



IN FLIGHT

Harold
Gretton

classical guitar

move

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1 Introduction, Theme and Variations on

"O cara armonia" from the Magic Flute, op.9 9'37"

– Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

2 Fantaisie Hongroise op.65 6'49"

– Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856)

The Prince's Toys

– Nikita Koshkin (b. 1956)

3 i. The mischievous prince 3'04"

4 ii. The mechanical monkey 2'53"

5 iii. The doll with the blinking eyes 5'51"

6 iv. Tin soldiers 3'04"

7 v. The prince's coach 2'26"

Three works in D

– Sylvius Leopold Weiß (1687-1750)

8 Fuga 2'50"

9 Passacaille 4'10"

10 Caprice 2'18"

Flock

– Harold Gretton (b. 1984)

11 i. Currawong 4'46"

12 ii. Magpie 2'25"

13 iii. Blue Wren 1'59"

14 iv. Galah 1'33"

15 v. Rainbow Lorikeet 4'07"

16 Danza Brasileira 2'39"

– Jorge Morel (1931-2021)

17 La Negra 2'50"

– Antonio Lauro (1917-1986)

18 Estrellita 2'39"

– Manuel Maria Ponce (1882-1948), arr. David Russel (b. 1953)

19 La Muerte del Angel 5'07"

– Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992), arr. Leo Brouwer (b. 1939)

20 Inarticulate Music 4'02"

– Harold Gretton

(Flock and Inarticulate Music are world-première recordings)

Jet-lagged and unacclimatised to London's Winter chill was how I followed John Taylor into the Gothic Holy Trinity church in Weston on the 2nd of January 2019. It was to nestle into a cocoon of heaters in the middle of a pewless timber floor, perched on a wooden chair, playing music I love into a marvellous acoustic, and there was no place I'd rather be.

This album feels a long time coming. My relationship with some pieces stretching back over 20 years. My teenage lust for new repertoire was insatiable, and had me fumbling through works well beyond my abilities, including Sor's timeless **Magic Flute Variations**. Aesthetically, the simple harmony, pure counterpoint and exquisite melodies make this an obvious starting point for the program – an invitation into the intimate sound of the classical guitar. Pragmatically, this was where the recording had to start as a number of struts had come loose

behind the sound-board of my instrument on the flight from Australia. The wonderful



master-luthier Celine Camerlynck had reglued these, but the glue was still

drying, and I was under orders not to play anything too loud!

I first heard Johann Kaspar Mertz's **Hungarian Fantasy** at the Darwin International Guitar Festival in 2001. It was the expert interpretation of Izhar Elias which brought this music to life, followed by the detailed and inspiring masterclasses given by Carlo Barone. The architecture is breathtaking, each lyrical moment tense with nervous anticipation, each crescendo seeming to reach the limits of the instrument's capabilities, and the final extended accelerando pushing any player to the limits of their technique. Romanticism at its finest, and what a ride!

Technique is pushed still further and extended in Koshkin's **The Prince's Toys**. Minh Le Hoang's dynamic performance of this evocative work is a formative musical memory for me, and playing it as a final year undergraduate student felt like a major arrival point. It's

a piece I had to record. It tells the story of a mischievous prince who mistreats his toys. The toys, a mechanical monkey with wind-up cymbals, a blinking doll, and tin soldiers, quite horrifyingly come to life and attack him. He attempts escape in his carriage, but something goes wrong and the horses gallop off into the distance, leaving the prince at the mercy of his vengeful toys.

As a first year student at the ANU I was introduced to the German composer Sylvius Leopold Weiß, being handed his **Passacaille** as my Baroque project for the semester. Naturally I hungrily consumed any recordings of this strange composer's works, revelling in stories of thumbs bitten off by French violinists, and by chance was besotted by Lutz Kirchhoff's version of a bizarre little **Fuga in D minor**. About 10 years later I stumbled across that fugue in a collection of stand-alone miniatures by

Weiß, next to an unpretentious **Caprice** which shared its eccentricities. It seemed



an obvious choice to combine these three works into a set. Unexpectedly, it was in

recording this set that I most appreciated the acoustic of the church in Weston.

It is a precious moment for quiet contemplation.

You don't need to harbour any nationalist sentiment towards Australia in order to acknowledge the unique landscape and wildlife it contains. While living overseas, it was the bird-life that I missed, feeling pangs of sentiment on hearing the currawongs' cries in the background while on the phone to my parents, or recalling magpies browsing the lawn for grubs. Birds seemed an obvious choice of inspiration when I decided to write a self-consciously Australian suite. My favourite bird growing up was the Superb Fairy Wren, or **Blue Wren**. Of course I had to model the piece on blues, the harmonic language inspired by Badalamenti's *A Real Indication*. The Galah, who foolishly wanders in front of traffic, was

written in a Polish airport while in transit. The theme for **Rainbow Lorikeet** was

composed on a walk between Vauban in Strasbourg and Kehl, a piece designed to seem very memorable but be difficult to remember exactly, a bit like the bird. The whole **Flock** is dedicated to Tim Kain, my teacher, mentor and friend, whose contribution to Australian music is immense.

I find it hard not to be seduced by the pulsating rhythms and lush harmonies of Latin American guitar music, so had to record four of my favourites. **Danza Brasileira** is a classic, lively samba with subtly accentuated off-beats, and plenty of colour in the harmony. **La Negra** is a beautiful Venezuelan Waltz which I first heard Jacob Cordover play between rehearsals for a concert we shared in Norway. The warmth of the music was such a contrast to the snow outside, and whenever I play it I think of Tønsberg. **Estrellita** is a lullaby by Mexican Manuel Maria Ponce. After it's composition in 1912, it became so popular that it has been included in collections of folk-songs without the

composer being acknowledged. Although financially probably not the best outcome



for Ponce's estate, this is surely an amazing testament to his abilities as a melodist.

Astor Piazzolla's **Muerte del Angel** (Death of the Angel) is a tango in the nuevo tango style, at once lyrical and rhythmically driving. The influence of Jazz can be felt in the slower middle section, while Leo Brouwer's own creative talents as arranger are brought to the fore in the introduction and guitaristic flourishes that finish the work.

Finally, I've included another of my own pieces to calm things down, **Inarticulate Music**. When I first moved to Wagga, I would often stay late at the Con, practicing and, on occasion, composing. This spacious and meditative piece is one of the results, prompted by a conversation with a painter who was frustrated with all the verbiage that surrounds the visual arts. Surely art should speak for itself, requiring no lengthy explanations to be enjoyed. And perhaps music, too, can be inarticulate?

Classical guitarist Harold Gretton seeks to bring a diverse mix of masterpieces to life with an interpretive approach founded as much on raw passion and imagination as on thorough research. Not only interested in pioneering new repertoire, he is equally at home rediscovering older classics. His unique vision is enriched by historical information in all of the virtuoso works he performs. Harold Gretton began playing guitar at the age of 7. He first studied music at the ANU before completing a course specialising in guitar duo performance in Strasbourg together with Véronique van Duurling. The two of them formed the Duo Amythis.

He has won numerous international guitar competitions, both as a soloist and in various chamber music combinations. He has been invited to perform concerts all over Europe, as well as in the USA, Mexico, Vietnam, New Zealand and Australia.

He has performed with orchestras in Australia and Europe, and gave the world-



première of the single-movement version of Westlake's concerto **Shadow Dances**

under the composer's baton.

With a passion for chamber music, Harold performs regularly with the Phoenix Trio, as well as with string quartet, the Duo Amythis, the crossover ensemble popBarock and the Assai Quartet. With the Phoenix Trio he carried out a successful crowdfunding campaign to commission Sam Smith to write a new work for flute, viola and guitar. The Duo Amythis also successfully carried out a crowd-funding campaign in order to record their first album, "The Journey", in 2016. He has recorded a solo CD and an album of Australian music with quartet Guitar Trek, released on the Tall Poppies label.

Harold's compositions have been performed live on Australian national radio, and have been recorded by Jelica Mijanovic, the Zoco Duo, the Brew Duo, the Duo Amythis, BANQ and dominantSEVEN.

A dedicated pedagogue, Harold has given masterclasses in numerous

guitar festivals, lectured at Universities and has participated on numerous juries in international competitions. He has held posts in Germany and France, and is currently Associate Director at the Riverina Conservatorium of Music, Wagga Wagga.

Many thanks first and foremost to John Taylor, for his technical wizardry, patience and critical ear. Thanks to Celine Camerlynck of Luthier's Corner (London), whose faultless work (on New Year's day!) made this recording possible. Thank you! Thanks also to Tim Kain, whose advice and encouragement over the years is felt in every one of these pieces. If the Weiß is tasteful, you can thank Tim! Thanks to Peter Warr for making me aware of David Russel's beautiful arrangement of Estrellita. Thanks to Penny Deacon, the



amazing artist whose paintings I find captivating, and who very generously let me use them on this CD. Finally, thanks to my family and friends, for their ongoing support and for continually reminding me to finish this album.

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