

# tensile flame

## ✱ TWO CD SET

### Reviews of original releases in 1991 and 1992:

“... Michael Kieran Harvey has done it again, both [discs] deserving of high praise. [He] seems to bring a spirituality to his performances. ... I've never heard the itinerant puppet Petrouchka have such life and character injected into his personality. The execution of the rhythmic and timbral niceties of the score are close to faultless and quite breathtaking. Harvey's performance [of the Vine Sonata] is superlative. ... [He] extracts every dimension of color in his vibrant account [of the Liszt]. ... Considering that [the Ravel is] one of the most difficult pieces ever written, and given Harvey's vibrant performance, it's nothing short of staggering. ... an assured technical control and broad expressive approach. ...”

## CD 1

Ferencz (Franz) Liszt (1811-1886)

- 1 **Sonata in B minor (1853)** 31'30"

Alexander Skryabin (1872-1915)

- 2 **Vers la Flamme (1914)** 5'45"

Sergey Rakhmaninov (1873-1943)

### **Etudes Tableaux Op 39 (1917)**

- 3 Etude No 1 2'55"  
4 Etude No 2 5'58"  
5 Etude No 3 2'52"

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

### **Gaspard de la nuit (1908)**

- 6 Ondine 6'31"  
7 Le gibet (The gallows) 6'03"  
8 Scarbo 9'17"

## CD 2

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

### **Trois mouvements de Petrouchka (1911-1921)**

- 1 Danse Russe 2'28"  
2 Chez Petrouchka 4'17"  
3 La Semaine Grasse 8'08"

Elliott Carter (b. 1908)

### **Sonata (1946)**

- 4 Maestoso 9'35"  
5 Andante 12'09"

Graham Hair (b. 1943)

- 6 **Under Aldebaran (1984)** 4'40"

Carl Vine (b. 1954)

### **Piano Sonata (1990)**

- 7 Lento 8'15"  
8 Leggiero e Legato 8'45"

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# MICHAEL KIERAN HARVEY

Australian pianist Michael Kieran Harvey was born in Sydney and studied piano in Canberra with Alan Jenkins, at the Sydney Conservatorium under Gordon Watson, and at the Liszt Academy, Budapest, under the Director, Professor Sándor Falvai. He has been a professional pianist since his late teens, making his career base in Australia. Michael Kieran Harvey has worked with conductors such as Edo de Waart, Reinbert de Leeuw, Diego Masson, Markus Stenz, Yoran Traub, Paul Mann, Kristian Jarvi and Sachio Fujioka, and collaborated with groups and individuals as diverse as the Arditti String Quartet, Jon Lord (Deep Purple), Keith Emerson (Emerson, Lake and Palmer), Absolute Ensemble and Paul Grabowsky (Australian Art Orchestra). His repertoire encompasses over fifty concertos, chamber music, traditional through to contemporary classical solos, and experimental and original works. Renowned for his performances of new music, he has dedicated much of his career to promoting the works of Australian composers. Michael Kieran Harvey's work has been recognised by numerous national and international awards, including the Grand Prix in the Ivo Pogorelich Piano Competition, Pasadena (1993), the Debussy Medal, Paris (1986), four consecutive Australian "Mo" awards for best classical artist (1997-2000), the

Australian government's Centenary Medal for services to Australian music (2002), and most recently he has been twice nominated for the Helpmann Award (2003-4). He is currently artist-in-residence at the Victorian College of the Arts and Fellow of the Faculty of Music, Melbourne University.



My interest in the music of Liszt resulted in the first disc, originally released in 1991. The record traces the influence of the Liszt *B minor Sonata* on three early 20th Century composers: Rakhmaninov, Ravel and Skryabin.

The second CD, first released in 1992, is a departure from the mainstream virtuoso repertoire, and reflects my interest in contemporary music. It features Australian composer Carl Vine's *Piano Sonata* (1990) and gives a perspective on Vine's individual style by including works seminal to his compositional processes, such as Elliott Carter's *Piano Sonata* (1946), Stravinsky's *Three Pieces from Petrushka* (1921) and the Australian composer Graham Hair's *Under Aldebaran* (1984).

*Michael Kieran Harvey*

The first disc traces the impact on 20th century keyboard music of one of the greatest piano sonatas ever written. Connections between the great Liszt *B minor Sonata*, Skryabin's *Vers la Flamme*, the three Rakhmaninov etudes and Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* abound, yet there is no documentation which shows how profoundly Liszt's sonata influenced these, and subsequent compositions.

For Liszt, the piano as well as being his confessional, was '...his ego, his language and his life.

'Its strings vibrated under my passions', he wrote, 'and its willing keys have obeyed my every whim and mood ... it occupies the first place in the hierarchy of instruments'.

Liszt, in the *B minor Sonata*, created more than mere homage to the instrument he devoted all his life to mastering; he created a work which, through structural experiments, freed the sonata itself from past conventions, yet still preserved strong links to the later works of Beethoven and to masterworks such as Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*. Liszt did not invent the device of metamorphosis of themes which is fundamental to many of his important compositions (he took this idea largely from Schubert); however, he managed to raise the technique to a major form of musical evolution.

Each of the themes in the *B minor Sonata*, so nakedly and defiantly stated at the opening, undergo myriad changes of mood, harmonisation and technical

presentation. More than this though, there is an expansiveness and blurring of formal outlines, in part attributable to Liszt's direction: 'Quasi improvisato', which creates a work improvisational in its entire effect. Skryabin also indicated that he wished his own music to be perceived as 'distilled improvisation'. *Vers la Flamme* is a good example of the extemporaneous result of careful development of an idea, in this case reminiscent of a huge crescendo.

In the *Sonata*, the traditional device of clearly delineated sections is not readily apparent, yet one feels that the ABA format is not entirely abandoned. Indeed, one could argue that the work as an entirety has elements of traditional sonata form - for example, the near-hysterical return of the B minor expositional passage which immediately follows the maniacal fugue. The character of this fugue, which Sacheverell Sitwell vividly described as 'ripping to shreds' the thematic material in the manner of a 'vengeful devil', is one of the best examples of the dichotomy (and hence human-ness) of Liszt; the fascination with the powers of evil and worldly excess, and the equal attraction (or pangs of conscience?) of the spiritual and things holy. Many commentators on Liszt have cited this anomaly as an indication that Liszt was nothing more than a charlatan and a hypocrite - on the other hand, it could demonstrate that he was simply one of the more public examples of the contradictory nature of genius.

The fascination with evil and the world

of the darkly supernatural is consciously conjured up by Liszt's constant reference to the elemental interval of the tri-tone, an interval which Skryabin, Rakhmaninov and Ravel also exploited and based much of their individual language upon. This component pervades the Sonata in just about every conceivable manifestation: key relationships, intervallic relationships, thematic structure, harmonic structure and even scales of consecutive tri-tones.

From the beginnings of western music this interval has been associated with the devil. Liszt, fully cognizant of this, deliberately saturates the work with this highly unstable interval, which takes the harmony frequently to the edges of tonality.

Liszt was driven all his life by what can only be described as a demonic energy to stretch the limits of his own technique, musical understanding and imagination, due no doubt to the inferiority he felt over his humble beginnings and perceived lack of knowledge. He educated himself with an overwhelming diversity of ideas and attained a pre-eminent level of erudition about the *zeitgeist* of the Romantic Age.

His own rejection during the 1850s of the exhibitionism necessary for the travelling virtuoso coincided with an intensification of his experimental and non-popularist excursions, of which the *B minor Sonata* is one of the first in larger forms; his attempts to modify traditional musical structures and create a 'music of the future' fell largely on deaf ears. Sadly,

his music from the 1850s onwards fell out of favour. Indeed, Schumann (to whom the Sonata is dedicated) and Brahms (leading composers of the movement away from “program” music towards more “absolute” music) both misunderstood the work when Liszt performed it for them, Brahms apparently falling asleep through most of it.

The B Minor Sonata is at once a grand summing up of all the drama, indulgence, pathos, beauty and sheer energy that was the Romantic ethos; at the same time it foreshadowed developments which are still influencing musical thought today. The unique, exotic and unsettling harmonies lurking within Skryabin’s *Vers la Flamme* (1914) exploit the tri-tone as an essential chord-building element. The eerie, ambiguous tonality of the opening is a result of regarding double tri-tone chords as static colours, rather than as dissonances awaiting resolution. Skryabin further evokes a disturbed, flickering atmosphere by employing complex rhythmic relationships, for example, the mournful falling semitone figure shrouded in left hand quintuplet and right hand nontuplet undulations.

Liszt’s signature textural device, the tremolo, is used by Skryabin throughout *Vers la Flamme* to sustain the shimmering, almost frantic surging of the insistent melodic fragment. Again, harmonic relationships are based on the tri-tone movement. In the first triumphant section, where the music first emerges from the

sombre gloom of the opening, the theme has metamorphosed (like the themes in the Liszt Sonata) into an exultant fanfare. The ever-present tremolo helps to sustain and propel the long melodic notes towards the crushing harmonies of first an altered seventh chord on G, and then the same again on E. The bleak double tritone has been surreptitiously altered to a more ‘illuminated’ harmony, based on sevenths. This increases the impression of optimism and momentum of the final stages, and Skryabin further intensifies the feeling of rushing forward to the final climax by introducing an urgent, repeated chord figure, based on perfect fourths. This rises ever higher, finally achieving an almost unbearable feeling of ecstasy as the melodic fragment ‘resolves’ to the major seventh of E, the entire piece hurtling into metaphysical space long after the actual sonorities have faded.

Skryabin’s theosophical mysticism gives a special significance to *Vers la Flamme*, (as with so many of the works of his later period) emphasising the combining of the artistic and the spiritual in an ecstatic union. Whatever the actual program of the work (if indeed there is a specific one), the effect is a dazzling example of the transcendental nature of Skryabin’s later music, and of the ease with which he creates broad, manic swings of emotion with the maximum use of minimal resources. It is a crystallisation of many of the ideas to be found in his great symphonic poems, such as *Prometheus* and

*The Poem of Ecstasy*.

Skryabin’s exact contemporary, Rakhmaninov, seemed unable to escape the shadow of Liszt, yet at the same time he managed to carve out a unique language, which took the melancholy self indulgence of Romanticism to even gloomier depths. His voice in these three etudes is dark and foreboding, yet these pieces, because of their very conciseness, avoid the more maudlin tone of some of his larger canvasses. The extreme chromaticism of Op 39 No 1, with its textural chiaroscuro in the right hand as the left hand turbulently seethes through an arching tri-tone based melodic pattern, is an example of the “diabolic” influence of Liszt. Rakhmaninov, fully aware of the importance of this interval as a means of throwing open tonality without actually committing the ultimate “sacrilege” of dispensing with it altogether, moves easily from one remote key to another, an agile feat in such a brief work. The highly chromatic chord sequence at the end, though obviously borrowed from Liszt is taken to the extremes as a device for propelling the music towards a thrilling and angry conclusion.

Etude Op 39 No 2 shows Rakhmaninov in an obsessive, almost pathological preoccupation with feelings of mortality, here represented as a sweet release... something infinitely tender. The *Dies Irae*, which is the basis of the gently rocking left hand figure, was also a favourite cantus firmus for Liszt, who would spend entire

nights improvising over its changes. Both composers peppered their greatest works with its references. Liszt's *Todtentanz* goes rather further than this of course, creating a passacaglia form out of the underlying harmonic sequence. Rakhmaninov uses it as a background to a swaying right hand melody which mutates into emotional outpourings of anguish, again highly chromatic and with the composer's familiar explosive outburst, followed immediately by an ebbing decay of the material. The music comes to a sighing, resigned close by way of a slightly surprising jazz-derived chord, based on A minor.

The punctuated outburst followed by a decay of the music is again a feature of Op 39 No 3, and the tri-tone fixation also returns, especially in the explosive central section. Rakhmaninov is able to conjure up orchestral sonorities as he shifts from a crescendo of resources towards the crashing C sharp major cadence, and then utilises an ingenious masking technique which fragments the material, the tonality becoming ambiguous by juxtaposing G7 over C sharp, and the right hand triplets rush headlong into a breathtaking descending cadenza before the recapitulation. The onrushing broken chord figure breaks down during the coda, becoming meek, languishing in the dissipation of its energy, before the music eventually vaporises.

One of the piano repertoire's most famous and notorious works, *Gaspard de la nuit* by Maurice Ravel, develops the

textures, harmonic language and even melodic material first presented in the Liszt B minor Sonata fifty years earlier. Ravel revered Liszt, and takes many of the elements so far discussed to an even higher degree of sophistication, subtlety and lushness of sound. The influence of Liszt is plain in Ravel's earlier mature works such as *Jeux d'Eau* and *Gaspard*. As in the Rakhmaninov Op 39 No 3, Ravel seeks orchestral sonority from the piano as Liszt did in the B minor Sonata.

The rhythmical crossed-hand passages in 'Scarbo' are reminiscent of the mood of the opening of the fugue in the Liszt. Even the repetitious melodic material Ravel uses to depict the evil gnome suggests the diabolic theme of the Liszt. Ravel constantly uses harmony based on the 'devil's interval', especially at moments of extreme poignancy such as the descending chord sequences of 'Le gibet', where the tri-tone produces chords of a jazz-inspired exoticism, which aptly depict the waves of dread and revulsion engendered by the original poem. The exhaustive exploration of moods and emotions that characterise the B minor Sonata is continued in 'Gaspard'; the mendacious sensuality of 'Ondine', the mythical watersprite, the protracted, hypnotic horror and despair of 'Le gibet' and the pernicious hysteria generated in 'Scarbo', all have precedents in the music of Liszt.

Of these four composers, Ravel was the least successful as a pianist, but in this work technical virtuosity of the highest

order is demanded. Ricardo Viñes, his close concert pianist friend, was instrumental in bringing the work before the public.

Ravel himself had a peculiar hand shape, which influenced him to write highly individual passages for the thumb, such as the sequences of cascading seconds towards the end of 'Scarbo'.

The poetic narrative of the three pieces is enhanced by Ravel; listening to the music we forget the rather old fashioned romanticism of the Bertrand poems. The music, by its very nature a more abstract art, can take on many interpretations, not the least of which can be that of a telling reflection of the actual psychological preoccupations of the composer. The world of *Gaspard* could be perceived as a microcosm and a confession of the life of Ravel himself, and the obsessive fascination he had with the supernatural. The new translation of the three Bertrand poems helps to highlight the Poe-like atmosphere of the original French.

*Michael Kieran Harvey*

# **GASPARD DE LA NUIT**

by Aloysius Bertrand (1908)

## 6. ONDINE

Listen! Listen! It's me, it's Ondine,  
who is brushing sonorous diamond-shaped raindrops  
onto your window, lit by the gloomy rays  
of the moon;  
That's her, the lady of the manor  
in a shot-silk dress,  
contemplating the beautiful starry night  
and dozing late upon her balcony.

Each wave is a watersprite swimming in the current;  
each wave is an undulating path to my palace.  
My palace is a flowing building,  
built in the lake-bed, in a triangle of fire, earth and air.

Listen! Listen! My father is beating the noisy waters  
with a branch of the green alder tree,  
and my sisters are caressing the fresh herbs, waterlilies  
and gladioli of the islands with their frothy arms;  
they sneer at the decrepit and mouldy willow trees  
trying to fish.

Murmuring a song, she implored me  
to accept her ring and put it on my finger,  
so to become the husband of one of the Ondines and,  
as the king of the lakes  
to visit her in her palace.

Answering that I was in love with a mortal woman  
she became sulky and resentful.  
She shed a few tears, then burst into laughter;  
disappearing in a cascade of white water  
along my blue window panes.

## 6. ONDINE

Ecoute! - Ecoute! - C'est moi, c'est Ondine  
qui frôle de ces gouttes d'eau les losanges sonores de  
ta fenêtre illuminée par les mornes rayons de la lune;  
et voici, en robe de moire, la dame châtelaine qui  
contemple son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau  
lac endormi.

Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant,  
chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon  
palais, et mon palais est bâti fluide, au fond du lac,  
dans le triangle du feu, de la terre et de l'air.

Ecoute! - Ecoute! - Mon père bat l'eau  
coassante d'une branche d'aulne verte, et mes soeurs  
caressent de leurs bras d'âcume les fraîches îles d'herbes,  
de nénuphars et de glaleuls, ou se moquent du saule  
caduc et barbu qui pêche à la ligne.

Sa chanson murrnée, elle me supplia de recevoir  
son anneau à mon doigt, pour être l'époux d'une  
Ondine, et de visiter avec elle son palais, pour être le  
roi des lacs.

Et comme je lui répondai que j'aimais une mortelle,  
boudeuse et dépitée, elle pleura quelques larmes,  
poussa un éclat de rire, et s'évanouit en giboulées qui  
ruisselèrent blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.



## 7. THE GALLOWS

Oh! What do I hear? Could it be the moaning of the nocturnal northwind, or could it be a sigh heaved by the man hanging from the fork of the gallows?

Could it be the sound of some cricket nestling in the moss and of the barren ivy clinging to the wood, which lent its hark compassionately?

Could it be some fly on the hunt, trumpeting into those deaf ears the bugle-sound of a stag hunt?

Could it be some errantly flying beetle, picking up a bloodsoaked whisp of hair from the corpse's bald head?

Or could it be some spider, spinning a half arms-length muslin tie around that strangled neck?

It is the tolling of the bells, hitting the town walls of a city beyond the horizon, and the corpse of the hung man reflecting the red of a setting sun.

## 7. LE GIBET

Ah! ce que j'entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit, ou le pendu qui pousse un soupîr sur la fourche patibulaire?

Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la mousse et le lierre stérile dont par pitié se chausse le bois?

Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnante du cor autour de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallali?

Serait-ce quelque escarbot qui cueille en son vol inégal un cheveu sanglant à son crâne chauve?

Ou bien serait-ce quelque araignée qui brode une demi-aune de mousseline pour cravate à ce col étranglé?

C'est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une ville sous l'horizon, et la carcasse d'un pendu que rougit le soleil couchant.

## 8. SCARBO

Oh! How many times have I seen and heard  
him - Scarbo - until midnight, when the moon  
glistens in the sky like a silver coin on a blue  
banner sprinkled with golden bees.

How many times have I heard his droning  
laughter in the darkness of my alcove and the  
grating of his nails on the silk curtain of my  
bed.

How many times I have seen him ascending  
from the floor, twirling on one leg and rolling  
across the room like the spindle of a witch's  
distaff.

Did I believe he had vanished? Between the  
moon and me the dwarf became larger and  
larger like the belltower of a gothic cathedral  
and the golden bell on top of his pointed cap  
was swinging.

But soon his body became blue, transparent like  
candle-wax, his face became pale like the wax  
of a candle-end, and suddenly he was  
extinguished.

## 8. SCARBO

Oh! que de fois je l'ai entendu et vu, Scarbo,  
lorsqu'à  
minuit la lune brille dans le ciel comme un écu  
d'argent  
sur une bannière d'azur semée d'abeilles d'or!

Que de fois j'ai entendu bourdonner son rire  
dans  
l'ombre de mon alcôve, et grincer son ongle  
sur la  
soie des courtines de mon lit!

Que de fois je l'ai vu descendre du plancher,  
pirouetter  
sur un pied et rouler par la chambre comme le  
fuseau  
tombé de la quenouille d'une sorcière!

Le croyais-je alors évanoui? le nain grandissait  
entre  
la lune et moi comme le clocher d'une  
cathédrale  
gothique, un grelot d'or en branle à son bonnet  
pointu!

Mais bientôt son corps bleuissait, diaphane  
comme  
la cire d'une bougie, son visage blémissait  
comme la  
cire d'un lumignon, - et soudain il s'éteignait.

## THE LEGACY OF STRAVINSKY

Shock waves like those from an imploding star were unleashed by Igor Stravinsky's phenomenal genius, echoes of which continue to resound into the twenty-first century. Russian, yet making his major impact on world music whilst living on foreign soil, he attained the position of outspoken guru of the avant garde, first in France, then later and more profoundly in America. Dogged by ill health for most of his life, Stravinsky managed to set himself in the musical firmament as the brightest of the creative stars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each of his works exists within its own self-defined universe, and was first realised at the piano.

Elliott Carter was singled out by Stravinsky as the most important American voice of the mid-twentieth century after he heard Carter's *Double Concerto* (1961). Carter's ingenious mix of economy and complexity, radicalism and conservatism, and the general intercourse of opposites, forged an individual style of great beauty and limitless expression, which easily embraced many musical languages. In 1978 Pierre Boulez said of Carter '... an astonishing example of an individual musician, a personality who found his own way, quite unexpectedly – as it always should be'.

These two monumental figures in turn deeply influenced two of the most original Australian composers this country has seen

in recent years.

One of these, Graham Hair, better known for his exquisitely transparent chamber and choral works, is represented on this disc by a rare piano work, intended to reach the same transcendental plane as Carter's monumental piano sonata, though on a miniature scale.

Carl Vine, the second of these Australian composers, here lends his considerable pianistic expertise to sonata form, with exhilarating results. Inspired by the rhythmic energy and parturiency of the three aforementioned composers (his greatest influences), he pays homage especially to the form and rhythm of the Elliott Carter Sonata of some forty-four years earlier, whilst creating an individual Australian masterpiece.

All these works are bound by the energy of their rhythm. Layering, modulation and collage are the techniques most featured in the music, and it was from these elements that these interpretations were approached. The resonating capabilities of the twentieth century piano are also explored, from the extended tremolos and huge chordal climaxes of the Stravinsky, to the delicate harmonics and 'scorrevole' passages enhanced by the instrument's natural overtones in the Carter, to the enormous waves of multi-layered sound in the Vine.

Stravinsky's *Petruchka*, although originally for orchestra, was arranged by the composer as a purely pianistic set of pieces, independent of the earlier

orchestral version, and peculiarly idiomatic to the instrument. Therefore this performance stresses the exciting percussive, driving nature of the music, eminently suited to these characteristics of the piano. Contrast is achieved, and interest maintained more by 'shifting gear' metrically and by registral and structural devices than by attempting to slavishly imitate orchestral instruments. The composer's intention was to create a separate work from the same musical stimulus as a vehicle for the virtuosity of a particular performer (Rubinstein in fact) and not simply to construct a transcription of the earlier work.

Carter's *Sonata* is also uniquely pianistic and the composer therefore concentrates on the resources of the instrument, allowing its overtones to generate a great deal of the musical material. Rhythmically it is a nightmare to play, with constantly changing metres which create perhaps less of the driving energy of the Stravinsky and more of an improvisatory quality in what might otherwise sound like merely expert counterpoint. He combines this with a 'pandiatonic' harmonic scheme, resulting in a work which is at times feverish in its syncopation and contrastingly serene and powerful in its interludes of organum and majestic chorales. The Sonata is highly structured, having quite conservative formal elements; for example, the remnants of sonata form in movement one and a diabolical fugue in movement two. Even cyclic form may be said to be represented

in the 'flashbacks' to movement one, which helps to further connect the overall form. It is still remarkably contemporary in sound, a study in opposites, relished for this very quality of incompatibility that has influenced whole generations of jazz pianists from the time of be-bop to the present.

Carl Vine's *Piano Sonata* 1990, commissioned by the Sydney Dance Company, was premiered by myself in June 1991. Again, rhythmic energy is fundamental to the work, the composer frequently preferring to use the technique of 'rhythmic modulation' (gradual change), rather than the more usual motivic, or harmonic devices, although there is a certain sense of modality, and a reliance on organum (movement by parallel fifths in this case), which not only shows the influence of Carter's work, but also serves to bind the material in terms of language.

We may further compare these two works in formal terms, both being structured in two movements, but differing widely in the application of tempi within this framework. Where Vine prefers to layer and contrast textures to create structure, Carter reveals a predilection for counterpoint.

Vine's *Sonata* and Stravinsky's *Petruchka*, quite apart from their origin in the dance, also show striking similarities in relation to form, and in abrupt juxtapositions. The 'gear shifts' in movement three of *Petruchka* are almost identical in their effects on the listener's

sensibilities, as are the kaleidoscopic episodes before the emergence of the main theme in Vine's first movement (a good seven pages after the brooding opening chords). These passages confuse the listener's sense of pulse, creating an atmosphere of insecurity, of drama....what unpredictable but exhilarating rhythmic change may happen next?

Again, in Graham Hair's *Under Aldebaran*, the composer's use of the constant juxtaposition of varying motifs and material achieves the illusion of pulsation. There is very little motivic development and in this case, the energy of the piece derives from Stravinsky's and Carter's technique of the 'spliced film collage', where sections are simply buttressed together, creating strong contrasts and an atmosphere of nervous tension.

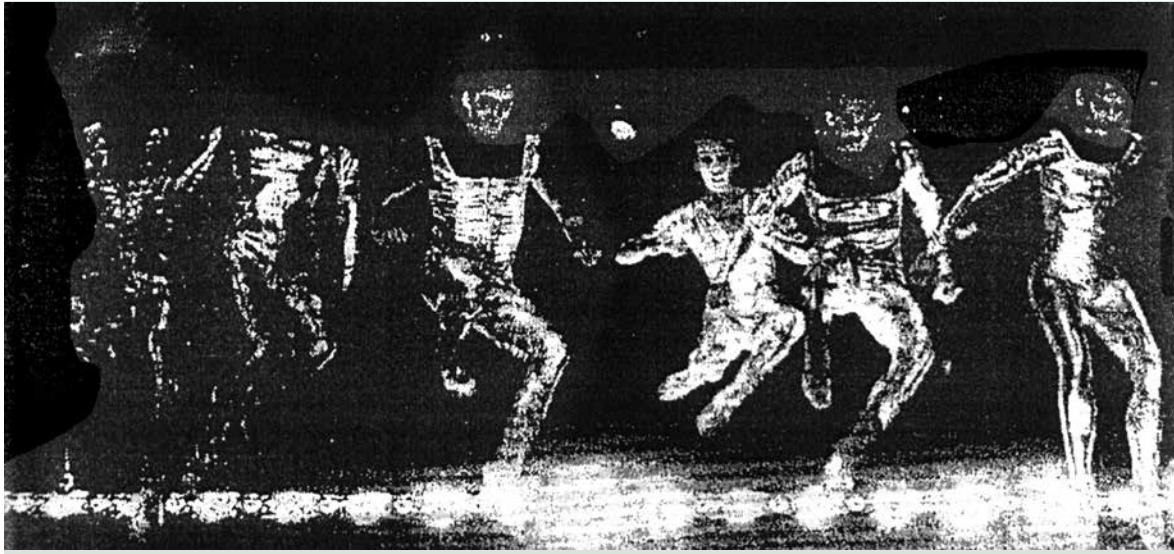
Hair's musical language ranges from startling dissonances and raging chordal sections to Ravel-type arpeggios and to obsessive, minimalistic repeated-note figures, where his favourite cross rhythm of 5:3 is explored. The entire piece then dissolves ethereally into thin air. This work is the first in a proposed cycle of twelve transcendental etudes, inspired by lines of the poet, James McAuley:

*.... Aldebaran Still glittered with its sad alternate fire. Blue as of memory, red as of desire.*

'The Incarnation of Sirius', by James McAuley (© Norma McAuley)

The metaphorical implications of the star Aldebaran as applied to music link this piece with the three other works on the disc: each of these creations burn brightly in the cosmos of contemporary piano music.

*Michael Kieran Harvey*  
For Sandor Falvai



“Graeme Murphy has choreographed a scintillating short work that is stunningly direct in visual appeal . . . *Piano Sonata* not only takes its title from the Carl Vine composition to which it is performed, it seems to spring from its musical inspiration like some three-dimensional force projecting the multi-faceted character of the keyboard score . . . it has featured segments – ebbing and flowing from the ensemble action, and a strong emphasis on lighting design. One of the three bars of delicate lights, which hang over the dancers in a trompe l’oeil reshaping of the wide stage, adds alternative elements of danger and play as it swings low over the performers. The choreography reflects the distinctive musical ideas but maintaining a unifying momentum. Harvey’s powerful performance at the keyboard is visually discrete, but so much a part of the whole impact that his live presence becomes as important as that of the dancers.”

*Jill Sykes, The Sydney Morning Herald, 29 May 1992*

Australian Hi-Fi 1991

Harvey extracts every dimension of color in his vibrant account [of the Liszt]. I have yet to experience the fugue delineated with greater clarity (at 19'46" - listen to that left hand, in particular) or keener attention focussed on inner lines.

Sydney Morning Herald **Roger Covell** 17 September 1991

... more sheer flair for vivid interpretation than most other young Australian pianists.

Wesley Classics **Cyrus Meher-Homji** March 1992

[In the Liszt] Harvey's detailed attention to inner voices is quite revelatory ... with the laser-like clarity you could swear you were listening to more than two hands. Considering that [the Ravel is] one of the most difficult pieces ever written, and given Harvey's vibrant performance, it's nothing short of staggering. [He has] an ability to color the most taxing music with uncanny insight. I've never heard the itinerant puppet Petrouchka have such life and character injected into his personality.

The Canberra Times **WL Hoffmann** 6 January 1992

... an assured technical control and broad expressive approach. [Ravel] is brilliant.

The Age Green Guide **Philip Nunn** 2 July 1992

Michael Harvey has done it again, both [discs] deserving of high praise. Harvey seems to bring a spirituality to his performances. The execution of the rhythmic and timbral niceties of the [*Petruchka*] score are close to faultless and quite breathtaking. Harvey's performance [of the Vine Sonata] is superlative.

Sounds Australian **Peter Platt** Spring 1992

I can't imagine a better performance of the Vine Sonata.



## ABOUT THIS RECORDING **Acoustic Recording Studio**

The recording studio was designed and built by Ron Craig who had had over twenty five years experience in the music industry at the time of these recordings, both as a concert tuner, technician and pianist.

Situated in the Southern Highlands, at Mittagong NSW, only ninety minutes from Sydney, the studio was designed with the serious musician in mind, and consisted of a large acoustically tuned room with as much ambience as possible. This allowed instruments that require reverberation to be recorded with a natural sound. Additional reverberation can be added later, if necessary, but the natural ambience induces inspired performances, as in these recordings, which is something that cannot be added later.

The studio's interior walls are constructed from ash hardwood panels, some of which are louvres that can be opened to expose broadband absorbers. Apart from the wood's aesthetic appeal, it makes a fine reflector of the higher frequencies. The ceiling is covered with a total of eighty-four pyramids, made from African Ash Brimsboard. Internally they act as absorbers via a 23 cm hole and fibreglass filling; externally, they act as diffusers.



**Executive producer:** Douglas Howard **Producer and engineer:** Ron Craig Recorded in Mittagong, NSW, Australia  
**Piano:** Steinway Concert Grand, Model D, built in Hamburg in 1936 — Originally released in 1991 and 1992  
**Re-released** 2004 by Move Records, Melbourne **Cover design:** Kat Mew **Booklet layout:** Martin Wright  
**Re-mastering:** Martin Wright, Move Records, Melbourne, Australia [move.com.au](http://move.com.au)



Carl Vine *Piano Sonata*: Sydney Dance Company