



# George ANTHEIL

## PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE: LATE WORKS, 1939–55

BERCEUSE FOR THOMAS MONTGOMERY NEWMAN  
CARNIVAL OF THE BEAUTIFUL DRESSES  
MUSICAL PICTURE OF A FRIEND  
PIANO SONATA NO. 5: PRESTO  
WALTZES FROM VOLPONE  
THE BEN HECHT VALSES  
MOTHER'S DAY PIECE  
VALENTINE WALTZES  
TWO TOCCATAS

Judy Pang

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

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❶	<b><i>Mother's Day Piece</i></b> (1939)	<b>1:39</b>
❷	<b><i>The Ben Hecht Valses</i></b> (1942)*	<b>5:03</b>
❸	<b><i>Musical Picture of a Friend</i></b> (1946)	<b>4:25</b>
	<b><i>Carnival of the Beautiful Dresses</i></b> (1939/1946)	<b>22:15</b>
❹	I Opening Choral	0:56
❺	II A la valse	1:54
❻	III Mexicali	1:01
❼	IV Valse Passion	1:36
❽	V Habañera-Rhumba	2:06
❾	VI Love Affair Valse	0:58
❿	VII Autumn Fancy	1:01
⓫	VIII Gamin Valse	1:44
⓬	IX Martinique	0:58
⓭	X Grand Climax	5:22
⓮	XI Valse of the Female Gamin Who Fell in Love Hopelessly for a Time	2:46
⓯	XII Gay American Valse	0:36
⓰	XIII Finale Rhumbetta	1:17
	<b><i>Two Toccatas</i></b> (1948)*	<b>4:32</b>
⓱	<b>No. 1</b>	2:04
⓲	<b>No. 2</b>	2:28

<b>Valentine Waltzes (1949)*</b>	<b>17:18</b>
19 No. 1	2:02
20 No. 2	1:36
21 No. 3	1:33
22 No. 4	0:55
23 No. 5	1:19
24 No. 6	0:38
25 No. 7	1:42
26 No. 8	2:11
27 No. 9	1:13
28 No. 10	1:42
29 No. 11	2:27
30 <b>Piano Sonata No. 5: III. Presto (first version, 1950)</b>	<b>4:31</b>
31 <b>Waltzes from Volpone (second version, 1949–53/1955)</b>	<b>6:44</b>
32 <b>Berceuse for Thomas Montgomery Newman (1955)</b>	<b>2:18</b>

**TT 68:47**

**Judy Pang, piano**

ALL EXCEPT \* FIRST RECORDINGS

# GEORGE ANTHEIL, PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE: LATE WORKS, 1939–55

by Mauro Piccinini

A reputation as ‘The Bad Boy of Music’ – the journalistic label born in the 1920s and later adopted by George Antheil (1900–59) himself for his 1945 autobiography<sup>1</sup> – has overshadowed Antheil’s real nature as a composer and misled readers and audiences for decades. Of course, Antheil (born in Trenton, New Jersey) really was an *enfant terrible* in his youth (as many composers are), but he also turned out to be a ‘good boy’ by his mid-thirties, and his later music, mostly symphonic and operatic, is plainly Neo-Romantic. But labels die hard, and probably justly so: Antheil’s fame rests mostly on his early mechanistic and post-Stravinskian piano and player-piano music, from *Airplane Sonata* (1922), *Sonata Sauvage* and *Death of the Machines* (both 1923) to the work that epitomises that period, the *Ballet mécanique* (1924–25) for four to sixteen player pianos, xylophones and percussion (a sort of ‘Sacre of the Robots’). This futuristic output, written mainly during his stay abroad, first in Berlin and later in Paris, rapidly exhausted itself: an imitation (or as Antheil insisted, a ‘synthesis’) of the machine, with percussive ostinati and block-like, rhythmically activated patterns, could in the long run become tedious. To avoid that outcome, he had infused his works, especially two early sonatas for violin and piano (1923), with hints of jazz and much irony (quoting and distorting old and beloved tunes, such as ‘In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree’ or ‘Cielito lindo’). But by 1930, these jazz infusions, much in vogue, seemed to come to a dead end after Antheil’s *A Jazz Symphony* (1923–25) and his opera *Transatlantic* (1930). Always following Stravinsky at a distance (but secretly hoping to surpass him and lead the avant-garde), Antheil wrote in a more

<sup>1</sup> *Bad Boy of Music*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1945.

Neo-Classical vein, and later on approached the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of the Germans, without ever giving up tonality.

When Hitler came to power, Antheil thought it better to go back to the States, where he was soon employed by the budding School of the American Ballet of Kirstein/Balanchine and by Paramount, finding his definite source of income in writing scores for the cinema. At this point, however, Antheil suffered a profound artistic and personal crisis, and even contemplated the idea of giving up musical composition. As he explained to his patroness, Mary Louise Curtis Bok (founder of the Curtis Institute), his idea was to cut himself off 'from the little cliques and groups of sheer intellectual musicians' and work 'in mediums that are part of our life and times.'<sup>2</sup> But after two (mildly) successful soundtracks for C. B. DeMille (*The Plainsman* in 1937 and *The Buccaneer* in 1938) Antheil – who now had a son to raise as well as a position to maintain – thought it easier and perhaps safer to exploit his many alternative interests and talents in order to make money. One of his 'business ideas', the *See-Note*, was a new system of musical notation, the aim of which was to make music-reading and piano-playing easier (patented in 1937, it never reached the public-distribution phase). His passion for endocrinology led him to write a sort of manual<sup>3</sup> and then charts and articles for *Esquire* (1936–39), an experience which prompted him to venture into giving advice to the lovelorn in the syndicated column 'Boy Advises Girl' (1937–45). Correspondence with his younger brother, Henry Jr., a code-room clerk at US embassies in Moscow and later in Finland, gave Antheil the impulse to double as a military analyst (for Manchester Boddy's *Los Angeles Daily News* and as the anonymous author of *The Shape of the War to Come*).<sup>4</sup>

By now, dear reader, you may be raising your eyebrows with suspicion, wondering what else our George could invent. But just try a web search on 'George Antheil' and, out of the 300,000 occurrences, you will find that half of them also mention the actress Hedy Lamarr, reportedly one of the most beautiful women ever, with whom Antheil no less than patented a radio-guided torpedo in 1942. Its guidance system, called 'Spread-

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated c. 10 February 1937, Library of Congress.

<sup>3</sup> *Every Man his Own Detective: A Study of Glandular Criminology*, Stackpole Sons, New York, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Longmans, Green, New York and Toronto, 1940.

Spectrum' and based on the frequency-hopping principle, is the basis for today's wireless technology!<sup>5</sup>

During these busy years Antheil created very little music. But the war, besides stimulating his patriotic technical prowess, also had a much more enduring creative effect: intensely shocked by his brother's untimely death as one of the first US war casualties in June 1940, Antheil was determined to write accessible but also better-structured symphonies modelled on his new musical idols, most notably Prokofiev and Shostakovich. He realised, though, that he required a thorough and disciplined study of the fundamentals of musical composition: his block-like, anti-developmental structures, so useful in background cinematic commentary, failed when applied to broader forms, such as the symphonic, often programmatic, music with which he now wanted to depict American history and geography, at the same time as hoping to reach public recognition and everlasting fame. As he demurely confessed to Hindemith in 1945, 'It is curious, Paul, but true musical understanding has come to me only late in life I'm afraid, but, better late than never'.<sup>6</sup>

During his last twenty years, Antheil produced a vast number of symphonies, operas and orchestral overtures with a more accessible, quasi-folkloric flavour, although his style always remained recognisable thanks to its rhythmical drive and often facetious humour. Although he gave prime importance to his operas, most notably *Volpone* (1949–53), based on Ben Johnson's play, and *The Brothers* (1954), Antheil continued to write as prolifically as ever in every other musical genre, including music for television and stock music for B-movies, but with the exception of sacred music. He created piano music in a variety of forms and for different occasions and functions, without shying away from pedagogical aims and worldly circumstances such as births, birthdays and valentines.

<sup>5</sup> For their joint invention Lamarr and Antheil were inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame (2014). On the history of their collaboration, cf. Richard Rhodes, *Hedy's Folly: The Life and Breakthrough Inventions of Hedy Lamarr, the Most Beautiful Woman in the World*, Vintage Books, New York, 2011, and the recent documentary *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* (Alex Dean, director; Reframed Pictures, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Letter dated 5 November 1945, Hindemith Institut, Frankfurt.

Although his violin music from 1945 onwards was prompted by commissions and co-operation with younger violinists such as Werner Gebauer and Israel Baker, his series of piano sonatas are mainly due to his friendship and admiration for a young Los Angeles pianist, Frederick Marvin,<sup>7</sup> a pupil of Rudolf Serkin at the Curtis Institute. Marvin premiered many of Antheil's later piano works, most notably the Fourth and Fifth Sonatas (1948, 1950), and the *Two Toccatas* (1948), all of which display a dry, restless virtuosity, coming to fruition through a deep knowledge of the instrument (Antheil had started his career as a concert pianist). But as this anthology clearly shows, Antheil was also familiar with a lovelier, more nocturnal and personal expression, most evident in his pieces dedicated to those dear to him, from his mother to his devoted wife, Böski, or to his many lovers.

*Mother's Day Piece* [1] was a little present composed and given to Antheil's mother, Wilhelmina Huse Antheil, on 14 May 1939 (as the autograph score reveals). That year was still a good year for the family. Antheil had visited his parents in Trenton, bringing with him his young heir, Peter, not yet two years old. George's brother, Henry Jr., was also on vacation from Moscow, and his younger sister Justine had returned from some months abroad, visiting her brother in Russia. The family reunited for Easter, and they all went to church (Justine and George had a Bible as a present for their mother), little suspecting what the following months would bring to them or to the world. *Mother's Day Piece* flows gently in the manner of a slow waltz in ABA form. Starting and ending in a radiant C major, it reaches in the middle section – almost inadvertently – a distant A flat major (perhaps an unconscious hint at the ambivalent feelings Antheil had towards his dearly beloved mother, who was nonetheless the source of innumerable discussions and conflicts concerning music).

During the following troubled years, Antheil managed to survive by composing scores for the film director and producer Ben Hecht, such as *Angels over Broadway* (1940) and *Specter of the Rose* (1946) or, through Hecht's intervention, a score for *Music to a World's Fair Film for World's Communications Building* (1939). Hecht had been the first to hire him

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<sup>7</sup> Frederick Marvin (born 11 June 1920) died on 11 May 2017, only weeks before this album was recorded. Judy Pang and the author of these notes would like to dedicate this recording to his memory.



*George Antheil with Frederick Marvin, Hollywood, c. 1948 (private collection)*

as a film composer back in 1934 with *Once in a Blue Moon*, and he so recalled Antheil's first venture into melodic, romantic and quasi-Korngoldian movie music:

Flop though the picture was, Antheil's music for it was delightful. I have never heard a merrier collection of waltzes, polkas, and background tunes than came out of its sound track. Georgie wrote melodies as if he had never heard or written a note of modern music.<sup>8</sup>

The writer and director remained a staunch supporter and friend throughout Antheil's Hollywood years (1936–57), and the two played together in the so-called Ben Hecht Symphonietta, an amateur ensemble which included, besides Hecht at the violin and

<sup>8</sup> *Letters from Bohemia*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1964, p. 163.



Antheil at the piano, Jack Benny, William Wyler, Ernst Lubitsch and Harpo Marx – on the clarinet! No wonder that, at the end of 1942, Antheil dedicated to Hecht a series of waltzes, a form much liked and exploited by both, especially in *Specter of the Rose*, epitomising their involvement with the world of dance. *The Ben Hecht Valses* [2] also contains an arch-structure of different waltz episodes – played without interruption – much larger in scale than the *Mother's Day Piece*. The first waltz, in G major, recurs after two other waltzing episodes, one of which gives the impression of a male-female dialogue made up of an ascending and descending three-note chromatic figure. The central section, reminiscent of Ravel's *La Valse*, where Antheil's use of the damper pedal suggests the full orchestra, is interrupted (at 2:56) by a sort of *rappel à l'ordre* warning bell. The main theme returns, more softly embellished with a phrase reminiscing over past motivic fragments. After another 'male/female' exchange, the *Valses* conclude with the gentlest and most intimate reinstatement of the main theme.

During the following years Antheil finally had his comeback in the world of bigger audiences, thanks to his friend, the conductor Leopold Stokowski, who decided to premiere his Fourth Symphony on the radio with the NBC Symphony Orchestra (1944). The success of the work, repeated at the first public performance a year later (by Hans Kindler and the National Symphony Orchestra), led to a series of orchestral compositions which took Antheil away from chamber and solo-piano music until 1947, when he wrote his Third Piano Sonata. The only exceptions were the *Musical Picture of a Friend* and the long suite *Carnival of the Beautiful Dresses* (both written in 1946). The *Musical Picture* [3], also published as Prelude in D Minor, was a token gift to an old female friend, Jan Gabriel (pen name of Janine Singer, who had been married to the writer Malcom Lowry, but already divorced by the time of this composition). Nothing more is known about the occasion for this portrait, save for the fact that Antheil's wife preferred to delete the dedication when the piece was published. Modest in its length, this 'musical picture' manages to portray the essence of a complex character with laconically few 'brush-strokes.' Reminiscent of Chopin's E minor Prelude, it begins with a chromatic chordal progression gravitating slowly forward with deep solemnity. While encapsulating the pervading temperament of mournful mystery, these bold chromatic

gestures serve as a unifying device apparent in both harmonic structure and melodic contour. The work is thus imbued with dark shades of expression conflicted between the impulsively passionate and the fearfully vulnerable.

The *Carnival of the Beautiful Dresses* [4]–[16] has a more detailed story: it was commissioned by Stanley Marcus for a style show on the occasion of the Tenth Annual Fashion Exposition of Neiman-Marcus Co., held in Dallas on 8 September 1947. During this event the annual award of trophies was to be given to leading international designers (Christian Dior and Salvatore Ferragamo were among the recipients of the award). Always ready to fulfil any commission, especially when coming from billionaires, Antheil went on record as the first classical composer to write music specifically for a fashion display (a broader application of Hindemith's demand for *Gebrauchsmusik*). Marcus and Antheil had met in Dallas, where Antal Doráti premiered Antheil's Violin Concerto. The composer assembled a suite of thirteen pieces, orchestrated for the show by assistant concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Zelman Brounoff, who also conducted them.<sup>9</sup> Antheil introduced the pieces:

I have endeavored to write a series of gay, little and unpretentious pieces that might be played by a small orchestra and still say what I mean. [...] The imposed simplicity should help these pieces do their functions, which is to background beautiful dresses. They are not concert pieces and anyone who listens to them as such earns my anxiety.<sup>10</sup>

For the benefit of his Dallas audience, Antheil provided some witty vernacular markings:

1. Opening Choral (with a hop-skip).
2. A la valse (with a 'Romanticó').
3. Mexicali.
4. Valse Passion (with a dream valse middle section).
5. Habañera Rhumba (for a very soigné dress or dresses).
6. Love Affair Valse.

<sup>9</sup> The little chamber ensemble consisted of four violins, two clarinets, flute, tenor saxophone, two trumpets, one trombone, piano, bass and percussion. The score in this version has not yet resurfaced.

<sup>10</sup> John Rosenfield, 'George Antheil Composes Suite for Neiman-Marcus Display,' *Dallas Morning News*, 31 August 1947.

7. Autumn Fancy (falling leaves, whirling?).
8. Gamin Valse (or music for a beautiful tomboy).
9. Martinique (for the unsophisticate).
10. Grand Climax (where they, the beautiful dresses, all get together – a longish number).
11. Valse of the Female Gamin Who Fell in Love Hopelessly for a Time.
12. Gay American Valse (hale fellows, well met).
13. Finale Rhumbetta (what is a Rhumbetta? – Why a little tiny rhumba not yet fully grown)

The suite starts with a pompous chorale-march, 1. Opening Choral [4], sounding like a religious hymn, which amounts probably to the quickest anti-climax ever penned for an exhibition of legs and smiling faces, clearly showing Antheil at his most tongue-in-cheek. From then on, however, a parade of waltzes and other livelier dances set the right mood. The music is strung together with some inner – harmonic rather than contrapuntal – relationships between the various sections, partly because five of the pieces were already composed in 1939 as *La Vie Parisienne* (probably intended for some ballet of Massine's Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo). As Paris was synonymous with fashion, Antheil found this previous work perfect for an *haute couture* show in Dallas, and interspersed some lovely pieces – such as the second piece, 'A la valse' (entitled 'Montmartre' in the previous suite) [5], the seventh, 'Autumn Fancy' (originally 'Ballets chic') [10], and the eighth, 'Gamin Valse' (originally 'Cafe Waltz') [11] – with lively folk-tunes and rhythms, such as the third piece, 'Mexicali' [6], a borderline Mexican rhythm, and fifth, 'Habañera-Rhumba', with its infectious dance-rhythm (originally 'Night Club') [8]. Antheil always liked the atmosphere and rhythms of the Southern states since his road trip from New York to Hollywood in 1936, when he had thoroughly enjoyed the climate and folk-music of Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, Texas and New Mexico. Ten years later his music found new vitality when he started composing (mostly orchestral) pieces commissioned by or intended for the Dallas, San Antonio and St Louis orchestras and their conductors Antal Doráti, Max Reiter and Vladimir Golschmann, respectively – all friends of his. Spanish, Mexican and Caribbean rhythms had already hit Paris during the twenties, and so 'Mexicali' could figure as 'Montparnasse' in *La Vie Parisienne*, and other

pieces, such as the seventh, 'Autumn Fancy' [10], with its polytonality, and ninth, 'Martinique' [12], could have been penned by Darius Milhaud. These traces (not only of Milhaud, but also in some gestures taken from Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*) always remain subtle and only rarely result in an open quotation. When this rarity occurs, however, it is probably subconscious, as with the sixth piece, 'Love Affair Valse' [9] (and partially with the eighth, 'Gamin Valse' [11]), where the quotation from Cole Porter's 'I got a kick out of you' (1934) induced John Rosenfield, the critic of *The Dallas Morning News*, to call it 'a dangerous reminiscence' which 'should get a kick out of Cole Porter'.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes one finds resemblances to previous pieces by Antheil. In this case the similarities in mood and rising phrases of the 'Gamin Valse' and its feminine version, 'Valse of the Female Gamin Who Fell in Love Hopelessly for a Time' [14], make them come across as children of *The Ben Hecht Valses*. Antheil's ability to vary the same material was evidently a gift much appreciated during movie-scoring, as was his ability in stretching the length of a piece in order to adapt it to the requirements of a cinematographic scene. This skill is much in evidence in the 'false endings' of the tenth piece, 'Grand Climax' [13], an elaborately treated simple gigue idea, and in the thirteenth, 'Finale Rhumbetta' [16], which is a version of the 'Mexicali' so much accelerated that it is almost unrecognisable. The twelfth piece, 'Gay American Valse' [15], a 'male' companion to the eleventh, finds its way unobtrusively into what is a parade of mostly female characters (or could 'Gay' be another pun?).

Being a sort of 'Satirical' *musique d'ameublement*, the composition went almost unnoticed during the fashion show, as John Rosenfield noted: 'As best as we could hear, what with our mind on metal cloth negligees, each number had its appealing melodic idea, developed neatly and concisely into symmetrical completeness'.<sup>12</sup>

Although during 1947 Antheil's symphonic music was one of the most widely performed of any composer in the United States, by 1948 he had virtually stopped composing symphonies, as his wife explained later in her unpublished autobiography:

<sup>11</sup> 'Antheil Style Show Suite Played For First Time... Makes Many Moods', *Dallas Morning News*, 9 September 1947, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

For serious music there is very little income involved in any case, as far as direct payments for performances are concerned. The fees for a symphonic performance are so infinitesimal, that if one mentions this to an outsider they don't really believe it.... like about a \$100 for a symphony performance, which means not only the amount of time spending on the composition, orchestration, but also copies of the orchestral parts.<sup>13</sup>

Instead, Antheil turned his attention to chamber music, which was more readily available and easier to sell, as well as to opera, bearing in mind the success of television operas, such as those by the young Gian Carlo Menotti. Another reason to produce piano music was his meeting with Frederick Marvin, who had given the first performance of the *Musical Picture of a Friend* in June 1947, and to whom the *Two Toccatas* were dedicated. By 1948, Antheil could count on Marvin's remarkable virtuosity and budding career as a showcase for his more serious piano works. His manuscript scores began to circulate among other pianists, notably Vladimir Horowitz, William Kapell and Claudio Arrau, even though none of them committed himself to playing them in public. Although he had once been an accomplished keyboard virtuoso, Antheil could no longer play so well, after many years spent at the desk composing instead of giving concerts.

The *Two Toccatas*, published by Schirmer in 1951, show Antheil's pianism at its best: they are as restless as his earlier pieces from the 1920s could be, but consist of more sophisticated tonal schemes, within Classical frames containing his sometimes unbridled inventive exuberance. In the two pieces, pinwheeling ostinatos, rapid-fire repeated notes and dry, angular harmonies are always a little reminiscent of Prokofiev, such as is the case with an earlier (1947) Toccata by Benjamin Lees, a pupil of Antheil.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the model for Antheil's pieces here is the third-movement *Precipitato* of Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata, Op. 83 (1942). To entice his friend Hans Heinsheimer, then working for Schirmer in New York, to publish them, Antheil reported on Aaron Copland's reaction to a private playing of the *Two Toccatas*:

<sup>13</sup> Unpublished, untitled manuscript, p. 13, Library of Congress.

<sup>14</sup> Recorded by Mirian Conti on *Benjamin Lees: Piano Music 1947–2005*, Toccata Classics tocc 0069.

I played, first of all, the record of the new toccata, recently premiered here with great success by the young pianist Freddy Marvin. Copland, unlike every other experience I've had with him, liked it instantly and without reservation. He suggested that it should be published instantly, as it would be very popular with pianists. He also liked the other toccata (there are two of them) very much.<sup>15</sup>

The two pieces are most similar to the other *vivo* or *presto* movements written during this prolific period, such as the third movements of the Second Violin Sonata (1947–48), the Third Piano Sonata (*Presto* 'Diabolic', 1947), the *Allegro* (*Presto*) of the Fourth Piano Sonata (1948) and the *Presto* of the Fifth (1950), of which the first version is recorded here. The Toccata No. 1 [17] is a restless isochronous *tour de force* marked 'Allegro in very strict tempo throughout', with alternating articulation from 'poco sostenuto' to 'ultra staccato (no pedal)'. The Toccata No. 2 [18] is a little more varied but remains brilliant and, as Antheil writes, 'ultra dry'. Here he gives much importance to the left hand while toying with just two musical gestures – an ascending third and a descending second with one or more repetitions of the final note. Although it is probably a parody (and surely a dissection) of the Protestant hymn 'Bringing in the Sheaves', Antheil makes it resemble Copland's Mexican, Texan or Cuban rodeos. The two Toccatas, as with his three last sonatas, are a sort of American (sometimes Hollywoodian) answer to Prokofiev's 'War Sonatas', Nos. 6, 7 and 8. A uniquely Antheilesque sense of mischief is ever-present, whereby the pianist must constantly engage in virtuosic leaps, repeated chords and octave passages, with almost an air of clownish acrobatic manoeuvre.

At the opposite extreme of Antheil's musical strengths there are once again some waltzes. In this case probably the most accomplished examples are the *Valentine Waltzes* [19]–[29], dedicated to Noma Rathner, his lover for many years (beginning in 1947). In a letter to F. Charles Adler, the founder and producer of SPA Records, he wrote:

They are a series of valentines, these in the shape of little waltzes. [...] They are delicate and frail – and, if one does not like, today, waltzes, perhaps they are a little too much in the swing of  $\frac{3}{4}$  time: but, I believe, each one is artistic, and expressive of my present

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 12 April 1948, Antheil Papers, Columbia University.

direction. They are either satirical (as some valentines are, though good humoredly) or outright declarations of love – but, again, in a new manner, coping again with my modern expression of harmony, counterpoint, personal lyricism.<sup>16</sup>

Anheil thought highly of these pieces, counting them among the finest works for piano he had ever written;<sup>17</sup> indeed, he recorded them himself for SPA Records. The waltzes seem almost improvised in the moment, as if they were all variations on the same initial waltz theme, and yet they are not at all joyous, and some are tinged with a degree of irony. It is tempting to read the *Valentine Waltzes* in a more romantically emotive manner and imagine them as a sort of biographical account of the difficult relationship with a woman who was not his wife. Not surprisingly, they mostly have a melancholic character, and the harmony often progresses unexpectedly, sometimes from terse optimism to a compound but logical cul-de-sac. For sure, Anheil's technical resourcefulness and flexibility came in handy when he composed them – and some of his wickedly abrupt modulations give the impression of a musical *coitus interruptus*.<sup>18</sup>

Many who knew Anheil attested that his personality was split into two conflicting facets: on the one hand, dreamy, nostalgic, nocturnal and longing either for a female conquest or a musical success; on the other hand, restless, workaholic, frenzied and sometimes peppery and vengeful. These two sides were very much evident in his music. The *Presto* from the Fifth Piano Sonata <sup>30</sup> is another example of the toccata-like *tour de force* which closed many of his sonatas, and a good example of his 'diabolic' side. The piece recorded here is the first version of the third movement, premiered by Marvin with the rest of the Sonata at Town Hall, New York, on 7 January 1951. In an interview Marvin confessed he was 'going crazy because George wasn't sending the last movement of the sonata'.<sup>19</sup> He sent it, late, and the critics noticed that Marvin had not yet mastered the intricacies of the score. Anheil thought to rewrite the last movement, especially after his friend and critic Virgil Thomson heard it at a private concert and wrote to Anheil:

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated 13 August 1952, Syracuse University.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Charles Adler, dated 21 September 1951, Syracuse University.

<sup>18</sup> The American composer, conductor and pianist Thomas McIntosh has orchestrated the work.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with the author, Vienna, 10 April 2012.

[Marvin] played it for a whole group of musicians one evening when Cage and Feldman and various others were playing music, including the very tough Boulez Sonata. I loved two movements of yours and found the third a trifle obvious, like something that might accompany a Western. The rest is just wonderful Antheil, the best Antheil; and you know how fond I am of that.<sup>20</sup>

During February and March Antheil therefore composed a new version, ‘ten times more difficult’ – as Marvin later laughed – and more solidly structured. Antheil called it ‘a kind of enormous sonata-allegro-toccata movement’, which, ‘excepting the first page, is entirely rewritten.’<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the *Presto* recorded here is worth knowing. Maintaining the same rhythmic gesture which opens the second version, it could as it stands have been Antheil’s Toccata No. 3.

At age 50, Antheil found himself making contacts with the new generation of composers, exchanging letters with Lou Harrison, Peter Jona Korn and Morton Feldman. His contact with these younger colleagues and encouragement from Virgil Thomson inspired him to revise his best scores from the twenties (*Ballet mécanique* and *A Jazz Symphony*). Thomson also persuaded him that the real centre for the world of music was New York, to which he had travelled every now and then, and from 1957 it became his (last) permanent abode.

Besides the *Carnival of the Beautiful Dresses*, another score has survived in a manuscript intended to be orchestrated: a further series of waltzes, taken from Antheil’s most important composition of the 1950s, *Volpone*. Called by the critic and fellow composer Herbert Elwell ‘rollicking good fun’, *Volpone* was a farcical rewriting of Ben Jonson’s most famous comedy (1606), adapted together with Alfred Perry, lyricist and musical director at Paramount. The work occupied Antheil between 1949 and 1953, when it received its premiere on 11 January in Los Angeles. The opera gives a nod to Stefan Zweig’s 1926 adaptation of the play, with its more liberal Viennese atmosphere, to which Antheil looks back also in his choice of the anachronistic *Walzer* form as its main feature (the device

<sup>20</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1951, Yale University, Music Library.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Virgil Thomson, dated 2 May 1951, Yale University, Music Library.



was substantially borrowed from Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*). This adaptation was done at the suggestion of André Kostelanetz, the Russian-born arranger and conductor much associated with 'easy listening' music, who, after having heard the opera, asked for a suite of its main waltzes. Antheil drew up a first suite in piano reduction at the end of 1954, but when he sent it to Kostelanetz in New York, it was deemed to be too long and had to be cut from eleven minutes to six. The conductor found the waltzes lovely, but requested also some quieter contrasting sections, which Antheil then sent in January 1955. Judging by the correspondence between the two, it is evident that Kostelanetz was still not yet satisfied. In all likelihood, he asked Antheil to make a more flowing composition, avoiding the sudden distant modulations so typical of his style. Antheil complied with all these requests, using the main *Volpone* theme (which unifies the opera by appearing every time someone expresses his or her love to someone else) as a recurring statement throughout the entire piece, as he had done in his *Ben Hecht Valses* (its first appearance can be heard at 0:48). This theme resurfaces continuously in different guises, and at the end it is coupled with the other principal theme (where he writes a more pompous *tempo di 'valse'*), which is recognisable by its final descending fourth (A flat–E flat: 0:26). The piano version presented here [31] was ready in June 1955 and was orchestrated soon thereafter. Its dazzling array of orchestral textures are reminiscent of Liszt transcriptions, with its numerous octave passages.

As this album quietly opened with an occasion piece, so it closes, with a homage for a colleague, Alfred Newman, whose son Thomas Montgomery (himself a well-known film-composer nowadays) was born in Los Angeles, on 20 October 1955. It is a gentle but modern lullaby with another simple ABA scheme [32]. Prevalent progressions of parallel fifths look back nostalgically as if to evoke an ancient melody born out of the subconsciousness of the ages, serenading tender infants through time. Antheil's personalised harmonic modulations revivify the ancient memory, seemingly extending a hand towards the past as invitation to the future.

Some three years after this composition, on 12 February 1959, Antheil, always a chain-smoker, died of heart-failure in New York, in the apartment of his friend Jerome Moross. His late years were embittered by the scant success of his last works, and he

left a musical, *The Happy Journey*, conceived with Alfred Drake, completed but only partially orchestrated. He overworked himself in the last two years, scoring for TV documentaries, such as the well-known CBS 'Twentieth Century' series. By then his music sounded *passé* to the young avant-gardists: Cage, for example, wrote that *Volpone* was a 'hideous opera' and that at its New York premiere he 'left visibly after first act to repair to nearest movie'.<sup>22</sup> Critics often accused Antheil of being too readily influenced by other composers, if not of being a kleptomaniac. But he was not a weak composer, resorting to putting on another master's overcoat, nor was he an unaware musical magpie. He was a jovial human being, fond of making allusions. With the post-modernism of Schnittke and others, Antheil seems instead to have been ahead of his time. As he confessed in his autobiography, *Bad Boy of Music*:

After all, *Antheil Always Gets There First* – that is, of course, when he doesn't get there second; but even then he files off the engine numbers, alters the body, repaints so thoroughly that even its owner wouldn't know the stolen item.<sup>23</sup>

*Mauro Piccinini is a Swiss-based, freelance researcher, expert in the avant-garde of the 1920s; he is currently writing a biography of George Antheil. He contributed the entries on Leo Ornstein and George Antheil for the German encyclopedia Komponisten der Gegenwart (Edition Text+Kritik, Berlin) and has also written on Frederick Delius, Arnold Schoenberg, Ezra Pound, Frederick Kiesler and Fernand Léger.*

<sup>22</sup> Letter to David Tudor dated c. 7 July 1953, in *The Letters of John Cage*, ed. Laura Kuhn, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 2016, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

**Judy Pang** is increasingly in demand as an inventive solo and chamber musician with an eclectic repertoire: she has established herself as a performer of both mainstream and contemporary works. She premiered the solo-piano works *Haiku* (2013) and *Firebird* (2014) by the composer Oliver Markson, as well as *The Happy Prince* (piano-quartet version, 2015) by Colin Pip Dixon. Alongside her dedication to a broad canon of the central repertoire, she has maintained a scholarly study of French impressionist music, on which she has given lecture recitals both in New York and Shanghai. Her numerous performances have taken her as far afield as the US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Finland, Australia and China.

In New York, where Judy Pang is currently based, she has made frequent solo appearances at Steinway Hall, Yamaha Piano Salon, Greenfield Hall, Staller Recital Hall and Bargemusic. As a devoted chamber musician, she has collaborated with Hai-Ye Ni, the principal cello of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, with the celebrated erhu player Hongmei Yu, the guzheng player Xiaohong Zhang and the cellist Evva Mizerska. She is also a member of the Elsewhere Ensemble – a New York-based group of musicians, actors and writers from a range of different countries.

Judy Pang obtained her Bachelor of Music degree with honours in 2006 from the University of Melbourne, where she studied with Igor Machlak. During that period, she was awarded the first prizes in the Melbourne University Aria and Concerto competition, the Alumni Chamber Music Competition and the Piano Duo Competition. After relocating to New York, she developed her Master of Music degree under the tutelage of Nina Svetlanova at the Manhattan School of Music, where she was a recipient of the President's Award and Dean's Award. She has also studied with the pianist Bernard Flavigny, a protégé of Olivier Messiaen and Alfred Cortot. In May 2015, she completed her Doctor of Musical Arts



Photo: Erica Kapin

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This recording is dedicated to the memory of Frederick Marvin.  
*Mother's Day Piece* is recorded by permission of the Antheil Family.

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