

BLUE₁₃

Junghwa Lee, pianist

Performs the Complete Piano Music of
Frank Stemper

Tracks

1. GLOBAL WARNING	8:09
2. FOUR PIANO PIECES — I. ♩ =76	1:57
3. FOUR PIANO PIECES — II. ♩ =76	0:48
4. FOUR PIANO PIECES — III. ♩ =80	1:12
5. FOUR PIANO PIECES — IV. ♩ =76	1:32
6. PIANO SONATA	9:27
7. KLAVIERSTUCK I	2:06
8. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — I. <i>...adrift</i>	0:49
9. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — II. <i>...a thousand years</i>	1:06
10. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — III. <i>spark...</i>	1:24
11. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — IV. <i>...my giddy intoxication</i>	0:46
12. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — V. <i>...ending the linear waltz</i>	1:02
13. SIX SHORT PIANO PIECES — VI. <i>...dust</i>	1:54
14. PIANO SONATA NO. 2 — I. Sonata Allegro - L'inizio della fine	9:51
15. PIANO SONATA NO. 2 — II. Minuet and Trio - Scherzo: Musica da ballo	6:48
16. PIANO SONATA NO. 2 — III. Andante e Improvvisazione	7:41
17. PIANO SONATA NO. 2 — IV. Sonata Rondo - L'ultimo allarme	8:33
18. BLUE ₁₃	8:40

Total: 73:45

Notes

The piano has been part of my life since before I can remember. As a kid, my parents never had to force me to practice – I was *always* playing the piano. Whenever I would go into the living room and sit at the old Steinway, my folks, back in the kitchen, would hear the piano bench creak, and I would hear the kitchen door quickly click shut. I have spent my life trying to make music that would get that door to open. The piano has been my guide, my counselor, the primary tool of my trade, my friend. We have spent thousands of hours together.

Having my scores brought to life by brilliant performers has been an incredible experience. I am a descent piano player, but a schooled, gifted, performing artist is something quite different. These brilliant musicians *fine tune* my scores, honing them into something more dynamic than I could ever have imagined. They seem to understand my musical intentions better than I, crisply shaping the notes, rhythms, articulations, etc. into perfect musical gestures, and adding the ultimate dimension to my music that I cannot: LIFE. Theirs is a talent and ability that goes to the heart and soul of what artistic communication is all about. From the stage, they come out to the audience, sit next to you, and whisper in your ear.

Junghwa Lee is such an artist, and the work she has done here is extraordinary. She has approached each of these works fearlessly, studying the music with surgical attention to every detail, and then bringing them to life with her dazzling technique. She has collaborated with each score, adding her own artistry – making it her own creation. I couldn't have hoped for anything more ideal for my music.

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Global Warning (2007) Is there anything a composer can do about the tangible realities of the world? Writing music does little to feed the poor, influence the abhorrence of racism, or appease international conflicts that lead to war. And if only there was a snappy tune that could reverse our current course of environmental disaster. The human species' selfishness and greed is a reality which is fueled by its leaders, who have the talent to positively influence the concrete world but rarely use it for that purpose. I guess humanity's pattern and course is set and will eventually play itself out.

This seems hopeless, and I doubt if this snappy tune will change anything. But actually, music may be the *only* thing that can help.

Four Piano Pieces (1976) was my first composition. Although it was preceded by perhaps 100 pieces, which taught me how to compose, this was the first statement that I consider music. It was written as a student in New York. My teacher was the late David Lewin, a mathematician, composer, pianist, and one of the most respected music theorists in history. David became my mentor, because, under his wing, I seemed to finally find my voice. I certainly miss the man. He had a frightening intellect – just so very smart. And like other friends and teachers I have known, whose intellect I have admired, David was also a great fellow – fun to be around, not at all pompous or haughty. By coincidence, David's father was head of psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital in New York and was my father's mentor/teacher when my dad was a psychiatry resident there after World War II. Kind of a dual-generational-student-teacher parallel in two very contrasting disciplines — although David thought composing and psychiatry were very much the same.

So this little group of tiny statements was my “coming out” piece, and they were (are) dedicated at the time to my girlfriend, Nancy Jefferson, another smarty-pants, who became my soul mate and the mother of our five children.

Piano Sonata (1987) As a young composer, I thought it was my artistic duty to see just how far musical discourse could be stretched. In this piece I tried to undermine the *Fibonacci Series* by trying to alter standard dramatic form (the *Golden Mean*). I did this by building to a climax near the beginning of the piece rather than toward the end – the traditional and natural spot. But then I foiled my own plan with the anti-climax, near the end, which ultimately steals the dramatic punch from the earlier, more energetic peak.

Another initiative of my early music was creating an overall *mono-form* by trying to eliminate middle level sectioning. Thematic contrasts do exist, but rather than occur separately in successive sectors, aspects of each are scattered evenly throughout the piece as if they've been put in a blender and homogenized. In this way the beginning will also be the end and middle, which was meant to give the impression that none of those

distinctions exist and that the music will go on forever. However, I also foiled this strategy with a tiny reference to the beginning of the sonata near the end, suggesting, very subtly, a recapitulation.

So in both cases intuition trumped my intellectual ideals. I love that intellect can be thwarted by instinct, and that even the listeners will sidestep a composer's cerebral intentions and just listen to the music.

Klavierstück I (1992) was written during the second of three residencies I had at the *Viktorsberg International Composers Institute* in the Austrian Alps. The composing studio I was using was a room in a monastery, originally built around AD 800, with windows that looked down the mountains across a huge valley back to the snow covered Swiss Alps. As beautiful as that was, it was also a metaphor for the seclusion that I feel as a composer. I have felt that my music is its own style, or at least that's what I have strived for. My music is not part of a particular technique or genre, and I'm not part of any larger movement or group of composers. I'm just alone.

And the same is true for you — as listeners. Each of you is affected according to your own unique spirit. Music can be a social art form, but it is primarily a deeply personal one.

Six Short Piano Pieces (2006) are homage to the six piano pieces by Arnold Schönberg (Op. 19), which taught me so much about modern music. Arnie's six gems, although teeny in duration, were huge in regard to the beginnings of atonality, pan-tonality, and serial music. But I also wrote these pieces as a revisiting of my first piece, **Four Piano Pieces** (1976), which were written directly after studying, learning, analyzing — devouring Arnie's Op. 19. So on the 30th anniversary of those four pieces, I wrote six more as kind of a personal recapitulation. The titles were after-thoughts, and are written in the score at the end of each of these short pieces, like Claude's (Debussy) Piano Preludes.

PIANO SONATA NO. 2 (2013) This music was written for Junghwa Lee, because I knew how dedicated and meticulous she would be as she approached my score. Some of the technical/interpretive demands include:

- Abundant and precise pedaling, using both sustain and sostenuto, to create asymmetrical gestures and phrasings; an overly sustained sound that intentionally becomes too cluttered; and frequent sympathetic overtones, finessed and meticulously calculated to ring as a sort of *ghost* counter theme.
- Excessive use of irregular, unpredictable repetition, which develops but also stays the same; multiplies and expands to form larger musical ideas; and tries to shake itself but always seems to return like compulsive nagging or a recurring dream.
- A more overt reference to Jazz, in terms of cliché, phrasing, and character.
- Continuous use of the *entire* piano, by not only using all registers equally, but often exploiting the less frequently used highest and lowest registers of the instrument for lengthy passages.
- All of the above is combined throughout with more traditional pianistic technique, such as lightly executed rapid passages, considerable variation of articulation, huge chordal sections, and almost always thematically independent left and right hands.

In composing a large work for my own instrument, I felt a bit of the *epic* was needed, so this music is about death. Or perhaps it is about life, for I am an optimistic fellow. Movement I begins at that final point, as life gently but hopelessly winds down — and disintegrates. What follows may be thought of as a flashback of life, with the music drifting through raw energy, fun, romance, euphoria and pathos, success and failure, pinnacle, and finally — *ALARM*: signaling the end (Movement IV).

That I have taken on life's greatest mystery seems pretty funny to me, because I can only fail and will undoubtedly appear trivial, sophomoric, or even puerile in the process. Every kind of narrative has had, at its nucleus, various attempted explanations of this mystery; and, because this is such a universal subject, and so inexplicable, trying to deal with it on a serious level is also very comical. But I am getting closer to this event, so I will gladly play the silly fool, because I'm not really trying to explain it, I'm just trying to *LIVE* with it, as all of us must. In that regard, death may be mankind's single-most universal entity, peacefully connecting and unifying us in a way that we have not been able to do in life.

Blue13 (2014) As a kid, performing jazz piano was my entrée into music. I first learned my trade by mimicking jazz players and then by *gigging*, well before I was old enough to go into the bars where I performed. I then gravitated toward Beethoven and those cats, absorbing the larger more involved forms, and later the

composers who were pushing the extremes, or, if you will, advancing the art form. I was home. But Jazz is my *Classical* music. That influence is infused in everything I've written for the past 40+ years, but **BLUE13** is the most overt reference to my Jazz core.

As I age as a person and composer, I find myself embracing my roots. My music is becoming more exposed in regard to technique and style. I am not concerned with trying to stretch the musical esthetic as I did when I was a younger composer. I am more interested – desperate, in fact – in getting the music written, saying what I have to say. I am not trying to fit into any genre of music, nor out to impress. I am simply explaining myself, whatever that means, wherever it leads, whatever good it does. I have always written for the listener, but I cannot alter what I am doing to reach them — that would be false. There is only one way to say what I have to say, and it is up to the audience to absorb it. So I will not “dumb-down” my music. But neither will I “dumb-UP” my music for what Samuel Barber called the *Minority Elite*.

I consider music a very personal experience, for the musicians, for the listeners, and for the composer.

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Junghwa Lee, “...a pianist of acute intelligence, conviction... and passion.” (*New York Concert Review*), has performed recitals throughout the world with recent successes in the UK, France, Romania, Hungary, China, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan — and her native Korea. She is also the winner of many competitions, including *Sonyun-Hankuk-Ilbo*, *Wolgan-Eumak*, *Seoul National University Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition*, and the *Korean Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition*. She appears regularly in solo recitals, chamber concerts, and lecture recitals, as well as in concerto performances as a soloist including those with the Korean Symphony Orchestra, Salina Symphony Orchestra, and Greeley Philharmonic Orchestra among others. She has recently performed on the *Arts Center Concert Series* at National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, *Beethoven 32 Sonatas Recital Series* in Singapore, the *International Festival Days of Contemporary Music* in Romania, the *Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series* at the Chicago Cultural Center and, in 2008, presented her New York debut recital at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall as a winner of Artists International’s *Special Presentation Award*.

The Manhattan Mercury wrote, “Lee’s beautifully persuasive playing...delivered her highly demanding program with masterful artistic control, integrity, and refinement.” The Philips County Review stated, “Flawless technique and exquisite attention to details left the (audience) dazzled by her performance...”

Ms. Lee received Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in Piano Performance from Seoul National University. While a doctoral student at the Eastman School of Music, she received the prestigious *Performer’s Certificate*, the *Max Landow Memorial Scholarship* for outstanding doctoral students, and the *Liberace*

Foundation Scholarship for Performing/Creative Artists, as well as the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance and Literature from the Eastman School of Music. An active collaborator as well as soloist, she also received the *Excellence in Accompanying Award* from the Eastman School.

She is currently Associate Professor of Piano at Southern Illinois University Carbondale where she directs the SIU Summer Piano Camp and SIU Summer Piano Competition, is an active member of the *Altgeld Chamber Players*, and a frequent performer in the *Outside the Box* New Music Festival.

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The music of **Frank Stemper** has been performed in 22 countries and half of the United States. His work as a composer has received support through awards such as the *George Ladd Prix de Paris*, the *National Endowment for the Arts*, four artist fellowships from the *Illinois Arts Council*, ten awards from *Meet the Composer—Global Connections*, 26 consecutive *ASCAP* awards, etc., and nominations for the *Grammy* and *Pulitzer* Prizes. Through his multiple artist and teaching residencies in Mexico, Romania, Spain, The Netherlands, and France, as well as more than 50 *Guest Composer* appearances at international festivals, his music has maintained a presence on the world new music scene. His mentors were composer Andrew Imbrie, theorist David Lewin, and pianist Robert Silverman, and from 1983 to 2014 he served as *Composer In Residence* at Southern Illinois University.

His music is an eclectic blending of the serial composers and jazz performers from the middle 50 years of the 20th Century.