

MANTRAS AND NIGHT FLOWERS

for solo piano

Composers often write short pieces to mark significant occasions in the lives of members of their families, friends, students and colleagues. I've collected together some of mine and arranged them in what I feel is a satisfactory sequence, although they can also be played individually or in small groups. The fanciful titles have personal significance to the dedicatees.

1. Snails Bay Mantra – for Bruce Beresford

This was a birthday present for the film director Bruce Beresford. Bruce has a wide knowledge and love of music, which he uses with great flair and discretion in his films. He lives near Snails Bay, an inlet of Sydney Harbour, and I've described the piece as a mantra because it's based on the prayer-like repetition of small cells.

2. Frangipani – in Memory of Sonya Hanke

In 1985 I was one of six Australian composers invited by the pianist Sonya Hanke, President of The South Pacific Liszt Society, to provide a variation on a theme from one of the 'Hungarian Rhapsodies', a group of some twenty piano pieces which Liszt composed on Hungarian themes. The resulting set of variations, an Australian Hexameron, was performed by Sonya in Sydney and Budapest. I disguised the theme (which I found just a little bit corny) by adapting it to a Japanese scale. Frangipani derives from Franz Japani, my working title, and gestures characteristic of romantic piano music, though always present, are given an exotic flavour suggestive of music for the koto, a Japanese zither with thirteen silk strings. I suppose you could call this artistic licence.

3. Night Flowers – in Memory of Peter Platt

Quiet and mysterious, blossoming briefly in its cantabile middle section, this gentle piece opens with a sinuous reed melody over a drone. I've attempted here to evoke the essential sound world of Peter Platt, Professor of Music at Sydney University from 1975 to 1989, a passionate and enlightened musician and an inspiring teacher whose two main instruments were the oboe and the sitar.

4. Emily's Song – for my daughter, Emily.

Hoping to cajole my daughter into keeping up her piano practice I wrote her several short pieces. This one tried to capture her gentle dreaminess. I once recorded it myself for the soundtrack of the film *Phobia*, a psychological thriller for which I composed the score. It seemed to match the character of the female protagonist, a sweet-natured Russian emigrant potter terrorized by her husband, a deranged, alcoholic, psychiatrist. I'm always astonished by the way music specifically designed for one purpose can sometimes effectively serve a quite different one.

5. Pipyarnyum Mantra – for Hartley Newnham.

This was a birthday present for the singer Hartley Newnham, who's also a pianist. In 1981 I composed *Maninya I*, especially for Hartley, to a nonsense text containing the pseudoword *pipyarnyum*, which has yet to acquire meaning. *Maninya*, also a nonsense word from the same text, has come to mean 'Australian dance-chant', whose characteristically jagged rhythms and phrases dominate much of my music. *Pipyarnyum Mantra* explores a lighter, more playful side of the *maninya* style.

6. Arc of Flowers – for Hanna-Mari and Christopher Latham

When my Australian publisher, Chris (a violinist) – married his Finnish wife, Hanna-Mari (a singer) at the Sydney home of composer Peter Sculthorpe under a flower arrangement designed by my wife, Helen, I composed this little piece, in which I attempted to express the joy of the occasion, as a wedding present.

7. Glamorgan – for John Metcalf

In 2001 I was one of several Australian musicians invited to take part in the Vale of Glamorgan Festival in Wales. That year, the festival was dedicated to Australian music and its specific theme was 'South Wales meets New South Wales'. I composed *Glamorgan* for the festival director, the Welsh composer John Metcalf, as a small tribute to his skill and vision.

8. Moments of Quiet Benediction – for Christine Myres and Matthew Hindson

I'd intended to compose a parody of Australian composer Matthew Hindson's outrageously exuberant and ingenious techno-derived music, but for some reason what emerged was this interior monologue that could only have been composed by me. In fact, all I ended up parodying of Matthew's was one of his titles (*Moments of Plastic Jubilation*). The music expresses my wish for Matthew's and Christine's happiness together.

9. Jubilation Mantra – for Jane Stanley and Michael Hooper

A precipitative wedding dance for two young musicians who found each other during their student years in the Music Department of Sydney University, where I was once Jane's composition teacher.

Ross Edwards

The first complete performance of *Mantras & Night Flowers* was given in 2001 at the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music by the pianist, Ian Munro.