

# ROBERT SIROTA

COMPOSER

## PROGRAM NOTES

### *LETTERS ABROAD* (1982)

Program note by Robert Sirota:

If there had been iPhones in the summer of 1980, *Letters Abroad* would not have been created. That was the summer that Vicki went to Europe to pursue her ground breaking research on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel. I, along with our 4-year-old son Jonah, stayed in Massachusetts, beginning what would be for me a 12-year stint teaching composition at Tanglewood. In 1980 a trans-Atlantic phone call was expensive, and texting hadn't been invented yet. I missed Vicki terribly, so I decided I would write brief pieces- "postcards" - to her, to ease the pain of separation. In 1982, I assembled these short pieces, with some additions, into *Letters Abroad*.

Piano and organ are a potentially awkward and difficult combination, and that is the point. The acoustic disparity and distance separating the organ and piano is the central metaphor of the work: the organ and the piano speak to each other over time and space, and create a sense of separation, and ultimately of being reunited. At the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, Vicki and I recorded the piece separated by about 100 feet (!). We used audio and video monitors positioned at the organ to enable us to play together.

The climax of the work is an organ prelude composed as an homage to Fanny Mendelssohn, followed without a break by a fantasia - pas-de-deux - conclusion, with the organ at one point taking the part of a German Drehorgel (street organ) and playing the tune "Der Berliner Bär" before the organ and piano intertwine and eventually are tenderly united.