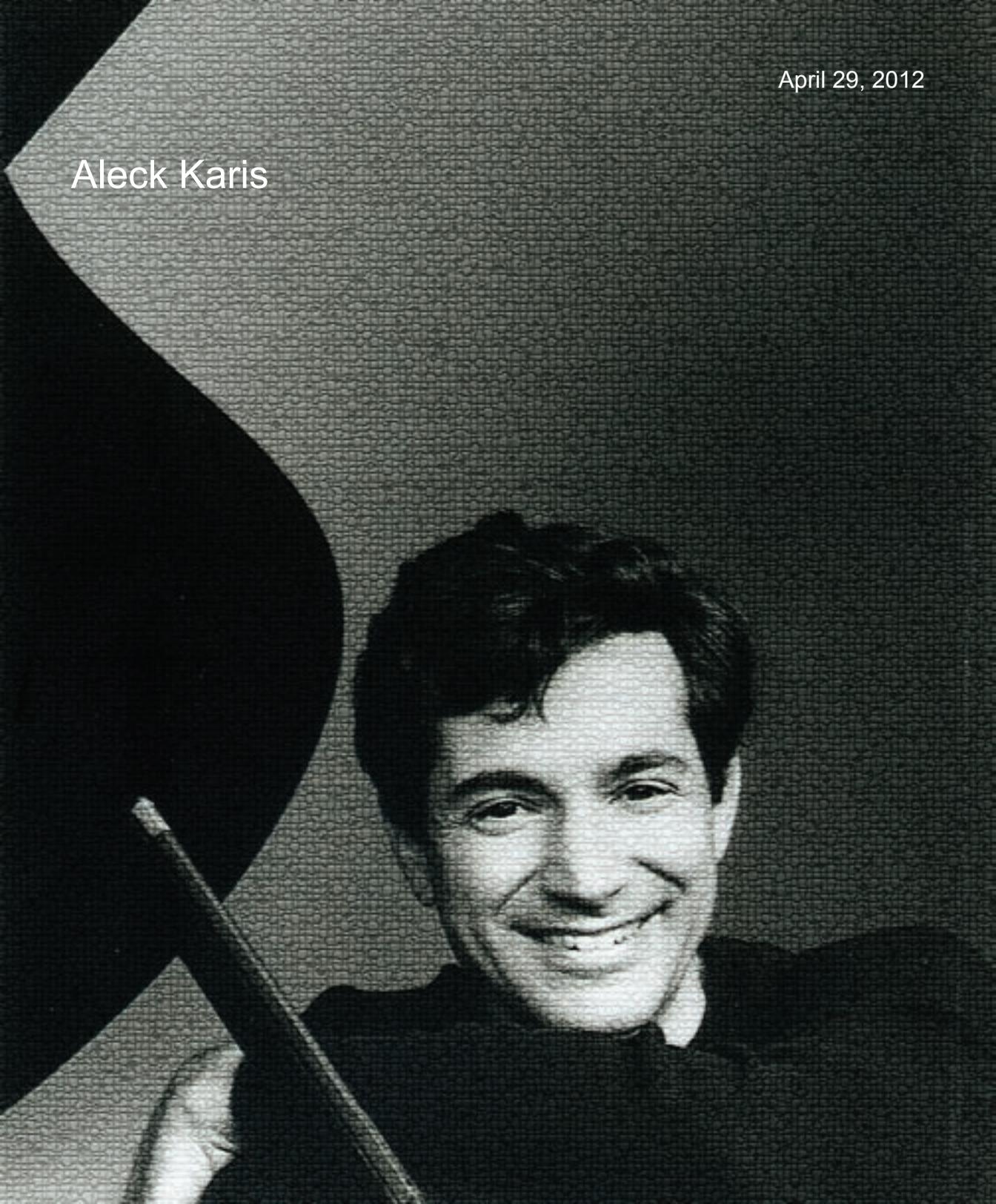


April 29, 2012

Aleck Karis





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box office: (858) 534-3448

Sunday April 29, 2012, 3 pm  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

**PIANIST ALECK KARIS**

**Serenade in A** (1925) Igor Stravinsky  
Hymne  
Romanza  
Rondoletto  
Cadenza Finala

**Sonata, Opus 31, no. 2** (1802) Ludwig van Beethoven  
Largo; Allegro  
Adagio  
Allegretto

**Four Hands+** (2012) Robert Yekovich

intermission

**Fantasy, K.465** (1785) W. A. Mozart

**Sonata, Opus 110** (1821) Ludwig van Beethoven  
Moderato cantabile molto espressivo  
Allegro molto  
Adagio ma non troppo; Recitativo; Klagender Gesang  
Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo

*Please turn off cell phones*

**Program Notes  
by Aleck Karis**

A “Classical” Program

By 1925, Stravinsky had already spent several years in his “neo-classical” period. Fans of his Russian period waited in vain for a return of the brilliance, color and explosive audacity of works like *Petrouchka*, *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces*. Stravinsky’s new music was much more low-key, subdued even, and abounded in references to music from the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Age of Enlightenment values of clarity and wit are paramount. Much of the music is also tinged with melancholy; for me the moods often evoke those of Picasso’s Blue Period, even as the polytonal harmony brings to mind cubism. The *Serenade in A*, written in 1925, has a form influenced by the technology of the time: each of its four movements is short enough to fit on one side of a 78 rpm record. It is not “in A” in any traditional sense. Each movement begins and ends with the note A, but the key A major/minor jostles with other keys (F, G, C# minor, g minor).

The *Hymne* begins episodically, progressing in fits and starts, only arriving at a true hymn-like feeling in its inspired final section. Here an ecstatic sustained three-voice melody is accompanied by a staccato, arpeggiated, bassoon-like accompaniment. In the *Romanza* a recitativo introduction precedes a purely lyrical meditation. The *Rondoletto* is a witty delight, with fairly long passages limited to the seven notes of the A major scale, and some very quick syncopations. The *Cadenza Finala* uses a darker palette to bring the work to a subdued, lyrical close, the *Final La*, a pun Stravinsky found so irresistible that he decided to break the rules of Italian grammar.

Though written during the Classical period, Beethoven’s sonata Op. 31, no. 2 has a stormy vehemence which feels quite Romantic; the nickname “Tempest” (not Beethoven’s) seems particularly apt for the first movement. This movement departs from conventional sonata form in the highly truncated recapitulation. Here all that remains of the first theme are the two opening rolled chords, after each of which Beethoven adds an operatic style recitative, hushed, with the pedal fully depressed throughout – a striking effect the composer called “voices from the cave”. The dignified restraint of the slow movement is occasionally given a martial and somewhat ominous air by a drum-like left hand accompaniment. The final Allegretto features a theme of obsessive and relentless character, in whose treatment and development Beethoven maintains a consistent tone of restless urgency.

I am delighted to introduce a brilliant new work written for me by my old friend Robert Yekovich, *Four Hands+*, which I think flows naturally after Op. 31, no. 2. I hear this work as a kind of Chaconne, in its constant re-working of un-transposed pitch material, and I admire the clear arc of its form. The composer writes:

*Four Hands+* is a work for one live pianist and a second “virtual” pianist as rendered by the pre-recorded electronic sounds. Many of the pre-recorded sounds are essentially those of a concert grand piano; however, at times, the acoustic and timbral qualities of the piano sounds are electronically enhanced so as to provide hybrid sounds not typically made by a concert grand piano.

The live and “virtual” pianists can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from one another, given the similarity between the live and recorded piano sounds and the manner in which the two are combined. In reality, there are times when it sounds like a work for a single pianist and others when it requires the equivalent of four (or even five) hands, plus of course, the electronically enhanced sounds.

The melodic and harmonic materials that comprise the work are stated in the first minute or so of the work and then varied throughout. Hopefully a comprehensible and compelling musical narrative results. This approach is typical of most of my musical compositions.

*Four Hands+* was written with pianist Aleck Karis in mind, whom I have had the good fortune to know for nearly three decades. His vast experience with much of the modern and contemporary repertoires, and overall musical sophistication are all things I greatly admire. *Four Hands+* is comprised of single movement and approximately seven minutes in length.

The fantasy is the most free of classical forms. There are no rules regarding its design, and in place of the joys of a familiar structure and set of expectations one finds improvisatory fancy, daring harmonies, and sharp

contrasts. In K. 475 Mozart does all of this, masterfully. One of the most remarkable things about the work is how many different kinds of music he incorporates while still maintaining a cohesive form. The key scheme is innovative. Mozart avoids the obvious choice of modulating to the relative major, E flat, instead devising an ingenious construction of six highly contrasting sections:

- C minor (moving to b minor)
- D major
- A minor leading to F major
- B flat major
- G minor with a recitative leading back to
- C minor

Beethoven's penultimate sonata, Opus 110, is wonderfully concise in its four movements. The movements flow naturally together, each beginning on the same note the previous one ended with. I have used the same principle in choosing the works on this program. The first movement, marked *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo*, maintains its expressive singing tone and shifting Romantic moods as it moves through a mostly conventional but highly distilled sonata form. The scherzo has a rather dark humor, with a trio that can best be described as unhinged. The return of the scherzo leads directly into a recitative (a recurring feature of this program) and the *Klagender Gesang (Arioso dolente)*, or Lament. This plaintive melody transforms the opening descending notes of the scherzo, and is answered by a fugue whose arching upward fourth come directly from the opening theme of the first movement. The uplifting, positive energy of this fugue is interrupted by a return of the Arioso, a half-step lower, marked "Ermattet" (exhausted). The melody at this point is quite literally falling apart. At its cadence, and having arrived at the lowest point, Beethoven quietly brings back the subject of the fugue in inversion, its shape now a trough rather than an arch. Gradually the music comes to life ("*poi a poi di nuovo vivente*") with inverted and original forms of the subject competing at various speeds (rhythmic diminution and augmentation) and finally leading to a return to the fugue, the key of A flat and a life-affirming end.

*In memory of Mary V. Karis (1925-2012)*

## **Aleck Karis**

For over thirty years, Aleck Karis has been one of the leading pianists in the New York contemporary music scene. He has performed and recorded with many of the city's new music groups and was called on by the New York Philharmonic for its Horizons Festival as well as the return concert of Pierre Boulez. He has been the pianist for Speculum Musicae since 1982 and has performed with that group all over the US and at the Bath, Warsaw Autumn, Geneva "Made in America" festivals and Venice Biennale. He has simultaneously pursued a parallel career as a soloist with orchestra and in recital, performing concertos by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Franck, Ravel, Carter and Hyla. He recently played Stravinsky's *Concerto for Piano and Winds* with the Columbus Symphony and performed Messiaen's *Trois Petites Liturgies* with the New York City Opera Orchestra under George Manahan at the newly refurbished Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center.

Karis' discography includes music by Mozart, Chopin, Schumann, Stravinsky, Carter, Cage, Glass, Babbitt, Martino, Anderson, Liang and Feldman, on Bridge, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World, Neuma, Mode, Centaur and CRI Records. His most recent disc, of late piano music of Frédéric Chopin, was released on Roméo Records in 2009.

Karis studied composition with Charles Wuorinen at the Manhattan School of Music, where he won the Sherman Ewing Composition prize. During his four years at MSM he studied piano privately with Artur Balsam. He worked for two years at Juilliard with Beveridge Webster, receiving a Master's in 1978. His chief piano mentor has been the brilliant Brazilian-American teacher William Daghlian.

Karis is a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego, and Associate Dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities.

Robert Yekovich is the fifth dean of the Shepherd School of Music and is also the Elma Schneider Professor of Music at Rice University. Prior to coming to Rice in 2003, he was Dean of Music at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

## **Robert Yekovich**

Dean Yekovich holds a bachelor's and master's of music from the University of Denver Lamont School of Music and a Doctor of Musical Arts from Columbia University. He has held teaching positions at Columbia Univer-

sity, Connecticut College, the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and the University of Denver.

Dean Yekovich is a composer whose works have been performed and broadcast throughout North and South America. His honors include a commission from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University. He serves on many boards including the New York chapter of the League of Composers/International Society for Contemporary Music, the Houston Symphony, the Houston Friends of Chamber Music, the Eastern Shore Chamber Music Festival, the Wellesley Composers Conference, Speculum Musicae, the Advisory Board of the University of Denver Lamont School of Music, the Shepherd Society, the Methodist Hospital Center for Performing Arts Medicine, the National Center for Human Performance, and the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Houston.