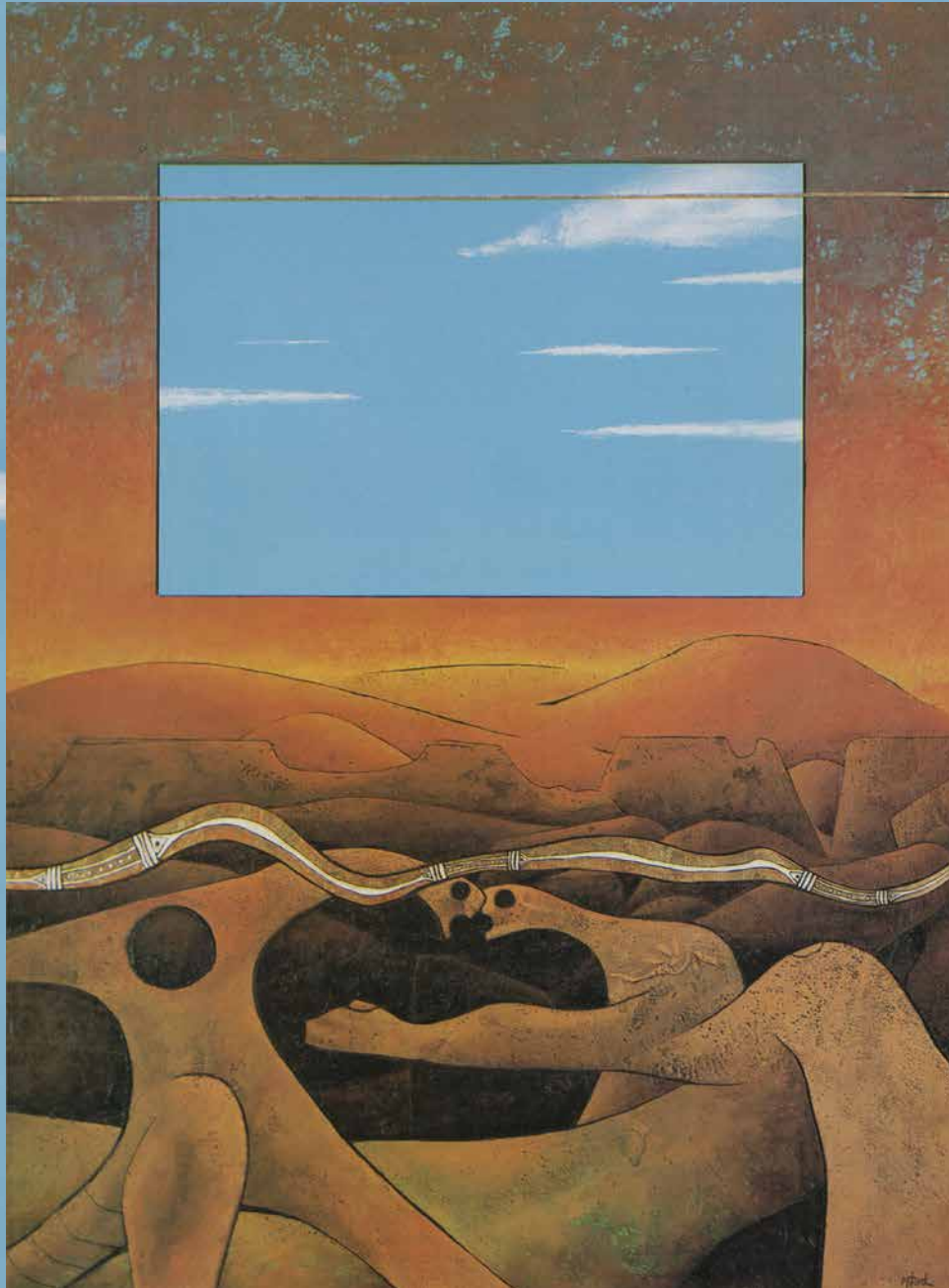


CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN PIANO



move

Larry Sitsky

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN PIANO

- 1 **Arch (Fantasia No. 4)**
Larry Sitsky 4'02"
- 2 **Cantillation**
Helen Gifford 1'47"
- 3 **Elite Syncopations**
Mary Mageau 2'09"
- 4 **Prelude**
Lawrence Whiffin 7'36"
- 5 **Sonata 1**
Keith Humble 2'33"
- 6 **Sonata 2**
Keith Humble 4'04"
- 7 **Masks**
Haydn Reeder 9'27"
- 8 **Uttering Joyous Leaves**
Nigel Butterley 4'21"
- 9 **Five Small Pieces**
John McCaughey 6'25"
- 10 **Ragings of a One Pot Screamer**
Theodore Dollarhide 10'40"
- 11 **Eshelgharam**
Ann Ghandar 3'49"
- 12 **Krebs**
Mark Pollard 5'38"
- 13 **The Spell**
Helen Gifford 1'42"
- 14 **Fantasia No. 1 (In memory of Egon Petrie)**
Larry Sitsky 6'25"



Larry Sitsky's activities as composer, pianist, writer, broadcaster and teacher place him inevitably among the foremost ambassadors of contemporary Australian piano music. In the present recording Sitsky dons his piano virtuoso cap as he juggles extreme contrasts such as those to be found in works ranging from the fiery Humble sonatas to the Joplinesque Mageau and his own rhapsodic pieces. Sitsky's career emulates the grand European composer-pianist tradition, and echoes of Liszt, Busoni, Anton Rubinstein, and Petri (with whom he studied) are present in both his composition and in the breadth and depth of his piano tone.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN PIANO

The publication by the La Trobe University Press of the scores of twelve works for solo piano helps overcome the difficulty experienced by most Australian composers in making their compositions available to the public. The book, together with this Move recording, provides cross-section of pedagogically useful Australian material to teachers, lecturers and to the adventurous listener.

This is music which may best be described as concert material, written in a varied gamut of contemporary styles, with a bias towards rigour. One of the composers represented, Larry Sitsky, has undertaken the gigantic task of performing the entire collection for this record; moreover, in order to provide a well filled compact disc, he has given us an additional work of his own, the first *Fantasia*, as well a short bonus from Helen Gifford, *The Spell*.

Research for the project was initiated by Dr Jeff Pressing and Lawrence Whiffin, both of La Trobe University's Music Department, and continued with the assistance of Haydn Reeder, former music editor for Universal Edition in Vienna and London, who brought his considerable experience

to the Editorial Committee in its task of selecting and editing the composers' manuscripts.

Arch (Fantasia No. 4) – Larry Sitsky

The title *Arch* was deliberately chosen by Sitsky to describe the form of the piece which gradually builds to a central climax and then subsides. As in much of Sitsky's music, a number of disparate melodic and harmonic thematic elements are developed independently; here, the centres A and Eb form a tritone (Sitsky's favourite interval) and pull against each other like magnets at opposite poles, and this is the most obvious controlling aspect of the piece. *Arch* was commissioned by the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1980.

Cantillation – Helen Gifford

Cantillation is defined as a chant or intoning of mostly scriptural text (especially Jewish) and, as with any type of chant, Gifford's composition formalises the sentiment that originally inspired the liturgy, but here in an entirely pianistic way.

Elite Syncopations – Mary Mageau

The composer writes "During 1977 I explored the school of classical ragtime piano with interest and composed a keyboard work integrating snatches of Joplin's Missouri rags with my own contemporary sound. *Elite Syncopations* is a rhythmic study in which brief passages of the Joplin rag (1902) are quoted as they

emerge from a surrounding context of changing rhythms and displaced accents."

Prelude – Lawrence Whiffin

The form of this prelude is ABA, the reprise being a strict mirror of the first. The short Coda reveals how the initial idea is based on a 1940 popular song, disguised by extreme chromaticism. The pitch organisation derives from the cyclic unfolding of a transposing chord sequence, a technique based on procedures used by late tonal composers. The sound in *Prelude* ranges from lush post-romantic in the early stages of the piece, to extreme dissonance at climax points.

Sonatas 1 and 2 – Keith Humble

Keith Humble wrote two sonatas for piano. The first was begun in Marburg (Germany) in 1953 during a concert tour and was completed in Paris in 1954. The second sonata was written in Melbourne in 1977. Despite the lapse of time between the writing of each, there are certain similarities, not the least being their brevity and attention to formal procedures. Both sonatas are twelve tone and follow the model evolved by the second Viennese school: all three movements of a complete sonata are brought into juxtaposition so that they form one continuous movement. Humble's first sonata condenses this new form so that short, contrasting subjects or sections represent not only first, second and third movements, but also the

exposition, development and recapitulation of a conventional sonata-allegro movement.

Masks – Haydn Reeder

The total content of this work derives from the three ideas presented successively on the first page of the score. The ideas are radically different from each other, just as three persons in a drama may be. Likewise, conflicts arise as each asserts itself, and exchanges of characteristics take place. The characteristics exchanged are three in number: Interval content, rhythm (duration) and shape.

The composer wished to use the full range of resources which the piano offers. This, however, was not simply for the sake of effect, but a requirement to have available sounds or techniques appropriate to a particular structural need. The technique also affects ideas which are identified in a particular way (eg. the damped accents of the second idea) or which move an idea into another sound world by changing its colour, as occurs when the first idea is presented in harmonics later in the piece.

Uttering Joyous Leaves – Nigel Butterley

This is one of five works written between 1973-1981 which were motivated in some way by the poetry of Walt Whitman. Only two of them are vocal. The brief quotation heads the score of the instrumental ones and is intended

merely as a pointer to the music. In this case the quotation is from *I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing*.

“... and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana
solitary in a wide flat space,
Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a
friend a lover near,
I know very well I could not.”

The piece is in a ‘mosaic’ form comprising nine elements, each repeated several times, but not in any regular order. The repetitions are sometimes shortened or lengthened, altered in other ways, or combined. Written for a piano competition it was intended to enable the display of pianistic colour, as well as agility. *Uttering Joyous Leaves* was commissioned by the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1980.

Five Small Pieces – John McCaughey

1. *andante* 2. *poco maestoso* 3. *leggiero, impetuoso* 4. *calmo, poco animato* 5. *semplice*

These pieces were written along traditional lines as a cycle of twelve-tone miniatures of complementary expressive character. The framing pieces *No. 1* and *5* remain within the bounds of vocal register and conventional phrasing, the first being a simple 16 bar melody and the last a chorale with oblique reference to a phrase from Schoenberg’s *Gurrelieder*. Piece *No. 2* develops a kind of chaconne out of a small idea contained in the

opening movement. Pieces *No. 3* and *4*, the principle ones of the set, move into wider registers of the piano and aspire to a phraseless continuity. In the third piece this is made up of flares of sound in the upper half of the keyboard. In the fourth there is a gradual canonic motion to a turbulent region in the bass, followed by an explosion to the extremes of the instrument.

Ragings of a One Pot Screamer – Theodore Dollarhide

The extravagant title derives from the composer’s intention to write a virtuoso piece depicting a pub crawl on a warm Melbourne summer evening. After the first drink one moves through various pub encounters until it is time to go home. The work is generated from four motives stated near the beginning which reappear, freely interpolated, at different speeds throughout. The irregular rhythmic aspect conjures up the image of an intoxicated staggering drunkard. Although the idea behind the piece is essentially light-hearted, the composer intends the work to be a serious reflection on the subject; the result is a pianistically demanding tour de force. Sitsky’s interpretation tends towards the aleatoric in certain passages where the difficulties of the piano writing are overcome with enhanced effect.

Eshelgharam – Ann Ghandar

Eshelgharam was written in January 1978 and was first performed at a

Composers' Seminar held at La Trobe University in February of that year. The basic material for the composition was derived from a combination of letters in her husband's and her own name (Mostafa Ann Ghandar), and used as a passacaglia theme. The title is a transliteration of two Arabic words.

Krebs – Mark Pollard

Krebs was written in 1980 and revised in 1983. *Krebs* is German for crab, the astrological sign for Cancer, and the piece reflects contrasting changes of mood, supposedly characteristic of people born under this sign.

TWO ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCES NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRINTED VOLUME:

The Spell – Helen Gifford

Like *Cantillation*, this is an exercise in small-scale composition which is, in the words of the composer, "the still, small point at the centre of a heart-stopping enchantment; the stasis in the middle of the whirling tumult".

Fantasia No. 1 (In memory of Egon Petri) – Larry Sitsky

The *Fantasia* was written in a matter of days under the emotional shock of hearing about Egon Petri's death. Petri, with whom Larry Sitsky studied in San Francisco, inspired a very human relationship with his pupils, so that his loss was to them a personal loss.

The work begins in a sort of numb sorrow, with two soft 'drum' taps, and a

melody spaced very widely on the keyboard, the interval of the tritone predominating. From this, the first part of the *Fantasia* develops, working up to a large, anguished moment.

The second part is marked *Quasi Chorale*, and commences with a soft chordal sequence which is interrupted with very high bell-like chords. The chords become louder with each repetition, and are punctuated by interruptions and interpolations of material from the first part of the *Fantasia*. After another climactic passage, the opening returns, very softly, and slightly altered. The piece ends, as it began, with a single melodic line and the 'drum' tap.



This project is assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

► The recording was made at the Canberra School of Music, recording and post-production by John Davies and Martin Wright.

► Analytical notes annotated by Lawrence Whiffin. The cover illustration was designed by Ignacio Mármol incorporating his painting *Alchera*.

© 1988 MOVE RECORDS. All rights reserved.

move.com.au



