



THE WAY OF THE SEEKER

Larry Sitsky

Music is to me a mystic experience, in the broadest understanding of that word; the mystic state can be achieved, even within music, in a number of ways. Taken in such a light, my compositions can then be regarded as biographical milestones on the road to self-awareness. *Larry Sitsky, 2001*

Franz Liszt invented the piano “recital”, and the music he played was primarily contemporary. The piano recital was for him an experimental, revelatory arena, imbued with a spirit of curiosity, of time travel to a distant future. Larry Sitsky’s monumental work, *The Way of the Seeker* is absolutely overflowing with the forward-looking spirit of Liszt, while at the same time paying homage to Busoni and Scriabin and the great mystical pianistic tradition. *Michael Kieran Harvey, 2006*

Larry Sitsky (b. 1934)

The Way of the Seeker 49'29"

- 1 Prologue 5'36"
- 2 Birth 12'22"
- 3 The Guide 12'18"
- 4 The Journey 8'26"
- 5 Beyond Time 4'35"
- 6 Epilogue: The Man of Light 6'09"
- 7 Larry Sitsky introduction 5'29"

Recorded by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 22 October 2006 at the Hobart Conservatorium

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Sitsky's highly virtuosic work for solo piano *The Way of the Seeker* (completed 11 December 2004) is dedicated to the Canadian pianist and composer Gordon Rumson.

This work takes its title from the English translation of Hakim Sanai's mystical text the *Sair al-Ibad ila'l Maad* (the Way of the Seeker) written in the 11th century. Abul Majd bin Majdud bin Adam, also known as Hakim Sanai, was one of the three great mystical Mathnavi poets of Persia, the others being Shaikh Faridu'd-Din 'Attar and Jalalu'd-Din Rumi. The youngest of these, Jalalu'd-Din Rumi, expressed his great admiration for Attar and Sanai in writing "Attar is the soul and Sanai its two eyes, I came after Sanai and Attar."

In the translation of Sanai's *Sair al-Ibad ila'l Maad* by Idries Shah, the text is divided into definite sections. In *The Way of the Seeker*, Sitsky follows these divisions, using quotations from each section as subtitles for each of the six musical movements. Each movement should be understood as a meditation on its corresponding quotation.

I: Prologue ... *pp*

... you are not of water, yet stir into movement, not of earth, yet lend it shape.

II: Birth ... *mf*

... there is in the soul an intuition of a superior state.

III: The Guide ... *p*

... for your journey on this arduous path, your only provision will be fire ...

IV: The Journey ... *f*

... you are prey to evil delusions.

V: Beyond Time ... *ff*

... pay the ferryman his fare, and leave behind the world of names ...

VI: Epilogue: The Man of Light ... *pp*

... the distractions from The Way are many in your world ...

The profound influence of Asian mysticism on Sitsky's creative output is evident from the titles of many of his works. These include: *Trio No. 6, "Samsara"* (1993); *Concerto for trombone, keyboards & percussion, "Kundalini"* (1982); *Lotus* (1995); *Lotus II* (1996); *Sonata for solo mandolin, "The Three Names of Shiva"* (1992); *Narayana* (1969); *Atman – A Song of Serenity* (1975); *Concerto No. 3 for violin & orchestra, "I Ching: the 8 Kua (Trigrams)"* (1987); *Sonata No. 3 for solo flute "The Jade Flute"* (1994); *Eight*

Settings after Li-Po (1974); *Shih Ching – The Book of Songs* (1996); *Fantasia for solo guitar, “Pashupati Nath”* (2000); and *Three Rumi settings* (2000).

The Way of the Seeker is based on thematic material derived from fragments of oriental chant. This theme is clearly stated in octaves at the opening of the piece and hypnotically recurs in various forms throughout each movement. Evocative of shamanistic incantation, this music recalls the sounds of Sitsky’s early childhood in Tsientsin, China where he frequented Buddhist temples, drawn there by the sounds of chanting.

Written in the tradition of Liszt, Busoni, Godowsky and Scriabin, *The Way of the Seeker* also responds to Sitsky’s western musical heritage. A student of the virtuoso pianist and Busoni disciple Egon Petri, Sitsky was initiated into an esoteric understanding of composition that has persisted throughout his entire creative output.

Like many of Sitsky’s pieces, *The Way of The Seeker* begins in darkness; the first movement is all in a low register, and ends in light; in this case the Epilogue is quite literally entitled “The Man of Light”. This emergence from darkness into light is a recurrent theme in those of Sitsky’s pieces that document the various stages of the

mystical journey. In this regard *The Way of The Seeker* can be regarded as a close relative of Sitsky’s *Twelve Mystical Preludes after the Nuctemeron of Apollonius of Tyana* (1991).

In composing *The Way of The Seeker*, Sitsky intended to generate a large-scale virtuosic work from as few pre-compositional determinants as possible. Each of the six movements is assigned a predominant dynamic, but the shaping of these dynamics inside each section is left to the performer. The durations of the movements telescope over the length of the work.

Judith Crispin



This recording project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Larry Sitsky,

born in China of Russian-Jewish parents, travelled to Australia in 1951. He studied piano from an early age under Winifred Burston and later Egon Petri. In 1984 he received the inaugural Australian Composer's Fellowship from the Australia Council. This gave him the opportunity to write a large number of compositions ranging from solo instrumental pieces to large orchestral works, including a *Second Violin Concerto (Gurdjieff)*, on Move Records.

Larry Sitsky has been the recipient of a great number of commissions and awards. In recognition of his various achievements, he was granted a Personal Professorial Chair at the Australian National University, and was awarded the ANU's very first Higher Doctorate in Fine Arts in 1997. A biography was published in the USA in 1997. In 1998 he was elected Fellow of the Academy of Humanities of Australia, and in 2000 he became a member of the Order of Australia. Sitsky is currently Emeritus Professor at the Australian National University.



Michael Kieran Harvey

is one of the foremost interpreters of contemporary piano music of his generation. A champion of Australian music and himself a composer, he regularly commissions new Australian music and performs with Australia's leading contemporary music ensembles and orchestras.

His repertoire encompasses concertos, chamber music, traditional through to contemporary classical solos, and experimental and original works. He has released over 30 CDs on Move, Tall Poppies, ABC Classics and New World Records.

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), and most recently the Australian government's Centenary Medal for services to Australian music (2002). He is currently Adjunct Professor at the Tasmanian Conservatorium and Fellow of the Faculty of Music, Melbourne University.