

Keith Kirchoff ♦ Composer & Pianist

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**Keith Kirchoff, piano
The Music of Frederic Rzewski**

The Turtle and the Crane
Snippets

- I. The Old Woman Under a Hill
- II. The Clever Hen
- III. St. Ives
- IV. T'Other Little Tune
- V. Old Woman
- VI. The Road to Babylon
- VII. Jack and His Fiddle
- VIII. Swan

Mayn Yingle
De Profundis

Frederic Rzewski is one of the greatest and most important composers alive. His output of piano music includes dozens of works ranging in styles from traditional sonatas and variations, to folk song arrangements, to theatrical works for speaking pianist, to the extreme *avant-garde*. Some of his works, for example *Four North American Ballades* and *The People United Have Never Been Defeated*, are gradually reaching a level of international recognition and are being played by more and more pianists everywhere. But he has a tremendous amount of music that is rarely, if ever, played, many works that are completely unknown, and countless that have never been recorded.

This recording would feature four different works of Rzewski. These four pieces are very diverse and each demonstrates a different aspect of his writing style.

The most important work on the disc is *De Profundis*, a thirty-minute oratorio for speaking pianist based on the text of the same name by Oscar Wilde. The piece is an example of Rzewski's theatrical style; the pianist does far more than play on the keyboard. S/he is also required to narrate text, play various parts of the piano-case as a percussion instrument, use bike horns, and even slap parts of his/her own body for percussive and theatrical effect. I have performed this work throughout the United States, and have even coached it with Rzewski himself. It is a very important work in the literature that needs to be more widely recognized by both musicians and non-musicians, and my personal history with the piece makes me a strong candidate to promote this masterwork.

The Turtle and the Crane is one of Rzewski's least known compositions. The most

abstract piece on the proposed CD, it is about fifteen minutes in length. The work is a musical representation of two characters from Japanese folklore: the turtle and the crane. These characters are symbols of longevity in Japanese culture; the crane is said to live 1000 years, and the turtle 10,000. Thus, in the piece, Rzewski creates a musical longevity through repeated-note patterns and long, spacious chords. Furthermore, Rzewski illustrates the American image of these two characters as well – the turtle as a slow, pondering animal who takes it's time (represented with long chords and silence), and the crane as a fast, swooping creature of the sky (with fast scalar passages up and down the keyboard). Rzewski creates a musical dialog between these two characters that is both charming and amusing. *The Turtle and the Crane* is virtuosic, very pianistic, and incredibly exciting. This work should certainly be a mainstay in the repertoire, but is nearly unknown due to the fact that it has never been recorded.

The shortest and most charming piece on the proposed disc is *Snippets*; a set of eight nursery rhymes for piano. The rhymes included are The Old Woman Under a Hill, The Clever Hen, St. Ives, T'Other Little Tune, Old Woman, The Road to Babylon, Jack and His Fiddle, and Swan. In this five-minute set of children's pieces, the pianist speaks the rhymes while playing music that illustrates the text. The work is a very valuable teaching tool (I have used it myself with my students) and needs to be known by a wider public, especially music educators. Unfortunately, it also has never been recorded.

The last work on this disc is *Mayn Yingele*. This piece is a twenty-minute set of variations on an early 20th century Yiddish-American ballad. It is a story about a man who is forced to work all day and is never able to see his little son. The song paints a very real picture about the poor and often fatal working conditions in turn-of-the-century United States. *Mayn Yingele* is the most traditional work on the disc, and represents Rzewski's use of traditional variation form. It closes with an improvised cadenza--a Rzewski trademark. This improvised cadenza also makes every single performance and recording completely unique. Also, with this work, I do something that no other pianist does: before I play the piece, I sing a translated arrangement of the song. This sets the tone for entire piece and also gives the tune background. I have performed this piece for Rzewski, and he strongly supports my use of the song before the piece. Please see the his letter to me which I included as an attachment to this email.

A sample recording of this recital is available upon request. It is also available on my website, keithkirchoff.com. If you are in need of any further materials or have questions about this proposal or myself as an artist, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions about myself or this program.