

# "THE HERALD"

## An Improvised Piano Solo by Denny Zeitlin

**M**ENTION THE TERM "free improvisation" to many musicians, and they'll conjure up images of chaos—a whirlwind of dissonance with no recognizable melody, no tonal center, no regular meter, and no audible thematic structure. But in fact, this is a description of a particular style of music, and free improvisation can take place in many different styles, from the most conservative to the most bizarre. Denny Zeitlin's unaccompanied piano solo "The Herald," which can be heard on the enclosed Soundsheet, is a free improvisation that embodies some of the harmonic devices of contemporary jazz and classical music, together with a strong rhythmic pulse and pounding left-hand octaves that owe something to rock. This blend of styles combines with the vibrant energy of free playing to produce a unique and exciting piece of music, which we're sure you'll enjoy listening to.

More than half of "The Herald" is transcribed below and on the following pages. As you read through it, you'll discover several things about how an improvisation of this type is organized. The opening fanfare figure is repeated in bars 10 and 26, and again near the end of the solo. The beginning passages are in a modal form of G minor, which is transformed at bar 37 into G major for a

quieter interlude. Many of the more complex-sounding chords are simple bitonal block chords, in which the right hand plays an octave with an internal fourth or fifth while the left plays some type of suspended second or suspended fourth voicing. Moving these two units in contrary motion produces exotic harmonies that are easy to get to quickly while improvising.

Most of the solo is in a very direct 4/4, with even sixteenths. At a couple of points, such as bar 2, Zeitlin adds or subtracts a beat. There is only one point in the transcription where the rhythm diverges from the metronomic: bars 31-33. Our notation here is admittedly an imperfect approximation. Tapping an eighth-note beat rigidly while listening to these bars will prove that they take up a total of exactly 24 eighth-notes, as they should. However, Zeitlin pushes the beat a bit in some places and ritards in others. The 7/8 bar with eight eighths in it gives approximately the correct phrasing, but it suffers from one defect: If played exactly as written, it puts the A $\sharp$  bass note slightly after the 13th eighth-note beat of the bar 31-32 phrase (the last half-note in a pair of 4/4 bars), whereas in fact the A is slightly before this beat. Also, the quintuplet shown at the beginning of bar 33 does not sound any faster than

an eighth followed by three sixteenths—but somehow, the downbeat of bar 34 arrives exactly when it should. If anybody comes up with a better way to notate these bars, we'll print it in our Letters column.

"I don't want to say too much about the piece," Zeitlin comments, "because I don't want to get in the way of people hearing it. But there is one thing I do recall that might be of interest. On rare occasions when I start to play a free improvisation, there may be a storyline, and there was one in this case. As I started to play, I had a sense of a herald from another country arriving at a town and coming through the gates. The townspeople give the herald a very exuberant and excited reception. I had the sense that somehow the piece was going to have something to do with the nature of the herald's message and how it was received by the people in the town."

The recording was made at the end of a week-long engagement at the Keystone Korner in San Francisco in January 1981, using a Tascam 25-2 tape deck with dbx at 15 ips, fed by a pair of Neumann mikes positioned fairly close to the strings in an X configuration. It has not been released before in any form.

—Jim Aikin

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TRANSCRIPTION BY JIM AIKIN

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Soundsheet & Transcription

7

Musical notation for measures 7-9. Treble clef with eighth-note chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line.

10

Musical notation for measures 10-12. Treble clef with chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line.

13

Musical notation for measures 13-15. Treble clef with chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line.

16

Musical notation for measures 16-18. Treble clef with chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line. Dynamics: *p*, *f*, *cresc.*, *mf*.

19

Musical notation for measures 19-21. Treble clef with chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line.

22

Musical notation for measures 22-24. Treble clef with chords and sixteenth-note runs. Bass clef with chords and a melodic line. Measure 22 contains a fingering '6'.

Soundsheet & Transcription

25 *8va*

28 *8va* ..... *15va*

31 *15va* ..... *8:7*

34 *dim.* ..... *3*

37 *mp* ..... *rit.* \*

40 *8va* ..... *rit.*

Soundsheet & Transcription

8va

43

46

8va

49

52

55

58

etc.