

HOUGHTON COLLEGE

GREATBATCH SCHOOL OF MUSIC

presents

Music By Two
Sharon Johnson
and
Nancy Davis,
Pianos
in

Faculty and Guest Artist Recital

Recital Hall, CFA
Houghton College
Thursday, January 10, 2019
7:30 p.m.

Johnson has been heard with the Greensboro Symphony and the Greensboro Philharmonia, in guest artist recitals at the NC Museum of Art, Dickinson State University, University of Wisconsin, the Baltimore Composers Forum, The Schubert Club Courtroom Concert Series, on Minnesota Public Radio with the Ted Mann Vocal Quartet, and WXXI Radio with flutist Nina Assimakopoulos. She has served as the invited pianist for master classes of Eugene Rousseau and Keith Underwood. Johnson has also been one of the official pianists for the International Horn Prize Competition, the International Tuba/Euphonium and Double Reed Society Conferences, and the National Association of Teachers of Singing Competitions. Last May, she was chosen as one of four pianists to participate in the Fall Island Repertoire Development Program. As primary keyboard/assistant director of the Continental Singers, Johnson has toured the United States, Asia, and Europe. Recently, she formed a partnership with saxophonist Chisato Eda as *Duo du Soleil*. As well, Johnson has begun a recital/masterclass exchange program with David Klassen, baritone (Manitoba, Canada) partnering at venues in the United States and Canada. Faculty positions held include Greensboro College, The Music Center of Greensboro, The Wesleyan Institute of Music and Arts, UNC Greensboro's Summer Music Camp and charter faculty member piano/collaborative piano at the Vivace String Camp (New York). Johnson completed the DMA in accompanying and coaching at the University of Minnesota, (studying with Margo Garrett, Karl Paulnack, and Tim Lovelace), where she was a teaching assistant and a Denny Scholar. Currently, she is Associate Professor of Piano and Collaborative Piano at Houghton College (NY).

We would like to thank the Houghton College administration for its faithful support of the Greatbatch School of Music.

***Shirley A. Mullen*, President**

***Jack Connell*, Vice President for Academic Affairs and
Dean of the College**

***Dale Wright*, Vice President for Finance/Chief Fiscal Officer
*Greatbatch School of Music Faculty, Staff, and Administration***

As a courtesy to the performer and your fellow audience members, please be certain that all cell phones, watch alarms, and pagers are either turned off or set for silent operation. Flash photography can be very disconcerting to performers and is not permitted during the performance. Thanks for your cooperation.

Program

Three Lullabies, Op. 76

- I. Con Moto
- II. Andante
- III. Lento

Lowell Liebermann

(b. 1961)

Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos

Norman Dello Joio

(1913-2008)

Intermission

Variations on a Theme by Paganini

Witold Lutoslawski

(1913-1994)

Sonata for Two Pianos

- I. Allegro Vivace
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro Giocoso
- IV. Maestoso; Allegro Molto

Eric Ewazen

Artist Biographies

As *Music By Two*, pianists **Nancy Davis & Sharon Johnson**, were named finalists in the 2016 Professional Chamber Ensemble division of *The American Prize* Competition. They have been heard in a variety of venues including: WFMT Radio in Chicago, and have appeared in faculty and guest artist recitals at The Library of Congress, The University of Maryland, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Houghton College (New York), *First Friday Series* (Ohio), and *Music on Market* series (Ohio). Their repertoire includes compositions that range in style from romantic to 20th century to sacred. Both as a team, and as individuals, Davis and Johnson are actively involved in premieres of new works on a regular basis. Since the spring of 2005, *Music By Two* has given multiple premieres of Eric Ewazen's *Sonata for Two Pianos*. In January of 2007, the duo premiered an unpublished work by Lowell Liebermann, *Three Lullabies, Op. 76* in North Carolina. In March 2007, a re-discovered four-hand piano work by Louise Talma was premiered in a concert at The Library of Congress. That concert celebrated the 100th anniversary of the MacDowell Colony. The two-piano version of the Talma work was premiered in January in North Carolina, and later, at the University of Maryland. *Music By Two* will release soon their first CD, *American Landscapes*, which includes world premieres by Eric Ewazen and Lowell Liebermann.

Averaging 50 concerts per year, **Davis**, has performed in the North Carolina area with University of North Carolina at Greensboro faculty including Randy Kohlenberg, Dennis Askew, Deborah Egekvist, Donald Hartmann, and LaVonne Tobin-Scott; and in New York recitals with Phyllis Tektonidis and Edward Bach, with whom she released a CD entitled, *Contrast*. A new CD project featuring Bach and Davis in sacred arrangements for trumpet and piano (*Glory to the Lord, My Shepherd*) was released in fall 2010. In 2016, she began an annual recital appearance with Bach at Brandon University (Manitoba); last year, she added performances and recordings with Aaron Wilson, trombone. After coaching with the composer, Davis and Renee Sokol, soprano, presented the world premiere of songs for voice and piano by Joyce Suskind (recorded on the *New York Women Composers* CD). Davis also has been involved in multiple premieres of works by David Gillingham, including works with percussion ensemble/piano and trumpet/piano. In addition to maintaining a private piano studio in Greensboro, North Carolina, she has served as one of the official pianists for the International Double Reed Society, Musical Director of the Young Artists Opera Theater, the National Trumpet Competition, and on the faculties of Greensboro College, Elon University, Guest Lecturer for Song Repertoire at UNC Greensboro (currently the collaborative pianist with the Chamber Singers under the direction of William Young), the UNC Greensboro Community Music School, Salem College Community Music School and is a 29 year veteran faculty member of the UNC Greensboro Summer Music Camp. Davis serves as one of the official pianists for the National Association of Teachers of Singing Competitions.

Program Notes

Born in New York in 1961, composer/conductor/pianist **Lowell Liebermann** is steadily becoming one of the most performed composers of his generation. Educated at the Juilliard School, he studied composition with David Diamond and Vincent Persichetti. Composing in diverse genres, Liebermann is particularly noted for his compositions for piano and for flute. His opera *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1995) was the Monte Carlo Opera Company's first commission from an American composer.

In the spring of 2006, I had the wonderful opportunity of meeting Dr. Liebermann while he was visiting at Houghton College in New York. During a conversation with him, I asked about his compositional output for two pianos (he had mentioned in his lecture of writing a work for 8 pianos— imagine the volume of that “wall” of sound!). He mentioned two works, but particularly the work you will hear this evening, *Three Lullabies, Op. 76*—a work that at that time was unpublished. I was delighted when he offered to send copies of the score to Nancy and me. The work was commissioned by the Murray Dranoff Foundation as part of the final round of the Murray Dranoff Two Piano Competition for 2001. Each year that the competition is held, an American composer is commissioned to write a compulsory piece for the final round competitors. Though not lullabies in the ‘traditional’ sense, each of the three short pieces begin and end quietly (ranging from *pp* to *pppp*) and somewhat slowly. From these quiet openings, the pieces proceed forward in an arch-like form—in dynamics (up to *ff*), range on the keyboard (using the lowest possible notes at either end of the keyboard), and rhythmic intensity (culminating in 32nd notes in groups of five and seven)—and then diminish to calm endings. Each melody has a haunting, lilting quality that is constantly transformed by shifts between major/minor, polytonality, and ever increasing rhythmic diminution. As well, each of the melodies has a vaguely familiar quality—yet remains completely original in its presentation.

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“A strong melodic vein, rhythmic vitality, a relatively restrained harmonic vocabulary, an infectious brio and freshness of invention, are among the earmarks of...” the compositional style of **Norman Dello Joio**.<sup>1</sup> Born in New York City to Italian immigrant parents, Dello Joio began studying keyboard around the age of four or five with his father, Casimiro (who trained at the conservatory of Naples). Three generations of the Dello Joio family had served as organist in the village church near Naples, Italy; Casimiro had hopes that Norman would follow in his footsteps as a church musician. In addition to his rigorous study in theory, sight singing, and ear training, each day Norman and his father would play together four-hand piano music—something that would prove valuable to him in his career. By the time he was 12, Norman had his first professional job as a church organist at the Star of the Sea Church on City Island; he would later serve as organist/choirmaster at Saint Ann's Church in New York City. In the fall of 1937, he began composition studies as a scholarship student at the Juilliard School, where his primary teacher was Bernard Wagenaar; he subsequently attended graduate school there. During the summer of 1941, Dello Joio met Paul Hindemith at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. For the next year, he commuted between Yale—to study with Hindemith—and Juilliard—to study with Wagenaar. Although Wagenaar was certainly an influence on his music, Dello Joio has indicated that “...Hindemith had the strongest, most lasting influence” on his compositional style.<sup>2</sup> In the *Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos* (1952), Dello Joio makes use of...the formal molds of the baroque era. The addition of the second piano allowed him to use massive organlike sonorities, multivoice contrapuntal texture, and occasional antiphonal effects. A monothematic aria in three sections of contrasting tempi precedes a spirited toccata in which shifting accents and syncopation...make the rhythm one of the more notable elements.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Edward Downes: “The Music of Norman Dello Joio” (*The Musical Quarterly*, vol. XLVIII, no. 2, 1962): 149.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas A. Bumgardner: *Norman Dello Joio* (Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1986): 1-2, 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 100-101.

The music of **Eric Ewazen** has a special meaning for both Nancy and me. Having spent most of our professional lives as collaborative pianists, we have played our “share” of music for brass. At almost the same time (without the others’ knowledge) we were both accompanying works written for brass by Eric—and both of us loved his music. When I discovered that he had written *Sonata for Two Pianos*, I knew that we had to play it—but the work was not yet published. What were we to do? Contact the composer, of course! And thus began a new sort of “collaboration”—dialoguing with a living composer. Tonight marks only the seventh performance of this wonderful work—in April 2005, Nancy and I were privileged to give the western New York premiere at Houghton College. Since that time, we have given premiere performances of this work in North Carolina, Ohio, and Illinois (a live radio broadcast at the Piano Forte Foundation). The other performances to date have been given by Eric and his two piano partner, Eleanor Nelson. In 2012, we were honored to make the first recording of this work for our upcoming CD, *American Landscapes* (recorded here at Houghton College in Wesley Chapel). Nancy and I are both grateful to Eric for his wonderful music and for his help in bringing this music to you. He sends the following notes about this work:

*Sonata for Two Pianos* was written for Eleanor Nelson, who premiered the work with Eric Ewazen at the Juilliard School in February of 1987. The piece is a large-scaled, 4 movement work, strongly influenced by my love of the rich, 20<sup>th</sup> century take on the romantic tradition of composers such as Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev. You will notice a great deal of modal writing, sometimes almost jazz-like elements, but always, the music is about expressing emotion. At the time I was writing this work, I had become familiar with Rachmaninoff’s *Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos*, as well as two piano works of Debussy, Brahms, and Mozart. Inspired by these great pieces of music, I wanted to write a piece that might capture some of their energy, excitement, and pianistic virtuosity. The first movement opens with ringing chords and a grandiose type of resonance. Motives are tossed from one piano to the other at times—and at times, both pianos join together heroically. The second movement is a theme and variations on a gentle, wistful melody that grows increasingly more dramatic and intense. The third movement is a playful scherzo with running 16<sup>th</sup> notes and non-stop momentum. The final movement, opening slowly and dramatically turns into a rip-roaring fugue which culminates in the return of the first movements’ bell-like chiming chords.<sup>4</sup>

Eric Ewazen currently teaches at the Juilliard School where he has been a member of the faculty since 1980. He has received numerous awards and prizes for his compositions. In addition, he has been commissioned by ensembles and orchestras in the United States and overseas. Educated at the Eastman School of Music and the Juilliard School, his principal studies were with Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Warren Benson, Gunther Schuller, and Joseph Schwantner.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Correspondence with the composer, April 2005.

<sup>5</sup>Eric Ewazen biography from: <http://www.ericewazen.com/newsite/about.html>.