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AN ANALYSIS OF
THREE VIOLIN SONATAS BY
WILLIAM BOLCOM

DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts
in the Graduate School of
The Ohio State University

By

Philip Richard Baldwin, B.M., M.M.

****

The Ohio State University

1996

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Professor Lora Gingerich Dobos
Professor William Conable

Approved by:
Advisor
School of Music
Dedicated to my parents,
Dean and Vicki Baldwin,
    to William Bolcom,
    and to my loving wife,
Dorothy Blankenship-Baldwin
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to my advisor and violin professor, Michael Davis, whose teaching and guidance have led me to this point in my educational career, and whose artistry will forever inspire my playing. I must also thank the members of my Document committee, professor Lora Gingerich Dobos and professor William Conable for their dedication and insights. This document could not have been written except for the beautiful music of William Bolcom and the cooperation of his secretary, Carol Wargelin, who helped me obtain reviews, scores, and other background materials essential to this project. Finally, I am indebted to my parents and my wife Dorothy for their loving support.
VITA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I first became interested in William Bolcom’s music at a violin recital given at the University of Akron by violinist, Lev Polyakin, and pianist, Anne Epperson. Polyakin was about to compete in the 1989 International American Music Competition for Violinists, and Bolcom’s Second Sonata was the piece he had chosen from a long list of American violin sonatas. What immediately appealed to me was Bolcom’s ability to hold my interest throughout the sonata, since, in my own experience, not every piece of contemporary music has that power. I was also intrigued by the jazz elements of the first and last movement as I often feel that "serious composers" are not successful when incorporating this uniquely American art-form.

I found myself returning many times to the listening library at the University of Akron which housed the only taped copy of the recital. Eventually, I purchased a score of the Second Sonata and set about learning it. Later at The Ohio State University, I studied it with Professor Michael Davis and Visiting Professor Laurence Shapiro. Mr. Shapiro had performed the piece many times for the American Ballet Theater and knew the work intimately. Professor Davis had not performed the sonata but was familiar with Bolcom’s Duo Fantasy, the First Sonata, and the Graceful Ghost. These distinguished mentors were influential in my decision to perform all three of Bolcom’s violin sonatas (the Fourth Sonata, though finished, has not been published as of this writing) and to write about the man who composed them.
As I began the preliminary research, I realized that very little has been written about William Bolcom aside from magazine articles and interviews. Despite the fact that many of his larger compositions have been played by the major American orchestras, that his opera *McTeague* was the first American opera to be commissioned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and that his *Twelve New Etudes* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, Bolcom is under-represented in textbooks about modern music. While a few dissertations have dealt with his organ and piano music, nothing has been written on his violin music.

Bolcom has written thirteen works for violin as well as ten string quartets and many chamber pieces involving the violin. Though not a violinist himself, Bolcom professes a special affinity for the violin. As a youngster, he frequently read the violin sonata literature with Gene Nastri, his hometown orchestra director in Everett, Washington. Bolcom's early compositions for violin and piano were encouraged by Nastri, who indulged him with many reading sessions. Bolcom later wrote, "I can't think of a better way for a non-player to find out about the history and psychology of that instrument than what Gene afforded me, and I shall always be in his debt." ¹

Bolcom's violin works have been spaced out over the past forty years, so it is interesting to view his stylistic development from this vantage point. During the decade of the 1970's he wrote six violin pieces, most of which were dedicated to Sergiu Luca. These are notably influenced by Bolcom's work with ragtime and popular song. Bolcom reached the zenith of his eclectic style in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which is a complete setting of William Blake's poems of the same name. Following that achievement, there occurs a gap of nine years between the *Violin Concerto in D* (1983) and the *Third Sonata* (1992). During that span, Bolcom

¹William Bolcom, liner notes to *Second Sonata, Duo Fantasy, and Graceful Ghost*, Nonesuch 79058-1.
continued to write large scale works, including the *Twelve New Etudes*, the *Fourth Symphony*, the *Fifth Symphony*, *Casino Paradise*, and *McTeague*. These display a refinement of his eclectic technique: transitions are smoother and more elastic, and he employs formal structures based on tonal areas as used in the Classical period.

This dissertation will explore the historical background and some of the technical points of construction of the *First, Second, and Third Sonatas*. A brief biography provides a context for understanding the composer and his artistic values, while the interviews with Bolcom and Sergiu Luca illuminate many details about their relationship with each other and the three sonatas. I hope also that this paper will provoke further scholarship on Bolcom’s enormous output and encourage a wider audience for his music.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

William Elden Bolcom was born in Seattle, Washington on May 26, 1938. His grandfather was a lumber tycoon whose wealth enabled him to host concerts by the leading virtuosi of the day, including Josef Hofmann and Ignaz Paderewski. Ever the music enthusiast, he once imported an entire opera company to perform in Seattle. However, bad luck in the stock market caused the family's fortune to decline and led to the eventual divestiture of the business. His father, who was "almost too gentlemanly for this earth, [and] had been raised solely to take over this big lumber business" was forced to take a sales position when Bolcom was about ten years old. His mother returned to teaching elementary school.

Despite these family difficulties, Bolcom's musical talents were recognized when he began playing simple tunes on the piano, and he began formal piano lessons with Evelyn Brandt Jacobsen at the age of five. Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* captured his musical imagination and sparked an interest in composition. Subsequently, his first lessons were with George McKay. By the time he was eleven, he was taking music classes at the University of Washington one day a week. His first string quartet was written a year later. Before graduating from Everett High School, he won the BMI Student Composers Award. Upon graduation, he received a General Motors College Scholarship to continue composition studies at the University of Washington with John

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Verrall. He graduated *cum laude* in only three years—paying his way by playing piano in hotels and nightclubs. Later in New York, he supported himself in part by playing piano for a female impersonators' club.³

During his freshman year at the University of Washington, Bolcom composed the *First Sonata* (1956) for violin and piano and dedicated it to his newlywed friends, Peter and Joanna Marsh. In 1984 it was revised (and published) for violinist Hanley Daws, associate concertmaster of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Between his Junior and Senior years, Bolcom studied at the Aspen Music Festival with Darius Milhaud. Milhaud warned him to "slow down and be more careful,"⁴ no doubt perceiving Bolcom's pen to be as quick as his own. Undaunted, Bolcom astounded his teacher and fellow students by producing a complete symphony (the *First Symphony*) and a set of parts in only five weeks. It was premiered by the Aspen Festival orchestra on August 16, 1957 under the baton of Carl Eberl. *New York Times* critic Howard Taubman was on hand and commented that Bolcom "helps himself to bits and pieces of styles from any handy source," and compared him to "a young Shostakovitch when he was writing symphonies and concertos in his late teens."⁵ Thirty-four years later, this *First Symphony* was recorded by the Louisville Orchestra conducted by Lawrence Leighton Smith for First Edition Recordings.

Milhaud was much impressed with Bolcom's ability and later invited him to pursue a Master of Arts in Composition at Mills College in California. Bolcom had another scholarship offer to study with Paul Hindemith at Yale, which his friends and teachers urged him to accept. Bolcom, while recognizing that Hindemith was "at the zenith of his reputation as a composer and teacher,"⁶ knew that Milhaud would not

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³Steven Wigler, "To Bolcom, music is music," *Baltimore Morning Sun*, 16 December 1986, D5
⁵William Bolcom, liner notes to *William Bolcom's Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, First Edition Recordings, CD LCD 007.
interfere with his interests or compositional style. Bolcom's 1977 article, *Reminiscences of Darius Milhaud* offered the following observations:

Many people have said Milhaud wasn't a great teacher, that they came away disappointed, that they hadn't been given anything concrete. Precisely. The concrete directions a teacher gives you are often the very things you must shed, one by one, as your own compositional personality emerges.7

In a related article, Bolcom describes Milhaud's catholic tastes and influences, and it becomes obvious why he chose to study with Milhaud-the-eclectic rather than Hindemith-the-theorist:

Milhaud had often shown his ability to incorporate not only polytonality, polyrhythm, and many ethnic musical styles but also twelve-tone technique and elements of chance into his music, years before anyone else in some cases, and always making it his own; why shouldn't we be able to do this as well? He offered no instant answers for compositional success, but he believed any of us should be able to write anything in any style or technique. In the late 50's, when tonality was commonly considered dead for composition and process was king, this was not what some students wanted. They wanted certitudes, they wanted gurus.8

Milhaud had a liberal teaching arrangement with Mills College which allowed him to teach one year in California and the next at the Paris Conservatory. Through Milhaud's influence, Bolcom obtained the *Bourse du Gouvernement Française* grant, which provided little money but offered an opportunity to study at the famed *Conservatoire*. In order to save money and take advantage of certain privileges such as discount subway tokens and student concert tickets, Bolcom decided to take the grueling exams that would allow him to enter the Conservatory as an *élève régulier*. He passed and embarked on a two year course of study, taking Olivier Messiaen's course in musical aesthetics and studying composition with Jean Rivier while, in the following year, Milhaud returned to California. Recognition of Bolcom's talent came

in the form of the Harriett Hale Woolley Stipend, and the Kurt Weill Foundation Award in 1960, followed by the William and Noma Copley Award in 1961.

While in Paris, Bolcom became friends with fellow composer Phillip Glass, and with the indefatigability of fun-loving students, the two of them once attended a twenty-four-hour movie marathon. Though Bolcom seems to have enjoyed the culture of Paris, he chafed against its musical scene. Parisian listeners were fascinated by the new sounds of Berio, Boulez, and Stockhausen while Bolcom's own teacher, Milhaud, was ignored as passé. Bolcom admired their music, though in his own music he only experimented briefly with serial technique. He remembers with distaste, however, conferences in Darmstadt concerned with "Logarithmic Procedures in Serial Technique." He says of his Paris musical experience: "I began to feel kind of claustrophobic—what you might call the Composer’s Concert Syndrome. It started as an antsy feeling when I went to avant-garde performances, and then led to outright boredom with much of what I was hearing."9

Bolcom's uneasiness with the Post-Schoenberg school led to self-reflection and concern over the entire problem of modern style. He was not alone, however. George Rochberg, his mentor and teacher at the Tanglewood Festival, also renounced serialism for his own reasons and wrote several (perhaps cathartic) articles on the subject, following the premiere of his Third String Quartet. Bolcom was not so public about his misgivings: he continued to write in his eclectic style, throwing in bits of twelve-tone music either as a nod to the prevailing academic attitudes or as yet another resource to be tapped. In later years he defended his appropriation practices, citing Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven as fellow borrowers from popular culture: "I'll use any idiom if I can make music out of it. The trick is to make them connect, to vibrate

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against one another in a meaningful way. I reserve the right to be both private and accessible, to not be stuck in one kind of music when I have more to say."\textsuperscript{10}

Bolcom found a useful (though not permanent) solution to his stylistic dilemma when Milhaud proposed that he should write the music for an opera written by the young poet, Arnold Weinstein. While studying in Italy on a Fulbright fellowship, Weinstein had met Milhaud and asked him to collaborate on his libretto. Milhaud declined, saying the subject was too American for him, but he knew a young virtuoso composer who could do it.\textsuperscript{11}

Bolcom and Weinstein embarked on the project in 1963 without even meeting—the whole thing was done through the mail. The libretto, originally entitled \textit{Comedy of Horrors}, was completed in three months and renamed \textit{Dynamite Tonight!} Bolcom describes the satirical anti-war story this way: "The prisoner from the opposite country sings in \textit{Wozzeck-schtyle}, but everybody else is singing in this 1912-1915 popular music kind of style."\textsuperscript{12} The premiere was given off-Broadway on December 21, 1963 by the Actors Studio in New York, funded in part by a Rockefeller Foundation grant. Its initial performance was so poorly received that the remaining performances were canceled. Nevertheless, Bolcom and Weinstein later received the Marc Blitzstein Award in 1965 for excellence in musical theater. \textit{Dynamite Tonight} was later revived by the Yale Drama School in 1966 (two years before Bolcom served there as visiting critic\textsuperscript{13}) and several other times by various companies.

The anti-war subject matter of \textit{Dynamite Tonight!} reflected both Bolcom's interest in theater and his objections to the Vietnam War. Students enrolled in post-

\textsuperscript{11}Rockwell, 51
\textsuperscript{13}This odd title, "visiting critic" is explained by Bolcom in Appendix A, p. 144. His duties were that of composer-in-residence.
graduate programs were exempt from the draft, so between 1961 and 1964, Bolcom returned to the United States to pursue his Doctorate with Leland Smith at Stanford University on a Stanford Futures Scholarship. His last year as a doctoral student was spent preparing \textit{Dynamite Tonight!}, and two days following its premiere, he married pianist Fay Levine, a Juilliard graduate.

In the summer of 1964, Bolcom returned to the Aspen Music Festival and composed a four movement work for violin and string orchestra entitled \textit{Concerto Serenade} which received its only performance that summer. Bolcom includes the following note in the score: "Movement II is written in homage to R.W. [Richard Wagner], who was a cousin of my grandfather's (on my mother's side). It is not a joke but a serious use of some of Wagner's thematic material. The quotations should not be played outside of the general dynamic range, but discreetly; they are used only as part of the contrapuntal fabric of this piece and should not be brought out."\textsuperscript{14} This represents one of the few instances of melodic quotation in Bolcom's music.

In the fall of 1964, Bolcom and his new wife returned to Paris where Bolcom re-entered the Paris Conservatoire for a year on a Guggenheim Fellowship. There, his \textit{Eighth String Quartet} won only second place in a composition contest at the Paris Conservatoire in 1965 because it "had something in it that sounded like variations on 'Rock My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham.'" He says, "Believe me, faces fell."\textsuperscript{15}

Upon returning to the United States, Bolcom was invited to teach at the University of Washington as an Adjunct Assistant Professor for the academic year 1965-66. In the Fall of 1966, he was hired by Queens College in New York City, first as a Lecturer, then as an Assistant Professor. He held these Queens College positions until his resignation in 1968.

\textsuperscript{14}William Bolcom, note in \textit{Concerto Serenade} score, (New York: E.B. Marks Music Corp., 1964), 19
In 1968, Bolcom received a second Guggenheim grant to serve as visiting critic (composer-in-residence) to the Yale School of Drama for one year. At Yale, he collaborated with Arnold Weinstein on an "opera for actors" called *Greatshot* which "describes an incident in the life of William Burroughs." An offer to be Composer in Residence took Bolcom to New York University where his salary was paid by a Rockefeller Foundation grant. He held a full time position from 1969-70, and a part-time position for two additional years.

To the outsider, it would seem that Bolcom was hitting his stride in the tough New York music world. Recognition for his compositions and piano playing came from a variety of enviable sources, and he was making a living as a professional composer. New York, however, is full of duplicities, and while on the one hand Bolcom was successful, he "found himself increasingly alienated from the Upper West Side contemporary-music establishment's cloistered concerts...." Bolcom "began having serious doubts about his entire vocation as a classical composer," according to John Rockwell. Hind-sight led Bolcom to offer the following observations in 1977: "After I got my degree, and had gone through a few teaching jobs and various personal reverses I won't mention, I ended up in New York as a free-lancer. I even tried writing pop songs, which horrified Milhaud: I still wonder why, when it's the sort of thing he might have done in my place—so much of his own music stems from the popular idiom—but when I began writing concert music again, he wrote a warm congratulatory letter." In addition to these questions of musical direction, Bolcom's personal life took a turn for the worse. Bolcom and Fay Levine were divorced in 1967, though he was

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17Rockwell, 50.
18Rockwell, 50.
soon re-married to Catherine Agee Ling, niece of the film critic and novelist James Agee. To quote Bolcom, the second marriage was "hellish" and they were separated a year later. The effect of these personal reverses was overwhelming, and he admits to a brief struggle with alcoholism.

The compositions of this post-Doctoral period show the influence of Berio and Stockhausen, whom he met in 1960 while studying in Darmstadt. For example, *Oracles* (1964), the *Eighth String Quartet* (1965), *Sessions I, III, and IV* (1965-67) are early attempts to fuse his own brand of twelve-tone technique with other idioms. As mentioned earlier, the *Eighth String Quartet* contains a gospel tune, *Session I* (for septet) employs jazz and a twelve-tone row, while *Session IV* (for nonet) contains "quotations from Beethoven's *Eroica Variations* and Schubert waltzes together with a pseudo James Scott rag...." Listeners at the International Music Festival in France reacted violently to *Session III* (for clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and percussion), forcing the performers to start over several times.

Two encounters with ragtime music sparked a new direction in Bolcom's music and in the national resurgence of interest in the works of Scott Joplin. His initial flirtation with ragtime was in *Black Host* (1967) for organ, percussion and pre-recorded tape in which atonality and ragtime are juxtaposed. At the time he was also experimenting with microtonal music and his own form of serialism, so the inclusion of ragtime initially seemed merely another resource. In an interview for *Musical America*, Jack Heimenz summarizes and quotes Bolcom: "One peculiarity of his progress, he [Bolcom] has noticed, is the way he anticipates himself. 'In my piece *Black Hosts*...there's a little ragtime spot—but I wrote that piece before I actually

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22Ewen, 84.
started getting into ragtime. Or in my 1971 piece *Whisper Moon*, I have quotations from such old pop tunes as *Blue Moon* and *Every Little Breeze Seems to Whisper Love*. It was six months later that Joan Morris and I first met and started doing our History of American Popular Song programs."

The second encounter involved Joplin's only opera, *Treemonisha*. While seeking out the score, Bolcom was introduced to other Joplin fans, and together they began the revival of Joplin's popularity. Bolcom describes these events in the program notes to his album of Joplin rags:

Norman Lloyd, the late director of the music division of the Rockefeller Foundation, had heard of a ragtime opera by Scott Joplin; "Who is that?" I asked him in 1967, and, intrigued, tried to track the piece down with no success. Even the Library of Congress asked please to let them know if I found out anything. Finally, I asked one of my many office-mates at Queens College if he'd any idea where to find *Treemonisha*. "I have a copy at home. Want to see it?" replied Rudi Blesh, who would turn out to be the world authority on Scott Joplin and ragtime. Which started a long friendship and odyssey into the world of Scott Joplin. Another new friend, the wonderful actor-singer-pianist Max Morath, had many rags by Joplin and other turn-of-the-century ragtime composers for me to learn and play. That Christmas, at Eric Salzman's party, I played a series of the most important and beautiful Joplin rags for Joshua Rifkin. Thus were born the Rifkin Joplin recordings, which were to give Joplin serious attention in the musical world. The rest is history, and today no one can remember that, barely twenty years ago, the name and music of Scott Joplin were almost totally unknown."

His intensive study of the genre led to friendships with other aficionados: Max Morath, Rudi Blesh, and Eubie Blake. Bolcom credits Blake for his belief that "there's no real line between improvising and composing, or between composing and performing." Bolcom later collaborated with Robert Kimball on an authoritative

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23Heinemz, MA-4.
24William Bolcom, liner notes for *Euphonic Sounds (The Scott Joplin Album)*, Omega OCD 3001.
biography of the famous vaudeville partners: Reminiscing with Sissle and Blake (1973).26

After immersing himself in the style, he performed a series of "marathon ragtime bashes" for WBAI in New York City and composed fourteen of his own piano rags.27 The most famous of these, written in memory of his father, is entitled The Graceful Ghost. Music critic Leighton Kerner ranks it along with "the finest of Gershwin, Kern, and Ellington."28 It has since been arranged for violin and piano, marimba ensemble, and string quartet. Composing rags relieved some of the pressures of writing serious music. Bolcom said, "It was such an amazing feeling, to put four flats and 2/4 time at the head of a score after being an academic composer."29

Ragtime and other popular styles influenced his violin pieces of the 1970s, notably the Duo Fantasy and Second Sonata. The Duo Fantasy (1973) contains a beautiful waltz and a ragtime section, whereas the last movement of the Second Sonata (1978) eulogizes the great jazz violinist, Joe Venuti. Between these two pieces, Bolcom wrote Session II (1976) and the Suite for Solo Violin (1977) which were more austere in nature and dedicated to violinists Mark Sokol and Sergiu Luca respectively.

In 1970, Bolcom's position at New York University became part time, and he began to freelance in New York by composing music for improvisational theater, doing orchestrations on commission, publishing articles on music, and working for Nonesuch Records both as consultant and pianist. Not all of his time, however, was spent in such lofty pursuits—he once played a simple arpeggio for an Estée Lauder commercial to

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281990 Current Biography Yearbook, 72.
29Rockwell, 51.
help pay the bills. It was a good move, since residual checks for $183 came every three weeks for as long as the commercial ran.

A personal turning point for Bolcom came in 1971 when he met Joan Morris, a mezzo-soprano who was making a living as a New York nightclub entertainer. Not only did they share the same interests in popular song, but they also had a deep appreciation for literature. Together, they embarked on a recital career of popular songs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including works by Gershwin, Kern, Berlin, and lesser known song-writers.

When Bolcom met Ms. Morris, he was negotiating for a position at the University of Michigan. Morris decided to give up her career in New York and join him in Ann Arbor, despite the fact that he and Katherine Ling were separated but not divorced. When Katherine was tracked down in a hippie commune, she granted the divorce and Bolcom and Morris were free to unite their careers as husband and wife. They were married on the 28th of November, 1975, with Eubie Blake "playing a ragtime version of the Wedding March for their ceremony." In 1974, they released their first album for Nonesuch records—*After the Ball*—which earned Joan Morris a Grammy Award nomination. Since then, they have recorded fifteen more albums, the most recent of which was released by Omega Record Classics in 1989 called *Let's Do It—Bolcom and Morris at Aspen*. The Bolcom and Morris duo has been in great demand since the first concert tour, and the couple maintains an active concert career of thirty to fifty concerts per year in the U. S. and Europe.

The stability of a university position gave Bolcom the time he needed to complete his enormous setting of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Although Bolcom began working on the project in 1956, he says, "...the

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30 Benson, 56.
31 Morgolin, 111.
work remained in my mind until 1973, when I moved to Ann Arbor to teach at the University of Michigan. I felt that I could thus simplify my life enough to be able to realize the cycle I had dreamed of for so long." In an interview with Nancy Malitz, he said, "There were so many different moods and style and types of poetry in the thing, there really was a feeling of the whole world by the time you were done." Diversity of tone and style had discouraged many composers such as Virgil Thomson, Benjamin Britten, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and John Sykes from setting all forty-six of the poems. Bolcom's eclectic style was ideally suited for the task, however, and he saw the project as ideal for overcoming "the latent tension between the cultivated and the vernacular partly by ignoring the problem, partly by confronting it, and partly by overwhelming it...." To prove his point, Bolcom glides effortlessly between styles, including a reggae tribute to the late Bob Marley as the finale. Organizing the whole piece was a different matter altogether, since a poet is not obliged to make connections the way a composer must. Bolcom discovered a clue in "the appendix of a rare edition of Blake's poems: the poet's suggestion for a new order in which to print 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience,' should there be another edition." Consequently, Bolcom divided the poetry into nine sections and chose to restore "A Divine Image" (left out by Blake in the final edition) as the finale. "All the sudden," said Bolcom, "it fell into place for me, because I saw how the piece could be built in huge sections and how the emotional curves could begin to happen." 

*Songs of Innocence and of Experience* nearly won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize and is still considered by many to be Bolcom's finest work. John Rockwell of the *New York

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35Malitz, 27.
36Malitz, 27.
The *New York Times* pronounced it as having "a very good chance of being a masterpiece of our time and place."\(^{37}\) The score is massive: it calls for nine vocal soloists, three choirs, a rock combo, organ, and a full symphony orchestra including triple winds, two saxophones, euphonium, and flugelhorns for a total of 250 performers. The premier was given by Dennis Russell Davies with the Stuttgart Opera Company in January of 1984. Three months later, Gustav Meier introduced the work at University of Michigan’s Hill Auditorium, while Lucas Foss conducted it at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1986. A BMG recording contract with Leonard Slatkin conducting the BBC Symphony has been approved for a November 1996 release.

The *Violin Concerto in D* (1983) was written one year after *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and was premiered in 1984 by violinist Sergiu Luca and the Saarbrücken Radio Orchestra, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies. While *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* was immediately introduced to American audiences, the *Violin Concerto* had to wait until May 16, 1986 for its premiere—this time with Luca and Dennis Russell Davies leading the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Carl Apone reviewed the Pittsburgh premiere and said, "There was much to like in the 25-minute violin concerto, especially in the happy and upbeat themes, and those sections throughout the piece where the strong flavor of American music keeps reappearing."\(^{38}\)

Bolcom’s program notes to the Argo recording explain a great deal about the *Violin Concerto* and his other Neo-Classical works such as the *Fantasia Concertante* and the *Fifth Symphony*. Bolcom says,

> All three of the works on this recording owe much to Classical-period music. I don't however consider them Neo-Classical in the 1920s - 30s sense (which was usually really Neo-Baroque); here I am using some of the formal benefits of Classical harmonic construction, notably the ability to steer a whole...

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\(^{37}\) Rockwell, *A Grand Achievement*, 19

form in a new direction on the turn of a musical card—something not usually discernible in a totally chromatic context....

The Concerto's beginning movement is a fantasia in the Classical sense, in which the careful juxtaposing of various types of music is the paramount concern. The solemn 5/4 second movement is in memory of the great pianist Paul Jacobs, a close friend who died in 1982; the long Adagio line includes a ghostly discourse between the solo violinist and an off-stage D trumpet. This leads *attacca* to the Rondo-Finale, where the Venuti influence is most apparent. Several styles from popular music (notably ragtime and rhythm-and-blues) are alternated rondo-fashion, up to the soloist's brilliant passagework (stretta) which ends the Concerto.39

Bolcom also tells us that he has written this concerto in the key of D major-minor.

This is important because nowhere else in his prose does he express his fascination with the duality of major and minor keys. Furthermore, the *Violin Concerto in D*, like the *Second Sonata* exhibits a multiple dedication—it was written for violinist Sergiu Luca, and contains a portrait of pianist Paul Jacobs in the second movement and elements of Joe Venuti's style in the fourth movement. Lastly, Bolcom claims this piece owes a debt to Classical-period music. This is another example of Bolcom's "anticipating" himself since thirteen years later, he is still using Classical devices. His most recent works (1995-96) are the *Gaea Piano Concerti (Numbers 1, 2, and 3)* for Piano Left Hand, written for pianists Gary Graffman and Leon Fleisher. Bolcom wrote the following note for the premiere performance on April 11, 1996 with the Baltimore Symphony conducted by David Zinman: "This music is strongly neo-classical—by which I don't mean that it sounds like Stravinsky—with a traditional three-movement structure, ending in a fugue. I have become more of a classicist as I get older."40

The *Fourth Symphony* (1986) similarly failed to win the Pulitzer, but Bolcom finally struck gold in 1988 with *Twelve New Etudes*. Richard Dyer speculated that Bolcom's "failure to follow approved academic paths" cost him the awards previously.

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The same argument could not be used against the *Etudes*: "the genre itself requires a tighter, more stringent compositional style and is by definition 'academic.'"41

Bolcom composed the *Etudes* for Paul Jacobs and intended to take full advantage of Jacobs' prodigious piano technique and championship of modern music. Jacobs, unfortunately, died three years before the work's completion and so the torch was handed to Marc-Andre Hamelin who brought to the *Etudes* his own exceptional technical and interpretive powers. *New York Times* critic Allan Kozinn remarked that "...each of the dozen, whether rumbling and ostentatiously virtuosic, or more introspective, make daunting demands on the pianist's agility and sense of color. In Mr. Hamelin's beautifully etched, transparent renderings, even the least programmatic of the pieces leave distinct and almost visual impressions."42

The last of these etudes—*Hymne a l'amour*—was re-orchestrated to serve as the last movement of *Symphony No. 5* (1992). Bolcom explains that both versions treat "the Love-Death axis from another more tragic viewpoint: Death generated by Love. In the *Etudes*, the *Hymne* feels like the triumph of the *Ewigweibliche*; here it is in ironic contrast to the rest of the work, particularly to the concluding *Machine* [the last movement of Symphony No. 5]."43

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Literature has played a significant role in all of Bolcom's music. His early fascination with Blake's poetry led to studies with Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington. Bolcom said of the experience,

> I did not study with him with any ambition to become a practicing poet, only to try to learn how to set words to music. Roethke was not an easy man to know, but his artistic struggle and evolution seem familiar to me—perhaps even similar to my own. In his earlier years, Roethke adopted an avant-garde, almost stream-of-consciousness 'Freudian' style;...later, he was to become more and

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more classically oriented, using such ancient poetic forms as the sestina and villanelle—although a respect for the works of the past is already obvious in his first publications.\textsuperscript{44}

As a tribute to their relationship and shared aesthetic values, Bolcom composed a song cycle based on Roethke's poetry. The result was \textit{Open House} for tenor and orchestra (1975) which shifts "from tonal melodies to Sprechstimme, from chromatic expressionism to popular-song stylings."\textsuperscript{45} Later, in the \textit{Fourth Symphony} (1986), Bolcom "uses the Roethke poem to send a musical love letter to his wife, the rose who grew in the lonely, stormy wilderness of his own heart."\textsuperscript{46} Roethke's approach to poetry has further implications for the symphony, which, according to Bolcom, is "a reaffirmation of classical values, parallel to the poet's own affirmation of permanence in the face of man's depredations and destructiveness."\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{McTeague}, Bolcom's 1992 opera, was the realization of another dream. As a doctoral student at Stanford, Bolcom had improvised a piano score to Erich von Stroheim's \textit{Greed}, which was a film adaptation of Frank Norris's novel, \textit{McTeague}. Bolcom was smitten with the story and realized then that it was an ideal source for an opera. It took twenty-five years for the right opportunity to present itself. The request came from Ardis Krainik, general director of the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Bolcom, of course, immediately proposed \textit{McTeague} as his subject.

The Chicago premiere was prefaced by a panel discussion, hosted by The Music Critics' Association and introduced by Saul Bellow. Bolcom was invited to chair a panel discussion on the future of American music in general, and on American opera in particular. Writing in the \textit{New York Times}, Edward Rothstein concluded, "Mr. Bolcom confronted the desire for a new American style head on. He combined exuberant hints

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44}William Bolcom, liner notes for \textit{Open House}, Nonesuch H-71324.
\item \textsuperscript{46}Rockwell, "Music, Every Which Way," 54.
\item \textsuperscript{47}Rockwell, "Music, Every Which Way," 54.
\end{itemize}
of barbershop quartet with paired expressionist modernism, robust turn-of-the-century street music along with extended classical forms like the passacaglia. The results were as mixed as the styles, but the event had a celebratory quality.\textsuperscript{48}

Critical response to Bolcom's early music was mixed. Since the late 1970s, however, his works have increasingly gained acceptance. Most importantly, Bolcom's music is being performed, recorded, and enjoyed. Much of the critical debate concerns Bolcom's mixing of classical and popular styles. The line between serious and popular music often concerns commercial rather than aesthetic issues, though some critics and composers would like to believe otherwise. As many composers in addition to Bolcom have demonstrated, the two need not be mutually exclusive. The objection raised by composer Charles Wuorinen is that "our celebration of compositional pluralism has led to an inability to conceive of any absolute musical values whatever"\textsuperscript{49} ignores the traditions of American composers established by Charles Ives. Gerald Groemer's dissertation on the piano music of Rochberg, Bolcom, and Albright defends the eclectic aesthetic in the following comment:

The style which a composer utilizes has always been largely determined by preference. Mozart's \textit{Overture in the Style of Handel} K. 399, Spohr's \textit{Symphony No. 6 "Historische Sinfonie im Stil und Geschmack vier verschiedener Zeitabschnitte,"} and other such works demonstrate that, even before our present "pluralistic" age, radical shifts of style were possible, even if a composer's choices were clearly modeled after the musical language of another composer. What is new to the twentieth century is the attempt by composers such as George Rochberg to endow radical stylistic fluctuations within a work an almost structural importance. The element of choice is thus elevated to a much more functional and "foreground" level.\textsuperscript{50}


Bolcom’s program note for the U. S. premiere of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* clearly explains his compositional approach and may in fact be his manifesto:

The Blakean principle of contraries: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence," (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) would also dominate my approach to the work, particularly in matters of style. Current Blake research has tended to confirm what I had assumed from the first, that at every point Blake used his whole culture, past and present, highflown and vernacular, as sources for his many poetic styles. Throughout the entire *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, exercises in elegant Drydenesque diction are placed cheek by jowl by ballads that could have come from one of the songsters of his day; it is as if many different people were speaking, from all walks of life, each in a different way. The apparent disharmony of each clash and juxtaposition eventually produces a deeper and more universal harmony, once the whole cycle is absorbed. All I did was to use the same stylistic point of departure Blake did, in my musical settings.

If I could say that any one work of mine has been the chief source and progenitor of the other, I would have to say that this is it. My fascination with the synthesis of the most unlike stylistic elements dates from my knowledge and application of Blake’s principle of contraries, and I have spent most of my artistic life in pursuit of this higher synthesis. In this work, through my settings, I have tried my best to make everything clear; I have used music in the same way as Blake did line and color, in order to illuminate the poems.51

By respecting and employing his own musical tastes, Bolcom reflects the cultural diversity of this nation, the "presence of the past" in art, and the richness of his compositional method.

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51 William Bolcom, program notes to the University of Michigan School of Music’s premiere performance of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 11 April 1984.
CHAPTER III

FIRST SONATA

The First Sonata was written in 1956 while Bolcom was a seventeen-year-old freshman at the University of Washington. He was hardly a typical student composer, having studied composition with George McKay and John Verrall at the University of Washington since he was eleven years old. Before writing the First Sonata, he had already composed three string quartets and many study pieces for his teachers.

The Sonata (originally Op. 4) was written as a wedding present for violinist Peter Marsh and his new wife, pianist Joanna Voles. Unfortunately, the Marshes never performed the piece before their divorce, so the premiere was in fact given by Bolcom and violinist Joy Aarset in the spring of 1957 during a composition recital at the University of Washington. The sonata then languished for many years until Bolcom wrote Commedia for (Almost) Eighteenth Century Orchestra for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. During rehearsals he met its Associate Concertmaster, Hanley Daws, who was drawn to Bolcom’s music and asked him to compose a violin sonata. Not having time to write a completely new work, Bolcom decided instead to revise his First Sonata.

The revision was commissioned by the College of St. Thomas for its centennial celebration and was premiered by faculty members Hanley Daws and Katherine Faricy. Their performance at Minneapolis' Ordway Theater on April 21, 1984 was legitimately billed as the world premiere since it represented a revised version. The program was
repeated in New York on January 13, 1985. Dennis Rooney of The Strad said of the New York debut, "The duo were always convincing in their performance of the work and occasionally brilliant although the violinist (sic) was disinclined to embrace enthusiastically the music's vulgar aspects."\(^52\)

Bolcom says in his note to the revised edition:

> I have rewritten only slightly, mostly tightening, but trying not to be "close-footed," not preventing—I hope—the youthful energy of the original from flowing. At times I found that my memory of the piece had changed some details, and I took these changes into account, sometimes respecting them, sometimes going toward the first version. Every note has been rethought, but many are unchanged. I have not destroyed the first version, but I would not have undertaken the revision had I not felt that reworking the sonata would reflect more accurately what I'd first intended than the earlier version had, or at least what I remember of it. (As it now stands, more than 200 measures have been cut; the only really new material is three measures in the second movement, which fill in a link I always felt missing.) I have always felt an affection for this sonata and am glad for the opportunity to present it in this new version." \(^53\)

A comparison of the two versions verifies Bolcom's claim that the revisions do not change the sonata's overall posture. The most significant alterations occur in the last movement where an entire fugue was cut (the "200 measures" referred to above). The other two movements have been re-touched: repetitions are pruned, rhythms are clarified, treble clef notations have been exchanged for ones in bass clef, and occasionally a chord is restructured. Some harmonies and rhythms have been re-written while notational eccentricities have been tamed and microtones eliminated. Although these changes represent significant structural improvements, the emotional content of the music is unaffected.

\(^{52}\)Dennis Rooney, "Concert Notes," The Strad, March 1986, 824.

Since each movement presents unique problems, the analysis will be correspondingly diverse. The first movement presents an opportunity to study his use of dissonance, while a three-bar addition to the second movement initiates a discussion concerning its effectiveness as a transition. Finally, the significant changes to the third movement call into question Bolcom's original title of "variations."

**First Movement: Legend**

The first movement is cast in two large sections (A-B-C-D and A'-B'-D) separated by a grand pause and concluded by a Coda. Though there are only a few memorable melodies, Bolcom achieves unity through melodic and accompanimental figures which rely heavily on ostinato and motivic sequencing, and through the large-scale repetition of A, B, and D.

The A section (marked *adagio*) is characterized by slow melodic lines in the violin which are created from chains of perfect fourths or major and minor thirds. Within each phrase these chains are usually unidirectional. The B section (marked *piu mosso, energico*) is derived from intervals of the previous melody, but the mood is somewhat unpredictable as the violin explores a number of different sounds including a waltz and country fiddling. A lyrical third section (C) acts as a transition to a sardonic jig in the D section. After a grand pause, the opening tune returns (A') followed by B', but neither section is significantly developed. Bolcom skips the lyrical C section and goes directly into an abbreviated version of the D section, giving it new pitch center and making it more rhythmically complex. The whole movement ends with a Copland-inspired coda.

Linear counterpoint plays a significant role in the harmonic and melodic structures of the first movement. Later we will see how dissonance treatment can be explained as a function of melody. The opening of the movement, however, demonstrates the interrelationship between the piano's chords and the intervallic choices
made in the violin melody. In the first four measures of Example 1 below, the violin melody rises by fourths and the piano’s block harmonies are largely quintal. In measure 8, the piano initiates the interval of a third (through a scale harmonized in parallel thirds) that is reflected in the violin part of measure 9.

Example 1 (m. 1-11) All examples of William Bolcom’s music are used with permission from E.B. Marks Music/Hal Leonard Corporation.

Intervallic agreement (i.e. similar intervals used in melodic or harmonic construction) between the two instruments continues throughout the movement in a "follow the leader" arrangement. As in Example 2, the quartal and tertian elements are often used simultaneously.
Example 2 (mm. 35-38)

In Example 2, the violin melody is constructed of minor thirds and perfect fifths. The piano imitates with the bass/alto and tenor/soprano voices moving in parallel thirds while parallel fifths occur between the other pairs. In measure 38, the violin leaps down two perfect fifths in response to the pianist's quintal harmonies. This indicates that while both tertian and quintal harmonies can be used simultaneously, one instrument often initiates the use of one or the other.

Looking at the vertical arrangement of pitches, we could analyze the piano's struck simultaneities as a sequence of minor-minor seventh chords, but the strong linear counterpoint draws the ear to the horizontal rather than vertical aspects of the music. This viewpoint is further strengthened by what occurs in the hymn-tune section (measures 54-63) shown in Example 3 below.
Dissonance within the context of free tonality is not always easy to explain, yet certain clues point to a logical (and linear) set of rules. For example, the first chord in Example 3 (measure 54) contains a $B^b$ major triad in the right hand and $B$ in the bass. If the $B^b/B$ discrepancy had affected the third of the chord, we might explain it as Bolcom's favored major/minor tonality; since this is not the case, something else must be at work. The $E$ on the second beat of the following measure (m. 55) offers a possible clue. Bolcom goes out of his way to contrast $B^b$ with $B$, and $E^b$ with $E$ in measure 55. It is quite reasonable to suppose that he has employed two different scales which result in bi-tonality: C major in the left hand and $B^b$ major in the right.
Therefore, while a chordal analysis is problematic, the intentional dissonances are more easily explained when viewed from a horizontal, melodic perspective.

Pedal tones that are dissonant to the harmonies provide further evidence of horizontal priorities. Beginning in measure 56, the $B^b$ in the top voice is a pedal that lasts for four measures. Then in measure 60, $F$ takes over as the repeated pitch for five consecutive measures. For a while, both $B^b$ and $F$ are heard in a tonic and dominant relationship (measures 60-61). The other pitches in the chords are the result of harmonizing the ascending scale in thirds or simultaneous thirds and fourths.$^{54}$

There are, however, other notes which need to be explained differently. In measure 55, the $G$ in the top voice (piano part) could have been replaced with an $A$ to avoid a dissonance with the violin. In that case, the ascending scale would be complete from $D$ to $B^b$. Instead, Bolcom retains the $G$ in the piano (from the second beat of measure 55) as a dissonance, rather than anticipate (and spoil) the violin’s passing tone ($A$). A similar situation occurs in measure 58 where an $E$ could have functioned as a passing tone in the tenor voice between $D$ and $F$. Here again Bolcom creates a dissonance (this time as an anticipation figure) thereby preventing parallel octaves between the hands and the rather ordinary sonority of a diminished triad.

As mentioned earlier, ostinatos are typically used to maintain coherence from both a rhythmic and melodic viewpoint or for a psychological effect. An example of ostinato occurs when Bolcom uses a hypnotic four note figure at measure 19 (circled in Example 4) to cross cut the 3/4 meter and prepare the transition to the surprising piu mosso, energico at measure 29. These events are shown in Example 4 below:

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$^{54}$The $D$ (second beat of measure 60) is a misprint in the 1984 edition, according to Bolcom. My analysis therefore is based on an $E$ in the bass voice.
Example 4 (mm. 19-31)

Two related ostinatos (Examples 5 and 6) serve the opposite function: namely to diffuse tension through a ostinato figure before returning to the opening theme.

Example 5 (mm. 72-78)
Example 6 (mm. 261-275)

Bolcom's melodies often conform to the ideas of repetition and intervallic identity that were discussed concerning his harmonies. For instance, the opening motive, while apparently set in the temporary key of $E_b$ major, pays a particular debt to the interval of the perfect fourth (square brackets in Example 7 below). In the second descending figure (mm. 8-9) the intervals become major and minor thirds (shown with angled brackets below).

Example 7 (violin part, mm. 1-10)
At the opening of the B section at measure 29 (Example 8 below), we see how the violin’s rising perfect fourth motive (Example 6 above) has been transformed and compressed into an aggressively ascending line which is momentarily imitated by the piano at the dominant pitch level. (Auxiliary stems have been drawn to clarify the rising fourth motive.)

Example 8 (mm. 29-31)

Several motives are created and developed through the simple system of interval identity. For example, the falling minor third in measure 35 is treated as a melodic kernel, producing an intervallic identity linking several sections together. The minor thirds in the violin part create family resemblances among the following motives:

Example 9 (violin part, mm. 35-39)
Chains of thirds (minor or major) are another favorite device of Bolcom's. In the Third Sonata, the entire third movement (Example 12) is created out of these chains, and we see its precursor in the First Sonata in measures 311-320 (Example 13).

Example 10 (violin part, mm. 155-161)

Example 11 (violin part, mm. 261-266)

Example 12 (violin part, Third Sonata, III, mm. 47-50)
Thus we see that Bolcom uses quintal and tertian harmonies which are highly linear in their orientation.

Second Movement: *Nocturne*

The *Nocturne* is a through-composed form. It opens with a deep and lonesome piano melody stated in three octaves and lightly colored by a four-note descending scale in the bass shown below in Example 14. Bolcom plays with the listener's metric expectations by extending the piano's second phrase (measure 3) by one quarter note, necessitating the 5/4 meter.

The violinist's answer is equally plaintive, but its contour and rhythm are more pronounced. The melodic structure is typical Bolcom: minor thirds are linked together by half-steps, creating a perpetually minor-sounding line. The piano, however, works
within its own system of gently rising and falling perfect fourths against an ostinato pedal point. A section labeled "Like a distant memory" (Example 15 below) introduces a bluesy theme which is accompanied only by a gentle pulsation in the lowest octaves of the piano.

Example 15 (mm. 17-19 of 1984 version)

As the "memory" drifts away, the violin asks a musical question which is then tentatively answered by the piano. The ensuing conversation is composed of icy, four note statements of crystalline imitation in the highest tessitura. Following a brief climax, the violin continues in a monologue of harmonics with occasional comments from the piano.

At this point in the revised edition of the piece, Bolcom inserts three bars of transition. Although they admirably serve their purpose, they resemble Bolcom's later music and therefore seem out of place in a way which will be demonstrated shortly. Formerly, the only transition was a one-and-one-half beat grand pause. This silence has been maintained in the 1984 revision, but an added tornado-like outburst of non-tonal music completely disrupts the otherwise glassy surface of the music. This disturbance is gone as quickly as it arrived, however, and we are left with a sustained
A semitone between violin and right-hand of the piano, which is punctuated by two *sforzando* notes in a mock cadential arrangement of dominant and tonic.

Bolcom's reputation as an eclectic might imply that all his works shift constantly from one type of musical expression to another. Indeed, some of Bolcom's music delights in shocking juxtapositions. For example, the *Fantasia Concertante* (1985-86) shifts among elements derived from Mozart, Rossini, Weber, and the blues. Here in this early sonata there are indeed a number of influences, including Hindemith and Ives. Nevertheless, these stylistic shifts are worked skillfully and non-obtrusively so that the listener is only vaguely aware of the technique. In the 1984 revision, Bolcom added three bars of transition, thus making an exception to this "rule" of smooth stylistic shifts. The result sounds more like the daring juxtapositions found in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and also resembles passages from the *Second* and *Third* violin sonatas. Example 16 below reproduces measures 33-36 of the 1984 revision.
The following examples demonstrate the resemblance of Example 16 to passages from the Second Sonata (1978) and the Third Sonata (1992):

Example 16 (mm. 33-36 of 1984 version)

Example 17 (Second Sonata, Second Movement, mm. 80-86)
Examples 16, 17, and 18 share jagged melodic shapes which descend in a sequential pattern. Their angular strength contrasts with the surrounding textures and in each case are initiated in a dramatic way, either by a glissando (First and Second Sonatas) or by a driving scale and double-stop chords (Third Sonata). A further family resemblance exists between the piano parts of the First and Third Sonatas: both accompaniments are chordal, with an active bass line in dotted rhythms and freely dissonant harmonies that are independent of the violin line. The piano part of the Second Sonata is not of the same texture, though it does demonstrate the same sense of independent harmony and thematic content.

These comparisons suggest that Bolcom drew from his twenty eight years of experience to "fill in a link [he] always felt missing."\(^{55}\) Certainly, the new transition is effective because it adds some drama to an otherwise placid movement. Furthermore, it counteracts the overall quietude of the second movement by foreshadowing the intense sections of the third movement.

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Third Movement: *Quasi-Variations: Scenes from a Young Life*

The movement opens with a nursery-rhyme melody accompanied by an Alberti bass and is reminiscent of an elementary piano piece (hence the "Young Life" designation). The violin imitates the line an octave higher before the piano introduces a second tune. Here, Bolcom intentionally misaligns the melody and accompaniment, almost as if to imitate a confused student's performance. The texture then suddenly changes, harmonies become dissonant, and the whole mood darkens. Out of this grows a highly animated interplay of sixteenth notes between the two instruments. This is temporarily interrupted by a melody reminiscent of the first movement and then a beautiful hymn tune. A *misterioso* section full of shimmers and shivers leads into a scherzando with jazzy rhythms and undulating half-steps. A brief coda sums up all of the material, and the movement closes with a reassuring return of the child's tune.

The title of the final movement was changed from "Variations" to "Quasi-Variations: Scenes from a Young Life." When asked what the revised title meant, Bolcom replied: "...when I was going over and looking at it again, I thought they were variations, but they weren't. They were quasi-variations." However, the changes made to this last movement are far more significant than just nomenclature. He cut an entire fugue (some 200 measures) because he said it was "terrible! And it certainly was outsized for the rest of the sonata." Its theme was a six-bar subject with entrances on the submediant (an unusual pitch level) and dominant as shown below.

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Example 19 (mm. 181-196 of 1956 version, Fugato)
Several changes to the *misterioso* section (which preceded the fugato) make it more eerily effective. In the first place, Bolcom has added a measured tremolo to the piano part to match the violin more effectively as shown in the comparison below.

Example 20 (mm. 146-150 of 1956 version)

Example 21 (mm. 142-145 of 1984 version)

In the next few bars shown on Example 23, he reshapes the bass line through octave displacement, thereby chiseling a stronger profile and better imitating the leaping violin line. Moreover, he changes some pitches. A comparison of measure 152 of the 1956 version to measure 148 of the 1984 version (Examples 22 and 23 respectively) reveals that Bolcom has rethought the harmonization. Similarly, in the following bar (measures 153 versus 149), the final three notes in the piano (L.H.) have been changed from D-G-C♯ to B♭-A-C♯. In Example 23 below, circled pitches represent a change in octave or pitch-class from Example 22.
A comparison of Examples 24 and 25 (below) demonstrates how Bolcom has recomposed bars 162 to 166 (1984 numbers) to effect a new transition into the Allegro scherzando. It is clear that the 1984 changes maintain motivic and contrapuntal continuity while simplifying the rhythmic complexity of 3 against 4. Additionally, the octave doublings, rhythm, and motivic continuity have been altered in the 1984 edition. The latter displays on the one hand greater consistency of the 6/8 meter and a more transparent texture; on the other hand, the melodic lines are more chromatic and the harmonies are completely changed. Furthermore, we see some of Bolcom's later technique of chord mirroring in the piano's right hand (circled notes in measures 164 and 165 of Example 20).\footnote{For a further discussion of this technique, see the discussion of the\textit{Second Sonata} in Chapter 4, pages 51 and 60.}
Example 24 (mm. 173-180 of 1956 version)

Example 25 (mm. 162-166 of 1984 version)
Bolcom also re-harmonizes measures 220-224 of the 1984 edition, avoiding the open fifth harmonies in the piano shown on Examples 26 and 27. He may have felt that these simple harmonies sounded too naive in the prevailing harmonic context, or perhaps he wished to supplement the jazzy rhythms with a more percussive sound. (The F♭ and E♭ in the lowest register create a "thud" reminiscent of a bass drum.) These changes are illustrated below:

Example 26 (mm. 315-320 of 1956 version)

Example 27 (mm. 220-224 of 1984 version)

Another small section of ten bars (shown below in Example 28) was cut from the original version, possibly because the Allegro forzando referred to the fugato subject which was cut from the revised edition.
Example 28 (mm. 357-366 of 1956 version)

Measure 364 (marked Andante) of Example 28 is an abbreviated quote from a preceding passage. Its original purpose would have been to sandwich the Allegro forzando; the previous cut rendered the Andante needless, and it too was cut.

The return of the opening material has been maintained in the 1984 edition to remind the listener of the simple melodies of childhood and perhaps more obscurely to remind the listener that these are "Quasi-variations." However, it is doubtful that even the most attentive listener would detect the variation process. Before the 1984 revision, there was evidence of shared motives between the fugato section and the allegro con brio which followed, but even this is a tenuous connection. Therefore, we must take Bolcom at his word about the "quasi" variations, and enjoy this quirky, multi-sectional movement for its more obvious merits.
CHAPTER IV
SECOND SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Many of the great works in the violin literature arose from collaborative friendships between composer and violinist: Stravinsky and Dushkin, Bartók and d'Arányi, Brahms and Joachim are famous examples. Such a relationship exists between William Bolcom and violinist Sergiu Luca, for whom the Second Sonata was written. Bolcom and Luca first performed together in 1973 at the Portland Summer Concerts held at Reed College in Washington, and premiered the Duo Fantasy which was dedicated to Luca. The concert was a success, although Luca broke a string and was forced to start over.\(^5\) The two men soon became fast friends, sharing a love for good food (Luca is a gourmet chef), jazz music, and virtuosity on their respective instruments. The story of their meeting, as told by Bolcom, goes this way:

Sergiu Luca climbed the five flights up to my New York apartment for the first time in early 1973. A mutual friend in Israel had recommended that he come see me in connection with Serge's just-forming concert series in Portland, Oregon—would I come out that summer with Joan Morris, as composer-in-residence and pianist? He wanted two works to be written specially for the Chamber Music Northwest group (then called Portland Summer Concerts): one, a piece for the ensemble (the Summer Divertimento), and the other, a work to be played by us, for violin and piano. This is the Duo Fantasy on this recording, begun in New York and finished at Lake Oswego, Oregon, that June. It was a warm, muggy summer; I mention this because the other major work on this album, the Second Sonata, is also a summer composition, and this may have something to do with the basically relaxed mood of both pieces. My favorite violin-and-piano music, in any event, tends less toward the grand than

toward the *intime*—I prefer the Beethoven Tenth Sonata to the *Kreutzer*, for example—and I feel the Ives' four sonatas share this modest format.\(^5^9\)

After the summer of 1973, Bolcom undoubtedly had to devote time to his new duties as Assistant Professor of composition at the University of Michigan; his compositions during the next few years were limited to a solo-guitar piece (*Seasons*) and a song cycle for tenor Paul Sperry called *Open House*. Meanwhile, the political climate darkened as the Vietnam War, the war in Cambodia, and Watergate captured the nation's attention, creating discontent on every level and dampening the nation's bicentennial spirits. His productivity increased dramatically in 1976 (partially due to two commissions), but politics colored his writing. In that year, he composed *A Short Lecture on the Clarinet*, *Revelation Studies* (for two carillon players), *Mysteries* (organ), *Piano Quartet*, and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* which was premiered at Aspen that summer. Unlike his contemporary Frederick Rzewski, Bolcom is not usually considered a political composer. However, he did use the occasion of the American Bicentennial to air his anti-war feelings. If he shared the sentiments of other University of Michigan faculty and students who protested Henry Kissinger's planned commencement speech (Kissinger withdrew), then it is quite reasonable to suppose that his anti-war feelings were expressed through his music. The times seemed to weigh heavily on everyone's mind, including Bolcom's, whose program notes to the recording of the *Piano Quartet* include the following explanation:

Both my major commissions for the 1976 bicentennial observance took for their themes what I think of as a tragic flaw in the American psyche that seems to lead inexorably towards violence. While the *Piano Concerto*’s last movement was a cavalcade of brutal clichés and naïveté in constant juxtaposition, the impulse that leads the *Piano Quartet* to a (to me) terrifying conclusion is internal and psychological, having as much to do with the inner forces of the previous movements as with the overriding contrary principle.

\(^{5^9}\)William Bolcom, liner notes for *Second Sonata, Duo Fantasy, Graceful Ghost Rag*, Nonesuch H-79058-1.
I plead guilty here to writing 'program music.' ...The contrary principle in the quartet derives as much from my own emotional fix on our nation's spiritual state as from Blakean philosophy.60

As the nation grew less somber, so did Bolcom's compositional style. In 1978, Bolcom began to write in a much lighter vein. He completed Darius Milhaud's 1937 adaptation of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. Other pieces included the *Three Irish Songs* (for medium voice, flute, violin, viola, cello and piano) and *Six Cabaret Songs*.

Bolcom's friendship with Luca had recently borne fruit in the *Suite for Solo Violin* (1977), and they were eager to do another piece in the violin sonata format. The opportunity and motive came early in 1978. Bolcom's program notes again provide the details:

> It need not be emphasized that Joe Venuti was incontestably the greatest jazz violinist of his (and our) time, who coupled an extremely developed classical technique with a wonderful, nuanced, swinging style that was copied by everyone else in detail. Perhaps the Art Tatum of the violin, Joe kept his technique and flawless intonation up to his death in the eighties. When Sergiu told me that he had become close friends with the grand old renegade from the Detroit Symphony, I was overjoyed—finally I wouldn't have to explain what I meant to a violinist when I wanted this or that kind of slur or smear, or that specially throwaway quality Joe so often had—and one evening in April 1978 at New York Michael's Pub, first Serge, then Joan and I, were invited to sit in with the master. An unforgettable experience!

The McKim Fund of the Library of Congress had given Sergiu a commission for me—a piece for us to play—and that June I began the *Second Sonata* (the *First* is a juvenile effort that I still like and want to revise someday) in Ann Arbor and New York. While working on the *Sonata* at Aspen later that summer, I received a newspaper clipping and a note from Serge: Joe Venuti had died, just before he was to play at Chamber Music Northwest in Portland. The *Second Sonata* became in part a farewell to Joe; although there is little in it that refers directly to his playing style, it is necessary for the violinist to know, and have well-rooted in the ear, the special world of Venuti.61

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60 William Bolcom, liner notes for *Piano Quartet*, CRI SD 447.
Overall, the circumstances and mood of its composition are reminiscent of the Brahms' *Sonata in G major*: it too was composed at a resort town during the summer months, exactly one hundred years previously, and was written with a particular violinist in mind (Joseph Joachim). Melvin Berger described Brahms' sonata as "Apollonian," a characterization that also applies to Bolcom's delightful work. The *Second Sonata* is (oddly enough) not dedicated to Luca; instead it bears a dedication to John Verrall, Bolcom's composition teacher at the University of Washington.

**First Movement: Summer Dreams**

The first movement "is built on a modified blues format with a contrasting middle section," according to the composer. This analysis is accurate when considering the outer sections of the piano part only, which create an A-B-A' form. The violin part follows an A-B-C format and will be discussed in detail momentarily. For the sake of clarity, the three sections are identified with roman numerals rather than letters in the following discussion.

**Section I**

The movement opens with a jazz-influenced bass line which follows the typical blues or boogie-woogie progression I-IV-V-I. Bolcom labels the piano part "smooth; no dynamic or rhythmic change" because the simple harmonies and familiar melodic outline are intended to create a dreamy, disembodied effect. Bolcom elegantly notates the "swing" feel of the rhythm, calling for an unusual time signature of 24/16 or 4 dotted quarter-notes per bar, thus facilitating the sixteenth-note triplets in the right hand of the piano part.

For the purpose of differentiating the lines, Bolcom rarely allows the violin and piano to share the same pitch in the same measure, the obvious exception being the

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rules: the piano is simply in F-major with some chromatic alterations while the violin is non-tonal as discussed below.

A fortuitous compositional accident creates a perfect twelve-tone row in measures 4 through 8, with the instruments sharing equally the twelve pitches. Example 29 shows this arrangement: solid stems designate the exact distribution for measures 4-8, and dotted stems show borrowed or shared pitches for measures 9-22.

Example 29 (Shared or borrowed pitches of mm. 9-22)

The remainder of the violin line, however, reveals no further development of the row by inversion, retrograde or transposition, confirming that no serial development was intended.

It may be safe to conclude that Bolcom composed the violin line simply as his ear instinctively guided him. Or, we might hypothesize that the violin melody is based on six pitches (E, C#, B, A, G, and F#) because they constitute the most distant relationship to the piano’s F-major tonality. An analysis of the violin’s pitch material (from the opening to the end of the A-section) reveals the following distribution:

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64This view is confirmed by William Bolcom. See Appendix A, p. 125
Table 1. *Second Sonata:* Pitch Content and Frequency in Measures 1-22.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitch Class</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D#</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C#</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F#</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As further evidence of this theory, Bolcom never allows the violin and piano to share the same enharmonic spelling of a note in the same measure, excepting measure 3 (Example 30) where the violin enters. Also, three pitches are not shared between the two instruments: the violin never uses F, while the piano never uses B or F#. This careful avoidance of F in the violin implies that Bolcom wants to preserve the psychological barrier between the two parts, while B and F# would be found only in secondary dominants to the piano's key of F major. Additionally, he avoids rhythmic alignment between the two parts in every measure except measure 3, shown below:

Example 30 (mm. 3-4)
It is noteworthy that Bolcom begins the violin part in unison with the piano part, but in the next measure, the C and C♯ are not struck together, thus setting a precedent for non-unison rhythms that will continue throughout the section.

Section II

The cool elasticity of Section I ends with a strictly measured grand pause, and section II begins with a complete change of texture, mood, and harmonic structure. The violin enters with a spiky melody of double-stop chords. Intervals of Major 7ths and tritones are established as favorites, and the construction is based on a mosaic-like repetition of short ideas. Throughout Example 31 below, the violin re-uses the same dyads repeatedly.

Example 31 (mm. 23-26)

The piano adopts the fragmentary rhythms and chordal repetitions established by the violin. Whereas the violin never repeats the same chord twice in a row, the piano part is frequently palindromic. In Example 32 below, letters identify similar chords.
Example 32 (mm. 27-29)

Example 33 (mm. 34-36)

Through the piano’s imitation of the violin’s tritones and major 7ths, Bolcom creates a consistent tonal color. An alternating conversation between the violin and piano further unifies this section and differentiates it from the first section where the parts are seemingly ignorant of each other.

The violin’s harmonic A in measure 61 initiates a small cadenza and again the violin and piano take divergent paths. D-major arpeggios form the violin’s melodic content, while the piano continues its block chords (marked "Bell-like") from Section II as shown in Example 34 below.
Example 34 (m. 62)

Section III

Coming to rest on a high A at the end of the cadenza (which is tied into measure 63), the violin relinquishes its bravura as the piano resumes the blues figuration from Section I. Again, the two instruments seem to be at odds: the violin stubbornly plays in D major as the piano slips back into an F-major tonality. This Ivesian bitonality is comprehensible because the listener recognizes the separate melodic functions of each instrument.

Finally, in measure 68, the violin accepts the pianist's invitation and joins in by scraping out the sly and dirty blues tune shown below in Example 35.
Example 35 (mm. 68-72)

For the sake of interest, Bolcom adds a few embellishing tones at the end of each measure and an occasional added voice or chromatic bass line to enliven the piano part as shown above in Example 35. The violin comes to rest on a high C in measure 77 (not shown) before embarking on another cadenza. The conflicting tonalities in the previous cadenza have been reconciled to a single key of F-major. Measure 81 shown below in Example 36 restates measure 22 and signals the start of the coda. Here, the bell-like chords of the cadenza combine with one last violin blues slide into the root of an F-major chord.
Second Movement: *Brutal, fast*

Living up to its name, this movement explores the savage rhythms and repeated phrases of Bolcom's childhood idol, Igor Stravinsky. Its rhythmic structuring also appears to be an extension of the dialogue begun in Section II of the previous movement, though the mood has darkened considerably. The formal construction resembles a volcanic eruption, with bubbling and ominous activity surrounding the explosion in measures 81-101.

The brutal tension of this movement is immediately established through rhythmically erratic repetitions of a single ostinato motive, lurking in the lowest registers of both instruments. The interplay between the instruments seems almost improvisatory because of the irregular spacing between repetitions and despite the cut-
time meter. As the statements pile up on each other, the music breaks its motivic bonds in measure 22, only to be captured by another ostinato that builds to an even greater climax in measure 29. Vertical sonorities of chromatic clusters and minor thirds (or their inversion) enhance the registral darkness of the piece.

A pitch analysis of measures 21 to 34 reveals that Bolcom is using a very limited number of sonorities in both vertical and horizontal configurations to achieve a unified sound. In Example 37 below, a chromatic hexachord becomes important as a sonority and melodic fragment. Measure 23 introduces the pitches E, C♯, F, D, E♭, and F♯ which are shared between the left and right hands of the piano. When these are transposed up a major third, they become measure 24. Measures 25 and 26 replicate this process. In measure 28, Bolcom compresses the chromatic hexachord from measures 23 and 24 by sounding the pitches two at a time rather than sequentially. Later, the violin and piano share the original six pitches as a vertical chord in measure 34. This type of compositional economy is characteristic of this sparse and angry movement.
Example 37 (mm. 18-36)
The music in measures 31 through 36 of the previous example continues for five more measures. During that time, we are lulled into a false quietude so that the *con forza* section at measure 42 (Example 38 below) catches us off-guard. Here, the pianist’s hands repel each other in contrary motion while the violin serves a rhythmic, but harmonically stationary role. At the peak of this brief climax (measure 46), the violin leaps more than an octave out of its narrow tessitura, and follows with a *pianissimo* version of the ostinato eighth-note motive (measures 46-49). In the previous section, six pitches in measure 23 became the basis for the next sequence of six pitches. In this present section, six chords (labeled A, B, C, D, E, and F on Example 38) substitute for individual pitches. Bolcom then repeats the sequence and then abstracts four chords (E, F, A and B) which are presented in a new order.

![Example 38 (mm. 42-49)](image-url)
Another example of compositional economy occurs when Bolcom combines three separate motivic elements to serve as a composite motive (Example 42) used in transition section from measures 53 to 79 (not shown). The violin's notes in the new motive derive from the first measure (Example 39), while the left and right hands of the piano come from measure 32 (Example 40) and measure 2 (Example 41).

Example 39 (m. 1, violin)

Example 40 (m. 32, circled notes in L. H. of piano)

Example 41 (m. 2, circled notes in R. H. of piano)

Example 42 (composite motive used in mm. 53-79)
The section labeled *Wild!* begins at measure 80 and makes spectacular use of a mosaic principle to organize a seemingly random collection of notes. By spacing out the violin's five motivic gestures (labeled A through E in Example 43 below), Bolcom preserves coherence for the listener throughout this dense and angry texture. At a much faster pace, the piano offers nineteen different harmonic fragments that repeat freely yet remain recognizable because of their registral and inversional integrity. A set-type analysis reveals that many of the motives are related by transposition or inversion. However, it is most likely that Bolcom achieves unity through aural identity alone—a testament to the brain's ability to recognize patterns despite the complex texture, speed, and density of the passage.
Example 43 (mm. 80-96)
A grand pause in measure 102 initiates the last section that recalls textures and rhythms from the first section. A single pizzicato played "close to the bridge" ends the movement. One might question Bolcom's choice of notation in the penultimate measure shown in Example 44 below. Coming as it does after a grand pause, the rhythmic subtlety of the large triplet is most likely lost on the audience. Yet the performer might interpret the notation with a waltz-like elegance that could not be achieved through binary divisions.

Example 44 (mm. 114-120)
Third Movement: *Adagio*

A dramatic statement by the solo violin opens the third movement. It is characteristic of Bolcom to write atonal melodies with jagged contours and wide ranges, and this one is no exception. At the end of the first phrase, the piano joins the violin with a single chord marked *espressivo*, indicating a supportive rather than competitive role in this movement. The two chords in the third bar encourage the violin to continue, while introducing set-types 4-24 (a whole-tone collection) and 4-27 which are prominent sonorities in the atonal portion of this movement. As in the second movement, these two sonorities alternate in the piano part but are not picked up by the violin. The 4-24 chord is then transposed upward four chromatic tones as shown below.

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65Set theory analysis was developed by American theorist Allen Forte to classify groups of notes. These groups are called "sets" and contain from three to nine discrete members. Collections which are transpositions of inversions of one another are considered equivalent. The sets are numbered in a consistent manner with the first number describing how many notes are in the set while the second number acts as an identifier. Sets can be transposed or inverted without losing their identity. In Example 13, the four note collections of pitches I am describing are called 4-24 and 4-27 set-types according to Forte’s nomenclature. I have chosen this method of classification because it provides a convenient labeling system for dissonant chords in the same way that a C major chord identifies a collection of three notes: C, E, and G. However, I do not mean to imply that Bolcom’s music is deliberately based on this technique *per se.*
III. Adagio

Example 45 (mm. 1-8)
This 4-24 sonority makes two more extended appearances later in the movement. In measure 15 it begins rising chromatically in the context of a written-out accelerando, creating the necessary tension and momentum to drive the violin to the extreme end of the fingerboard.

Example 46 (mm. 15-19)

During the violin's descent in measures 19 through 23 (Example 47 below), the piano arpeggiates three chords (and introduces a new texture) before beginning the third and final repetition of the 4-24 sonority in measure 21-22. This one decelerates from
triplets to syncopated duplets while getting softer and lighter. The violin completes its phrase in an unmetered solitude.

Example 47 (mm. 18-23)

Not all of the sonorities in this movement are reducible to set-types 4-24 and 4-27, and therefore they present a wider palette of intervallic colors. For instance, the piano part shown in Example 48 below could be described as the modern counterpart to a baroque continuo realization. Chords are presented in misty arpeggios, without form
or substance, and well deserving of Bolcom's performance directions, *liquid* and *delicate, smooth*. Their gossamer lightness is due to the tessitura, which lies above middle C on the keyboard. When combined with mercurial rhythms, they serve as a perfect complement to the solid rhythms and angularity of the violin line.

Example 48 (mm. 12-14)

According to Sergiu Luca, the final section (shown below in Example 49) is a Requiem to Joe Venuti. Bolcom was notified of Venuti's death at this point in the writing process and the musical comma at measure 23 seems to suspend time: just as if we too had to put down our daily concerns to mourn with Bolcom. When the piano enters at measure 24, it transports us to the world of sensuous jazz tonality. Stubbornly, the violin tries to continue its free tonality but is overwhelmed (after two statements) in a sea of D^b-major sonorities. The beautiful melody is finally shared by the two instruments in measure 34 with an added obbligato in the pianist's right hand.
The movement comes to rest in measure 44, at which point the tonal harmonies dissolve as the violin descends an F major and A major/minor arpeggio against the $G^b/D^b/A^b$ quintal harmonies in the piano, thus ending Venuti’s requiem with a gentle reminder of the opening free tonality.

Example 49 (mm. 24-47)
Fourth Movement: *In Memory of Joe Venuti*

This movement shares many ideas with the first movement and indeed begins with the bass line and regular phrase structure typical of the blues played by Joe Venuti. Conventions such as circles of fifths, third relationships, bi-tonality, pedal points, and hemiola are used throughout in ways that bear Bolcom’s signature. The form can be broken into eight sections: A-B-C-D-A'-E-A''-Coda. The A sections share the I-IV-V blues progression in a variety of keys, while the melody becomes a source of improvisational material. The B and C sections are atonal, with touches of Bartok’s violence and Debussy’s wit. The movement concludes with a brief repetition of the opening material and a coda based on the coda of the first movement. The analysis below first discusses the three blues sections (A, A', and A''), and secondly the
contrasting sections (B, C, D, and E). For convenience in following the analysis, these sections are cross-referenced with measure numbers in the diagram below:

Table 2. *Second Sonata: Musical Form of the Fourth Movement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>51-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>67-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>79-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>99-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>116-134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A''</td>
<td>135-142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>143-152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bolcom's expertise as a ragtime player is demonstrated by the myriad of accompanimental figures he adds to a simple blues progression. He begins with rich sounding block chords in only three parts, allowing the violin plenty of space to state its simple tune. Example 50 below reproduces the first nine bars of the piece.
IV. In Memory of Joe Venuti

Example 50 (mm. 1-9)

The parallel sixths in the right hand provide richness and an intervallic identity that links it to the accompanimental figure at the beginning of the first movement. Its other functions are discussed below. Later in measure 18 (Example 51), he initiates a new accompanimental variation, created by adding a chromatic pick-up to each arpeggiated chord, giving it a forward-swinging momentum.
Example 51 (mm. 18-19)

The piquant dissonances in Example 52 below fall squarely within the jazz style, but also offer a further example of Bolcom's ability to create new sounds from simple elements. He also takes the figure through eight levels of a circle of fifths at the rate of a half-measure per tonal center (shown with connecting lines in the example). The piano leads the violin in a playful game of tag, first at the distance of two bars, then at only two beats (shown by brackets in the example). Both instruments harmonize their melodies in major sixths, delighting in the resultant cross-relations (for example, the C and C\textsuperscript{b} in measure 28), or other dissonances such as the E in the violin part against the G\textsuperscript{b} major chord in the piano on beat 3 of measure 29.
Example 52 (mm. 26-32)

In the A' section (measure 99, Example 53), eighth-note rhythms and octaves on each change of harmony strengthen this new variation. Meanwhile, the violin soars to a high B♭ in an exuberant display, followed by a long string of arpeggiated thirds, so typical of Bolcom's style. On the arpeggio's conclusion (measure 107) the piano breaks its harmonic and rhythmic pattern with a series of parallel augmented chords in syncopated rhythm. Example 53 below shows the relevant portion of the A' section.
Example 53 (mm. 99-107)

After a grand pause in measure 134, the movement seems to begin over with A' and the coda. However, a series of silences punctuates the melody, as if the performers needed more time to reconsider the shape and drama of each phrase. Finally, the violinist gives up and ends the piece with a quotation from the first movement, including the mournful slide into the F. The piano continues on blithely as if nothing unusual had happened, completing three more statements before realizing its
error and concluding the movement with a high-hat cymbal imitation. These events are shown in Example 54.

Example 54 (mm. 135-152)
The four episodic sections (B, C, D, and E) contrast with the jazz-stylings of the opening. They employ some of the unifying tricks of the second movement, such as repeated figures and contrary motion between violin and piano. However, it is Bolcom's sense of melodic shape and linear counterpoint that successfully integrates these non-tonal sections.

The B section introduces a new texture and a fourth type of accompaniment in measure 51. As shown in Example 23, the harmonies and iambic rhythmic pattern are reminiscent of the melody introduced at the end of the third movement (Example 17, m. 24 above). Bolcom adds a pedal F that functions as the dominant of the violin part and as a common tone to the $D^b$ major, $G^b$ major, and $F$ minor$^7$ harmonies in the piano. Mixed meters of 7/8, 4/4, and 3/4 skew the rhythm and create a drunken feeling with off-beat entrances, irregular phrase lengths, and syncopations.
Example 55  (B section, mm. 51-54)

In the C section, the violin begins with four chords in a descending pattern, coming to rest on a long tritone in measure 68. The piano answers in measures 69-71 with three statements of a swirling, impressionistic figure. Two further statements from the violin interrupt the piano's reverie. With each phrase, the tessitura becomes lower, and the energy level seems to diminish.
Example 56 (C Section, measures 67-78)
A short, sweeping figure leads into measure 79 and opens the D sections with its two disappointed glissandi. This is followed by a meandering scale in the violin that becomes fixated on a B-natural trill (measure 88 ff, shown on Example 57). As these events transpire in the violin, the piano accompanies with a series of arpeggiated gestures that resemble each other in shape and rhythmic structure. When the accompaniment is divided into voice parts, it becomes possible to see a linear progression of half-step motives complementing the winding half-step violin melody.

Example 57 (mm. 85-88)

Several elements unite to create the E section beginning in bar 116. Bolcom has based the melody (Example 58) on the requiem theme from the third movement (Example 59).

Example 58 (Fourth movement, mm. 116-118)
Example 59 (Second Sonata: Third Movement, mm. 38-41)

Bolcom achieves the *misterioso* effect in Example 58 through augmented harmonies, the sparse texture and the irregular meter. Furthermore, he has used the violin's minor sixth double stops to contrast with an earlier motive used in the A section at measure 29 (shown in Example 51 above). In the A section, the major sixths sound optimistic and playful. In the E section shown below in Example 60, the minor sixths sound sinister and mysterious. Bolcom adds to the tension by introducing an ostinato in measure 122 along with dissonant harmonies.
As mentioned previously, the movement ends with a return of the opening theme followed by a brief coda (Example 54 above). It is not the kind of bravura ending that one might expect from such an emotionally diverse sonata, but it does seem to be the logical conclusion to a sonata dedicated to a great jazz violinist whose life ended in an equally peaceful manner.
CHAPTER V

THIRD SONATA (SONATA STRAMBA)

Written in 1992, the Third Sonata commemorates the seventy-fifth birthday of violin pedagogue Dorothy DeLay. In her half-century career, she has trained some of the world's leading violinists, including Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg who commissioned and premiered the sonata at Aspen on July 12, 1993, with the composer at the piano.

In this remarkable sonata, Bolcom's well-known eclecticism combines with highly idiomatic writing for both instruments to create a significant and rewarding challenge to performers and listeners alike. While there is no particular novelty about the forms of its four movements (except perhaps the third), the thematic and harmonic content is full of aural challenges and daring dissonances but is eminently listenable. In his own notes for the Aspen premiere, Bolcom offers the following story.

I am told by my longtime librettist and collaborator Arnold Weinstein that "stramba" means something like "weird" in Italian, and this is certainly a weird Sonata! Its uncanny mood possessed me throughout its creation.

The first movement, after a long and highly theatrical introduction, intones "guerra, guerra" in its principal motive, obsessively and implacably, like war in human history. The Andante seems hardly a relief from the tragic mood. "Like a shiver" is a scherzino leading directly into the last movement which shares a mood somewhere between the darker tangos of Astor Piazzolla and that of heavy-metal rock. But none of these moods is quite "on the nose;" the whole work is "stramba."  

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66 William Bolcom, program notes for Lincoln Center's Stagebill, March 1992, 12D.

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This work exemplifies the breadth of Bolcom's eclectic vision. For example, nothing could seem more incompatible than a dramatic, atonal monologue and a tarantella with its strict triplet rhythm and major/minor tonality. Yet the first movement amalgamates the two through motives and harmonic identities.

Bolcom calls this piece "a portrait of a person," meaning violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and has said that sonata's diversity is "all part of the wildness that she would respond to." The problem with musical portraiture is that the composer must create continuity without sacrificing each movement's individual character. He does this by holding some traits in common throughout the work. Bolcom's penchant for chords that contain both a major and minor third is evident, as are disjunct triads (sometimes called polytonal harmonies), added-note chords, circle-of-fifths bass lines, octatonic, chromatic, whole-tone, and blues scales. As in the Second Sonata, Bolcom ventures into free-tonality where dissonances result from linear counterpoint and where set-class analysis seems an appropriate analytical method. Chains of thirds (major and minor) create melodic structures and organize the vertical sonorities in the third movement, just as they did in the First Sonata.

Bolcom's catholic taste in harmony is matched by the variety of his formal structures. The three violin sonatas could be thought of as suites in which stylized dances are replaced by programmatic titles or performance directions. In the First Sonata, the movements are labeled Legend, Nocturne, and Scenes from a Young Life. The Second Sonata also has three descriptive titles—Summer Dreams, Brutal-Fast, and In Memory of Joe Venuti—and one traditional title, Adagio. The Third Sonata has only one descriptive title—Like a Shiver. The other three movements have performance directions such as A piacere, drammatico; Andante; and Moderato, risoluto, all'
arabesca. As in the seventeenth or eighteenth-century suite, these titles indicate both tempo and temperament, though not form.

**First Movement: A piacere, drammatico**

The first movement alternates between a recitative theme and a tarantella, creating the impression of rondo form which is diagrammed below in Table 3.

**Table 3. Third Sonata: Musical Form of the First Movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Recitative theme on starting pitch D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>Recitative theme on starting pitch A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Presto followed by second theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>A&quot;</td>
<td>Recitative theme on starting pitch D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Tarantella theme in rising arpeggios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>B'</td>
<td>Second theme with tarantella accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Trans.</td>
<td>Transition back to recitative theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>A&quot;</td>
<td>Recitative with tango accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Tarantella with descending octatonic thirds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>A&quot;&quot;</td>
<td>Recitative theme on starting pitch E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>B&quot;</td>
<td>Presto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Tarantella, closed by circle of fifths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>Stretto treatment of the tarantella theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The solo violin's opening gesture is unmetered and atonal, hence the indication *a piacere*. When the piano enters in the second bar, a time signature of 4/4 is inserted, though Bolcom deliberately maintains a recitative-like feeling. A new section marked *Allegro con fuoco* begins in measure 24 and utilizes a tarantella rhythm in the key of A minor. A transition to the opening material begins in measure 82 where the tarantella rhythm overlaps with the atonal harmonies from measure 2. An ostinato piano part accompanies the violin's development of opening material, and the whole effect is of a rather demonic tango. Heralding the return of the tarantella at measure 110 is an arpeggiated figure accompanied by a descending octatonic scale in parallel minor thirds. The recitative in measure 117 begins on E and corresponds to measures 5 through 18. The tarantella returns in measure 133 and continues to the end of the
movement, though a stretto section interjects at measure 149 after a brief allargando. Here the lighter texture encourages a faster tempo and a whirlwind close to this boisterous first movement.

A detailed look at the piece reveals Bolcom's idiomatic harmonic and melodic construction. The explosive opening of measure 1i introduces some of the characters and elements heard throughout the movement. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that many of the compositional clues are contained within the first three phrases of the piece: the harmonic/melodic use of half steps, major and minor chords which interlock, and chains of perfect intervals. Even the tarantella rhythm contained in the body of the movement makes a brief appearance toward the end of the introductory violin recitative.

Although Bolcom's harmonic building blocks are traditional triads, he often uses them to create tonal ambiguity. For instance, the first measure (shown in Example 61) consists of only six pitches and yet the listener perceives several tonal mutations. One analysis yields a large scale G major/minor chord moving to an A\(^b\) chord with no third. Another interpretation finds interlocked chords of G minor and E\(^b\) major. Each analysis is valid because Bolcom uses major/minor tonalities and interlocking triads extensively in this movement.
Example 61 (m. 1i)

In the second recitative statement (Example 62), a chromatic appoggiatura figure (B♭, A, C and B which is coincidentally the Bach motive) contains both harmonic and melodic implications which play out in the remainder of the movement. The motivic possibilities are revealed when the appoggiatura figure (labeled A on Example 62 below) is expanded (labeled B) to produce a pair of interlocking minor triads—A-minor and B♭-minor (labeled C).

Example 62 (m. 1ii)

Once the violin has reached the B♭ which begins measure 1ii (Example 63), the semitone appoggiatura figure develops further. This time the half steps produce interlocking augmented triads which lie a perfect fourth apart.
Example 63 (m. iii)

Later in measures 7 through 9 (Example 64), the appoggiatura figure, major/minor chords, and interlocking triads combine to create the movement's first climax. The first beat of measure 7 re-introduces the BACH signature heard in Example 62 above. Measure 8 develops the same figure along a synthetic scale. The $B^b$ major/minor melody that opens measure 9 leads to a high A in the violin, followed by a massive chord in the piano consisting of B-major and D-minor triads.

Example 64 (mm. 7-9)
After a brief non-tonal interlude (the B section, measures 10-20), the recitative (A") returns as a transition into the tarantella (C) which dominates the movement. In this version of the recitative shown in Example 65 below, Bolcom reverses the direction of the half step motive in preparation for an inversion of the chromatic appoggiatura figure that occurs in measure 34-35 (Example 67). He also uses a perfect fifth relationship between triplet figures as a harmonic identity that will be picked up in measure 41 (Example 68).

Example 65 (mm. 21-24)

Major/minor chords permeate the harmonies of the tarantella section (marked Allegro con fuoco) shown on Example 65. While the violin part and right hand of the piano part are locked in the key of A minor, the left hand introduces C♭ as part of a recurring bass line that begins G♭, F♯, D♯, C♯, and ends with either A or B♭, or both. This ensures that major/minor tonalities will result from the A-minor chords in the right hand and C♯ pitches in the left. From this point forward, the music becomes
increasingly saturated with major/minor sonorities. Example 66 below reproduces a portion of this section.

Example 66 (mm. 23-27)
In the violin part at measure 35 (Example 67), Bolcom inverts the chromatic appoggiatura figure from measure 1ii (Example 62) so that it resolves upward.

Meanwhile, the piano part offers a bi-modal accompaniment: the left hand always presents the upper two pitches of a major chord, while the arpeggios in the right hand are always minor, though based on the same root. The dissonance created by this arrangement lends a sinister power to this tarantella marked Allegro con fuoco.

Example 67 (mm. 34-38)

This section also introduces two other devices: linear constructions which result in dissonant harmonies and chains of perfect intervals. In measures 41 through 45
shown on Example 68, major/minor triads and the half-step motive from measure 35 (Example 67) permeate the passage. However, at the end of each triplet a dissonant note occurs, sometimes creating a seventh chord, and sometimes creating a ninth chord with a missing seventh. A more convincing analysis explains the dissonant note as a part of a line rising in perfect 4ths. The pattern flows for six measures (with some breaks in the sequence) as notated in Example 68 and contributes to the sweeping feel of the passage.

Example 68 (mm. 40-46)
Another structural/harmonic device is the use of non-key-defining scales. While it can be argued that the large scale tonality of this movement is A minor with frequent appearances of its subdominant, Bolcom uses octatonic, chromatic, and whole-tone scales to color (or perhaps obscure) the basic tonality. The tango at measure 93 provides an interesting example of this phenomenon. The score is marked "adagio appassionato" and "inflexible" as the piano embarks on an ostinato of dark strength and implacable rhythm. Meanwhile, the violinist states a quasi-improvisatory line of ascending figures on the chromatic appoggiatura motive of the opening. Obviously, the chromatic scale can be abstracted from these patterns, but so can the whole tone scale. The distinction is important: later, the two types of scales combine to produce a pair of voices that ascend at different rates as shown in Example 69 below:

Example 69 (mm. 100-103)
This arrangement is not without effect on the piano part: through a similar progression, the tessitura rises in both parts until a climax in measure 104 (Example 70) where the piano's D minor harmonies are overlaid with a circle-of-fifths progression ($E^b/A^b/D^b/G^b$) leading to the violin "cadenza" a la Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64.

![Example 70 (mm. 104-108)](example70.png)

In measures 114-115, shown on Example 71, the violin's arpeggios alternate between A minor and D minor as the piano invents a new kind of descending accompaniment based on the octatonic scale harmonized in thirds. Neither part is compromised through this combination, and the two tonal systems maintain their audible integrity. A momentary surge on the last beat of measure 116, shown in Example 71, serves up a shocking reminder of the work's opening. It is almost as if the preceding section were the eye of a storm and could thus be only momentarily calm.
Example 71 (mm. 114-118)

The movement ends with a stretto based on the tarantella theme. Stretto is a technique usually found in contrapuntal works such as fugues. In this case, the imitation is between two voices only. To simulate the effect, Bolcom reduces the time between entrances in addition to shortening the phrase lengths and eliminating the rests that formerly separated them. The stretto section begins at measure 149 in the key of A minor for both instruments (not shown). The piano, however, quickly deviates by a tritone to D# minor in measure 154, shown in Example 72, and then into even stronger dissonance. Beat four of bar 155 commences a series of 4-18 tetrachords that are predominantly transpositions of C, Eb, F#, and G which are labeled in Example 72.
The pattern of these tetrachords follows the triadic soprano voice. However, since not all of the tetrachords are transpositions of the 4-18 set type, the other voices do not yield either a linear or vertical pattern.

![Example 72 (mm. 155-159)](image)

Example 72 (mm. 155-159)

This apparent anarchy contrasts sharply with the predictability of the next six bars (measures 160-165) shown on Example 73. The pianist's left and right hands converge along the strands of a diminished arpeggio and are harmonized with transpositions of the tetrachord A, E♭, G, and G♯ in the right hand, and inversions of
the same sonority in the left hand. The narrowest point occurs in measure 162, after which the lines repel each other to the extreme ends of the keyboard in preparation for the finale.

Example 73 (mm. 160-165)

The finale begins in measure 166 shown below in Example 74. Here, Bolcom exchanges the previous sonority for disjunct minor triads (bi-tonality of A minor and B♭ minor). Through repetition of the fff chords and sonorities which recall measure 2, Bolcom concludes the movement with tremendous energy while exercising compositional economy.
Second Movement: *Andante*

The second movement serves as a lyrical contrast to the drama of the first. The violin presents a halting melody in $D^b$ major accompanied by syncopated neighbor-chord patterns. Hints of octatonic scales and major/minor tonality prevent this tune from becoming too sentimental with cocktail-lounge harmonies. Near the end, the violin plays a searing tune in the upper registers while the piano repeats a rhythmic ostinato. Bolcom incorporates a chain of dominants, running unbroken through nine
keys (from F♯ to B), while the ostinato figure descends a whole-tone scale. Using major third relationships, Bolcom transposes the final motive downward to the original key of D♭ major.

Bolcom creates a mournful and haunting mood out of elements which, when rearranged, could have produced a simple hymn. The violin melody (Example 75), for instance, is little more than a D♭-major scale and arpeggio that migrates briefly into the key of E major (measures 6 and 7) before returning to its home key at measure 9. Two components of this melody create a neighbor-tone motive and an arpeggio motive.

Example 75 (violin part, mm. 1-10)

The traditional harmonies implied by this simple tune are indicated below the staff, but Bolcom avoids a stereotypical accompaniment through the use of neighbor chords and a syncopated ostinato rhythm. The ostinato rhythm (labeled A in Example 76) is
motivically linked to the figure in the violin part (labeled B) and therefore promotes the dialogue between violin and piano. In measure 1 of Example 76, the subdominant harmonies simply function as neighbor chords to the tonic harmony. This neighbor chord pattern continues until measure 4 after which the harmonic rate accelerates toward E major. Example 76 below shows the chord progressions and ostinatos of the opening five bars of this movement.

Example 76 (mm. 1-5)
As the first section closes on $D^b$ major in measures 9-10 (shown below in Example 77), Bolcom supports the violin's repeated appoggiatura figure with answering appoggiaturas in descending tenths between the outer two voices of the piano part. Also in this section, Bolcom dispenses with the neighbor chord relationship of the opening syncopated figure (measures 1-5, Example 76): now the syncopated half-note chords follow a cadential pattern of $\text{vi-IV-I}^6-\text{V}_3^4-I$.

Example 77 (mm. 9-11)

A development section begins in measure 13, shown in Example 78 below. Using the arpeggio motive, the violin ascends through a number of keys ($B^b$ minor, an enharmonic spelling of $A$ major, and $C$ minor). When the piano enters at measure 14, it briefly imitates the violin's melody before shifting to free tonality and using the syncopated rhythmic motive of the opening. Meanwhile, the violin assumes an accompanimental role by temporarily moving in half-notes, thus allowing the piano's line to come through.
Example 78 (mm. 13-18)
In measure 17 of Example 78 above, the piano's syncopated rhythm pauses for an eighth note to establish a new idea. This "hiccup" establishes a non-syncopated accompanimental figure in the piano and a new violin melody at measure 19 shown below.

Example 79 (mm. 19-20)

A transition at measure 23 returns us to the opening tune in the original key at measure 25. The recapitulation (shown in Example 80) initiates a new rhythmic ostinato and new harmonies in the piano. Triplets add to the rhythmic palette of the violinist, who plays an octave higher to compensate for the thicker accompanimental texture. Even though the phrase is identical in length to the opening, the movement seems to pick up momentum with this return. Passing tones in the soprano, alto, and tenor voices of the piano and triplets in the violin add some forward motion to the line and allow it to achieve a higher relative altitude (and a new key signature) in measure 30 than did its partner in measure 6.
Example 80  (mm. 25-30)
The last section (Example 81) is a display of Bolcom's technical mastery, using eighteenth century techniques to produce twentieth century harmonic structures. The B' section introduces a bass line which follows the circle of fifths from F♯ in measure 39 to B♭ in measure 42. Meanwhile, the right-hand moves in sympathy with the violin, and both instruments sequence the melody down by major thirds beginning on A (in the violin and soprano voice of the piano) and passing through F, C♯ (D♭), A, and F. At first, this progression happens every two bars, but by measure 43 the cycle has been reduced to every bar. Several other favorite devices are brought into play: parallel major sixths in the right hand accompany the violin throughout the section, while major/minor chords abound in the ostinato texture of measures 39-42. The entire passage is reproduced below in Example 81.
Example 81 (mm. 39-47)
Third Movement: *Like a shiver*

*Like a shiver* is the title for the brief third movement which is reminiscent of Webern's vaporous textures. The harmonic and melodic building blocks consist primarily of major, minor, and diminished arpeggios with an occasional quintal harmony in the piano. After a quick arpeggio up to the very top of the violin fingerboard, the movement evaporates.

One of the more remarkable aspects of this movement is its complicated formal structure, whose macro-form is A-transition-B-transition-A'-Development-A-Coda, and whose micro-form contains elements of a rondo. Bolcom weaves his formal magic in miniature: single measure motives substitute for entire phrases and are used individually, in sequence, or in combination to serve a variety of purposes. Seven shapes are used throughout the movement in different groupings to create the form. They are shown below in the order of appearance and at their original transpositional level.

Example 82: #1, a single repeated note

Example 83: #2, an ascending arpeggio

Example 84: #3, a turn-like figure
Example 85: #4. a descending arpeggio

Example 86: #5. ascending and descending arpeggios

Example 87: #6. a short, chromatic scale followed by a descending figure

Example 88: #7. an ascending scale

The first three of these figures comprise a theme that recurs throughout the movement and will be labeled the A section in the subsequent discussion. The remaining three figures (or one of their constituent parts) provide contrast. The form of this movement is therefore based on alternations of the A motive and contrasting figures. This superficial simplicity belies a much more complicated arrangement of the individual figures or motives listed above. Because their shapes are so distinctive, Bolcom achieves a kaleidoscopic effect in which the individual pieces can be heard as
independent motives or in groups. This technique relates to the mosaic patterns discussed in the second movement of the Second Sonata. If we identify the motives by number (given in Examples 82-88) as they occur in the movement, they can be graphed and grouped into formal sections as follows:

Table 4. Third Sonata: Musical Form of the Third Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-8</th>
<th>9-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>25-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motive #</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>4, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-form</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-form</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Trans.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>29-33</th>
<th>34-36</th>
<th>37-41</th>
<th>42-46</th>
<th>47-50</th>
<th>51-57</th>
<th>58-end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motive #</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3, 2</td>
<td>7, 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-form</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-form</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>Development/Transition</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This detailed analysis of the individual motives might wrongly imply that the movement lacks continuity. On the contrary, the seven motivic shapes are related through their interval construction and can be blended or contrasted according to purpose. The piano part generally provides frictionless accompanimental support, though it occasionally shares a melodic fragment with the violin as in the playful exchange below in Example 89.

Example 89 (mm. 38-40)
To help delineate the form, some melodic fragments have a corresponding accompaniment that maintains its intervallic distance and voicing particulars, even when the motive is transposed. Others, such as the principle tune, are distinctively re-harmonized when they leave their original pitch level. In Example 90 (from the development/transition section) we see how Bolcom simply sequences his material upward by step.

Example 90 (mm. 42-44)

When the principle motive is transposed to function as a transition, Bolcom does not retain the original accompanimental figure. Example 91 and its transposition (Example 92) below share the original trochaic rhythm in the piano, but the latter rhythm is compressed into a single beat. The second transposition (Example 93) does not contain rests and is consequently continuous and smooth.
Like a shiver

Presto
con sord.

\[ \text{basically } pp \text{ throughout, with swells to } mp \]

sempre una corda

Example 91 (mm. 1-2)

Example 92 (mm. 11-12)

Example 93 (mm. 29-31)
Examples 92 and 93 each initiate development sections, signaled by a new transposition level and accompaniment. However, the continuation of Example 93 contains a false recapitulation where the original tune reappears at the opening pitch level, shown below in Example 94. Several items seem to prevent us from hearing it as a true A section: first, its harbinger (the repeated-note motive) does not appear. Second, while the notes are identical to the original, the melodic line is shared between the piano and violin, thereby upsetting our sonic expectations. Lastly, the section continues with transitional material (motives seven and one as identified above) leading into a true appearance of the A motive at measure 51 (not shown). It is quite possible that the false recapitulation at measure 38 is simply Bolcom’s sense of humor showing through the wispy textures of this movement.

Example 94 (mm. 36-40)
Fourth Movement: *Moderato, risoluto, all' arabesca*

The gossamer textures of the third movement contrast with the solid sobriety of the last. As Bolcom describes it, the movement "shares a mood somewhere between the darker tangos of Astor Piazzolla and that of heavy-metal rock." The continuum which Bolcom describes provides a key to understanding this fascinating conclusion to the sonata.

The term arabesque refers to Arabic art and architecture, which is highly elaborate and ornamental. Nicolas Slonimsky identifies several features that Western composers like Debussy and Tchaikovsky have used in their imitations of Arabic music, such as pedal points on the tonic and dominants, the use of the minor mode, duple meter, and highly figured melodies. Bolcom invokes these stereotypes when portraying Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg’s Italian and Jewish ancestry and her flamboyant playing style. In this case, he has combined the Italian virtuosity of Paganini’s *Fifth Caprice* with the florid designs of Arabic art to paint an intense and dramatic portrait.

Bolcom’s program note mentions rock music and Astor Piazzolla, the Argentinean composer and virtuoso *bandoneon* (accordion) player as reference points. While this movement does not use standard tango rhythms, it does emulate the Olympian power of Piazzolla’s stylized tangos. Similarly, it has rock-and-roll’s driving rhythms and simple harmonic structure, and there is a brief but unmistakable electric guitar imitation mid-way through the movement. Salerno-Sonnenberg’s larger-than-life stage presence and virtuosity are equal to the best of rock’s icons (Jimi Hendrix and Mick Jagger, for example) or to the virtuosity of Astor Piazzolla.

Despite the diverse elements which influence it, this movement flows with

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69 William Bolcom, program notes for Lincoln Center’s *Stagebill*, March 1992, 12D.
unflagging energy and unity of expression through a simple ternary (A-B-A') form, identical to the Paganini model. The first section is literally nothing more than an elaboration of an A-minor scale and arpeggio. The first half of the section surges from the tonic toward the fifth scale degree in its search for drama.

Example 95 (mm. 1-8)
After a rapidly ascending scale, a second tune commences in measure 13, shown on Example 96. This time it slopes downward from the fifth scale degree toward the tonic.

Example 96 (mm. 13-16)

Throughout this first section, the only chromatic interpolation comes when two scales (Aeolian on A and Phrygian on B) are used, resulting in F-naturals and F-sharps as seen above in Example 96. Not until measure 37 does Bolcom shift the tonal center to the dominant key (a combination of E major and minor). With this dramatic change in color, Bolcom prepares for his Jimi Hendrix imitation at measure 44. He sequences the opening tune downward in thirds from E minor down to C minor and on to B minor in measure 41 (Example 97).
Example 97 (mm. 37-42)
After a synthetic scale in measure 42 (Example 97), the piano resurfaces in more dissonant harmonies as the violin slides down in minor sixths shown below in Example 98. Unlike the A section, this B section shares many techniques with the other movements. In particular, sequences of minor sixths have been a prominent sonority throughout the sonata. Measures 44 and 45 of the violin part (Example 98), combine the descending minor sixth figure with the major/minor chord to give the line a simultaneous linear and vertical aspect. This figure is one of several imitations of an electric guitar glissando that was the trademark of rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix.

Example 98 (mm. 44-45)

At the recapitulation in measure 50, we return to the comfortable world of A minor, almost as if the middle section were a nightmare that subsided into peaceful sleep. The juxtaposition of dissonant and consonant music is also a contrast between twentieth and nineteenth century virtuoso styles. Whereas the previous section imitates Jimi Hendrix, the arpeggiated figures between measures 60 and 70 are loosely derived from Paganini’s Fifth Caprice.\footnote{William Bolcom, interview by the author, 11 May 1995. See Appendix A, p. 129.} Examples 99 and 100 below demonstrate the
similarities between the *Fifth Caprice* and the *Third Sonata* which are both arpeggations of an A-minor triad:

Example 99 (Paganini: *Fifth Caprice*, m. 1)
Example 100 (Bolcom: *Third Sonata*, Fourth Movement, mm. 60-63)
In the *Fifth Caprice*, Paganini begins in the minor mode and ends in major (not shown). Bolcom imitates this arrangement by beginning in minor (measure 60) and later introducing the major mode in measure 83 in the violin part only: the piano remains stubbornly in the minor mode until the violin capitulates and joins the piano in a last unison statement of the opening theme shown in Example 101.

**Example 101** (mm. 83-90)
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Bolcom's contribution to the twentieth century literature is important not because he invents a new system of pitch organization as Schoenberg did, nor because he pioneers new rhythmic systems like Messiaen or Nancarrow. Bolcom has repeatedly rejected such self-conscious "systems" and has embraced eclecticism as their ideological opposite. His music, while innovative, is a reflection of his attitude that the heritage of Western musical language is meant to be explored and employed, not mummified. Bolcom's comments in an interview with David Patrick Stearns illustrate this point of view:

I'm interested in how different things relate to each other. But I'm just doing what the old guys did up until the twentieth century—mixing classical and popular music. The more we know about the inner workings of the great classics, the more we realize we're dealing with music written with popular elements. People used to yell at Mozart because he was doing so many different styles. In the first bars of one of his string quartets, you hear "church" style, contra dances.... So I'm really a traditionalist.73

Despite the reference to Mozart in the previous quote, the roots of Bolcom's eclectic art are better traced to Charles Ives, whose unorthodox music contains quotations from an amazingly wide variety of sources including Beethoven, ragtime, and popular songs. Milhaud exerted another strong influence on Bolcom's development of eclectic technique, and like Milhaud, Bolcom joins his diverse

materials with compositional glues such as ostinato, rhythmic and melodic motives, thematic development, counterpoint, and musical form. Eclecticism, by definition, rules out the use of a single harmonic system. Consequently, common-practice harmony, polytonality, free-tonality, quartal harmonies, or rock-and-roll harmonies are all available to Bolcom as vertical pitch organization systems. Additionally, he often imitates another composer's music in his scores and can convincingly re-create the sound of any style of music from Mozart to heavy-metal if it serves his musical purposes. Unlike Ives, however, Bolcom seldom borrows melodies.74

The foundations for Bolcom's famous eclecticism were being laid as early as 1956 when he began work on The Songs of Innocence and of Experience, though completion of that project was twenty-eight years away. In the First Sonata, (also written in 1956) the listener can detect only a few stereotypic musical references to hymn tunes and country fiddling. The Second Sonata and Third Sonata (both written many years later) are the work of a mature composer, and display a greater variety of harmonic language, musical references, and compositional techniques for holding the structures together.

The foregoing analyses reveal that there are some features common to all of the sonatas, such as tertian or quartal harmonies driven by linear counterpoint, chains of major or minor thirds and perfect intervals, the use of parallel intervals (especially perfect fifths or minor sixths), whole-tone, octatonic, and synthetic scales, and the juxtaposition of tonal and atonal music. These are the building blocks of Bolcom's music, yet they are not the music itself, nor are they unique to Bolcom. It is Bolcom's

74The main exceptions to this rule occur in the second movement of Bolcom's Concerto Serenade which includes themes from his distant relative, Richard Strauss; the Fifth Symphony which contains quotations from Wagner's Tristan; and in Bolcom's Satires which combines Abide with Me and the wedding march from Lohengrin.
ability to create new sounds from traditional elements that sets him apart as a composer, and makes hearing or performing these sonatas a rewarding experience.

In the interview which follows (Appendix A), Bolcom provides many background details of his violin pieces and personal life, and clarifies some of the inaccuracies that have been reported in the print media. A second interview with violinist Sergiu Luca (Appendix B) offers insights to the *Duo Fantasy*, the *Suite for Solo Violin*, the *Concerto in D*, and the *Second Sonata*, all of which were written for him by Bolcom.
Philip Baldwin: You've often said that you write with a particular performer in mind.

William Bolcom: Well, I try to when I can.

PB: What sort of people were Peter and Joanna Marsh, for whom you wrote the First Sonata?

WB: Well, Peter is still around and so is Joanna, but they are no longer married. Peter Marsh was then I believe at the time, head of the Lennox Quartet which was a very prominent quartet in the 50's and early 60's if I remember rightly. I think they gave the Carter Second Quartet its premiere—or maybe they recorded it. Anyway, they were a wonderful quartet. And Peter was out in Seattle, as was I, and he had his own quartet (actually, this was before the Lennox Quartet—they got formed a little later). I did write a quartet for them.

PB: That's one of your unpublished quartets.

WB: Yes, that's one of the unpublished ones, number five I think. They played it, I remember, at one of the art museums. But that was some years ago, 1954 or 1956. Anyway, the whole idea was to write a piece for Peter and Joanna Voles (for she was unmarried). Then she married Peter and that didn't work out so I think she married actually the violist of the quartet, Scott Nickrenz. They are now broken up, but her daughter, Erika Nickrenz is part of a new trio called the Eroica Trio, and is a wonderful pianist. Well, anyway, Peter couldn't schedule the performance so I did the First Sonata with another student; I think it was a grad student named Joy Aarset. I have not seen Joy since then. We did do the piece that one time and I guess the rest of
it is pretty much what you already know [see the notes which accompany the 1984 edition].

**PB:** Was there anything specific about their relationship or those two people—Peter and Joanna—that you reflected in the music.

**WB:** Oh, I don't know about the relationship, but in a way it was like an epithalamium—they were getting married, or were married, or just married.

**PB:** It was a wedding present in a sense.

**WB:** Yes.

**PB:** Through Carol Wargelin's help, I was able to look through the score of the first version of the *First Sonata*. I've compared them pretty carefully, and one of the largest sections you've cut from the last movement was a fugue.

**WB:** Oh yes, it was terrible! And it certainly was outsized for the rest of the sonata.

**PB:** Yes, that's what I thought—then the last movement was almost twice as long as....

**WB:** Well I know, and that was a major part of it. And there were a lot of repeats here and there that I cut as you might have noticed. I made the mistake that a lot of younger people do (and I find it in my students, too), and that is they're afraid that you won't get it the first time so they do it a second time. Well, if you don't get it the first time, you won't get it the second time, either. But that takes a little while to learn. And those are the mistakes you make when you're 18. But they're 18-year-old mistakes. I have a couple of kids right now who are just finishing up their year here (freshmen) who are absolutely bursting with talent and it reminds me a lot when I think back on pieces like the *First Sonata* of what I was doing. Mozart, was after all, a professional musician at the age of six! So he learned things that we didn't learn because we were all hayseeds, more or less. I mean, even though you might be
reasonably experienced, you haven’t learned the things that somebody like that will have learned at the age of 18.

PB: Well, Mozart made many mistakes which his father corrected for him, but perhaps he learned faster than the rest of us.

WB: Well, he had to—he was out there in the professional world. We were in school!

PB: You’ve entitled the last movement "Quasi-Variations: Scenes from a Young Life." What does that mean?

WB: That means when I was going over and looking at it again, I thought they were variations, but they weren’t. They were quasi-variations.

PB: So the title didn’t go with the original version? I couldn’t tell from the copy I have of the manuscript which markings were added after the fact.

WB: No, I added that in when I looked back. It sort of brought me back to being 18! All the feelings and changes and the kind of naive simplicity of trying things out. You know, when you’re young you try everything.

PB: Well, it’s a lovely sonata.

WB: It’s got a certain kind of feeling about it—for a young piece.

PB: With regard to the Second Sonata: I analyzed that a couple of years ago and performed it as well. In my analysis, I could find evidence of a row in the first movement. You may be completely unaware of it, but I wanted your official opinion.

WB: Well, I can’t remember—I used to do things like that, and I still do hide rows here and there. They have a wonderful transitional effect. But I don’t use classical row technique—not anymore, anyway. I don’t know if I ever did, except just to try it. It’s a good discipline like many things, but I am not a row composer. I have used series and rows in unorthodox ways, and I never could see any reason not to use the tonal side of it as in late Schoenberg or Berg.
PB: Well, the way I found it was by comparing the blues piano opening of the sonata against the violin part, which doesn't match any of the piano's pitches. In doing that, I noticed that there were twelve pitches between the two instruments and each instrument only got half the pitches.

WB: Isn't that interesting! It breaks into hexachords. Oh my heavens—how those things get in there subconsciously! That's fun.

PB: Let me jump to the Third Sonata just for a minute then. There's a whole section where one sonority predominates: I think its a set-type 4-24 which keeps being transposed, and I'm wondering if there's any set-technique going on right there.

WB: Well, I did all of that in the '50's and '60's like everybody else. But I was more involved with interval series than I was with a closed row system. I felt that was a little bit ridiculous.

PB: So you think perhaps that in this instance it subconsciously drifted in?

WB: Oh, certainly. And I think that's where it belongs. Having it in the fore-front all the time ends up making the harmonic rhythm ridiculously fast, and you can't vary it. So, what is it for? Any of these techniques have a certain use, and they've got to be used for what they are and the effect that they have on the music. This can be done without making a political point out of it. That was the problem with that technique—when it was made into a political statement. But if you can use if for the effect it has, then it's another story entirely. Every technique starts out with a certain point of view, and then it falls away over time.

PB: You mean that at first it begins rather self-consciously and then it develops.

WB: Yes, and some of it sticks and some of it doesn't. What sticks becomes part of the musical language. What doesn't stick, doesn't. I was certainly schooled in it and dealt with it a little bit. I mean, you couldn't not do so.

PB: Not in that period of time.
WB: I never felt as if I could become part of the crowd. But of course it did make you feel like the odd man out if you were interested in tonal effects. Everybody else was trying to get rid of tonality.

PB: If I have my chronology straight, you were in Paris when Stockhausen and Berio were giving lectures, and I know you were thrown into that scene.

WB: It's funny. I feel very comfortable with Berio's and Boulez's music in particular. I think they're both wonderful composers, and I've been close friends with Luciano [Berio] for many years. We don't get to see each other very much, but we're still friends. And Boulez has always been very nice to me—he's played my music and came to *McTeague* and was very complimentary. I don't write like him, but I guess he thinks I sound all right. It's really just a different point of view. He has a certain artistic credo, and it has resulted in his case in some very beautiful music. And it's really not a matter of whether you believe or don't believe [in serial technique]. I once wrote him a letter and said, "I found all these tonal effects in your piece," and he was a little upset by that. It had a strong harmonic rhythm, so I pulled out *Tombeau* and I showed him how you could read these things in a new tonal field, but they actually operate in very traditional ways. I think he was rather surprised by that. So, if you're telling me that [in my sonata] there's a hexachordal relationship between the piano and violin, then there it is! It's so internalized by now that I don't think about it.

Sometimes I'll find a pattern and figure it out, or I'll use serial plans for a large tonal scheme.

PB: Can you think of any pieces in particular where you did this?

WB: Well, *Commedia* was one, but I can't remember how I did it. I don't keep all the charts. I have kids who come in to me with graphs of all kinds, and I say to forget all that. Graph afterwards. If you get stuck and you know something's wrong you can
check it by graphing what you've done. But don't follow a graph because you'll fight your own intuition all the time.

**PB:** Let me direct the topic back to the *Second Sonata*. Where did you meet Joe Venuti?

**WB:** Well, that's kind of a fun story! I had always been an admirer of Joe and then Sergiu Luca (for whom I wrote the *Second Sonata*) became friends with Joe Venuti. That was a rarity among classical violinists who often look down their noses at that kind of terrific technique and terrific ideas because it's not in their camp. In the last movement of my Concord Quartet, the *Ninth Quartet*, I remember asking Mark Sokol (who had been my student out in Seattle) to play like Joe Venuti and he said, "Who?"

**PB:** Oh, so that's who you were talking about secretly in your liner notes to the *Second Sonata*.

**WB:** Well, I didn't want to embarrass him, but he's one of the people who either wasn't interested in or had no knowledge of jazz. This was sort of the attitude amongst [classical] violinists. Although, I think fiddlers within the last twenty years have made a big change in their appreciation and incorporation of jazz techniques. I think the Kronos Quartet have had a lot to do with it. A lot of people have played my [Second] *Sonata*, which I don't think is all that jazzy.

It [the *Second Sonata*] sort of became "In memory of Joe Venuti" because it was during that time that I got a call from Sergiu [that Venuti had died]. How I met Venuti was just as I described it on the back of the record jacket: Sergiu had decided to play a jazz set with Joe and he invited me up to play with him. We talked afterward: Joe Venuti was one of those people who just sat there and spritzed and said all sorts of interesting, slightly acerbic, funny comments about violin playing and about everybody else and people he'd like to settle scores with.

**PB:** Did you know that Venuti wrote a violin concerto?
WB: No! But it would be fun to find it.

PB: You’ve mentioned in the score something about Venuti's special slides. Did you use any other Venuti "licks?"

WB: Oh, yes. That trick where he alternates right and left hand pizzicato and the way he slides up on notes.

PB: Tell me about the Third Sonata. You’ve entitled it Sonata Stramba, which reminds me of Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg. Did you have her in mind when you wrote the piece?

WB: Very Much! (laughs).

PB: What can you tell me about the experience. Did you work with her at all when writing it, or did Stephen Shipps help test it out?

WB: Well, I didn't have to work with either of them much. But I did meet with Nadja for lunch in which I think she consumed about ten cigarettes and about three bites of lunch—and we talked about this and that. I don't think she had ever had a piece written for her before, and I had this strong impression that this was all very new to her. And she was a little bit nervous. The idea had come from somebody at Aspen [Music Festival] and they were going to do it [provide the commission] and we were going to play together. So I kept thinking, "Here's a girl who's really been schooled and is really a whiz at all the standard repertory and she puts that extra life in it. That is why I think people like the way she plays. She's a little controversial because she's a wild personality. But she's a wild personality playing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto and all those things that are standard stuff. And of course the Paganini Caprices got in there [into the piece] too. And I was fascinated by taking simple stuff like the A-minor triads in the last movement which makes it like the Fifth Caprice [of Paganini] as you might have noticed. And that's all part of it—I felt I could play with that. It's all part of the wildness that she would respond to. She did ask for a tape, so
Steve [Shipps] and I put together one. Really, there was very little [that needed to be changed to make it idiomatic]. I've been writing for the violin since I was twelve, and I have some idea of what I want.

PB: Yes, you write beautifully for the violin.

WB: I love writing for it. But it's always a new experience for me. The violin and voice are so, so quirky. Even cellists aren't as quirky. I think it is either the long history of the violin, or the mentality of violinists. But I love working with it. If you get the person on your side, then it's just so exciting. Like working with a singer. I did a piece for Marilyn Horne [I Will Breathe a Mountain], and her voice is going through a change—it happens when you get to a certain age. She's no longer a mezzo. She said herself that she's a contralto now. And so I have to think of the old Marilyn as a voice which is gone and the new Marilyn who has this wonderful new, buttery-rich thing. But it's a different atmosphere entirely, and so there were things that involve a strain or difficulty and so of course I rewrite. I rewrite a lot for singers, especially female voices. But male singers ask for things, too. I had to rewrite for Paul Sperry when I wrote a cycle for him some twenty years ago [Open House]. But I had very little rewriting to do for McTeague for example. There I think the rewrites mostly involved text. Although I had considerable re-writes for Catherine [Malfitano, who sings the part of Trina in McTeague] and that's just the way it is. Of course it pays off in the end. You have to get used to that. And I've rewritten for example in the Violin Concerto—I did a lot of work with Sergiu [Luca] on that one. It's just one of those things: some pieces require it and others don't, I don't know why.

PB: In your program notes you mention guerra, guerra and I'm wondering what that's a reference to.

WB: Guerra, guerra which means war, war. In one of the Monteverdi madrigals they're making war all over the place and it's really wonderful. So I wrote in a little
bit of the same atmosphere. There's a famous painting of a big battle by [Paulo] Uccello which if you go into the Uffizi and turn left there's this huge thing with white horses that look like toy horses falling in battle. And they're fat. And there's all these guys [knights] running each other through. It's a fantastic painting of the early Renaissance and I thought of it very much when I was writing this piece.

**PB:** Does that have anything to do with the *Arabesque* texture at all?

**WB:** In a way, I suppose.

**PB:** Well, in the sense that it's continually evolving and making use of the same materials in a Byzantine way.

**WB:** Yes, and I don't know if that's her [Nadja]—she's half Jewish—but I really wasn't meaning to be [Middle Eastern]. But I don't know why: there was something about that absoluteness [of the last movement]. Also we [Bolcom and Joan Morris] had spent some time in the Middle East a few years ago and it really struck me. Particularly Istanbul—it was an amazing place. We played in Cairo and down the Nile, and I have a very strong attraction to the Moorish things we saw in Spain. I have no idea why: I have no background in my family for that. I have no idea why it draws me so.

**PB:** Maybe for exactly the reason that it's the opposite of your Norwegian ancestry.

**WB:** It could very well be! It's that absolutism. I felt a little bit about her [Nadja] that way for some mad reason. I think that's why all that seemed to come out in the piece. Even that big war scene by Uccello, with its absolute carnage, is absolutely gorgeous, too. If you ever go to the Uffizi, have a look at it. Certain paintings I've stood in front of for hours, and that's one of them. Another is the big Traini, *Triumph*

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75Paulo Uccello (1397-1475). *Battle of San Romano*. c. 1455. Tempera on wood, 6'x 10' 5". Uffizi, Florence.
de la Morte which absolutely had me shaking.\textsuperscript{76} Or the Grünewald paintings in Colmar.\textsuperscript{77} You just stand in front of them and tremble with the power coming out of them.

**PB:** In your original designation for the movements, you had the third movement listed as *Iracundia*.

**WB:** Yes, that's a Latin word for anger, but it wasn't really angry enough so I decided to leave it out. I'm going to save that title for something great.

**PB:** Something really angry!

**WB:** Yes, I want a big angry piece and I'll use it for that. It [the third movement] wasn't angry enough—it's really a weird kind of will-o-the-wisp kind of piece. Oh, by the way, after the first rehearsal she [Nadja] was all disarmed and everything was just fine. We had a wonderful time together, and I hope to record it with her. She's taken it on the road with some of her pianists, and it's very do-able and she brings it off wonderfully. When she came to the rehearsal with the third movement, it was too fast for me! I couldn't play it. I couldn't keep up with her. I had marked it *prestissimo* and she really had played it [that way]. I think it was 90 to the dotted quarter or something unbelievable. And she really could do it!

**PB:** What ideas do you have for the *Fourth Sonata*?

**WB:** It's done!

**PB:** What can you tell me about it? I know you wrote it for Henry Rubin.

**WB:** He wanted a brilliant type of piece so it's got some brilliant things. The last movement's got something *arabesque* about it too. The last movement turns out to be another Spanish dance.

**PB:** Has that gone to E. B. Marks Music then?


\textsuperscript{77}Matthias Grünewald (c. 1470-1528.)
**WB:** It will go, but we're still trying to figure out when to premiere it. I thought maybe of trying to do a concert of all my sonatas, either with Henry; or as the Lincoln Center people have suggested, a concert where I play with four different violinists. I may even get Peter Marsh out for the *First Sonata.*78 And the *Second* of course I'd do with Sergiu, and the *Third* I'd do with Nadja, and the *Fourth* I'd do with Henry. I'll see if that works out—at least that was an idea that was bandied about.

**PB:** I will be there if it works out!

**WB:** I have no idea whether we'll be able to pull it off or not. The second one [second movement of the *Fourth Sonata*] is a piece about somebody who can't sleep—and how sometimes a tune from your past comes into your head. And it's an early tune that I found in my papers somewhere—I save all my papers. You never know, something might be useful. And, this damn tune would come back to me when I couldn't sleep. So I wrote a piece about having this tune come back, and when you try to push it back out of your head, you can't. So that's the second movement. The third movement starts out very Arabic and goes into this very fast triple [meter] sort of *jota* music, or whatever it is.

**PB:** That will be a great piece for Henry.

**WB:** Well it should be.... I don't know him personally, but I've heard his playing on tape, and I know his wife because she was our concertmistress here [in Ann Arbor]. So it's a case of two fiddlers marrying and being happy I guess!

**PB:** Let me get back to some more mundane questions. In analyzing your music, I've noticed that you like chords with both the major and minor third present. Is that just a sonority you like, or do you even think of it that way?

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78Peter Marsh was the violinist for whom the *First Sonata* was originally intended. He never performed the piece.
**WB:** Well, it's something I've done since I was so young that I can't remember when it started. You'll find it in my earlier stuff. It's just so much part of me, and I guess that I've always been involved with the ambivalence between major and minor, anyway. Lots of pieces do that. Sometimes it becomes a structural principle. In *Frescoes* (that piece for two pianos) it's basically a major versus a minor triad and everything just grows out of there. I guess I've always done that. Some people like it, some don't. I understand that Elliot Carter always said he hated major and minor.

**PB:** Well, you don't always do it in an obvious way, since it's often in an open spacing. Another tendency I've noticed in your music, especially in the third movement of the *Third Sonata*, is to use strings of tertian harmonies, such as a major/minor/augmented arpeggio which just keeps going. Do you think of it that way when you write? Or is it again something that's just innate.

**WB:** Well, I don't think! Everybody has this impression that "now I'm going to use tertian harmony, now I think I'll do a row." I never could do that, and I think that one of the problems we have had with composer/theorists is that they are trying to do both sides of the problem at once. I think it sometimes ends up killing them as composers.

**PB:** You made that comment about Hindemith...

**WB:** Yes, well I think it killed him. Good and dead, too. That's why I didn't go study with him in the end. I couldn't have told you consciously, but I'd gotten to really dislike those sonatas [of his], having to accompany several of them in a row. I suddenly thought, "This is so formulaic, I don't think I'll be happy with it." And, I'd already met Milhaud, and he seemed like such an open person and we got along so well, personally.

**PB:** Well, I think you two make a good spiritual match.

**WB:** We are so much more of the same kind of mind. As I say, I'm still sort of family to them—Danielle, Madeleine and me. They are just that way: he was a very
embracing person and had an embracing family. If you were of their ilk, you were "family." I still am after all this many years, and I'm sure that would never have happened with Hindemith.

**PB:** I noticed certain Hindemith-isms in your early music.

**WB:** Well, there was so much of it in the air that it was pretty hard to get away from it. At that point in the '50's you realize that everyone pretty much throughout Academe was convinced that Hindemith was the greatest composer. And I was playing lots of it in chamber music. Hearing wall-to-wall Hindemith, you can't help but to [pick it up]. It was either that or Bartók. Bartók was probably a better composer than Hindemith, but the problem was that people became *ersatz* Hungarians all over the place. If you heard a composers' concert in the 1950's anywhere in the United States, except perhaps in the Columbia/Princeton area, you would have heard everyone suddenly becoming Hungarian even though their last name might have been O'Toole. People go for the surface things. Even in Schubert you can detect influences of Weber and Rossini because they were the hot tickets. Schubert was either very influenced by what he heard—or trying to hit the same button. Sometimes you can't be conscious about these things. If it turns out that I've used these things, or somebody's described them as such, I didn't apply them [on purpose]. You do just stick them in. What happens is that they're in your ear and it's just part of what organically happens. Of course you are aware of how they operate, and rather than calling them up by name, as in some kind of computer search and zapping them in, you...

**PB:** I've know several composers and I'm always surprised at how little thought they've given to their own technique. They do what they do on the basis of what they hear, and they do it subconsciously. Those of us listening are trying to categorize things, so when something familiar pops up, we say, "Oh, that's like so and so." We
leap for that because I think we're looking for a sense of security through familiarity and categories.

WB: I think a composer who expands a musical vocabulary is partly doing so either by what he or she has heard, but then is thinking what the next implication is. That's what the mind does. I think that the mind operates with all of these functions in an entirely different way than theorists seem to think. Even Schenker was aware of the limitations of his systems. I think it was meant to provide chamber musicians with an idea of the overall tonal plan of a movement so that they'd be able to play with more coherence.

PB: Are there any theorists who you think do a good job—not necessarily with your music, but in general.

WB: Well, I think the new semiological approach by various people, having to do with the humanist roots of things, is probably of some use, because it is basically an aid to playing. But [analysis] is not really an aid to composition. The danger was that it became an aid to composition. The Allen Forte approach, for example, had so much logical positivism in it that people became attracted to using this as application rather than as a study guide. This tied lots of folks into knots. And it also ended up [producing] an awful lot of unlistenable music! I think today it's hard to tell: the formalist people are hanging on with their teeth. I think they had a certain use and now it's hard to move out of it. They've even made some defiant moves in some cases. At McGill, for instance, they've decided to cut out the traditional harmonic curriculum and go straight to set-theory. Well, that's obviously somebody on the faculty fighting for this point of view. The only danger is that it's going to leave a whole bunch of students without any strong idea of how harmonic practices in the nineteenth century worked.

PB: And it's amazingly confining to a small body of music.
**WB:** Whenever you're dealing with people who have this partisan point of view it's very ruinous. I certainly have never objected to anyone using any of these things whenever they wanted. Right now, I don't see much of it [serial composition] amongst the students here [at the University of Michigan], but I have in the past and I'm sure it might happen again. It has a certain use and I think that you should have some experience with row technique and I think it doesn't hurt to have any of those [capabilities]. It's like learning how to write a fugue. Knowing how it [serialism] works explains a lot of twentieth century music and to a certain extent, some things in the nineteenth. It's important to know how to do it and absorb the technique, but then you just put it in your head and forget about it. Let the subconscious absorb what it will and that will become part of language.

**PB:** I want to ask you about your relationship with George Rochberg.

**WB:** I just got a letter from him.

**PB:** He's a wonderful composer too...

**WB:** Yes, we're old friends.

**PB:** Let me ask you about what you said in your introduction to *The Aesthetic of Survival*. I'm going to quote you: "I'm grateful to him for showing 'alternate courses' to me when I was still recovering from my experience with the post-Webern movement...." He had abandoned serialism in 1963, and I'm wondering what advice or "alternate courses" he gave you.

**WB:** George's important point was that it's ridiculous to try to cut off the past. And I think people did that. But I think that with George's music, people sometimes feel that not only did he decide to embrace the past, but close the door to the future. In some of his pieces, I felt he did do that, frankly. But the implication is that language is an

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organic thing that has continuity—a past, a present, and a future. He tried to tie all these things together rather than make these things an absolute fiat, which is what a lot of people did do, thereby cutting down any possibility of coherence, I think. Language always grows, and this won't be the only time when people throw in something arbitrary just to see what happens. It's happened a good half-dozen times in the history of Western music, and even in Eastern music. People have always tried various imposed orders and something survived from it, but not generally the whole order. What happens is that either it made some kind of sense and enriched the language, or it didn't. There's just too much partisanship involved in the changes in the twentieth century, and we all were under that terrific pressure. Then here comes this guy, Rochberg. We got along well as people, but what struck me was that he was advocating that you didn't have to follow the party line. And there was a strong party line in those days. Most composers of my age will tell you what it was like—you felt terrific pressure—peer pressure. It took an enormous amount of courage to throw off the expectations, and I think his was a terrific example. I learned a lot from him.

PB: Was that at Tanglewood Music Festival?

WB: I met him first at Tanglewood. Both Bill Albright and I studied with him a little bit that summer.

PB: Was that in 1966?

WB: Yes, 1966. That's when I met Bill, too. I don't think either one of us looked on them as real lessons. Within a short time it was clear that it was just a matter of getting to know each other. I was pretty old and didn't want to study with anybody, but you had to study with somebody. So if there was anybody I wanted to meet, it was George. We found we had a lot in common. I had actually met him the year before when I was still teaching at the University of Washington. He had been out talking about his music, and something about his whole attitude (and his music, too) really
attracted me because I felt this was a nice way to move out of what I felt was an extremely closed situation. In that type of [serial] music, things had really felt claustrophobic. But also in that time I had become involved in ragtime and got familiar with Scott Joplin's work, and began to find some connections between my interest in American popular music (which I wasn't supposed to have) and my serious composition. You had an enormous number of people looking at you and saying, "Oh, he only does show music." They would use these things as an easy way to knock you down.

PB: I think some people think of composers as belonging in strict categories.

WB: Oh, I think it happens still. And there's an absolutism about it. Milhaud himself rebelled against it—the idea that there's this kind of music and that kind of music and never the twain shall meet. But the whole history of music is full of people who didn't believe in those categories. Sometimes the results were humorous, and sometimes not, but you find it throughout music. And it wasn't a problem before, and never was until now. Peer pressure becomes very strong in a university atmosphere, and it becomes particularly strong when the triple equation of artist/composer/piece gets destroyed and you don't have any audience any more; then your peers really loom large.

PB: Well, then you start composing for each other.

WB: Except that's not even the case. You're not writing for that other person, you're writing to snow that other person! You're writing to destroy them! You're not writing for their appreciation! Most older composers who attend younger composers' concerts are there only to substantiate, confirm, or corroborate something that happens to be their own particular point of view. Then there are a lot of people who are guru-cum-teachers. I've run into students who have studied with guru teachers and they are often incurable. They know that what they want to do is not what their teacher has inculcated, but they are so influenced by this person that they can't move out of it.
PB: I want to clear up one piece of information which conflicts in different sources.\(^{80}\)
Did you study piano with Rochberg at all?
WB: No.
PB: Did you see each other when you were teaching in New York and he was at the University of Pennsylvania?
WB: It wasn't that kind of relationship, but it was easy enough. Sometimes I would take a train and I'd stay with him overnight and we would talk about this and that. I did that several times over the years and we still see each other occasionally. I really had to sit on him a lot to make that series of essays into something coherent. Sometimes he would come back on the same point and start haranguing. And when he got all hot about something, the sentence structure would suddenly go out the window. So I really had to sit on him to try and be a good editor. He came here [to Ann Arbor] and stayed several days, and we really chopped away.
PB: It's a terrific collection of essays, and really demonstrates the growth of his philosophy.
WB: Well, he's a wonderful writer, and he's one of the very few people I know in the musical world who actually has done some reading and shown an interest in the rest of the world and has a strong background in literature and the sciences. He has a world culture point of view and that's such a rarity. People are often so one-sided.
PB: He reminds me of Eduard Hanslick or Nicolas Slonimsky, except of course that Rochberg composes.
WB: In a way, yes. He was one of the guys who really did have a background in music. God knows the critics these days can't even read a score. Even people on the New York Times can't read score, I'm pretty sure. Well, compared to Miriam Boland,

\(^{80}\)The source of this misinformation comes from Brian Morton and Pamela Collins, eds., *Contemporary Composers*, (Chicago: St. James Press, 1992), s.v. "Bolcom, William (Elden)," by Eleanor Caldwell. The article contains other unreliable information.
who was able, for example, to do a chamber orchestra reduction of one of Michael Tippett's operas for a theater performance himself. Now this is a critic who can do this. I don't think there is any critic in the United States who has had that level of experience. There are a few in England who could, and a few on the Continent. Boulez says the same thing—the daily critics don't know anything about music.

**PB:** Let me ask you about your ragtime associations. I met T.J. Anderson last year when I was playing a piece of his. He mentioned some squabbling over the premiere of *Treemonisha.*

**WB:** Oh, that was an ugly situation. What happened was this: I had a lot to do with getting hold of a very prominent music editor named Vera Brodsky Lawrence who had put together the reprint editions of various things such as the complete Gottschalk. And I mentioned to her that a complete edition of Joplin would be a great project. So, she said fine. The problem was (and I didn't realize it) was that she also saw a few dollar signs. She managed somehow to accrue the rights for Joplin's music to herself in some very devious way. I, of course, had no idea that she would even try to do such a thing. So, T.J. and I put together a performing edition of *Treemonisha,* which was done by Robert Shaw in Atlanta at Morehouse College. We decided on a small theater orchestra which I thought sounded sensible. Both he and I had talked with Rudi Blesh, and T.J. and I had worked out a performing version—essentially making some cuts in the overture, etc. He [Joplin] wasn't a very experienced opera composer (it was sort of a home-made opera) which was fine. We didn't slick it up, but kept it simple and small, and I think it was lovely. Well, Vera Lawrence decided that she didn't like it, and in the meantime she had acquired all the rights. So she cornered me and said, "I want to do another orchestration." So I asked what was wrong with it. She said, "Well, it should be a fuller orchestra." I said, "Well, maybe I could just take his and just expand on it." She said, "No, I want it to be completely different." I didn't
realize she was doing this for legal reasons. So, here I was: I was up against somebody [T.J.] who used to be my old friend, and I didn't want to be in that situation. In the meantime, T.J. was feeling that he should be protecting himself in the situation, so he got in touch with a lawyer, Walter Gould (who was Morton Gould's brother), and that's when things got very ugly. In the end, she threw out my orchestration too, and it was replaced by Gunther Schuller's. Gunther, bless him, had a good idea what the situation was, and explained to T.J., who was still quite angry with me, as if I had somehow [been responsible]. The other possibility would have been to give it to a commercial Broadway orchestrator, which is now what I wish I had done. Frankly, that's what she really had wanted. Anyway, Gunther told T.J. that I had been caught in the middle of it, and T.J. made an indication that he'd like to be friends again, so here we are. Later they put on this great big production with the Houston Opera on Broadway, and of course, it just couldn't sustain that kind of exposure. It would be like taking a Punch and Judy show and throwing it up to a Broadway cast of thousands. It was supposed to be a modest little opera made for Howard and Wilberforce and other all-Black colleges who could only afford to do it with a little orchestra and their good singers. I'd love to see that done.

**PB:** Was it ever recorded?

**WB:** I think that the Houston Opera did.

**PB:** I have another question about *Dynamite Tonight!* There are again some inconsistencies about it. There was one article by Linda Benson...

**WB:** Oh that woman, she got everything wrong! She's a neighbor here and went through so many interviews with me, and she got it all screwed up anyway. Then she wanted to expand it, and I said no because there were too many inaccuracies. Whatever she said is probably wrong.
PB: Well, it says that Weinstein had written an opera libretto and you had a score and then somehow magically you put the two together.

WB: No, see what I mean. That just goes to show you.

PB: So, can you tell me the whole story? It sounds like Milhaud had introduced you to each other.

WB: Well, I didn't meet him [Weinstein] in person until after the first draft of the opera was complete.

PB: But Weinstein had proposed originally that Milhaud should do the music...

WB: He had given it to Milhaud to look at, and he said, "Well, I like it but it's too American for me." So he showed it to me after class and I said that I wanted to do it. So, we wrote to Weinstein and he said let's go ahead. I came to New York not too long after that and we started working on revisions and got it produced.

PB: The earliest date I have for that meeting is 1960. Is that correct?

WB: I actually didn't meet him until 1961 in April. I actually had to leave the Conservatory because the draft got after me. It was March or April when I came back, and suddenly I was in the middle of the whole New York painting and art school and meeting everybody. I was broke and waiting for the draft to get me, so Franz Klein would take me out to lunch. At the time, I didn't think two hoots about it, but now they're all sanctified painters. Frank O'Hara and all those people were just people I knew. Everybody sort of baby-sat me: I was this kid, twenty-one or twenty-two years old and they were all about ten or fifteen years older than I. But they all took care of me, put me up and made sure I was OK. So I was very quietly and very undemonstratively being taken care of by the whole New York school of the arts.

PB: That sounds like a different New York than what you described later that decade.

WB: Oh, of course. Those were the years when everybody did know everybody and every night you would go out with friends. Frank would call up from his office at the
Museum of Modern Art and tell everyone, "Hey, such and such is happening—be there," and we'd all show up. It would be a poetry reading or a new play or maybe a gallery opening. Sometimes before the opening of a MOMA show, he would invite us the night before so we could see the exhibit before the crowds came.

PB: Can you tell me, then, a little about the chronology of your activities in the late sixties. You resigned, I believe, from Queens College in 1968. What kind of freelancing did you do after that?

WB: I did resign in 1968. I freelanced until 1973, but I was still working for other colleges. In 1968-69 I spent a year at Yale working on another show called Greatshot. We put it on, but it was a chaotic mess—as was my life at that particular point. I went through a very bad marriage. But it was also 1968, and schools everywhere were experiencing a very unstable time anyway.

PB: Your position was funded by a Guggenheim fellowship, but your title was "visiting critic." How did that work?

WB: That was the only title they could find that would fit the situation. The drama and music schools don't fit the original Yale charter, and they've had the most interesting time trying to finagle around the original charters so they can even have a school. Therefore the titles available to them are the weirdest things I've ever seen. I've never been a critic and I certainly wasn't a visiting critic and I wasn't sitting there making criticisms.

PB: Well that struck me as odd, too.

WB: That's what they named me because that was the only thing that would work!

PB: Tell me about your first teacher, John Verrall.

WB: Well, he wasn't really my first teacher. He was my major early teacher. My first teacher that I worked with when I was a little boy was a man named George Frederick McKay. He and Verrall both taught at the University of Washington. I went
to George first for a little while, just as baby steps when I was eight or nine, but at
about the age of eleven I began going consistently (once a week) to John Verrall. He
gave me composition lessons and also counterpoint, harmony, and orchestration. I had
all that essentially under my belt by the time I got to college. So, I could actually test
out of a whole year of school. I did that at the University of Washington because I
wanted to be able to study with Milhaud. He was one year here [in the U. S. at Mills
College], one year in Paris. I went to Mills after my University time.

PB: Can you explain one story I heard about the disturbance that Session III caused at
the International Music Festival in France?®

WB: It was actually Session IV. This happened in 1968, I think. Dennis Russell
Davies had just graduated from the Juilliard School and got together with Luciano
Berio who was teaching there at the time. Luciano and he put together a thing called
the Juilliard Repertory Ensemble with a number a hot players and they began to tour.
So they went to Rouen to this festival, which is on the Atlantic coast of France. I used
quotations of stuff including a little Beethoven and a rag piece and a few other things
thrown in. And it touched off a riot. I was sorry to miss it! I wanted to be at my own
riot! On the third try, they actually got through the piece. And I guess at one point,
according to Dennis, some woman came out of the audience during the piece, went up
to the bass drum, picked up the mallet, and whacked the bass drum player over the
head. I wish I’d been there! This tape sounds like a mad football game with people
yelling, screaming, and clapping, and absolutely acting like idiots!

PB: Well, at least there’s a certain audience participation in a French performance!

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81This misinformation comes from the "William Bolcom" entry in David Ewen's American
Composers: A Biographical Dictionary, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), 84. Based on the
fact that Session IV does contain quotes from Beethoven, I am inclined to trust William Bolcom's
memory.
WB: They let you know what they think. People here are rather churchy about it and well behaved. I'd rather know what they thought!
Philip Baldwin: You met Bolcom in New York before you asked him to be composer-in-residence at the Portland Summer Concerts in 1973. Together you premiered his \textit{Duo Fantasy}. Did he write that for you?

Sergiu Luca: He wrote it for me and dedicated it to me. It was actually an outgrowth of our first meeting. I had my violin with me [in New York] and he wanted to read through some music for violin and piano. He pulled the Schubert \textit{Fantasy} off the shelf and we bombed through it. We literally bombed through that piece. I think that's where the inspiration came for the \textit{Duo Fantasy}.

PB: Yes, he's mentioned Schubert in connection with his own piece.

SL: The original title for that piece was \textit{Duo Fantasy for Fat People}. We were both a little overweight.

PB: He's got a great sense of humor. Had you heard any of Bolcom's music before going to meet him?

SL: Yes, that's why I went to meet him. There was a guy in Portland who had known Bill in Seattle during his University of Washington days. He knew Bill's music and a great deal about American music in general. He was also a pianist. I would go over to his house and he would play tapes of Bill's stuff. That's the first time I heard Bill's music—that was \textit{Session III}. I didn't know who Bill Bolcom was—nobody did at that time, actually. I remember hearing a lot of tapes that didn't impress me, though I remember hearing a piece of Bruce Mather's that I liked. But this piece of Bill's just jumped at me and I said, "Who's this guy?" I asked him if he had any more of Bill's
music, but he said he only had this one piece but that he had written *Session II* and a couple of other things. I said, "I've got to meet this guy."

**PB:** Did you ever play *Session II*? It's written for violin and viola....

**SL:** No, I never did. But that's how it came about. This guy got me Bill's number in New York, and I went to meet him because I'd heard this tape of *Session III*. We hit it off, and so he showed me some more of his music. Then I said, "Come out to Portland, and in return for your fee there you will have to write a piece. You can write for anything you want." He chose to write for violin and piano.

**PB:** I've listened to the *Duo Fantasy* several times and it strikes me as a very difficult piece.

**SL:** It was very hard for me.

**PB:** Well, it changes styles so frequently and rapidly.

**SL:** And that was so *avant garde* then. All that stuff was just beginning. One of the things that I got from Bill (who was at the forefront of that ragtime revival which got too big for its own good) was that Stephen Foster section of the *Duo Fantasy*. That's what I had the most trouble with was that part, actually. Bill said, "You've got to play it straight and with dignity." When Classically trained violinists see that kind of stuff they just mess around with it. Finally he said that the way to play this music is to play like Joe Venuti. I said, "Who's Joe Venuti?" At that time, I didn't know. So he made me listen to some records, and eventually we saw him play live in New York, which is why I also invited Joe Venuti to come out to Portland.

**PB:** I see! That was a little unclear from Bolcom's program notes of your recording. I wasn't sure if Joe Venuti was headed out there.

**SL:** Well, I met Joe Venuti because he was Bolcom's ideal of what violin playing should sound like. In fact, after I heard Joe Venuti (which was after the premiere of
the *Duo Fantasy*) it became much easier to play these sections because I knew where Bolcom was coming from.

PB: When did you meet Venuti? Was it much before the *Second Sonata*?

SL: Yes. I met Joe Venuti shortly after I played the *Duo Fantasy*. Then we became friends, and Joe came to the festival and stayed in my house. We were supposed to make a record together. It was during the *Second Sonata* that Joe Venuti died.

PB: The next piece that Bolcom wrote for you was the *Suite for Solo Violin*. Did you ever perform it?

SL: That was a very hard piece. I didn't play it right away. I premiered it many years later at the New Little Festival in Oregon. It was probably about ten years ago.

PB: I'm curious about the differences between the *Duo Fantasy* and the *Suite for Solo Violin*. The latter seems much more serious in nature.

SL: Well, with Bill, the word "serious" is always dangerous. Because what may not appear serious on the surface to some people (who are used to a different kind of serious music) is in fact extremely serious. You see, I think that stuff in the *Duo Fantasy* is very serious.

PB: I didn't mean to imply that Bolcom's music is not serious. I am thinking that the *Suite* shifts styles less frequently and each movement is cut from a single cloth. Would you agree?

SL: Yes, there are fewer styles. But there's that wonderful Waltz/Tango which is really hard to do right.

PB: Did audiences react differently to the two pieces?

SL: I don't really remember, but audiences have always reacted favorably to his music. The *Suite* is more austere, having only a solo violin. But in a way, the *Duo Fantasy* caused more of a reaction—people started giggling. That always bothered Bill a lot.
PB: I'm sure that his style changes are not meant as jokes.

SL: I think that the giggling is the audience's discomfort—not knowing whether to take the music seriously. It has nothing to do with the music's intention. It's the baggage that the audience brings with it to that concert. That kind of reaction has changed some, at least recently, and it's made music like Bill's stand on its own more easily.

PB: I know you've played the Second Sonata many, many times. Other violinists seem to be playing it more and more. What do you think of that?

SL: Well, it's becoming a repertoire piece.

PB: His other pieces which include violin are the String Quartets and the Piano Quartet. Have you played any of them?

SL: I've played the Ninth and Tenth String Quartets. The Tenth has been recorded, but the Ninth he hadn't heard since he wrote it. We did a concert of his music at Rice University, and he was here for that. He played some Milhaud and then Brian [Connelly] and I surprised him. A friend of mine at Mills found his very early Sonatina. Do you know that piece?

PB: Yes, I have a copy of it that I found at the University of Michigan library. I also have an unlabeled recording of it that Mr. Bolcom sent me.

SL: That must be our performance. Bill forgot that he wrote it and it wasn't on the program. After Bill played, Brian and I came out and said we would like to surprise Mr. Bolcom a little bit and we played this piece. It was a really great moment to watch Bill go nuts! He had completely forgotten about it!

PB: So my recording is of you and Brian Connelly then?

SL: Probably, since I don't think anyone else has played it.

PB: Who were your colleagues for the Ninth and Tenth Quartets?
SL: Ken Goldsmith was the other violinist, Maria Lambert was the violist, and Norman Fischer was the 'cellist.

PB: Norman Fischer was in the Concord Quartet, who I believe gave the premiere of the Ninth Quartet.

SL: That's a great piece!

PB: Mr. Bolcom told me that he did some re-writing of the Violin Concerto in D at your request. What kinds of changes did you recommend to him?

SL: I don't remember the specifics, but I remember that he did some re-orchestrating. We also re-wrote a couple of violin passages and cadential places. But I've played it so many times since then, it has become standard the way it is. I don't think there were any radical changes.

PB: Everything I've ever played of his has been very idiomatically written for the violin. So when you say that the changes were minor, you are implying that Bolcom does not make the mistakes that you might expect from a non-violinist composer.

SL: No, the changes had more to do with the flow of the part. We took out some octaves, and we also eliminated about five bars which wouldn't have been heard over the orchestra anyway.

PB: I want to ask you about the grant from the McKim Foundation which allowed you to commission the Second Sonata. I'm unclear about that sequence of events.

SL: I had played three or four concerts at the Library of Congress—at least four, because two of them I played on the Kreisler del Gesu—that was an incredible experience. Another recital was with Bill. After that concert, I suggested to the concert manager that I'd like to do one of Bill's pieces. At the time, Bill wasn't very well known.
PB: ...especially not in the instrumental world. His operatic pieces such as *Casino Paradise* had received some attention, but even his *Piano Concerto* went rather unnoticed.

SL: I asked if there were any funds for commissioning a new work, and this manager said, "Well, we have this McKim Fund, and if you really like this guy's music, then perhaps we could just pay for that." Also, the fund provided for recording and publishing the music. It was all together.

PB: Have you played his *Third Sonata* yet?

SL: No. I have the music—he sent it to me—but I haven't had time.

PB: I played it recently, and it seems very different from the *Second*. But, there is some similarity between the second movement of the *Third Sonata* and the little coda to the third movement of the *Second Sonata*.

SL: That's a requiem for Joe Venuti. He was writing the third movement when he found out from me that Joe had died. That's where the piece stopped and he wrote the requiem. Then, the last movement became the Joe Venuti memory.

PB: That's incredible. Now that ending makes sense to me.

SL: It's a beautiful, beautiful section.

PB: How do you feel Bolcom is treated by his critics and the press. Many times the reviewer's comments simply describe, rather than critique the music. I never get the sense that they know what to make of Bolcom's music. It's non-committal.

SL: Well, I haven't seen that many reviews of his music. I don't even read my own reviews! But my impression is that yours is a very good assessment. The reason, probably, is that they don't know what to make of it. They're afraid to be wrong.

PB: I suppose that history has a way of revealing a critic's indiscretions.

SL: They have been very wrong about Bill, especially at the beginning. They are never comfortable shooting down something which is powerful. When he was not
known, they shot at it like crazy: "Why write these trite tunes?" Now, of course, they shoot at him from the other angle: "Why is a man of his importance writing like this—it doesn't hold together." In fact, none of us know. All we can do is play the music if we like it and believe in it, and people enjoy it. History will decide.

**PB:** When I heard Lev Polyakin play the *Second Sonata* in recital, I immediately fell in love with the piece.

**SL:** If a piece of music does that to you, then it's good. Even if posterity judges it not to be so good, who cares? I remember all these interview in which people asked me if I thought the *Violin Concerto* would take its place alongside Brahms and Beethoven. I said, "I don't know, and I don't care. I won't be around at that time." The point is that people get excited when I play it. There aren't many pieces that I know that can do that. So, who cares what happens later.

**PB:** Can you think of anything else you'd like to say about Bolcom's violin pieces?

**SL:** Do you know about the variations on *The Graceful Ghost!* Every time Bill would write a piece for me, I asked him if he could put in a little quote from *Graceful Ghost.* That was one of the first pieces I knew of Bill's, and I loved it. And you could never get him to play it in the old days, and the reason was that he had written it in memory of his father. It was a very personal piece to him, so he wouldn't play it just any time. He wouldn't play it just to show off. But I used to go nuts when he played it. So I always asked him, "Couldn't you just put three bars of it into the piece. It doesn't even have to be in the violin part!" When he wrote the *Violin Concerto,* I said, "Bill, put it in the bassoon if you don't want to let me play it." I'd get the scores every time and look for something from the *Graceful Ghost,* and there would be nothing. Finally, when I got married to Anne Epperson (my first wife), this package came in the mail with a note saying something to the effect: "Here it is. Now stop bugging me about the *Graceful Ghost.*"
PB: So that's why he wrote the transcription for you in 1979.

SL: Yes, that was to take care of my need to have something from the *Graceful Ghost*.

PB: Was that in any way related to the *Happy Birthday (Lament)*? He wrote that for the Portland Summer Concerts also, I think.

SL: Actually, on the tenth anniversary, I asked each of the former composers-in-residence to write something. And everyone tried to write something funny and of course Bill managed to write something weird! He is a character. Also, the *Graceful Ghost Rag* was his way of taking care of all my *Graceful Ghost* needs.

PB: How did you end up in Portland?

SL: By accident. I went to Portland when I first started playing concerts in this country under the auspices of the Levintritt Foundation. And I had a concert in Portland at a Settlement Music School and I just fell in love with the place. I needed to make some money in the summer because in those days there was nothing. I also wanted to play chamber music, so somebody introduced me to the head of the music department at Portland State University. And I said, "How about doing this project?" And that's how it all started. I now have a place near Lincoln City.
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