

move

complete solo piano works
Night (from Sun Music)
Sea Chant ● Sonatina
Koto Music ● Djilile
Left Bank Waltz
● and more

Peter
Sculthorpe
PIANO
MUSIC

THE TEAM OF PIANISTS
PETER SCULTHORPE
MICHAEL HANNAN

This disc of piano music by Peter Sculthorpe spans a period of over 35 years. Beginning with the composer's first acknowledged piano work, the *Sonatina* written in 1954, it includes music representative of each stage of his personal creative journey.

The recently-released *Callabonna* (1963) and the *Night Pieces* (1971) are integrally related with such landmark works of the 1960s as *Sun Music I* and the *String Quartet no 6*, in which Sculthorpe created the idiom which is unmistakably his own. In *Landscape* and *Koto Music I & II*, works of the 1970s, his engagement with Asian idioms inspired Sculthorpe to leave the piano keyboard and experiment with new sounds made within the instrument. The *Four Little Pieces*, compiled for his 50th birthday celebrations then signalled a return to the keyboard and to a renewed appreciation on the part of the composer of his own gifts as a melodist. Finally, three works of the 1980s – *Mountains*, *Djilile* and *Nocturnal* – are representative of Sculthorpe's latest creative phase, as expressed in the powerful melancholy of the orchestral works *Mangrove* and *Earth Cry*, and the optimistic exuberance of the *Piano Concerto* and *Kakadu*.

The short 3-movement **Sonatina** [15] (1954) is one of the first works in which Sculthorpe's personal musical idiom is revealed. Its distinctive opening chord was to become a hallmark of the composer's music for several decades, recurring transposed in *Sun Music 1* and again as the opening chord of the piano piece *Night*. Though still bearing the conventional European title 'sonatina', this early piece nevertheless has already the same strong extra-musical associations with Australia and the legends of its Aboriginal peoples that were to become such an

important characteristic of Sculthorpe's aesthetic in the years that followed.

The *Sonatina* is based on the legend of the tribal leader Yoonecara, who wishes to make a journey to the land beyond the setting sun in order to visit his ancestor Byama. In a slow introduction, Sculthorpe portrays Yoonecara looking out over a vast plain and contemplating his journey. A quick section follows, in which Yoonecara sets out, while the return of the opening slow music represents his realisation that Byama cannot be reached by physical means. Thus, in the introspective second movement Yoonecara makes the journey in his mind, and achieves a spiritual meeting with his ancestor. The last movement portrays the rejoicing of the tribe when Yoonecara returns. Linking the music to his subject, the repetitive patterns which Sculthorpe employs, especially in the faster music, are in some ways akin to those found in aboriginal music.

Sculthorpe's next piano piece, **Callabonna** [5], was written almost a decade later. It grew from a series of important events in the composer's life, beginning with the death of his father and ending in his first major orchestral work *Irkanda IV* (1961). The music started out as the first movement of a piano sonata; however, as Sculthorpe writes: 'While the sonata was abandoned, I kept playing this particular movement. Almost 30 years later, I finally decided officially to "reinstate" the piano version. I called the piece *Callabonna* because it was written at the time of the beginning of my friendship with the painter Russell Drysdale, who often said that my music reminded him of the outback lake Callabonna.' Sculthorpe subsequently reworked the music as the basis

for the first movement of his *String Quartet no 6* (1965) written in memory of Drysdale's first wife, Bonnie.

Night [9] is a free transcription of part of Sculthorpe's next major orchestral work *Sun Music 1* (1965). Since Sculthorpe had originally intended the basic material for this section of *Sun Music 1* to be a piano piece, *Night* (which finally made its way onto paper in the piano version in 1970) can be seen as a belated realisation of his intentions. It is essentially identical with a 16bar section of the orchestral work, with 4 bars added at the beginning, and some minor alterations.

In 1971, *Night* was joined by four new pieces to make up the set of five **Night Pieces** [6][10]. The score of the set is inscribed with a *haiku* by Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902): *The moon one circle/Stars numberless/Sky dark green.*

The opening bracket of three pieces demonstrates Sculthorpe's harmonic and rhythmic idiom at its simplest and purest. These miniatures are based on a Japanese concept of metamorphosis known as *setsugekka* (literally, 'snow, moon and flowers'): moonlight, for instance, may make flowers look like snow, and vice versa; while the moon itself may be viewed as an enormous snowflake or a giant white flower. Although it comes after *Night*, the final piece *Stars* is more clearly related to *Snow, Moon and Flowers*. Aspects of its harmonic scheme are developed from *Snow* while the figuration is an adaptation of the central section of *Flowers*.

Landscape [18] (1971), though written at the same time as the *Night Pieces*, sees the composer tackling the quite different challenge of composing music to be played inside the piano, rather than at the keyboard. In it, he

also offers a solution to some of the structural problems involved in the improvisational idioms he was then exploring.

Sculthorpe's idea was to ask the player to select four different types of sounds which can be made inside the piano. The sounds which Michael Hannan chose for this recording are: (A) drumstick-roll glissandos on the piano's lower, wound strings, with wooden objects dropped on them while they are still vibrating; (B) striking with wooden objects on the metal structural beams of the piano; (C) glissandos of harmonics made by rubbing the smooth surface of a small bottle on middle-register strings, while simultaneously plucking the strings; and (D) bouncing wine corks on damped middle-register strings.

These sounds were recorded on tape, each type of sound continuing for approximately 2 minutes. These 2-minute blocks were then arranged in a simple symmetrical pattern — A1 B1 C1 D C2 B2 A2. This recorded sequence is then used as background for a live improvisation in which the sound materials are more varied and the structure relatively free.

As this recording is intended to serve both as a completed performance of *Landscape* and as the prerecorded element for future live performances of the work, there is little overdubbing. The additional sound of running a finger along a wound string is heard in sections C1 and D, while sounds C, B and A are overdubbed in sections C2, B2 and A2 respectively. Tape echo is applied in section D.

While Sculthorpe intended the title *Landscape* to suggest a terrain of pianistic effects ranging from flat to

jagged, **Koto Music I & II** [16][17] has a more specifically musical origin (the koto is a Japanese zither). Each piece consists of a plucked *ostinato* recorded to tape. Another *ostinato* is overdubbed, which phases with the original; and finally short upward glissandos are added, marking off sections corresponding with the Japanese *dan* (literally 'step'). In performance, live elements consist of a melodic line of no rhythmic definition, between certain prescribed notes of which the performer may insert improvised sounds of his own choice.

Koto Music I [16] (1973) is based on the notes of the *hirajoshi* scale. The melody uses all the notes, while the *ostinato* involves four consecutive notes of the *koto* tuning (E, F, A, B) arranged rhythmically in groups of five. The piece has six sections, in imitation of the traditional Japanese *koto* piece, *Rokudan*.

The *ostinatos* of **Koto Music II** [17] (1976) employ the lowest five notes of the *kumoiyoshi* scale (A, B flat, D, E, F) arranged in groups of four notes, with a phasing organisation similar to that in *Koto Music I*.

In accordance with the composer's instructions, Hannan has chosen for his improvisations sounds which relate closely to the tonal schemes in question. In both pieces he employs harmonic glissandos made on the piano strings with the aid of a guitar slide, while in *Koto Music II* harmonic glissandos are also produced by running a finger lightly along a wound string. *Koto Music I* also includes a violent sound made by scraping an ivory piano key along a wound string.

Four Little Pieces for Piano Duet were all arranged from preexisting music as pieces suitable for young pianists. As Sculthorpe notes: 'I made the arrangements

in 1979, especially for a concert in the Sydney Opera House for my 50th birthday. I felt that, to be fully representative of my work, the concert should contain some overtly melodious music, and music that could be played by the very young.'

Morning Song [1] was originally a Christmas choral piece, *Morning Song of the Christ Child*, to a text by Roger Covell; while the **Little Serenade** [3] was written in 1977 for the Sydney String Quartet to use as an encore. The two remaining duets are also recorded here in alternative piano solo versions [19] and [20]. **Sea Chant** [2] (1971) began its career as a song for unison voices and piano. The **Left Bank Waltz** [4] (1958) is one of Sculthorpe's earliest piano pieces. Despite its title and mood evocative of Paris's Left Bank cafés, the main melody later became the theme for a short Australian film, *They Found a Cave*, in which it is played on the harmonica.

If the *Four Little Pieces* were written for young pianists just starting out, Sculthorpe's next piano piece was written for students at the peak of their capacities. Nevertheless, **Mountains** [11], written as a test piece for the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1981, is more a test of musicality than technical virtuosity. The work is Sculthorpe's response to the mountainous terrain of Tasmania, often known as the 'Isle of Mountains', where he was born. Dominated by the opening motif, a falling tritone and a rising minor third, the work is in three sections. The first and third are slow and brooding, while the central *estatico* section, is an extension of the first in which more prominence is given to complex rhythms. The resulting feeling of irregularity, combined

with a much wider range of pitches and increasing tempo, create in this section the illusion of height, power and angular peaks.

Two piano works written in 1989 were both inspired by the composer's desire to play favourite sections from older works to himself. **Nocturnal** [14] is a version of the solo piano part of the slow fourth section (*Come notturno*) from the *Piano Concerto* (1983). Even while writing the Concerto, this music appealed to Sculthorpe as a pianist for its use of favourite techniques like toccata-like alternation of hands. Unlike many piano arrangements from concertos, Sculthorpe's makes no attempt to include any of the orchestral music here.

Like the *Nocturnal*, the final piano solo form of **Djilile** [12] evolved gradually from the time when the composer first thought he might make a separate piece out of it in 1986, until March 1989 when it was finally committed to paper. It is based on Sculthorpe's adaptation of an Aboriginal melody collected in Arnhem Land in the late 1950s by A. P. Elkin and Trevor Jones. Sculthorpe writes: 'I have a special fondness for this melody, having used it in my music for the feature film, *Essington* (1974); for the string orchestra work derived from it, *Port Essington* (1977); and recently in the orchestral work, *Kakadu* (1988). I made this piano arrangement of it, with additional material, simply for my own pleasure, and perhaps for the pleasure of others.' The title 'Djilile' means 'whistling duck on a billabong'. The 12-bar melody, presented alone at the beginning, is the basis for the whole piece.

The **Rose Bay Quadrilles** [13] are the work of the early Australian composer William Stanley. They are

believed to have been commissioned by David Cooper to mark the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of Woollahra House (Rose Bay) on 15 December 1856, and they were published five days later in an Australian album by J. R. Clarke of George Street. Frank Fowler, presumably the first editor, declared in his introduction to the album that all the music in it could be sent 'home [to England] as a specimen of what we can do out here at Botany Bay—as an index of our education, refinement, art-feeling'.

As the name implies, the *quadrille* is a kind of square dance, French in origin but fashionable in Europe and Australia by the 1820s, and often made out of the melodies of popular songs. Stanley's set of quadrilles is made up of five pieces, all in duple or compound-duple metre.

While not the first music to be written and printed in Australia (that honour goes to another set of quadrilles by a bandmaster, Reichenberg, in 1825, including pieces with such titles as *La Woolloomooloo* [sic], *La Illawarra*, *La Sydney* etc.), it seemed to Sculthorpe to be important to bring these early pieces of Australia's musical heritage to a wider audience. Accordingly, Sculthorpe made a practical performing edition of these works in 1989, merely correcting the many printing errors that mar the originals, and touching up some of Stanley's less-adept voice leading.

THE PERFORMERS

The Brisbane Courier-Mail recorded that the **Team of Pianists** provided pianism of the highest order, stamped with individual warmth and personality. The Team has made two European tours, and after initial studies at Melbourne University, individual members have spent prolonged periods at Hanover, Vienna, Bolzano, Budapest, London and Banff. As well as overseas, the Team has given concerts in all main Victorian centres, ACT, Queensland and South Australia, has produced LP recordings, CDs, cassettes and two videos on piano performance, and performed on the ABC, MBS, SBS radio and on television. Two of the original members are on the piano staff at Melbourne University. The Team of Pianists represents a new generation of Australian pianists.

Born in 1949, **Michael Hannan** was still at school when he first met Peter Sculthorpe. As a student he worked for Sculthorpe as a copyist and music editor, and later collaborated with Sculthorpe in writing music for the film "Essington" and for ABC radio. As a pianist he has performed Sculthorpe's works, made Sculthorpe the subject of his BA(hons) and PhD theses at the University of Sydney, and the book "Peter Sculthorpe: his music and ideas 1929-1979", published by the University of Queensland Press in 1982. In the book, Hannan offers an appreciation of the problems faced by a composer in Australia when striving for an identifiable national character.

The original **LP version** was recorded in the Sydney Studios of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1976 and released by Move Records in 1981. It featured pianists Michael Hannan and Peter Sculthorpe.

Producer: Diana Plom

Sound engineer: Barry Smith

Project coordinator: Michael Bowden

Cover art of original LP: John Spooner

The **compact disc** reissue features all the music from the original release. New performances of some pieces as well as additional works were recorded by members of the Team of Pianists in 1989.

Sound engineer: Martin Wright

Digital recording on Sony equipment. Digital editing on Macintosh computer using Digidesign Sound Designer II.

Cover art for expanded CD reissue: Jenny Snow

Liner notes: written and edited by Graeme Skinner from original material by the composer and Michael Hannan ©, and from notes supplied by the performers.

Peter Sculthorpe Piano Music

© Copyright: 1990 Move Records

© Copyright: 1990 Move Records

www.move.com.au

FOUR LITTLE PIECES FOR PIANO DUET

(piano duet: Max Cooke and Darryl Coote)

- 1 Morning song
- 2 Sea chant
- 3 Little serenade
- 4 Left Bank waltz

5 **Callabonna** (solo piano: Linda Kouvaras)

NIGHT PIECES

(solo piano: Robert Chamberlain)

- 6 Snow
- 7 Moon
- 8 Flowers
- 9 Night (from Sun Music)
- 10 Stars

11 **Mountains** (solo piano: Gudrun Beilartz)

12 **Djilille** (solo piano: Alex Furman)

13 **Rose Bay quadrilles** (solo piano: Gudrun Beilartz)

14 **Nocturnal** (solo piano: Robert Chamberlain)

15 **Sonatina** (solo piano: Alex Furman)

16 **Koto 1** (solo piano: Michael Hannan)

17 **Koto 2** (solo piano: Michael Hannan)

18 **Landscape** (solo piano: Michael Hannan)

19 **Sea chant** (solo piano: Peter Sculthorpe)

20 **Left Bank waltz** (solo piano: Peter Sculthorpe)

