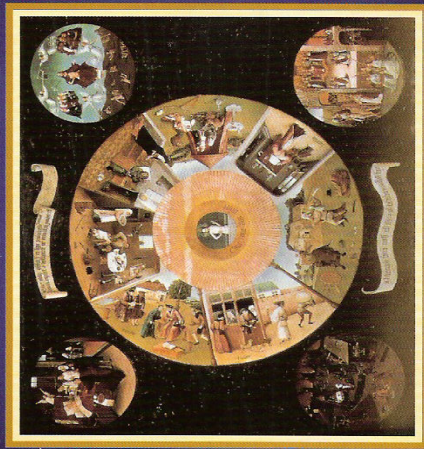


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# — Robert Beaser —

Chorale Variations • The Seven Deadly Sins  
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra



Jan Opalach, bass-baritone Pamela Mia Paul, piano  
American Composers Orchestra  
DENNIS RUSSELL DAVIES

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American Composers Orchestra/Davies MUSIC OF ROBERT BEASER PHCD162

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Jan Opalach, bass-baritone Pamela Mia Paul, piano  
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- 1 **Chorale Variations** 20'25"  
(for orchestra)
- 2-8 **The Seven Deadly Sins** 22'07"  
(for baritone and orchestra)  
(poems from "The Hard House"  
by Anthony Hecht)
- 9 **Concerto for Piano and Orchestra** 15'55"  
I. Introduction-Allegro 11'35"  
II. Lento-Variations 6'45"  
III. Rondo

Jeffrey Kaufman/Executive Producer  
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Cover: "The Table of the Seven Deadly Sins"  
by Hieronymus Bosch

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Engineer: Simon Eaton  
Tape Editor: Jenni Whiteside  
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File Under Classical/Beaser



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During the two decades following the end of the Second World War, American composers discovered and embraced Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-note technique. Schoenberg's pupil Anton Webern had become highly influential, and composers were to apply serial treatment to every aspect of composition: pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and tone color. The mathematics of this approach dominated the scene in intellectual circles, particularly within universities, while other styles of composition met with critical derision. Yet to many listeners the serialism marked a complete break from the expressive means through which composers had always enjoyed a connection with their audiences. Although a few serial composers – notably Alban Berg – were able to produce works in which listeners experienced an emotional reaction similar to that from the Classical and Romantic masterpieces, much new music was composed for increasingly small audiences of academic specialists who applauded new technical innovations insisting that the listener's response was irrelevant.

Not surprisingly the pendulum swung back. Some former devotees of serialism admitted that the technique had restricted them in their expression of certain ideas, and they began cautiously to employ tonal elements in their music again, through quotation of older compositions or frank imitation of older styles with modern elements superimposed. At the same time a number of younger composers expressed their strong belief that a composer's essential purpose is to write music that forges a link with listeners, and not simply with theorists. This meant that in order to have the freedom to compose in a style of their own choosing, they had to oppose many of the entrenched opinions of the 1960s and 1970s. Such a composer is Robert Beaser, who has emerged as one of the most accomplished creative musicians of his generation. He is often cited as an important figure among the "New Tonalists" – composers who are adopting new tonal grammar to their own uses – and through a wide range of media has established his own language as a synthesis of Western tradition and American vernacular. On which Mr. Beaser comments:

"My own road led me back to tonality in Rome, sitting under a fig tree in the late seventies by the Casa rustica. Even my previous non-tonal works had a strong gravitational centre and I felt that in order to speak coherently on multiple levels it was necessary to reopen the door to functional harmony. While anyone educated in the twentieth century knows that to return to the Age of Innocence is but thinly veiled nostalgia, it seemed clear to me that the choices we composers were being handed in the name of "historical necessity" had simply become too narrow... The challenge for me has been to find a middle ground: where knowledge would no longer be suffocating, and originality no longer an end in itself. Understanding that while it may be impossible to reinvent the wheel, the mere fact of being alive today means that we are already traversing different roads. It is a delicate tightrope to walk, but there is exhilaration in the process."

The Baltimore Sun writes: "Beaser is one of this country's huge composing talents, with a gift for vocal writing that is perhaps unequalled." His recent Opera *"The Food of Love,"* with a libretto by Terrence McNally, is part of the *Central Park* Trilogy, which opened to worldwide critical accolades at Glimmerglass and New York City Opera. The

San Francisco Chronicle called his opera "gripping" and "arresting... a masterful score with beautiful rhapsodic turns, canny pacing, pungent orchestral writing and magnificently shaped arias." The Arizona Republic called it "a masterpiece" and USA-Today wrote: "Beaser's glistering, percussion-tinged orchestral textures and utterly singable melodies are a joy to hear at every turn." Televised nationally on PBS Great Performances, it received an Emmy nomination in 2000.

### The Seven Deadly Sins

It was during his stay in Rome that Robert Beaser encountered a volume of poems entitled *The Hard Hours* by Anthony Hecht, a book that had won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1968. He was immediately taken by a series of vivid modern epigrammatic treatments of the traditional vices, and set them as a song cycle for baritone and piano. Following the first performance by Richard Lali, Beaser revised the cycle for performance by tenor and piano, a version that has been recorded by Paul Sperry. He had originally planned an orchestral version as well, and at the suggestion of Leonard Slatkin, produced one for the New York Philharmonic's *Horizons Festival* in 1984; on that occasion Slatkin conducted and Ian Opalach was the soloist. Beaser's musical settings of the seven brief poems highlight their direct meaning and provide a sometimes ironic counterpoint. The moods range from the assertive, heroic quality of *Pride* to the delicious laziness of *Sloth*, from the driving energy of *Wrath* to the cool insinuation of *Last*. Beaser loves working with words, and he has said of this piece: "The musical rendering of these poems draws upon the irony, drama, and elliptical wit implicit in the text. Stylistically diverse musics intermix freely to suit each of the seven sins. Hints of jazz, Impressionism, and other musical languages float just beneath the surface, but the core of the music springs directly and viscerally from the dense power of Hecht's words."

### Piano Concerto

Pamela Mia Paul commissioned Beaser's *Piano Concerto* and gave the world premiere in May 1990 with the St Louis Symphony Orchestra and Leonard Slatkin. Here, Beaser is working in a genre with a long and distinguished tradition to which he pays both serious and witty homage. Cast in the traditional three-movement pattern (fast - slow - fast) with the "expected" shape from movement to movement (the composer describes the middle movement as "ghost" variations), the effect of the piece grows from the interaction between what might be called the "straight" piano concerto and the "subversive" one. In the first instance, the listener takes all of the rhetoric, the brilliance, the lyric elements, the textures, and the color at face value as a genuine recreation of the grand virtuosic Romantic concerto for our time. Any music lover will be able to follow this ground-plan without difficulty. The witty underground of the piece may not be so readily apparent at first:

Within this superstructure lurk a host of subversive interventions: there are veiled and not-so-veiled quotes from the Beethoven Violin Concerto to Bernstein's *West Side Story*, abundant winks at nineteenth-century piano rhetoric, and a good bit of tinkering with one's expectations. But unlike "post-modern" music, these ironies are merely subscripts

to the main event. What is essential is the narrative arch. Throughout the drama, the soloist's role shifts, its character evolves and deepens. The material, at first kaleidoscopic and brash, collapses under its own weight, retreats, and eventually reinvents itself into a more distilled elemental opposition.

References to older musical styles have been a common element in much twentieth-century music; the "post-modern" music since the 1980s has allowed almost anything to happen while at the same time denying that it has meaning beyond a certain ironic quality. Beaser's "subversive" interventions are not meant to play a distanced, ironic role, but to spring from the musical material and to play a role in its narrative shaping.

### Chorale Variations

*Chorale Variations*, the most recent of the compositions, was commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra which, under the direction of Dennis Russell Davies, gave the first performance in Carnegie Hall on November 8, 1992. The genre of "chorale variations" is, of course, a distinguished one, particularly in the musical traditions of the German Protestant Church in which the chorale, or congregational hymn, formed so much of the basis of the musical life and the educational system. The great organ composers and performers, culminating in J.S. Bach, prided themselves on their ability to bring all the possible expressive variations on a pre-existing tune known to the congregation.

Beaser's use of a familiar genre name as a title is, however, more than simply a casual reference to the past or an attempt to recreate a vanished form in modern style. Beaser enjoys making punning use of musical terminology: in his titles, as with his more recent orchestral work *Double Chorus*, in which "double" refers to the *doppelgänger* of Schubert's song and "chorus" refers not to a vocal ensemble but an instrumental choir. Thus a tradition-bound title recurs in an unfamiliar context. So, too, with *Chorale Variations*.

In this instance, Beaser's work involves the systematic transformation of material, though the "chorale" on which it is based, is not a pre-existing melody from a hymnal but rather a tune of the composer's own invention. The transformations are not simply the melodic ornamentations of so many older variation sets; instead they constantly alter the character or spirit of the material. There are ten discrete sections, tightly organized, each with a irparatite form, conceived to sound spontaneous rather than strict. The openly inviting character of the music encourages repeated hearings through which the piece gradually reveals its deeper structure and coherence.

*Chorale Variations* opens with an Intrada, an assertive trumpet fanfare of fast repeated notes followed by an expanding melodic line. This anticipates the chorale idea, which is heard in its simplest and most direct form only at the end of the composition. There are two contrasting types of material - one diatonic and the other fully chromatic. "In fact, it's a twelve-tone row" said Beaser. "I've never written a twelve-tone row in my life! It turned out that's what it is, but I discovered it only after I'd written it, so it was totally accidental."

Though it may be divided into ten segments, the work has a through-composed, symphonic quality as it pursues its own expressive thread. And this thread is, in fact, a kind of narrative. The composer has said that it is "the most literally programmatic piece I've ever written", but the "plot" must be inferred by the listener since the composer plans never to reveal it, preferring to suppress the specific impetus behind the expressive character of the work, and to let the music speak for itself. *Chorale Variations* moves through sustained and slow music to light dancing woodwinds, through moods dramatic, lyrical, rhythmic, comic to a rapt 'chorale-like' close.

Steven Ledbetter

### THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

#### Pride

"For me Almighty God Himself has died,"  
Said one who formerly rebuked his pride  
With, "Father I am not worthy, and here denied  
The Mercy by which each of us is tried."

#### Envy

When, to a popular tune, God's Mercy and Justice  
Coagulate here again,  
Establishing in tissue the True Republic  
Of good looks to all men  
And victuals and wit and the holy sloth of the lily,  
Thou shalt not toil nor spin.

#### Wrath

I saw in stalls of pearl the heavenly hosts,  
Gentle as down, and without private parts,  
"Dies Irae," they sang, and I could smell  
The dead-white phosphorus of sacred hearts.

#### Sloth

The first man leaps the ditch, (Who wins this race  
Wins laurel, but laurel dies.)  
The next falls in (who in his hour of grace  
Plucked out his offending eyes.)  
The blind still lead. (Consider the ant's ways;  
Consider, and be wise.)

#### Avarice

The penniless Indian fakirs and their camels  
Slip through the needle's eye  
To bliss (for neither flesh nor spirit trammels  
Such as are prone to die)  
And from emaciate heaven they behold  
Our sinful kings confer  
Upon an infant huge tributes of gold  
And frankincense and myrrh.

#### Gluttony

Let the poor look to themselves, for it is said  
Their savior wouldn't turn stones into bread.  
And let the sow continually say grace,  
For moss shall build in the lung and leave no trace,  
The glutton worm shall tunnel in the head  
And eat the Word out of the parchment face.

#### Lust

The Phoenix knows no lust, and Christ, our Mother,  
Suckles his children with his vintage blood.  
Not to be such a One is to be other.

"The Hard Hours"

From "Collected Earlier Poems" by Anthony Hecht  
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## AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

American Composers Orchestra is the world's only orchestra dedicated to the infinite variety of American music. ACO performs at Carnegie Hall. Founded in 1977 by composers Francis Thorne and Nicholas Roussakis, Music Director Dennis Russell Davies, and Resident Conductor Paul Lustig Dunkel, ACO has played works by 500 composers, including over 100 world premieres and commissions, generating more new American symphonic works than any other orchestra.

Among the notable artists who have collaborated with the American Composers Orchestra are: Leonard Bernstein, Keith Jarrett, André Watts, Emanuel Ax and Itzhak Perlman. The ACO discography includes 22 recordings on the ARGO, FCM, Music Masters, CRM, Point, Izadik, New World and Nonesuch labels. ACO concerts are broadcast on Public Radio International, National Public Radio, and Voice of America. Among the honors the Orchestra has received are special awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Broadcast Music, Inc. The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers has awarded ACO its prize for adventuresome programming in each of the last 26 years, recognizing ACO as "the orchestra that has done the most for new American music in the United States."

In addition to its concerts, commissions, recordings, and reading sessions, ACO has offered *Sonidos de las Américas*, an annual festival of Latin American music; Coming to America, examining music of immigrant composers; and Orchestra Tech, an initiative to develop new works employing new technologies. ACO also offers Music Factory, an education program that places composers in New York City schools to explore the process of creating music.

## DENNIS RUSSELL DAVIES

A masterful and innovative force in classical music, Dennis Russell Davies is considered among today's most inventive conductors at the forefront of the orchestral, chamber and operatic worlds. A modern, articulate and versatile artist revered for his command of both traditional and contemporary music, Mr. Davies is also recognized as an accomplished pianist and as an acclaimed collaborator, sought out by orchestras, composers and artists alike for his interpretive skills.

American-born Mr. Davies has lived abroad since 1980, but maintains an active presence on the North American music scene as a regular guest conductor with the major orchestras and opera houses of New York and Chicago. In addition to his ongoing duties as Chief Conductor of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra and Professor of Orchestral Conducting at the Salzburg Mozarteum, Mr. Davies is Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Bruckner Orchestra Linz and Chief Conductor of the Linz Opera. In January 2002, he was appointed to a 5-year term to the Board of Directors of the esteemed Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University.

A champion of contemporary music, his support of modern works, particularly American, is legendary. His close personal friendships with some of the 21st century's greatest composers, including Luciano Berio, William Bolcom, John Cage, Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, and Francis Thorne (with whom he formed American Composers Orchestra), have been an important catalyst for enriching concert and operatic repertory around the globe. Recently, Mr. Davies concluded his tenure as Chief Conductor of the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (1996-

2002), and as Music Director of the pre-eminent American Composers Orchestra (1975-2002). He continues his affiliation with American Composers Orchestra, which he co-founded 26 years ago, as Conductor Laureate. Mr. Davies has had successful tenures as the General Music Director of the City of Bonn (Germany), Principal Conductor/Classical Music Program Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Stratoga Performing Arts Center, Principal Conductor of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Music Director of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Music Director of the Cabrillo Music Festival in Santa Cruz, California. In addition to his North American orchestral guest conducting appearances, Davies has guest conducted some of the most prestigious orchestras in Europe including the Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Dennis Russell Davies was born in Toledo, Ohio, and graduated from The Juilliard School where he studied piano with Lonny Epstein and Sasha Gorodnitski and conducting with Jean Morel and Jorge Mester.

## JAN OPALACH

The American bass-baritone Jan Opalach has won the 1979 Metropolitan Opera National Auditions, the 1980 Walter M. Naumburg Vocal Competition, and the 1981 International Vocal Competition in the Netherlands. He was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Soloist Recital Grant. He has appeared with the Oratorio Society of Washington and New York, The Handel Festival Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Musica Sacra and the New York City Opera. He further has performed with the New Orleans Opera the Kentucky, Dayton, and Greensboro Operas, as well as Festival Vancouver. He has also appeared in concert appearances with the London Sinfonietta at Carnegie Hall. His recorded works include Stravinsky's *Renard/Pulcinella*, Wolpe's *Quintet with Voice*, Carter's *Syringa*, Beaser's *Seven Deadly Sins*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, Kernis' *Mourning Song*, Schubert lieder, and, with the Bach Ensemble, solo cantatas for bass by J. S. Bach.

## PAMELA MIA PAUL

Hailed by critics as a "star among stars," after her debut with the Vienna Symphony, she has built an impressive career that spans four continents. Miss Paul received critical acclaim for her appearances with the Vienna ORF Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, to name a few. Her interpretations of twentieth-century piano concertos have garnered consistent praise, both overseas and in the U.S. In 1990 she performed the world premiere of Robert Beaser's *Piano Concerto* with Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony and in 1992 premiered the work in Carnegie Hall with Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers Orchestra. Miss Paul's U.S. orchestral appearances include those with the New York Philharmonic, symphonies of Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Houston, Boston Pops, New York Pops, the Minnesota Orchestra and Caramoor Festival Orchestra. Recital performances include appearances in all major concert halls of New York City and throughout the South and Midwest. Recent engagements include guest artist performances in South Korea, British Columbia and Texas. A gifted teacher, Miss Paul has presented master classes in Europe, The People's Republic of China, South Korea and throughout the U.S. When not concertizing, Miss Paul fulfills responsibilities as chair of the piano department at the University of North Texas. She received a Doctor of Musical Arts and Master and Bachelor of Music degree from The Juilliard School.



Since 1982, when the New York Times wrote that **Robert Beaser** possessed a "lyrical gift comparable to that of the late Samuel Barber," his music has won international acclaim for its balance between dramatic sweep and architectural clarity. Beaser's orchestral CD on London/Argo has garnered considerable attention prompting Gramophone magazine to call his music "Masterly...dazzlingly colorful, fearless of gesture...beautifully fashioned and ingeniously constructed."

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Beaser studied literature, political philosophy and music at Yale College, graduating summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa in 1976. He went on to earn his Master of Music, M.M.A. and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the Yale School of Music. His principal composition teachers have included Jacob Druckman, Earle Brown, Toru Takemitsu, Arnold Franchetti, Yehudi Wyner and Goffredo Petrassi. In addition, he studied conducting with Otto-Werner Mueller and William Steinberg at Yale, and composition with Betsy Jolas on a Crofts Fellowship at Tanglewood in 1976. From 1978-1990 he served as co-Music Director and Conductor of the innovative contemporary chamber ensemble Musical Elements at the 92nd street Y, bringing premieres of over two hundred works to Manhattan. From 1988-1993 he was the Meet the Composer/Composer-in-Residence with the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, and has served as the ACO's artistic advisor until January 2001, when he assumed the role of Artistic Director. Since 1993, he has been Professor and Chairman of the Composition Department at the Juilliard School in New York. In 2004 he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Beaser's compositions have earned him numerous awards and honors. At the age of 16, his first orchestral work was performed by the Greater Boston Youth Symphony under his own direction at Jordan Hall in Boston and at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. In 1977 he became the youngest composer to win the Prix de Rome from the American Academy in Rome. In 1986, Beaser's widely heard Mountain Songs was nominated for a Grammy Award in the category of Best Contemporary Composition. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim and Fulbright Foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Goddard Lieberston Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Charles Ives Scholarship, an ASCAP Composers Award, a Notescu Commission Award and a Barlow Commission. In 1995, when the American Academy of Arts and Letters honored him with their lifetime achievement award, the Academy Award in music they wrote: "His masterful orchestrations, clear-cut structures, and logical musical discourse reveal a musical imagination of rare creativity and sensitivity... and put him in the forefront of his generation of composers."

Beaser's music has been performed and commissioned with regularity both in America and abroad. He has received major commissions from the New York Philharmonic (150th Anniversary Commission), the Chicago Symphony (Centennial Commission), the Saint Louis Symphony, The American Composers Orchestra, The Baltimore Symphony and Dawn Upshaw, The Minnesota Orchestra, The Brucknerhaus Orchestra Linz, The American Brass Quintet, Chanticleer, New York City Opera, Glimmerglass, and WNET /Great Performances. Recent major orchestral performances have come from the Chicago, Saint Louis and Baltimore Symphonies, The Minnesota Orchestra, The New York Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, the Marine Band, the Vienna Radio Orchestra, the Bruckner Orchestra Linz, The Krakow Philharmonic, the Dutch Radio Symphony, the Gelders Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic with James Galway, the Monte Carlo Philharmonic, and the Rome Radio Symphony.