

Solo Piano

Donald Berman

As a performer, pedagogue, and scholar, pianist Donald Berman thrives on shining light on the underrepresented corners of classical music, whether it's premiering new works by living composers or programming overlooked music by 20th-century masters.

Performances on a number of the U.S.'s biggest stages for contemporary music — including Carnegie's Weill and Zankel Halls, National Sawdust, and (Le) Poisson Rouge — have won Donald acclaim as "deliciously witty" (*New York Times*) and a "pianist of stupendous abilities, both athletic and intellectual" (*Boston Sunday Globe*).

But instead of presenting only the same war-horse works season after season, Donald uses the solo recital format to link classical and modern repertoires in ways that provoke new and fascinating revelations and connections. This approach lets each work contribute to a larger, more meaningful story about music, creativity, and the world around us.

Through his progressive approach to recital programming, Donald continues to forge imaginative avenues for audiences to discover astounding new compositions that stand shoulder to shoulder with works they already know and love.



Long Distance

Dana Brayton, *A Little Traveling Music* (1993) (5')

Lei Liang, *My Windows* (2007) (12')

- I. *Tian* (Heaven)
- II. Seven Rays of the Sun
- III. Magma
- IV. Pausing, Awaiting the Wind to Rise ...

Maurice Ravel, *Une barque sur l'océan* (1905) (7')

Kareem Roustom, *Five Aleppo Songs* (2016) (16')

- I. How Beautiful the Light of the Rising Sun
- II. Antiochian Hymn
- III. Oh People Leave Me to My Sorrows
- IV. The Silenced Guardian
- V. Enough! I Intended to Leave You

Arson Fahim, *Song from a Dreamland* (2023) (5')

Paul Desenne, *Fiesta en Caraballeda* (2018) (4')

Anthony Davis, *Middle Passage* (1983) (8')

Betty Olivero, *Sofim (Endings)* (1991) (9')

Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *You Shall Know the Brilliance of the Dawn* (2022) (4')

About This Program

Long Distance brings together piano works that speak to stories of displacement. Primarily focused on contemporary works written over the past 40 years, this program showcases composers — many of whom were dislocated from their countries, sometimes by force — who connect to their homelands through music both turbulent and peaceful.

Dana Brayton's *A Little Traveling Music*, written for Berman in 1993, opens the program with a feeling of unbridled energy and perpetual locomotion, featuring journeys across the keyboard that bring to mind Messiaen's bird songs and otherworldly harmonies.

My Windows from the Chinese-born American composer Lei Liang showcases the ways both Eastern and Western cultures have influenced the composer's music — particularly in "Seven Rays of the Sun," inspired by an image in the Naimittika pralaya in *Vishnu Purana*, in which 100 years of rain pours down to envelop three worlds into one ocean.

Ravel's *Une barque sur l'océan* serves as a brief promenade between works, evoking one boat's journey across a vast ocean represented by fluid, pianistic textures and harmonies as ever-changing as the waves of the sea.

Kareem Roustom's powerful *Five Aleppo Songs* find the Syrian-born composer marrying original material with urban folk songs from Aleppo and a reimagined hymn from the Syrian Christian Orthodox (Antiochian) church. More than an ode to the musical riches of Aleppo, Roustom's songs also raise awareness of the refugee crisis that's devastated his homeland for more than a decade.

A new work from Arson Fahim, *Song from a Dreamland*, showcases the composer's mission to preserve the musical traditions of his native Afghanistan that are in danger of extinction following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Now a student at The Longy School of Music of Bard College, where he studies with Berman, Fahim's new work is a symbol of the hope and change made possible through love and art.

Fiesta en Caraballeda from the great Venezuelan composer Paul Desenne — who died of a heart attack earlier this year, a decade after fleeing his Caracas home amid the rising political violence — displays his fascinating ability to merge the musical traditions of European classical music and those of indigenous Latin America, including

Afro-Venezuelan drumming. A talented visual artist himself, Desenne's *Fiesta* evokes a work of the same name by the revered artist Don Armando Reverón.

Although Anthony Davis is best known in the classical world for his jazz-infused operas charting modern African American history, he turns the calendar back several centuries in *Middle Passage*. Inspired by the sea route used to transport kidnapped Africans during the slave trade, Davis's work pays tribute to the approximately 12 million men, women, and children forced to endure the horrifying journey to the New World.

The compositions of Betty Olivero fuse aspects of Israeli and Jewish culture — including Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Hasidic musical traditions — with techniques of the European avant-garde. In *Sofim (Endings)*, Olivero brings to light imaginary landscapes that repeatedly appear and disappear in the far horizon through wide dynamic contrasts and repetitious, freestyle rhythms that create endless possibilities for interpretation.

About Donald Berman

A multidimensional pianist, pedagogue, and scholar, Donald Berman has won tremendous acclaim for his "stupendous abilities, both athletic and intellectual" (*Boston Sunday Globe*) and performances hailed as "stunning, adventurous, and substantive" (*New York Times*).

With an emphasis on presenting American music of the 20th and 21st centuries, Berman's inventive recital programs have been featured on the U.S.'s biggest stages for contemporary music — from Carnegie's Weill and Zankel Halls to National Sawdust and (Le) Poisson Rouge — as well as major venues across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. An enthusiastic commissioner of new music, he has added more than 200 works to the contemporary canon — many of which he performs alongside classical repertoires to provoke new and fascinating revelations and connections across periods and styles.

Berman's body of work as a recording artist demonstrates the breadth and depth of his engagement with the music of our time. His albums have included numerous world-premiere recordings as well as illuminating performances of previously unknown works of 20th-century American composers, including Charles Ives (*The Unknown Ives, Vols. I & II*), Carl Ruggles (*The Uncovered Ruggles*), and Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions (*Americans in Rome*). As concerto soloist and chamber musician, Berman's discography includes collaborations with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (George Perle: *Serenades*), soprano Susan Narucki (*This Island, The Light That Is Felt: Songs of Charles Ives*, and the Grammy-nominated *The Edge of Silence*), and the Borromeo Quartet (*The Worlds Revolve*). Upcoming albums include a survey of Elena Ruehr songs with baritone Stephen Salters and a new recording of Ives's *Concord Sonata* and *Impression of the St. Gaudens in Boston Common*, to be released on Avie Records during the composer's sesquicentennial celebrations in 2024.

A former fellow of the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, Berman currently serves as Chair of Keyboard Studies at Longy School of Music of Bard College and leads Tufts University's New Music Ensemble. He is also the General Editor of three volumes of Ives's *Shorter Works for Piano* — a titanic project representing 30 years of work — and President and Treasurer of the Charles Ives Society, where he is leading an extensive expansion of the Society's digital archives on charlesives.org.

Berman's trajectory as a musician and scholar was set in motion by four important teachers: Mildred Victor, George Barth, John Kirkpatrick (who premiered Ives's *Concord Sonata* in 1939), and legendary pedagogue Leonard Shure.

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Get in Touch

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