**Program notes on Sarah Feigin**

For a pianist, it is a unique, and rare experience, to have the opportunity to give the first performance of a piece of music by a celebrated and accomplished composer. And for an audience, there is a special thrill in meeting a new composition that is poised to become part of the concert repertoire. In the first half of my concert at Carnegie, on October 8th I will play solo piano works by contemporary Israeli composer Sarah Feigin (1928-2011), that have never been heard before. I have also been privileged to make a CD of her piano compositions, which will be distributed by Naxos in Spring 2018.

Feigin’s piano works have been a veritable treasure trove, introducing me to a composer of great finesse and emotional diversity. And I have, when playing these pieces, felt able to draw on profound resonances that we share from within our common Jewish and Israeli heritage.

My experience of playing these pieces has been further enhanced by having the guidance and advice of the composer’s pianist daughter Carmela O’Flaherty. It has been of enormous vlaue to have her insights into the interpretation of these works.

She shared with me personal stories about her mother, and even recalled technical pianistic advice that her mother gave her as a child.

To have this opportunity to have such a close connection to the actual composer via her daughter, while performing the pieces, is so exceptional, and I cherished and carefully absorbed every moment of it.

Sarah Feigin was able to convey a whole spectrum of emotions in the five pieces recorded here. From a hilarious *Joke*, the 2nd movement of the *Four Scenes,*  to the extremely sinister and intensely painful 3rd movement of the *Sonata* that was dedicated to the memory of the tragic story of the massacre at *Babi Yar*. From the graceful and nostalgic waltz in *Memories*, the 3rd movement of the *Four Scenes,* to the dramatic and wild *Storm* from *Prelude and Storm*.

Sometimes the emotional content rapidly changes within the piece, with Feigin moving from something dark and sinister to a shrugging joke-like moment, in the matter of a measure. Her writing involves many sudden changes in tempo, dynamics, rhythm, and character, that one is involved in surges of conflicting emotions. For the pianist, it is such an exciting and emotionally challenging experience to play such music – it demands every ounce of concentration and energy in order to play these sections successfully.

In addition to the emotionally difficult aspects, I have had to deal with the extreme technical and pianistic difficulties these pieces have posed.

I expressed one of these difficulties to Carmela, only to find out that she had had exactly the same problem while she was studying these pieces as an undergraduate piano student.

As I sat down for the first time to learn these pieces, the preliminary step I took (as with every piece I have just begun) was to write in the fingerings for almost every measure, and most definitely for all the challenging measures.

I very quickly discovered that this would be the most complicated aspect of learning the piece. Because, as soon as I had begun writing the fingerings in and I was sure this was a comfortable position and possible continuation for my hand to be in… I had run out of fingers!

Then once I had written in a good fingering, I realized that it would be impossible to use it because the next section would demand a different fingering. And so I had to devise some new and creative ways to solve these problems.

Not only did the fingerings pose difficulties but also the tempi and unique compositional writing of the composer. Huge leaps for the left hand in very fast tempi, polyrhythmical measures leading into completely different polyrhythmical measures. Repeated notes at extremely fast tempi with soaring melody lines on top and base lines beneath them (such as in the *Toccata*), something one would imagine only three hands could be capable of playing.

Feigin’s music is so richly colored with gorgeous and vibrant harmonies, exquisitely beautiful and nostalgic melodies, delightfully brilliant and exciting rhythms, and most of all – the deepest and most elaborate emotions a human can find and express.

I am the first interpreter of this whole corpus of piano music and it has been the most amazing experience for this young pianist, on the threshold of a professional career.

Again – I must express my deepest gratitude to Carmela, for choosing me, trusting me, and introducing me to her mother’s inspirational works, so that we could make these pieces available to the public.