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THE PIANIST ON CELLULOSE

THE EDUCATION OF
BENNY GREEN

TANGO PIANIST
ARMINDA CANTERO

NEW MUSIC REVIEW

Piano

& KEYBOARD

Christophe Rousset

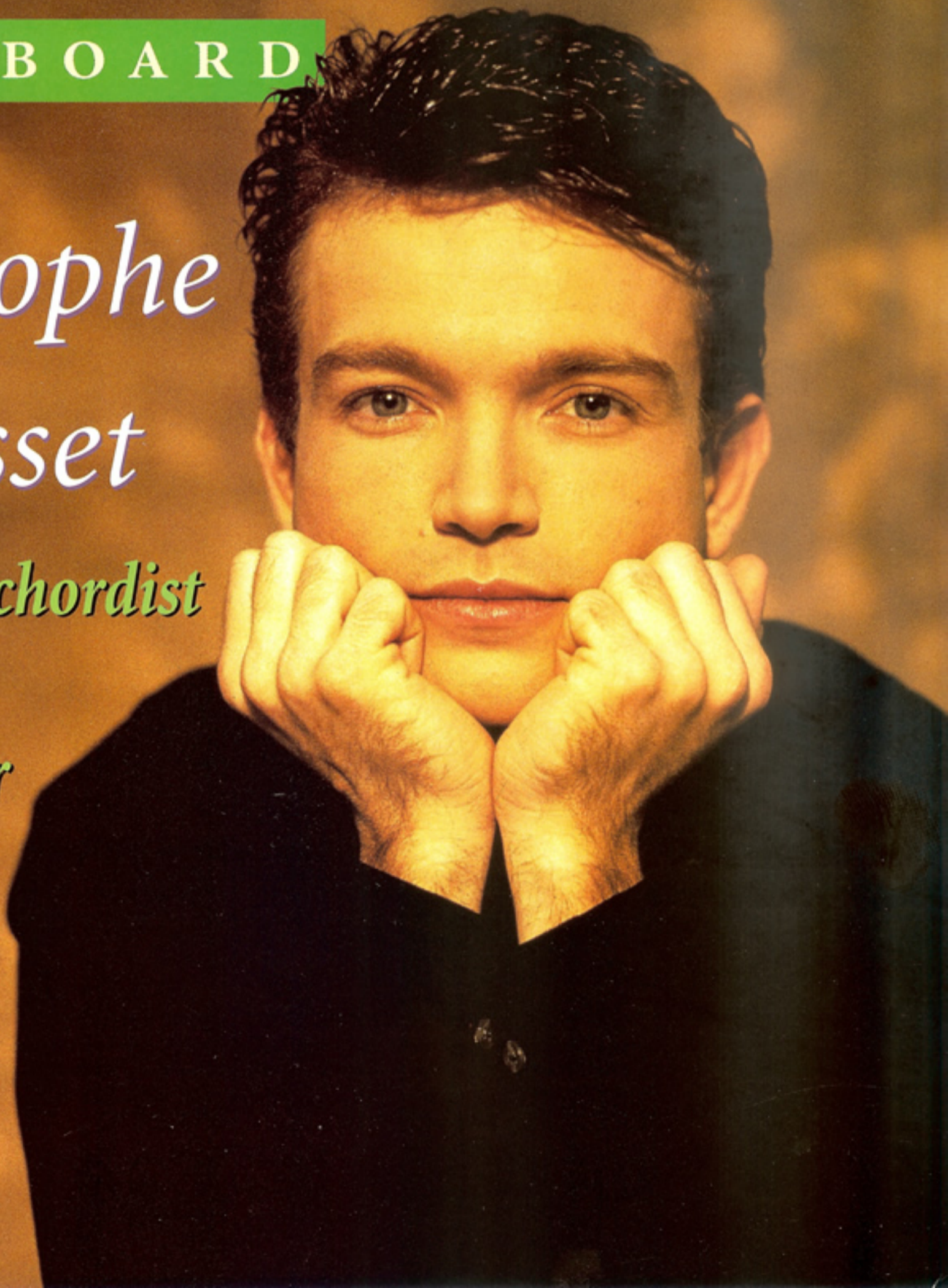
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Leaves of Class

By Bradford Gowen

In Shape: Concerto in Three Movements for Two Pianos and Marimba, by Robert Greenberg. Fallen Leaf Press, PO Box 10034, Berkeley, CA 94709. 1991. Two scores and marimba part, \$60.00.

FALLEN LEAF PRESS publishes beautiful editions of contemporary music. The clear notation, informative résumés of composers' careers, good paper, and elegant gray covers indicate a commitment to production quality that leads one to approach the music with respect. The only negative aspect is the relatively high price of some of the pieces.

One of the most intriguing items in Fallen Leaf's catalogue is Robert Greenberg's *In Shape*, a 22-minute exploration of the possibilities for melding two pianos and a marimba into a kind of three-headed superinstrument—a piamarimbano?—that shows

New Music for Performance

itself off to brilliant effect. The marimba part is imaginative, idiomatic, and demanding. In writing for the pianos, Greenberg emphasizes their marimba-like qualities, giving tremolos and articulated, percussive effects precedence over lyricism. Thus, a unified "territory" of sonority is achieved among the three instruments.

There is no orchestra in this concerto; it is a work for three equal virtuoso soloists. Presumably the composer reached for the term "concerto" with the same impulse that Beethoven felt when he titled his "Kreutzer" sonata for violin and piano *Sonata per il Piano-forte ed un Violino obbligato, scritta in uno stilo brillante molto concertante, quasi come d'un Concerto*. The three solo instruments are connected through their constant interplay of sonority, rhythm, and gesture.

The publisher's note gives a clear sense of the work. "The title *In Shape*

refers both to the physical condition of the players demanded by the piece and to the thematic content that characterizes each movement. The first movement, 'Wedge,' has a heroic—even bombastic—nature. Based on an expanding wedge-shaped motive, this is the most outwardly concerto-like movement of the piece. . . . The second movement, 'Labyrinth,' is a long cadenza for marimba. The title refers to the harmonic paths created by the tremolo pianos, which direct the mallet player. . . . to a tranquil and mysterious refuge at the end. The title of the third movement, 'Spike,' refers both to the

explosive *martellato* accents from which the texture is built and to the overall hammered effect of the movement."

Nervous energy pervades this piece, whether in an exultant moment or in a driving, mechanical effect. Even its quieter moods usually have a core of anxiety. A glance at the score gives a false impression of static nervousness, but closer examination reveals an evolving form. To create an effective performance, the players will have to resolve the demands of precision and aggressiveness with the projection of mood changes achieved through shifts of texture, movement, and

IN SHAPE

Concerto for Two Pianos and Marimba

I. WEDGE

Robert Greenberg (1990)

PIANO I

PIANO II

MARIMBA

poco rit. a tempo

poco rit. a tempo

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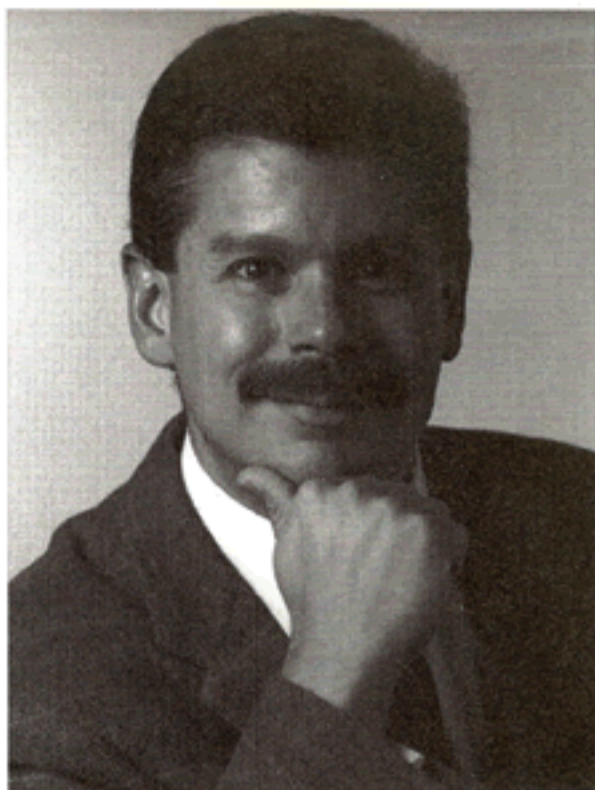
dynamics. The result could be a compelling experience as well as a stunning demonstration of technical and ensemble virtuosity.

Composer Robert Greenberg was born in 1954 and is on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Ever mindful of the creator of the music, the publisher provides a final note that is a nice touch: "Programs of public performances of this music, if mailed to the publisher, will be forwarded to the composer and are always much appreciated."

Five Short Piano Pieces, by Richard Felciano. Fallen Leaf Press, PO Box 10034, Berkeley, CA 94709. 1992. 12 pp., \$23.00.

THESE FIVE BRIEF pieces, commissioned by the Music Teachers Association of California, last about eight minutes altogether. Within that time the ear is confronted with some unconventional sounds that reward careful listening. Composer Richard Felciano has long been interested in new ways of producing sonorities, an interest that led him in 1987 to found the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is a professor of music.

The first, third, and last pieces in this set are most aggressively "sound pieces."



WORK IT ON OUT: Robert Greenberg's *In Shape* demands that players be in top physical and mental form.

The first, "Trumpets for the Apparition of the God of Harmony," alternates short staccato bursts with "silences" timed in durations of specific seconds. These silences are actually filled with resonances from the undamped strings in the bass, whose keys have been silently depressed. The resonances vary in intensity according to what was played preced-

ing them. (The piece can be played on either an upright or a grand piano.) The third piece, "A Distant Singing," is a study in foreground and background, the "singing" fragments being in the background. Here again, accumulation of resonance during the pedaled "rests" engages the ear. "The Pendulum of Heaven," the last piece, is about big, booming bells from which emerge higher, more brilliant peals "like the butterfly that takes wing from the cocoon," in the composer's words. As in so many bell-ringing pieces for students, the pedal is held the whole time—or, as Felciano puts it, "Pedal I depressed throughout, but cheer up."

Piece number two, "Directions," has the fingers scampering in (mostly) five-finger fragments, while number four, "Drums," is a piece of latter-day primitivism with a few tricky rhythms. In all these short compositions there is enough going on sonically and intellectually to keep a student's attention, and enough repetition to facilitate learning.

Divertimento (1990) for Two Pianos, by Frank La Rocca. Fallen Leaf Press, PO Box 10034, Berkeley, CA 94709. 1990. Two scores, \$27.00.

HERE IS A five-and-a-half-minute bit of fun guaranteed to put its players in high

Commissioned by the Music Teachers Association of California
Five Short Piano Pieces

Richard Felciano

I. Trumpets for the Apparition of the God of Harmony

(♩ = 80, ♪ = 320)
3" 4" 2" 4" 5" 3"

Silently depress the two triads indicated while engaging Pedal II (sostenuto). Hold Pedal II down continuously until the beginning of the final brace. Use no other pedals. Sustain the upper triad with the left hand. Play all notes with the right hand. The piano must be in tune.

Divertimento

for Genevieve

Frank La Rocca

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