

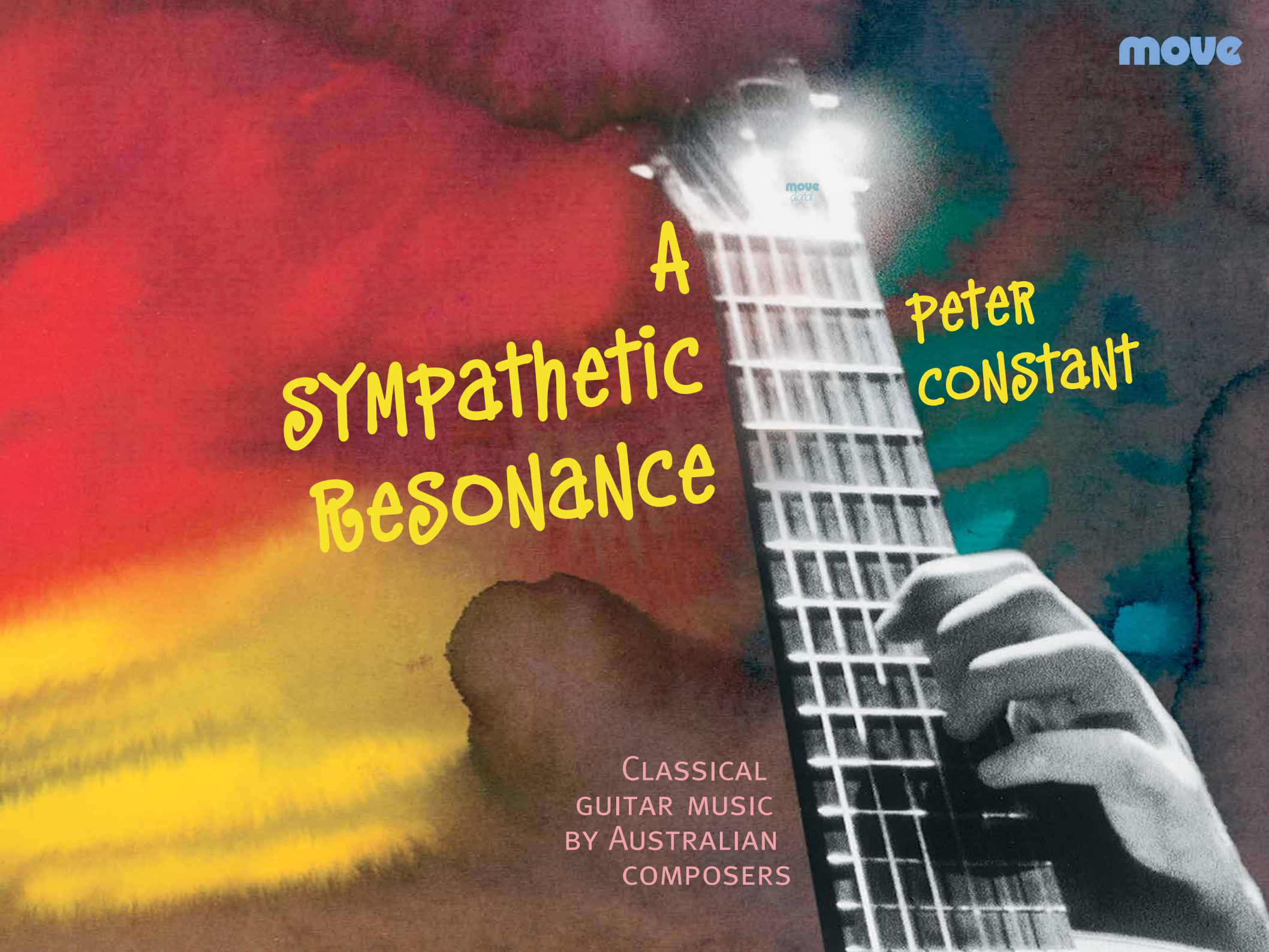
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A
SYMPATHETIC
RESONANCE

PETER
CONSTANT

CLASSICAL
GUITAR MUSIC
BY AUSTRALIAN
COMPOSERS



A SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE

Borrowing its title from Mark Pollard's beautiful composition **15**, A Sympathetic Resonance has grown into a concept in Australian music. Here is a personal view of the guitar presented through music by composers with whom I've had some kind of (sympathetic) working relationship. What's more, all of the works recorded here were written with the guitar's unique voice very much in mind - for example, many make full use of the instrument's natural resonances (quite a common thread in recent Australian guitar music) and all of the music explores colouristic or contextual characteristics peculiar to the guitar. Much has been said about the explosion of activity in every aspect the classical guitar in this country over the last decade – here is a sampling of a wide range of Australian guitar music put together by an Australian artist on an Australian-made instrument.



1 Rain (1991) Phillip Houghton

Gentle, warm rain is heard
on a river of knowing.
It holds us like a new-born babe
it eases our minds and caresses our
restless fears
and washes us in warm, beautiful tears
of joy and timelessness.

Referring to the first time he and I collaborated (on the Guitar Trek commission News from Nowhere), Phillip Houghton once commented in an interview that I was making “beautiful mistakes” – some of what I played on fumbling through my part for the first time he considered better than what he had written, so he wrote down my version, dictated it back to me, and of course from then on I had trouble playing it! Rain was a similar case – having been initially confused by the scordatura of this work, I produced a misreading or two which Phil now prefers to the published version. In this piece, the simple re-tuning of the guitar's fifth string to A-flat gives a characteristic tonal colour, deliberately reminiscent of the didgeridu, which is the basis of this descriptive and highly atmospheric work.

Three miniatures: Mark Pollard

2 just a moment ... (1996)

3 one sweet moment ... (1997)

4 in the heat of the moment ... (1997)

Mark wrote the first of these three miniatures, or “moments”, to fill a gap in

a programme I toured in 1996. The other two followed a year later. Each is based on an open bass string resonance, D, A, E respectively. He writes: “the motifs and phrases purposely evoke a certain familiarity to many other works but to none in particular. These motifs and phrases repeat sometimes almost endlessly, creating a type of ‘mantra’ of perpetual ambience. The sound of these repetitive patterns is inspired by the Gamelan music of Java and Bali”. Through the minimalistic writing and lack of performance indications on the score in these pieces, the way is deliberately left open for a wide range of interpretations in performance. Here is one.

just a moment ... is a tightly constructed rondo in which the initial module expands out on each return, always leading the music in a new direction.

one sweet moment ... is bold in its simplicity, being based on a single series of natural harmonics which is built up one note at a time then dismantled one note at a time in a different order. Each time a note is added or subtracted, a simple kind of recontextualisation takes place, where the previous material is heard in a new light - thus the music develops.

in the heat of the moment ... is a kind of minimalistic moto perpetuo which combines elements of the previous two “moments”. Structurally, like one sweet moment ... , a pattern of notes is built up and gradually dismantled. The pattern itself

contains contrapuntal elements more akin to those in just a moment This eleven note pattern (unfolding in a different way) is also superimposed upon itself, being heard as a melody above the rapid modular development.

5 Prelude no.1 (1991)
Richard Vella (“Between Earth and Air”)

I clearly recall when, crammed into a ruthlessly re-arranged Blue Mountains hotel room, Richard Vella was directing us (Guitar Trek) through his beautiful Melody and Elaboration, just hours before the premiere performance. It is a loosely notated work and as we were pressed for time, Richard guided us through the musical phrasing (not necessarily evident on the score). Having been given such a clear view of this work prompted me to pull out Prelude no.1 (which I had always liked) and learn it, in order to explore the kind of Romanticism Richard could convey when he was coaching us and which could not possibly be expressed in written musical notation. Additionally, the performer is invited to take part in the construction of Prelude no. 1 – it exists in eight sections (A to H), the order of which can be determined to some extent by the interpreter. I play A,B,C,D ... it seems to work.

6 Wildflower (1991) Phillip Houghton

This would hardly be a collaborative recording if I didn’t ask a few of my favourite musicians to join me on this

collection. Wildflower is the second movement of a three movement work entitled From the Dreaming, written in response to impressions of Australia’s outback gained while the composer was working as a labourer on a pipeline stretching from Darwin to Alice Springs. He describes this movement as: “the song of a single flower in an ever changing panorama and climate of storms, drought, heat and isolation.....isolation and endless space”.

7 Pluck It! (1991) Gerard Brophy

Pluck It! is an intrinsically guitaristic piece, setting out to demonstrate as many ways of physically plucking the string as possible in such a short piece. Somewhat atypically, I actually learnt and performed this piece before I encountered Gerry – maybe it was the title which attracted me! We met by accident a couple of months later and he turned out to be one of the bawdiest individuals I’ve ever met! – we got along famously and he’s since written me another piece.

8–11 Valses Melodique (1994) Richard Charlton

These attractive waltzes are, at heart, salon music, tapping into the role the guitar has occupied for centuries, as a portable, versatile instrument of great beauty and allure. The first three waltzes are a little bit French (showing the influence of Francis Kleyjnans), and the last sounds somewhat reminiscent of Nikita Koshkin’s Usher Waltz.

Here we are also introduced to another quirk in the notion of composer/performer collaboration – that is, when I once made some minor adjustments to Richard’s pieces ... I didn’t tell him. Hmm, I think this recording’s more or less what he wrote.

12 Black Cat Tango (1995) Mark Viggiani

Mark V. is a local (Melbourne) guitarist/composer/improviser. When I first encountered him he was playing fascinating programmes mixing stylish performances of baroque guitar music with his own improvisations. When I once asked him if he had any duos, he deftly knocked up this version of a piece he wrote for gigs in a Black Cat Cafe where he and a violinist would improvise on it. I’ve asked Marion to record it with me here (we call ourselves Z.O.O. DUO) – it’s actually one of the most popular pieces in our repertoire.

13 Prelude, Book 1, #3 in G (1979)
Donald Hollier (homage to Chopin)

One of the most impressive, even intimidating figures in my student years was Donald Hollier, with whom I was fortunate to take individual composition tuition. Canberra School of Music being such a strong and pioneering centre for classical guitar, it seemed natural that he should write for the instrument, though he did so with a degree of disdain for the predominance of certain guitaristic idioms and keys in the repertoire. His response to this was to set about writing two books of

preludes, some years apart, each of which moves through the entire cycle of twelve tonal areas (major/minor was considered irrelevant, hence there are not 24, as in the Well-Tempered Clavier of J.S. Bach). Many of the preludes, especially those in Book 2, are written in homage to various composers (though sometimes theatrical or even derisive). It seemed appropriate to include this single “homage to Chopin”, where the well-known original is treated with great sensitivity and respect.

“Matilda’s Song” from Matilda’s Dream
(1993)
Mark Pollard (text by Marie Sorensen)

This charming and ethereal song is taken from a chamber work (scored for voice, flute, cello and guitar) whose text depicts correspondence between two colonial Australian women – Lucy, who is practical and “down to earth” and who has some difficulty understanding the ruminating Matilda.

From the depths of my thoughts
remembering well
instinct seemed so strong.

From the depths of remorse
breeds nothing of worth
reach out grasp through the mist.

I shudder with the realisation
young girls laughing at an old fool.

From the depths of my heart

the prophet does speak
predictions rise to my memory.

From the depths of my sight
the people are weary
eyes full of our stories.

From the depths of my soul
the twisting and moaning
pain of hunger and hope.

From the depths of my mind
the memories come
prophecy reeks through the years.

15 A Sympathetic Resonance (1988/95)
Mark Pollard

In 1995 I worked with Mark to create a final copy of the 6-string version of A Sympathetic Resonance (originally for 10-string guitar). This considerable process was necessary due to the work’s inclusion in the AMEB syllabus before a neat, playable copy existed. Given that Mark’s compositional style changed considerably between composing and revising this work, each subsequent draft in the revision brought the piece closer to the more consonant language of his later musical style – the piece is not so much finished, but at a certain point he simply stopped revising. Though the work is only half its original length, key harmonic/structural elements are retained and the ambient, resonant nature of the work is enhanced in performance (as on this recording) by adding a long electronic reverb.



CLASSICAL GUITAR
MUSIC BY
AUSTRALIAN
COMPOSERS

PETER CONSTANT,
GUITARIST *

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A SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE

- 1** Rain – Phillip Houghton 4'22"
- 2** just a moment... – Mark Pollard 3'39"
- 3** one sweet moment... – Mark Pollard 2'56"
- 4** in the heat of the moment... – Mark Pollard 2'39"
- 5** Prelude no.1 – Richard Vella 7'40"
- 6** Wildflower – Phillip Houghton 5'08"
- 7** Pluck It! – Gerard Brophy 3'18"

Valses Melodique – Richard Charlton

- 8** waltz one 1'21"
- 9** waltz two 1'30"
- 10** waltz three 1'52"
- 11** waltz four 1'32"

- 12** Black Cat Tango – Mark Viggiani 4'18"
- 13** Prelude, Book 1 #3 in G (homage to Chopin) – Donald Hollier 3'25"
- 14** "Matilda's Song" – Mark Pollard 3'40"
- 15** A Sympathetic Resonance – Mark Pollard 9'33"

* with guests: Mardi McSullea, flute - track **6**
Helen Noonan, soprano - track **14**
Marion Schaap, guitar (Z.O.O. D U O) - track **12**

Rain (Phillip Houghton) © The Frederick Harris Music Co.
just a moment... one sweet moment... in the heat of the moment... (Mark Pollard) © Mark Pollard
Prelude no.1 (Richard Vella) © Currency Press
Wildflower (Phillip Houghton) © Moonstone Music
Pluck It! (Gerard Brophy) © Gerard Brophy
Valses Melodique (Richard Charlton) © Charlton Music
Black Cat Tango (Mark Viggiani) © Mark Viggiani
Prelude, Book 1 #3 in G (homage to Chopin) (Donald Hollier) © Donald Hollier
“Matilda’s Song” from Matilda’s Dream (Mark Pollard) © Mark Pollard
A Sympathetic Resonance (Mark Pollard) © Mark Pollard

Mardi McCullea, flute - track **14** Helen Noonan, soprano - track **14**

Marion Schaap, guitar (Z.O.O. D U O) - track **12**

Cover notes by Peter Constant, 1998.

Produced by Peter Constant. Co-producers Martin Wright, Marion Schaap

Recording engineer: Vaughan McAlley

Photography: Nubar Ghazarian, Colin Bogaars. Water colour: Robert Constant

Image manipulation: Simon Wright. Layout: Martin Wright

Peter Constant plays a guitar made by Greg Smallman (1985)

Also available on Move:

Light on the Edge: Peter Constant, Marion Schaap and friends play
music by Phillip Houghton

Dusting Off Roses (CD single): music by Mark Pollard, performed by Z.O.O. D U O

A Classic Case of Love: love songs spanning the centuries performed by
Peter Constant and Helen Noonan

Black Cat Tango has been recorded by the composer on The Rainmaker

For information about the music on this recording and on Australian music in general, contact The Australian Music Centre,
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