during a final restatement of the opening material. Major-minor conflicts recur throughout the movement, which largely maintains a modal tonality of C.

The finale, *Allegro* [3], is suggestive of a spirited tarantella, as the unaccompanied violin introduces the main theme in G. The piano enters, abruptly shifting the tonality to the remote key of C sharp. The material undergoes continual development during which the violin remains active while the piano accompanies with mostly open fifths. A second section, maintaining the C sharp tonality, features a more subdued melody in the violin, while the piano now takes a more active role, drawing upon the first theme. This section is followed by a development of both thematic ideas, often combined. A coda accelerates the tempo, pressing forward to an emphatic conclusion, re-affirming the tonality of G.

Rosner composed *Danses à la mode*, Op. 101, in 1994, dedicating it to his friend Jan Naigus. In a note printed in the score, Carson Cooman comments that Rosner taught a variety of music courses during his years as a professor, including ethnomusicology. This latter experience led him to explore the music of a variety of countries and ethnicities, contributing to an already fledgling interest in the music of other cultures. These explorations found their way into some of his compositions, such as *Danses à la mode*. The title has something of a double meaning, referring on the one hand to the use of modal scales common to much ethnic music as well as to his own music. On the other hand, as Cooman observes, it also alludes to his ‘lifelong interest in all matters culinary’ – a dish served ‘à la mode’ has an ice-cream topping. Cooman notes:

The first movement *À la Greque* [sic] [4] is in a fast $\frac{7}{8}$ meter, with inflections characteristic of Greek folk music. Even before his teaching days, Rosner was interested in Indian music, and its influence appeared in a few of his compositions, including the second movement of this suite [5], as well as the concert band work *RAGA!*, a more extended exploration of the raga concept. The third movement, *Sarabande* [6], pays homage to the Baroque dance form. *Musique du Nord* [7] evokes Scandinavian dance music.

The first performance of *Danses à la mode* was given by David Cowley in 1995, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as part of a festival devoted to Rosner’s music.

Rosner composed quite a number of sonatas and related works for solo instrument with piano. In fact, most standard instruments are represented among these pieces, and they comprise some of his most serious, deeply searching compositions. These works often sandwich a lighter, scherzo-like movement between two movements of sombre, brooding character, and that is the case with the **Sonata for Bassoon and Piano, Op. 121**, composed in 2006. Compared with the light-hearted exuberance of the First Violin Sonata, the Bassoon Sonata – one of Rosner’s last works – maintains a mood of sober reflection throughout, even during the faster central movement. The work as a whole indicates the extent to which the composer’s language had expanded during his later

years to embrace considerable tonal freedom. It was premiered at the 2014 memorial concert by the duo that performs it here.

The first movement, *Adagio* [8], opens with an unaccompanied line in the bassoon – highly chromatic, but by no means a twelve-note row. This solo line embraces a number of short intervallic motifs that provide the source material for the movement – most prominently, a minor second and three scale-steps, both ascending and descending – which will appear clearly in all three movements. Though the opening line suggests a tonal centre of G, it is of little consequence. The piano enters, addressing the intervallic motifs and engaging them in counterpoint with the bassoon, while also providing an accompaniment largely of open fifths and triads. A continuous development follows with wandering tonality and soon the tempo quickens. The music builds to something of a climax, followed by a return to the original tempo, as the bassoon clearly restates a variant of the opening solo line, leading the movement to an unambiguous ending in D.

The second movement [9] serves as a scherzo, although, as the marking *Allegro energico ma serio* indicates, its character is far from jocular. Although mostly in $\frac{6}{8}$, there is much use of hemiola ('three against two'). The movement opens with arpeggiated open fifths in the piano with a tonality of G, followed by a stepwise rising and falling motif in the bassoon. Within this passage is incorporated a rising half-step figure that was a prominent motif in the first movement, treated here as an essential element as well, appearing in both ascending and descending forms. The movement unfolds as a free development of these ideas tossed back and forth chromatically between the two instruments, finally reaching a decisive conclusion in A.

The third movement, *Lento* [10], is rather unusual in structure. It begins with a solemn solo in the bassoon, chromatic but suggesting a tonic of E flat. Prominent in this solo are the rising and falling minor seconds that played a role in both previous movements. The solo is answered as a canon at the fourth treated in three voices, followed by a development of the motifs introduced thus far, with special attention to the rising and falling minor seconds. As the movement begins to draw to a close, there is a reminiscence of the canon material, now abbreviated, in the piano, and further development gradually leads to a quiet conclusion in B flat major-minor.

Rosner composed his **Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano, Op. 89, *La Divina Commedia***, in 1990. (The Sonata No. 1 had been composed in 1968; Maxine Neuman was the cellist for both its premiere and its first recording.) The work did not originally have a subtitle; the reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy* was added several years later, but Rosner left no information explaining why he chose to add this subtitle, and so the listener is free to imagine what the connection might be.

The first movement, *Adagio* [11], is an isorhythmic motet. This is a musical form that flourished during the mediaeval period, and one that Rosner used in several of his works, most notably the second movement of his String Quartet No. 4. In Rosner's approach, a musical phrase is presented by all the instruments involved, each instrument contributing its own part. The rhythm of this phrase is then repeated over and over by the duo as a unit, although the actual pitches differ with each repetition. It is thus easy not to realise that one is hearing repetitions of a single composite rhythmic pattern. In the case of the movement at hand, the phrase consists of ten bars, and is repeated ten times. The overall character of the music is rather severe – extremely so for Rosner, and the basic phrase is quite complicated rhythmically, harmonically, contrapuntally and dramatically. Although the movement maintains an overall tonality of C, the elaboration is freely chromatic.

The second movement, *Moderato, con rubato* [12], is also unusual: a modal incantation of vaguely Middle-Eastern character (melismatic melody in the cello accompanied by open fifths in the piano, with roles reversed in the first return, and combined in the final return), heard in alternation with brief quasi-Renaissance dance-episodes. The movement maintains a tonality of D, with modulations to the keys of A and C sharp.

The finale, *Allegro* [13], is exuberant in character, with a formal structure that suggests sonata allegro but with only one thematic group. Opening vigorously in G, the movement promptly introduces two main motifs, which permeate the movement while spinning off several subordinate motifs. The first main motif leaps up a perfect fourth, then turns back to where it started. The second main motif is focused on a descending stepwise triplet that repeats insistently. Both of these motifs, along with related subordinate motifs, are subjected to extensive development, as triplet rhythmic figures propel the

movement forward. Finally, there is a recapitulation of the opening statement followed by further development. A coda leads to a decisive final cadence in G.

The premiere of the Cello Sonata No. 2 was given in 1991 in New York City. The cellist was Dorothy Lawson and the pianist was Elena Belli. Rosner felt that the finale was appealing enough in its own right and so he decided to orchestrate it as an autonomous piece. He found the opportunity when he was commissioned in 1999 to write a piece to celebrate the approaching millennium and so entitled the result *A Millennium Overture*.

Walter Simmons, musicologist and critic, has written extensively on American composers who maintained an allegiance to traditional musical values. He is the editor of a series of books, 'Twentieth-Century Traditionalists', published by Rowman and Littlefield. He wrote the first two volumes himself (under the Scarecrow Press imprint): Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers (2004), which treated the lives and works of Barber, Bloch, Creston, Flagello, Giannini and Hanson, and Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin (2011). As a staunch advocate of the music of Arnold Rosner, he is deeply familiar with much of his output; he and Rosner were close associates for more than forty years.

Curtis Macomber is considered one of the most versatile violinists before the public today, equally at home in repertoire from Bach to Babbitt. His playing has been praised recently by *The New York Times* for its 'thrilling virtuosity' and by *The Strad* for its 'panache'. As a member of the New World String Quartet from 1982 to 1993, he performed in virtually all the important concert series in the United States, as well as touring abroad. He has for many years been recognised as a leading advocate of contemporary music and has performed in hundreds of premieres, commissions and first recordings of solo violin and chamber works by, among others, Carter, Davidovsky, Mackey, Perle and Wuorinen. He is the violinist of Speculum Musicae and the Da Capo Chamber Players, and a founding member of the Apollo Trio. His most recent recordings include a solo recording (*Casting Ecstatic*) on CRI; the complete Grieg Sonatas on Arabesque; a Steve Mackey record (*Interior Design*) on Bridge, and the complete Brahms Sonatas, also for Bridge. He is presently a member of the chamber-music faculty of the Juilliard School, where he earned B.M., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees as a student of Joseph Fuchs. He is also on the violin faculties of the Manhattan and Mannes Schools of Music, and has taught at the Tanglewood, Taos and Yellow Barn Music Festivals.



Photo: Jill LeVine

Maxine Neuman is a cellist whose solo and chamber music career spans North and South America, Europe and Asia. She is a grant recipient from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts and a shared Grammy Award winner, and her biography appears in *Who's Who in the World*. She is a founding member of the Claremont Duo, Duo Cellissimo, the Crescent String Quartet and the Belmont Trio, groups with which she has travelled and recorded extensively. She has appeared as soloist before a sold-out audience in New



York's Town Hall in the American premiere of Giovanni Battista Viotti's only cello concerto, and for Austrophon she recorded Schumann's Cello Concerto in Count Esterházy's historic palace in Austria. She has also been heard in such diverse settings as the Montreux Jazz Festival, films of Jim Jarmusch, with Metallica and the Ron Carter Jazz Nonet. A longtime champion of contemporary music, she has commissioned and premiered works by many of today's leading composers. Distinguished as a teacher as well as a performer, she has served as a juror for numerous international competitions, and has taught at Bennington College, Williams College and C. W. Post University. She is on the faculty at the New York School for Strings and Hoff-Barthelson Music School. Her cello is a J. B. Guadagnini, dating from 1772. A friend of Arnold Rosner for almost fifty years, she gave the first performance and made the first recording of his Cello Sonata No. 1, as well as this first recording of his Cello Sonata No. 2.

David Richmond is a bassoonist who has performed with orchestras, on chamber-music programmes, and in solo performances in North America, Europe and Africa. A member of the Sarasota Opera Orchestra in Florida, he has also performed with orchestras throughout New England, including with A Far Cry, the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Odyssey Opera, the Monadnock Music Festival, the Boston Pops and the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra. In addition to this recording, he may be heard on the Boston Modern Orchestra Project's 2016 recording of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. In November 2016, he was featured soloist with the Nairobi Orchestra in Kenya, and has spent increasing time in Nairobi, introducing young Kenyans to the bassoon and sharing his love of music with the rapidly growing community of classical musicians in the city. He received his master's degree in bassoon performance from the Rice University Shepherd School of Music, where he studied with Benjamin Kamins. Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, he graduated from Harvard College with a degree in music, and also studied bassoon privately with George Sakakeeny



Photo: Sandy Swanson Photography

on a Paine Fellowship from the Harvard music department. He gave the first performance of Rosner's Sonata for Bassoon and Piano.

Margaret Kampmeier enjoys a varied career as piano soloist, collaborative artist and educator. Equally fluent in classical and contemporary repertoire, she has concertised and recorded extensively. She has appeared with the St Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic Ensembles, Kronos Quartet, Saratoga Chamber Players, Sherman Chamber Ensemble, Richardson Chamber Players, Mirror Visions Ensemble, Locrian Chamber Players and Peter Schickele. As orchestral keyboardist, she performs regularly with the Orchestra of St Luke's, and is a frequent guest of the New York Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. As a recording artist, she can be heard on the Albany, Centaur, CRI, Koch, Nonesuch and Bridge labels. She teaches piano and chamber music at Princeton University and is Chair and Artistic Director of the Contemporary Performance Program at the Manhattan School of Music. She has given lecture-recitals on a wide range of topics, including 'Preludes and Fugues through the Ages', 'Contemporary Keyboard Techniques' and 'Piano Music of Women Composers'. She holds a doctorate from SUNY Stony Brook, where she studied with Gilbert Kalish. She has both performed and recorded a good deal of music by Arnold Rosner, including serving as accompanist on a recording of his complete vocal music.



Carson Cooman is one of the most remarkable figures on the music scene today. He is active as a pianist as well as an organist, specialising in the performance of contemporary music. More than 150 new compositions by composers from all over the world have been written for him, and his organ performances can be heard on a number of recordings. He is also a composer whose catalogue numbers more than a thousand works, embracing a wide range of forms and styles, from solo instrumental pieces to operas, and from orchestral works to hymn-tunes. His music has been performed on all six inhabited continents, in venues that range from the stage of Carnegie Hall to the basket of a hot-air balloon. His music appears on more than forty recordings, including more than twenty complete CDs on the Naxos, Albany, Artek, Gothic, Divine Art, Métier, Diversions, Convivium, Altarus, MSR Classics, Raven and Zimbel labels. He is also a writer on musical subjects, producing articles and reviews for a number of international publications. He serves as an active consultant on music business matters to composers and performing organisations, specialising particularly in the area of composer estates and archives. He is an avid admirer of the music of Arnold Rosner, with whom he developed a close relationship during the older composer's final years; indeed, Rosner chose him to be the curator of his musical archive.



ALSO AVAILABLE FROM TOCCATA CLASSICS



“Toccata continues its valuable service unearthing composers and scores that would otherwise be neglected, and in this case Rosner gets the royal treatment with the London Philharmonic’s world-class playing. [...] Neo-Romanticism surges forward.”
Huntley Dent, *Fanfare*

“The more of Rosner’s music one hears, the more one learns that he has his own unique sound. Some of that is because of his interest in modal harmonies and the polyphony found in early music. But he also reveals a slight jazz influence (particularly noticeable in the outer movements of his Piano Concerto here). Most importantly, there is an emotional truth in his compositions. It never sounds like empty effects, nor is it solely written to entertain. While he never minimizes the value of entertainment, neither does Rosner shrink from its power to move, to stir deeper emotions. [...] The performances and recording quality are first-rate. [...] the accompanying notes are extremely insightful and informative. Strongly recommended.” Henry Fogel, *Fanfare*



Recorded on 11 June 2015 at Futura Productions, Roslindale, Mass. (Bassoon Sonata),
and on 26, 29 and 30 August 2016 at the DiMenna Center, New York City
Recording engineers: John Weston (Bassoon Sonata) and Bill Siegmund
Producers: Carson Cooman (Bassoon Sonata) and Walter Simmons

All music available from the Estate of Arnold Rosner; for further information,
visit www.ArnoldRosnerMusic.com.

Booklet text: Walter Simmons

Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)

Typesetting and lay-out: Kerrypress, St Albans

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

© Toccata Classics, London, 2017

© Toccata Classics, London, 2017

Toccata Classics CDs are available in the shops and can also be ordered from our distributors
around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no
representation in your country, please contact:

Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK
Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

ARNOLD ROSNER Chamber Music

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Op. 18 (1963; rev. 2004)

13:38**1** I *Allegro molto*

4:57

2 II *Lento*

4:58

3 III *Allegro*

3:43

Danses à la mode, Op. 101 (1994)

10:06**4** No. 1 *À la Greque*

2:16

5 No. 2 *Raga*

3:13

6 No. 3 *Sarabande*

2:37

7 No. 4 *Musique du Nord*

2:00

Sonata for Bassoon and Piano, Op. 121 (2006)

16:07**8** I *Adagio*

5:44

9 II *Allegro energico ma serioso*

4:43

10 III *Lento*

5:40

Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano, Op. 89, *La Divina Commedia* (1990)

21:06**11** I *Adagio*

7:48

12 II *Moderato, con rubato*

7:15

13 III *Allegro*

6:03

Curtis Macomber, violin **1**–**3****TT 60:57****Maxine Neuman, cello** **4**–**7** **11**–**13**

FIRST RECORDINGS

David Richmond, bassoon **8**–**10****Margaret Kampmeier, piano** **1**–**3** **11**–**13****Carson Cooman, piano** **8**–**10**