music takes him, and the result is quite stirring in its poetry and alarming in its dramatic effect. Too often, I think, pianists take the titling of these works at face value and too seriously. They're called sonatas; therefore, they must be played as sonatas. This misses the point that the term didn't hold the same meaning for Chopin that it did for Haydn and Mozart, or even for Beethoven and Schubert. Chopin's sonatas are something different, a new wine poured into a new bottle that still bears an old label. But the label belies the bottle's newly blended varietals.

I sense that Kobrin gets this. His readings of the sonatas, in spite of their titles, are programmatic in feeling. They tell stories, mostly of tragic death and futile cursing of the darkness. As I listened to Kobrin's B♭-Minor Second Sonata (the "Funeral March") in its entirety, a novel thought occurred to me: This is Schubert's *Der Erlkönig* on an epic scale—the desperate galloping figure in the first movement, the mounting horror in the second movement, the inevitable interment and lament in the third movement, and in the finale, the utter vanity and meaninglessness of it all. The B-Minor Sonata (No. 3) is no happier an affair, though it calls forth no specific graphic imagery or literary allusions for me. Nonetheless, its grimness and menace are palpable in Kobrin's hands. One does have to acknowledge, however, that Chopin seems finally to have bowed to convention in the sonata's finale, ending the piece on a resounding B-Major chord.

Chopin didn't compose much, if any, music of an explicitly programmatic nature in the manner, say, of Schumann's character and descriptive pieces. Chopin found his calling instead mainly in dance forms—mazurkas, polonaises, and waltzes—as well as in abstract études, preludes, scherzos, and ballades, and in mood setting pieces, such as nocturne and barcarolle. But implicit in much of his music are elements of storytelling and the narrative which are at the heart of the Romantic ethos. Whether it's Alexander Kobrin's Russian roots or not I can't say for sure, but the Romantic ethos is strongly felt in his playing of Chopin's sonatas. You can hear it in the pulse-quickening drama he brings to the scores and in the tonal nuances and emotional expression he brings to his phrasing, his shifts in tempo, and in the coloration of his dynamics.

I find myself more drawn to Chopin by Kobrin than I am by many of the pianists who are well loved for their playing of the composer's music, pianists such as Horowitz, Rubinstein, Vladimir Ashkenazy, and Van Cliburn, among a bevy of other famous names. But anyone who can make me appreciate Chopin in the way Kobrin can has to be an artist of very special talent and communicative power. Just imagine how much more admiring of Kobrin I'd be if only I actually liked Chopin. **Jerry Dubins**

Beautiful Things Repeat Themselves: An Interview with Klaus Martin Kopitz

BY JACQUELINE KHAROUF

This interview marks the third time that I have spoken with German composer and musicologist Klaus Martin Kopitz. As in our previous conversations, he is as open and forthcoming (and patient) as ever, but here we dive into more of the particular techniques, styles, and inspirations (from both classical and contemporary music) that comprise something I can only describe as the "Mia Sound." Such a term—coined from Kopitz's music-writing pseudonym Mia Brentano—encapsulates not only the auditory colors and textures of his music, but the connections he invents between memories and other works of art: visual, musical, film, or literary. In our earlier interviews (please see issue 42:1 Sept/Oct 2018 and issue 43:1 Sept/Oct 2019), we discussed Mia Brentano at length and unpacked some of the reasons why she is utilized both as a type of narrative device and a concept for Kopitz's expressive and creative side. Here again, we revisit someone I'd like to consider a mutual friend, an otherworldly idea who sometimes speaks in repeating phrases, dabbles in jazz themes, and unspools her stories across chords and densely three-dimensional rhythms.

I feel very lucky to speak with Kopitz about his composition process, his working relationship with the musicians who perform his incredible works, his experiences of living in Berlin both before and after the wall, and his third album, *Mia Brentano's Summerhouse*.

When I first listened to this album, one of the most notable aspects of what I've come to think of as the "Mia Sound" is your use of repetition. Repetition—by which I mean repeating phrases, and even the use of repeat notations in the score—not only creates a space and therefore demands a listener's attention, but also creates an auditory "texture" in which a repeated phrase may be an established baseline, or a launching point, for a more dynamic or more melodic line or for creating a sense of evolution, in which deviations from such a baseline standout and have a greater impact on the listener (as in Unsung Song*).*

Thank you for asking me about such compositional aspects. Yes, there are repetitions of entire sections, i.e., quasi mere copies, but also varied repetitions. In this case only one baseline is repeated—as in Pachelbel's famous Chaconne—which then becomes the basis for an improvisation that unfolds over it. I think repetitions are very important; all people want beautiful things to repeat themselves, and so it is with music. In addition, this is a way to give pieces a structure, a shape. But what repetitions do can be very different. Repetitions can have a calming effect, such as the prelude to Wagner's opera *Das Rheingold,* which consists of only one extremely long, pulsating E♭-Major chord. For me, this music radiates a great, almost sublime calm. You might experience the repetitions in minimal music in a similar way, although there are always little changes, especially in very motoric pieces, i.e., in *Electric Counterpoint* by Steve Reich. But repetitions can also build up tension and convey the feeling: Something could happen at any moment, a change has to occur. So repetitions can also be very dynamic and drive the music forward. Last but not least there's also a very special kind of repetition, the chorus of a song. Here it should be so that the listener is happy when the passage is repeated—maybe he even sings along. It's like meeting a good friend again. I've tried to use all of these different forms of repetition. If I've actually used repetition signs for some repetitions—sometimes even for very short phrases that could just as easily have been written down again—it's also for practical reasons: the more repetition signs there are, the less the musicians have to turn pages.

A piece like Funky Fox *has a playful texture, while* Alone at the Lakeside *is also playful but feels funny, almost humorous. Pieces like* Drifting *and* Walking in Starlight *are soft and floating, with an almost ethereal texture. These auditory textures are so much more subtle than the textures in your second album* Mia Brentano's River of Memories: A Mystery Trip*, which utilized recorded noises and spoken word or narration and synthesizer sounds. With this third album, were you intentionally taking a step back from the collaging and layering of that second album, or did you develop the sound of this third album based on pieces you may have already been working to complete? Or to ask in another way, do you group pieces together on an album based on a particular theme, perhaps, or a particular tonal landscape that you wish to create?*

Both albums are certainly very different experiences for the listener. But the development process was actually similar, in both working in the studio played an important role. Basically, this is the result of my experience with electronic music as it can be heard on the second album. I learned that a studio offers enormous possibilities when it comes to creating music, not just in terms of sound. I find it strange that few contemporary composers use these possibilities. They are of course used in pop music, including film music. But modern "classical" music, for example chamber music or music with orchestra, is still almost exclusively created for a performance in the concert hall, where it's often given only mediocre playing—and hardly rehearsed before. Wouldn't it be better to create contemporary music in the studio, especially if it's a little bit complicated? In the studio you not only can make corrections, but also add some reverberation, insert overdubs, and even change the tempo afterwards until the recording really sounds optimal. The possibilities offered by the cut alone are fantastic. It's similar to a movie.

When the recordings were over, we had about 10 hours of music, and then it was a matter of finding the crucial hour for the CD, the best tracks. It was an exciting process on all three albums, at the end of which a kind of "collage" always emerged—in principle also with piano music. However, we only used technology discreetly here, because it shouldn't sound "artificial" under any circumstances. One of the few exceptions is *She Needs the Wind*. Here we worked with overdubs in a few places because I needed a third piano. We also used a fadeout for *It's Dripping on My Roof*. In any case, I have a lot more control over the result in the studio than I do in a concert hall. As I said,

it amazes me that so far only a few musicians have used the enormous advantages of studio work, although there are famous role models, such as Glenn Gould and Vladimir Horowitz, and of course pop musicians, especially The Beatles. They gave their last concert in San Francisco on August 29, 1966, after which—until 1970—they only worked in the studio. As far as I'm concerned, the conceptual work, collecting ideas and shaping them, always starts off. It can be a very long process. I usually create several pieces at the same time without first knowing whether and how they can be put together to form a cycle. At some point later, however, I actually wonder whether there might be similarities or connections, whether there are several pieces on a certain topic, as you said.

I appreciate having the sheet music to follow as I listened to this album. It helped me understand how you "build" the music, or the language you use for the two pianos to speak to each other and the overall sound (or narrative) they create as a partnership. The two parts sometimes trade ideas—carrying phrases and harmonies, and then flipping or reversing roles at a certain point in the piece (as in Roads into Dusk*)—but the two parts are also sometimes completing each other's phrases (as in* Alone at the Lakeside *and* Drifting*). Performing a piece for four hands seems like very delicate work and seems to rely on a certain intuition between the performers, who must have a complete understanding of the rhythm and time of each piece, each duet. In terms of composition, is it somehow easier—or perhaps a way of breaking down the exact elements of the particular sound or tone or mood that you want to create—to write for four hands, to see four lines of notations? Or, do you begin writing with an idea already in mind, which you already know will be a piece for two pianos (or a solo)?*

Indeed, I usually start with four staves in order to be open and free to ideas of all kinds from the outset. So it's no problem to add something at any time. But it's important to really stay free, so not to want to force yourself that both pianists have a "full-time job." The breaks are also important, and sometimes just one piano should be playing alone. It's similar to an orchestral piece: Not all instruments always play, as that would quickly be tiresome and there would be no possibility of increase. Overall, I really like piano duos, including the way the two partners sometimes "speak," as you call it, or throw ideas at each other. On the other hand, pieces for two pianos are always a great challenge. I don't have a tried and tested "recipe" to use. There's no routine. Both writing and playing are difficult. There are simply a lot of individual voices, important voices, less important ones, and you still have to oversee it all and not lose sight of the overall sound and shape. As I said: Unfortunately there's no recipe, no routine. After all, in the end each piece should be unique and distinctive. Whether it will be a piece for one piano or for two pianos isn't necessarily decisive. It was often the case that this was only decided in the course of the work. I could also imagine some pieces with an orchestra, especially *Before Sunrise* or *Walking in Starlight*.

The "Mia Sound" is notable for the two pianos, creating a fuller and more complex piano sound that is, at the same time, improvisational, conversational, close, and intimate. The tone also oscillates between warm and cool colors. I am intrigued by this sound because, mysteriously enough, it is actually not dependent on the sound of two pianos at all. This album also includes five pieces for solo piano—the first piece, The Letter, Desert Island, Sleepy Landscape*, and the two bonus tracks that are arrangements of original pieces by Henry Mancini,* Days of Wine and Roses *and* Moon River*. Would you tell me a little more about your arrangements for solo piano and how your composition process for a single piano might differ from your writing process for two?*

The pieces really sound very colorful, very complex when they are played by two good pianists. There are far more possibilities for differentiation than with a piano alone, almost like an orchestra. But there's a little problem: The pieces only sound good if both pianists play exactly together in time and tempo, completely in sync, if they are on the same wavelength, so to speak. You mentioned it earlier. It's really very tricky. If a string quartet doesn't play well together, hardly anyone hears it, but in a piano duo everyone hears it. This has to do with the fact that the sound of a piano is similar to that of a drum kit, because it's also produced percussively, with a hit on the string. Both pianists have to play with the precision of a metronome in order to produce a really homogeneous sound. The fast, virtuoso pieces are less difficult than the slow ones, where every inaccuracy is particularly noticeable. A ritardando or even a rubato is almost impossible. Nevertheless, at the end of some pieces I prescribed a slackening of the pace, and I think Benny and Billy played it fantastically well. Even

with these extremely difficult passages, I feel as if I'm only hearing one instrument. From this point of view, one of my favorite passages is the end of *Angel in the Rain*, the last two bars, in which there is a surprising change in style at the same time. Shortly before, the piece oscillates a little undecided between Schubert, Rachmaninoff, and a jazz ballad, but then suddenly Bach emerges, very quietly, very clearly. So maybe he's that angel? But he only shows up for a very short time and then disappears again. Anyway, tempo fluctuations of all kinds as occur here, or even completely free play, are no problem at all if a pianist plays alone, i.e., as a soloist. That was the reason to include some pieces for piano solo for a change. The very different, much freer way of playing that's made possible by this is shown quite well in the first piece, *The Letter*, played by Billy Test. Several times he brakes extremely fast, only to accelerate again immediately afterwards. That would not have been possible with two pianos. In terms of composition, it doesn't really make a big difference whether I write for one or two pianos.

And, in terms of the bonus tracks, did you influence the pianists to possibly incorporate the "Mia Sound" into their arrangements? Or were these bonus track arrangements purely improvised by the pianists who perform all the music on this album? (Benyamin Nuss arranged and performed Days of Wine and Roses*; Billy Test arranged and performed* Moon River*.)*

The idea for the bonus tracks came about after a concert that Benyamin Nuss gave on March 6, 2020 in Dessau as part of the Kurt Weill Festival. There he performed at the end with Gershwin's Piano Concerto and then improvised over two jazz standards, *My Funny Valentine* and *Days of Wine and Roses*. It was absolutely gorgeous; the hall was raging. Since the concert was recorded by a radio station, I immediately considered whether we could use one of the encores for my next album. But Benyamin told me that he didn't think it was that good, though he would like to re-record it in the studio if I wanted that. I asked skeptically: Can you repeat an improvisation? But he said it wasn't a problem; he had memorized every single note. When Billy Test was added to the production, I wished he would improvise on a jazz standard too, and by chance both pianists chose a song by Henry Mancini. I didn't influence this in any way. It was, however, the case that both had prepared extremely well for the production, so that—when the recordings of my pieces were finished—we still had a lot of time for experiments. The bonus tracks are only a "best of" this session, or in other words: it was I who suggest the selection. That was all I did.

I also want to ask about when these pieces were written and how or why you decide to include pieces that were composed long ago with pieces that are more recent. What does that space between when you first composed a piece and when you "finished" it (or decide it is ready to be recorded) tell you about your process as a composer? Or, is it simply a method of self-editing or even, in a way, communicating with a past version of yourself—as the persona of "Mia" has come to represent?

I worked on some pieces for a really long time, or rather they came about over a long period of time. As I now re-studied and corrected some of them, it was indeed as if I were encountering myself, in a younger "version," or as if I were seeing this person in the mirror. Maybe you could call her "Mia." Among these old pieces were some for piano solo, including *The Letter*. I wrote it in January 1988 for a theater production and played it myself at the time. Over the years I wrote other pieces for piano solo, but only a few. When I was thinking about the conception of this album, the idea occurred to me: It would actually be good if not all pieces were for two pianos. I've already mentioned the reason: One pianist alone has more freedom in design, especially in setting the tempo. And so I incorporated some of those old things. But there were also pieces, especially pieces for two pianos, that remained half-finished for many years, for example *Funky Fox*. The first two pages with the basic idea were created on May 25, 1985, in a few minutes, but the impulse to finish the piece only came in 2020 when I began to come up with a concept for the new CD. It then happened very quickly, too. The fact that pieces like this were finished much later has a simple reason: in 1985, even later, there was no one who could have played them, so I didn't have to hurry. The good, classically trained pianists I knew played only classical music, anything else was out of the question for them. The pianists who dealt with pop or jazz, on the other hand, had only very limited technical skills. They were unable to play a virtuoso piece from notes. There were of course exceptions, such as Friedrich Gulda, but he was out of reach for me, and I didn't need just one but two pianists of this format. It was completely hopeless. That only changed on November 24, 2010, when I heard

Benyamin Nuss for the first time in the Berlin Philharmonie. It was a "classical" piano evening in which he played mainly pieces by Nobuo Uematsu, a Japanese composer who became famous with soundtracks for computer games, especially for *Final Fantasy.* On April 21, 2011 I heard Benyamin again, this time in the Berlin jazz club "A-Trane." It was a fantastic experience, like the beginning of a new era, at least for me. I really saw Benyamin as a new type of musician that didn't exist before. For him there are no "limits" in music; he can play anything, all styles and genres, and he does it too. Later, through him, I got to know others who are similarly "universal" musicians, including Max Nyberg from Sweden, Andy Miles from Germany, and Billy Test from the USA. All four are also very good composers, so our communication, even on musical issues, was never a problem. We understood each other immediately, without many words. Every kind of music needs certain kinds of artists, and as long as they don't exist, it's difficult to write music for them. However, I own a Yamaha Disklavier, a computer-controlled grand piano, which can play everything I write quite well for me. This is also a great help when composing, especially with such complex textures as the music for two pianos represents.

One of my favorite aspects of your music is the feeling of nostalgia that it creates. I think your music really speaks to me as a writer because writers are very concerned about the past—reflecting on what happened and what it meant and why something happened and the decisions that led to that happening—and in some ways, writing, in a sense (at least for me) is about attempting to relive the past. I know it is impossible, hence my nostalgia, but the act of writing has meaning, despite that futility. Are you comfortable with nostalgia? Or is the nostalgia that I hear in this music more of a confrontation with the past that should in some way feel unsettling or unresolved to the listener?

I'm actually a happy, contented person, but I think life also includes feelings of melancholy or nostalgia. It almost happens by itself: when we remember things in the past, especially beautiful things, nostalgia sets in, maybe even sadness. It's already the same for young people, not just older people like me. Paul McCartney was only 23 years old when he wrote *Yesterday*, a song in which he wistfully remembers a former girlfriend. It also became one of The Beatles' most successful songs. Many people apparently recognized themselves in it and have had similar experiences. Yes, I also find some of my own pieces to be very melancholy, such as *I Was Seventeen, Unsung Song, Strange Little Boy, Sleepy Landscape,* and *Angel in the Rain*. As the titles partially suggest, they're actually about memories, things that are over, things that can no longer be changed, or simply nostalgia. *Strange Little Boy*—that could be me when I was a kid. Sometimes I also get melancholic when I try to imagine how different my life would have been if I had found artists earlier who could play my music—and who even like to do it. But we cannot change the past; we can only write about it, interpret and evaluate it, you as a writer or I as a musician. On the other hand, my music isn't "modern" music, so then it cannot quickly become "out of fashion." At least I hope not. I mean, it probably doesn't matter if *The Letter* was made in 1988 or 2021. I also like to refer to composers from the past. For example, *Roads into Dusk* begins like a prelude by Bach, very calmly and evenly, almost emotionless. At the beginning, perhaps, it also resembles certain works of minimal music. Later, jazz chords are included. In *Desert Island* there are again some dissonant, atonal passages that may be reminiscent of Schoenberg. A composer should of course create something completely his own, music that's as unmistakable as a painting by Modigliani. But you can't force that. It just happens—or it doesn't. I read in a book about Scriabin that as a young man he wanted to compose like Chopin. But he didn't manage to imitate him. In the end, he was satisfied with the fact that his music sounds like Scriabin. It was similar with Gershwin—with him it was Ravel, from whom he would have liked to learn how to compose "even better." With The Beatles, the question actually arises as to whether they have created their own style, because they have often imitated other styles. I think of *When I'm Sixty-Four*, where they imitate this old-fashioned jazz. But I think, like in many other songs, it ended up with something of its own. Anyway, I like to look back, to remember. I also think that this gives life a certain seriousness and depth. But of course you shouldn't overdo it. You surely know the nice anecdote about the score for *Schindler's List*. John Williams actually didn't want to write it and said to Spielberg: "Steven, I really think you need a better composer than I am for this film." And he replied: "I know, but they're all dead." Yes, perhaps. But it's still good that Williams accepted the job.

We have already talked in the past about Mia Brentano as pseudonym, as Doppelgänger*, to*

Klaus as musicologist. That dynamic seems, in some way, to be represented by the two pianos, the two performers. In a way, you are writing for both sides of your personality—the creative, personal, emotional side (Mia) and the serious, organized, logical side (Klaus). It seems that Mia still has so much to express and say and explore in music. Are you continually surprised by the ideas and the themes that emerge from this creative collaboration?

I think it's really good to have such a *Doppelgänger* for my music, an imaginary counterpart, and it's also good that it's a woman because it creates a certain tension. The original idea was initially just to separate my work as a musicologist from that as a composer by publishing the latter under a pseudonym. Later I went a little further and tried to think up little stories about Mia. Corresponding role models exist, especially in German literature. E. T. A. Hoffmann invented the figure of the conductor Johannes Kreisler, to whom he lent tales from his life. This in turn was the model for Schumann's *Kreisleriana*. Hermann Hesse later took up Hoffmann's idea again, in his novel *The Glass Bead Game*. You're certainly right that these two different identities could also be symbolized by the two pianos, I like the idea very much. But the music is also a *Doppelgänger* itself. It has a very emotional side, but also a very scientific one. Music has a lot to do with math, too. I really think that this diverse field of tension is an inexhaustible source of ideas.

You also mentioned that Joni Mitchell's song The Priest *and Jimi Hendrix's song* Drifting *were inspirational to this album. I think that I hear elements of these pieces within some of the tracks—or maybe, I sense of an overall tone or mood that seems related to your pieces—the narrative quality and mysterious, almost hypnotic rhythm and tone of* The Priest *is most definitely detectable in the themes and sequencing of the album; as well as the kind of circular patterning that seems to almost become jazz but then isn't quite fully realized in* Drifting*, which also seems to be a part of your compositions too—but, I wonder if you would discuss a bit of why these songs were important for your album. And I'm curious if you would recommend listeners of your album to also pair their listening experience with* The Priest *and* Drifting*.*

Both Jimi Hendrix and Joni Mitchell mean a lot to me. I could list many songs from both that have shaped me. I also think that both are (or were) primarily distinctive composers who created their own musical language. It's often said that Hendrix was "the best guitarist of all time," that is, a style-shaping interpreter. Perhaps, but he almost never played works by other composers, and he would probably have failed because he couldn't read music—like Joni Mitchell, who also cannot read music. But aren't their performances as interpreters secondary? What counts are above all their achievements as composers, because a composer is something greater—at least that's what you can say about these two. I mean, would anyone say that Beethoven was a great pianist? No, even if it's true: his performance as an interpreter disappears behind his gigantic compositional *oeuvre*. In any case, I would think it would be very nice if people would listen to Jimi and Joni even more under this aspect—also in comparison with the pieces on my album.

*During our second interview, we referenced your time living and working in East Berlin prior to the destruction of the wall. I wanted to follow-up with you on living and working in your home country, Germany, now. When I listen to your music, for some reason I make associations to landscapes and feelings I've had while traveling in the U.S. (*Roads into Dusk *is definitely reminiscent of a feeling I know from driving home on long road trips I used to take between Denver, where I live now, and South Dakota, where I mostly grew up), but perhaps there is more of an association to your home country or feelings associated while interacting with the city and countrysides of Germany. I find it fascinating that we may have been in Berlin at about the same time, at an important time in that city's history. My father was stationed at Hahn Air Base in the late 1980s, before the wall came down, and my parents have told me a story about all of us driving in our car through Checkpoint Charlie to visit East Berlin. They had bought a brand new powder-blue Volvo station wagon, and as they drove it through East Berlin, my parents said people stopped on the street and stared at the car. We also went into some stores and ate at a restaurant. My parents said the stores had mostly empty shelves and that the restaurant was so cheap that we ordered just about everything on the menu. I should clarify here too—I sadly don't have any memories myself of Germany (I was four years old when we left) and that I only know these stories based on the experience of my parents. They told me*

I befriended two boys who lived next door and that they were older but nice to me. I think they raised sheep. My mother gave piano lessons during the day. Whenever I ask my mother about the time when we lived in Germany, she always calls Berlin a haunted city. What is your relationship with this place and how does that inform or perhaps inspire your work as a composer?

Together with my wife, I traveled through the USA myself in October 2015, first by train from New York to Niagara Falls, to Canada, and a few days later from there to Boston, this time by car. It was great to experience these wonderful, wide landscapes. We were particularly impressed by the huge Adirondack Park with its mountains and rivers, as well as the people who live there and who, by the way, were all very kind, also curious, and liked to speak with us. We were out for a whole week and never knew in the morning where we would be in the evening. The cities in which we stopped had such beautiful names as Canajoharie, Saratoga Springs, Canandaigua, Lake Placid, and Concord. In Concord we also visited the famous Sleepy Hollow Cemetery with the graves of Thoreau and Emerson. Sorry if I tell you this in detail; I just want to say: *Roads into Dusk* is probably mainly inspired by this trip, not so much by a trip through my homeland. I'm very happy that these feelings carried over to you and that the piece reminds you of your own travels through the USA.

Nevertheless, of course, I also love my homeland and like to live in Berlin, especially since we have a house in a very idyllic location. From my study I look directly onto a small lake. In the immediate vicinity is a villa where Bertolt Brecht used to live. All in all, it's a beautiful city with lots of trees and parks, and many lakes in the area. It's also a very lively, creative city with a lot of culture. That has to do with the many people from all over the world who live here. In this respect, I find it very inspiring to live here, to which the long history of the city also contributes. I think of the seething era of the "Roaring Twenties," when Brecht and Weill wrote *The Threepenny Opera* here, but also of the terrible time during the Second World War, when Berlin was the metropolis of unimaginable crimes. For me, Berlin was above all the "city with the wall," where I unfortunately lived on the "wrong" side. I had a map of New York at the time that I would sometimes pull out and mentally take for a walk in Greenwich Village. It's really fascinating that you and your parents were also here at the time. We could have met.

Looking back, I don't necessarily see East Berlin in the 1980s as a ghost town, but at least as a dreary, boring, poor, and broken place. But it just so happened that life mostly took place at home, in the apartments, not on the street, not in public. At home you met up with friends and could talk about anything. What I missed a lot back then were people from other countries, from other cultures. Every now and then you met people from West Berlin, in the theater or in the opera, it was always a big event. I then quietly went looking for the few foreigners who lived in East Germany. I mean "real" foreigners, not people from West Berlin, but from Ethiopia, France, Iceland, Korea, or Nigeria. You can hear some of their voices on my second CD, *River of Memories*. Since the wall disappeared, a lot has changed, mostly for the better, but not only: At the moment it's hardly possible to find an affordable apartment. This is a difficult situation especially for young people, for students, and also for artists. But overall I like the city a lot. Most of all, it's impossible to live here and turn a blind eye to history. One is reminded again and again, downright forced to deal with it, to look into the past. This city doesn't leave you indifferent, I think.

At the conclusion of our last interview, you mentioned that you were thinking about working on a bigger production, possibly for orchestra. Do you still have plans to work on a project of this scale? Or has the pandemic hampered some of these plans?

In fact, I wanted to realize an album for piano and orchestra, indeed. The recordings should have taken place in Cologne from February 1 to 5, 2021. Detailed arrangements had already been made, and part of the orchestral material was even finished. But then we had to give up the project as a result of the pandemic in November 2020. I suffered a lot from it for a few days, but then I asked Michael Breugst, the chamber music producer, if we couldn't realize at least a new project for two pianos, and that wasn't a problem. He was in favor immediately and gave me a specific date. Before that I knew from Benyamin Nuss that he had already played several times together with Billy Test, the pianist of the WDR Big Band. Benny said Billy is fantastic and I thought: OK, let's do it. In retrospect, I'm almost happy that it turned out that way, and I'm very grateful to everyone involved.

But an album with an orchestra is definitely still a dream of mine. We will see. I would also be interested in a live project, i.e., a concert—in a concert hall or in a club. I really appreciate the work in the studio, but I could also imagine performing my music live.

BRENTANO ***The Letter***[2]***. Roads Into Dusk***[1,2]***. Cat in the Window***[1,2]***. Before Sunrise***[1,2]***. I Was Seventeen***[1,2]***. Unsung Song***[1,2]***. Desert Island***[1]***. Birds Leaving the Earth***[1,2]***. Strange Little Boy***[1,2]***. Dreaming Mathilda***[1,2]***. Sleepy Landscape***[1]***. Funky Fox***[1,2]***. Angel in the Rain***[1,2]***. Nightlounge***[1,2]***. She Needs the Wind***[1,2]***. Alone at the Lakeside***[1,2]***. It's Dripping on My Roof***[1,2]***. Red Shoes***[1,2]***. Drifting***[1,2]***. Walking in Starlight***[1,2]***.*** **MANCINI** ***Days of Wine and Roses*** (arr. Nuss)[1]***. Moon River*** (arr. Test)[2] • [1]Benyamin Nuss, [2]Billy Test (pn) • MONS 874700 (66:53)

I am endlessly fascinated by the ways in which composers speak so distinctly with what seem like the simplest of tools: notes and rhythm, instruments and performers. Mia Brentano (via her surrogate, Klaus Martin Kopitz) is no exception. In her new album, *Mia Brentano's Summer House: New Music for 2*, he weaves ideas (hinted at from the titles of her pieces) into short stories and vignettes as told by a soloist at a piano, or conversations and plot-driven narratives as expressed by a pair of pianos. I don't want to reduce this music or say that it's simple. It is hardly simple at all with intricate notations on two clefs, four staves, grace notes, tempos both fast and slow, along with complex rhythms played and traded between four hands. Rather, the music sounds easy and natural to play because of the incredible skills of the two pianists, Benyamin Nuss and Billy Test, who handle solos and duets, as well as their own arrangements in the two bonus tracks.

I listened to this album both without the sheet music—which has recently been published by Ries & Erler (Berlin)—and while reading the score book. But after listening to the album with the sheet music, I realized that I liked not knowing which pieces are performed by a soloist and which pieces are actually performed by two players. And so, I hesitate to recommend that listeners also listen to the music while reading the score. (I should clarify here: *absolutely* buy the sheet music if you read music or play. It's a beautiful book of beautiful music.) I hesitate only because I think following along with the written notes actually removes the illusion Kopitz has created. Then again, reading how Kopitz the composer has layered his composition for each hand, across four staves, and hearing the two pianists form a seamless team to sound like one instrument, also enhanced my listening experience and left me in awe of the incredible work of both the performers and the composer. (I defy anyone listening to *Birds Leaving the Earth*, for an example with a fast tempo, or *Strange Little Boy*, for an example with a slow tempo, to find any disconnection between the two pianists.)

Kopitz/Brentano's music is transportive, nostalgic, and meditative—qualities, perhaps, that represent a sort of blend between contemporary classical music and jazz. This is music that occupies a space between genres (or above genres) and seems to ask very little of the listener. It merely suggests that we remain present, that we consider a repeated phrase in order to remember something—if not about ourselves, then about the ebb and flow of the direction such music takes. In this sense, then, the music is ultimately a narrative, a series of events unfolding for a singular purpose. As listeners, we are invited to daydream of places where we have never been, or to imagine a world where we once existed, some part of ourselves that we can only visit when we reminisce about the past, or about what might have been. **Jacqueline Kharouf**

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I enjoyed both of the two discs by Mia Brentano (the alternative persona of Klaus Martin Kopitz; see the interview by Jacqueline Kharouf in 43:1) that came my way: *Hidden Sea* (*Fanfare* 42:1, which I branded at the time as "Easy Listening for advanced students") and *River of Memories* (*Fanfare* 43:1). Brentano's music remains unclassifiable apart from in misleadingly broad-brush terms. Here is a sequence of some 20 tracks plus two "bonus tracks," one for each of the pianists. The main body of the disc is collectively titled *Summerhouse*, and is split into four groups of five movements each (so four "metamovements," perhaps). What keeps one listening is not just Brentano's variety, or her ability to compel through the slow but natural unfolding of her pieces; it also results from the sheer excellence of the playing and the recording.

Many of the tracks are for two pianos, but each pianist gets his moment. The very first move-

ment, *The Letter*, is a solo for Billy Test, for example; *Desert Island* features Benyamin Nuss alone, this last of more advanced demeanor, notably sophisticated. Each of the first three "metamovements" has one solo number, while the final panel has both pianists playing together throughout. Mia Brentano is a mistress of atmosphere, but she needs performers that understand her music to create that atmosphere: the track *Dreaming Mathilda* seems to sum that up perfectly.

Of the more open, jazzy movements, *Funky Fox* (inspired by the animal) offers light relief and is supremely well written, while the performance is full of definition and rhythmic verve. At the other end of the spectrum is *Nightlounge*, the penultimate song of the third grouping. With the first movement of the last panel, *Alone at the Lakeside*, virtuosity meets Minimalism in a compelling marriage. The very last movement of *Summerhouse*, *Walking in Starlight*, is arguably the most beautiful.

Finally, there come two "bonus tracks," one for each pianist. Nuss plays Henry Mancini's *Days of Wine and Roses* in his own sparkling arrangement, highly individual and compositionally virtuosic, raking in a huge variety of styles within a short space of time. It fizzes with exploratory spirit; moments when everything seems to collide together are moments of magic. Test's arrangement of *Moon River* is swimmy: he creates a slow vortex of sound out of which emerges that famous melody. A beautiful arrangement, and both "encores" (bonus tracks) seem the perfect way to close.

A memorable disc again comes from Mia Brentano, and again is produced with the highest of values. A superb release. **Colin Clarke**

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Mia Brentano is the "muse/friend/alter-ego" of German composer and musicologist Klaus Martin Kopitz (b. 1955). In his liner notes for *Mia Brentano's Summerhouse: New Music for 2 Pianos*, Kopitz recounts one of their visits. The two discuss Brentano's music and its sources of inspiration. At the conclusion, Kopitz writes: "Mia's tightrope walk between styles was finally realised by two wonderful pianists, Benyamin Nuss and Billy Test. As an encore, they play two pieces of their own, based on songs by Henry Mancini: *Days of Wine and Roses* and *Moon River*. I think they fit perfectly in the *SUMMERHOUSE*." I agree with Kopitz's assessment, one that suggests the sustained character and inspiration of *Mia Brentano's Summerhouse*. The influence of the kind of smooth, lyrical, and melodically inspired jazz so characteristic of Mancini's creations abounds in this collection of 20 Brentano works (plus the two encores). But that is just one of many influences and styles at play. Brentano's music also embraces a wide variety of other kinds of jazz and jazz-related approaches, as well as the great popular and classical song traditions of Europe and the U.S. Not only does Brentano explore these various genres, she often features several of them in the same brief piece. But the composer does so with such a confidence and fluidity that the effect is consistently fulfilling, rather than jarring. One might be tempted to characterize the music of *Mia Brentano's Summerhouse* as "easy listening." But to the extent that is accurate, the ease of the listening experience is the gratifying product of Brentano's melodic gifts, expressed with a mastery of various styles and instrumental colors. Benyamin Nuss and Billy Test play the music with great feeling, style, and elegance. Their Mancini arrangements/improvisations are quite lovely, too. The recorded sound falls as graciously on the ear as does Brentano's music. A marvelous disc. **Ken Meltzer**

Reacquaintance and Renewal with Cellist Nathaniel Rosen

BY JERRY DUBINS

Longtime readers—and I mean longtime—may recall a short-lived record label, Desmar, that put out a number of LPs in the mid-to-late 1970s. The rights to some of those releases were were acquired by and transferred to open-reel (aka reel-to-reel) tape under the Barclay-Crocker label. Nathaniel (he likes to be called Nick) Rosen was, at the time, one of America's premier cellists, having won the Gold Medal at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1978. At the age of 13,