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SOLO FLIGHTS

ABC
Classics

PIANO MUSIC BY JOHN CARMICHAEL



ANTONY GRAY



Bravura Waltzes		[11'05]
1	Introduction – Waltz I (Nostalgic) –	2'06
2	Interlude – Waltz II (Capricious) –	4'25
3	Interlude – Waltz III (Demonic) –	3'19
4	Waltz IV (Finale)	1'12
5 Spider Song		2'11
Sonatine		[10'40]
6	I. Pastorale	3'27
7	II. Interlude	3'56
8	III. Toccata	3'15
9 Bagatelle		3'05
Latin American Suite		[9'21]
10	I. Bahama Rumba (Caribbean)	2'15
11	II. Obsession – Habañera (Cuba)	2'36
12	III. Joropo (Venezuela/Colombia)	4'28
Damon Suite		[8'13]
13	I. Prelude	1'53
14	II. Sarabande	2'07
15	III. Shadow Waltz	2'22
16	IV. Arabesque	1'48

17	Gestörter Traum – d'après Franz Liszt (Troubled Dream, after Franz Liszt)	5'01
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Hommages

[11'41]

18	I. Manuel da Falla	3'45
19	II. Francis Poulenc	1'51
20	III. Gabriel Fauré	3'29
21	IV. Maurice Ravel	2'34

From the Dark Side

[14'52]

22	I. The Secret Ceremony	3'20
23	II. Before Nightfall	3'11
24	III. Elegy	4'30
25	IV. Dance with the Devil	3'50

Total Playing Time 76'56

Antony Gray piano

Bravura Waltzes is dedicated to the Australian pianist Victor Sangiorgio, who gave the premiere in London at a concert to celebrate the composer's 65th birthday. Although each waltz is a separate piece with its own distinct melodic elements and character, the dotted motif in the Introduction and Interludes binds the work into a whole which reaches its climax in a rhapsodic reprise of each waltz in the Finale. The piano writing is florid and makes considerable technical demands on the player, hence the title *Bravura*. In **Spider Song**, by contrast, the piano texture is spare and finely spun, as befits music to accompany the spider diligently spinning the threads of its web.

Sonatine has its origins in a Wigmore Hall concert which Antony Gray presented as a musical celebration of the 70th birthday of Malcolm Williamson. A request went out to several composers for musical tributes to Malcolm to be played to him at the concert; the response was immediate from Peter Sculthorpe, Richard Rodney Bennett and many others including myself, hence the *Pastorale*. Gray later suggested expanding it into a larger work, and so came the *Interlude*, sounding almost improvisatory after the A–B–A structure of the *Pastorale*. The lyrical middle section of the *Toccata*, its melodic line sparkling with single off-beat notes, is framed by an unrelenting cascade of semiquavers in the opening and closing sections.

Bagatelle was my first published composition (Augener, 1960) and consists of a simple A–B–A structure, but its gentle character conceals some real technical difficulties such as sudden leaps of register, and a melody and accompaniment allotted to one and the same right hand.

I was for several years Musical Director of a Spanish dance company; my *Concierto Folklorico* stems from that period, as does the **Latin American Suite**. The rumba style is well known, but other Latin American dances were also featured in the company's repertoire, and in this way I became acquainted with the fascinating rhythms of the *Joropo*, in which 3/4 and 6/8 metres alternate and combine in a variety of ways. There are two competing theories as to the origin of this dance: one claims that it is the Viennese waltz transformed by the rhythmic genius of the Latins, the other that it imitates the galloping rhythm of the horses which abound in parts of Venezuela and Colombia. Either way, it is a dance performed by girls waving long scarves which they entwine around their partners in intricate patterns during the course of the dance. The *habañera* was born in Havana, Cuba, and *Obsession* is haunted right to the last bar by an off-key descending motif, while *Bahama Rumba* celebrates the pleasures of life in the Caribbean. The suite was originally written for piano four hands; this version for a single player was created at the request of Antony Gray, despite my warnings that it would

prove to be unplayable. As it has turned out, I am very happy to admit that I was wrong!

The **Damon Suite** was written when I was a student at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium. At Antony Gray's prompting I unearthed this piece of juvenilia, reworking some parts to give them a little more polish, at the same time trying to preserve whatever virtues the original had. This quite disparate collection (a sarabande rubbing shoulders with a waltz!) was given its title by a school friend who explained that *Damon* meant 'first born' in the same way as the more common name *Damien*, and so, since it was the first complete set of pieces to see the light of day, the title seemed appropriate.

An admiration for the music of Liszt led to the composition of the tribute **Gestörter Traum**, in which undercurrents disturb the calm of a peaceful dreamscape. It is dedicated to Liszt specialist Leslie Howard who, on receiving it, wrote to me: 'Thank you for your very beautiful Liszt homage – although it shows its debt, it has a life and personality that remain entirely yours.'

Hommages is a series of tributes to four masters of 20th-century piano music, each written in a spirit of admiration and gratitude for the beneficial effects their influence has had on my own efforts at writing music for piano solo. The series began as a single movement in honour of Poulenc; it was Antony Gray who,

after playing it through, suggested expanding the work to include the other three composers, all favourites of mine from an early age.

From the Dark Side is conceived as a parallel in music to the kind of Gothic tales of mystery, imagination and terror, evoking thoughts and fears of what lies beyond the everyday – on the dark side. What kind of rite is being enacted in *The Secret Ceremony*? The quote from W.H. Auden at the head of the score gives a clue: 'There is always a deadly secret.' When night approaches in *Before Nightfall*, feelings of apprehension can plague us; 'The moon is up and yet it is not night,' wrote Lord Byron. But Coleridge sounds a different note for the *Elegy* when he writes: 'Death came with friendly care,' as the final serene resolution on a wide-spaced A major chord suggests. The contrasting episodes of the final *Dance with the Devil*, however, recall the ancient adage: 'The devil has many guises.' Three of his faces are represented here: lustful, malicious and threatening.

John Carmichael

Composer to pianist
Extract from John Carmichael and
Antony Gray in conversation

Antony Gray: Many people wonder why you continue to write, in this day and age, music so firmly rooted in tonality and even then very conservative in its harmonic idiom.

John Carmichael: Yes, I can understand that many musicians and music lovers look for experimentation, new techniques and innovations in music by a contemporary composer; but surely, now that the renaissance in tonality is so well established and so many contemporary composers write in a tonal idiom, they can no longer be surprised at meeting it yet again in my music. I think the answer is that each composer has to find the idiom which allows him to speak with his own voice. Imposing restrictions such as 'You must experiment' or 'You must write in this or that way because that is what contemporary music is' did not work for me. There was a time when only twelve-tone music was taken seriously and if you did not follow that creed, your work was virtually overlooked. That time has passed and a much freer attitude prevails now, although there is still the feeling that contemporary music has to 'challenge' the listener, and if it is doesn't, then it is often classed as 'light music'; but melody has always been a prime element in whatever I write, and I find that tonality still has melodic treasures for a

composer, provided he can find them. For me, tonality and melody go together.

AG: And when did you start studying composition?

JC: After I won a scholarship to study piano at the University Conservatorium, I took composition with Dorian Le Gallienne as my second study. Although I had written little fragments from the age of 12 or 13, which fortunately have disappeared!

AG: Yes – Le Gallienne, a very underrated composer, really.

JC: I think because his music was not really very revolutionary, it kind of slipped by the wayside.

AG: Well of course, the same – should we call it an accusation? – has often been levelled at your music, hasn't it?

JC: Oh yes. 'John Carmichael, with the curtains firmly closed on our tumultuous times,' as one reviewer remarked.

AG: But weren't you ever tempted to explore more contemporary styles?

JC: Well, as I said before, there is now a more liberal climate, and I felt I would only write bad music in what was taken to be a contemporary style. You know, there's bad music written in every epoch; in the Romantic era there was over-sentimentality; in this age there's been



Antony Gray (left) and John Carmichael in London

experimentation at all costs, sometimes, I think, at the expense of aesthetic values, and I just felt that I would simply be following a trend alien to what I was aiming at, so it wouldn't work for me...

AG: So you continued to write in your own conservative style.

JC: Well, you see, I met Arthur Benjamin who was on a tour of Australia; he had a look at some of my stuff and his statement, which stuck in my mind, was that I had a gift for melody, and so I felt I should work on thematic material, melody, which at the time tended to be – not exactly frowned on, but looked down on as not relevant. A recent reviewer remarked that I was 'evidently completely serious in [my] pursuit of discovery in melody.' Every composer looks for the vein of gold he can mine, and when he finds it, it becomes the basis, the starting point for the compositional process. And this applies to every work I have ever written.

John Carmichael

Born in Melbourne, John Carmichael studied piano with Raymond Lambert and composition with Dorian Le Gallienne at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium before continuing his piano studies at the Conservatoire National in Paris with Marcel Ciampi. Contact with Arthur Benjamin while he was still in Australia led to a period of study with him in London; studies in composition continued later with Anthony Milner.

John Carmichael was a pioneer in the field of music therapy; engaged by the Council for Music Therapy, he developed music teaching and music appreciation projects at Stoke Mandeville Hospital (where the Paralympic Olympics was born) and Netherden Mental Hospital in Surrey. Then followed a period as Musical Director of the Spanish dance company Eduardo Y Navarra, with extensive international touring including an Australian visit during which ABC Television recorded their dance program *Fuego en la Sangre* (Fire in the Blood). The contact with flamenco, expressed both in dance and by the flamenco singers and guitarists, led John Carmichael to encapsulate the experience in his *Concierto Folklorico*, released on ABC Classics with the composer as piano soloist.

In 1980 James Galway premiered John Carmichael's *Phoenix – Concerto for Flute and*

Orchestra at the Sydney Opera House; he gave the American premiere at the Hollywood Bowl a few months later and included the work in his *Flute Masterpieces* series, released by RCA to celebrate Galway's 60th birthday. His Trumpet Concerto, recently released on CD with John Wallace and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, was originally written for Australian trumpeter Kevin Johnston and also released on ABC Classics, together with his *Country Fair* for clarinet and orchestra.

Writing for the piano has always stimulated ideas for compositions, including works for four hands, and has led to collaborations with Australian pianists such as Victor Sangiorgio and Antony Gray, who gave the premiere of Carmichael's Piano Quartet *Sea Changes* in London in 2000 with Australian string players Belinda MacFarlane, Morgan Goff and Matthew Lee; the work was later released with works for flute, saxophone and clarinet on the ABC Classics CD *Sea Changes*.

John Carmichael's latest work, *On the Green*, for wind ensemble, was premiered in London in September 2007. Celebrating the green spaces of West London where the composer has lived for the last 40 years, it highlights the events which take place in these areas open to all to enjoy – open air music, fun fairs, children's games and care-free summer's days.

Antony Gray

Antony Gray was born and educated in Victoria, Australia. He graduated from the Victorian College of Arts where he studied with Roy Shepherd and Stephen McIntyre, and won several awards, including the Allans Keyboard Award two years running. In 1982 he received a scholarship from the Astra Foundation to continue his studies in London with Joyce Rathbone and Geoffrey Parsons.

He has performed widely throughout Australia, Britain and Europe, and has recorded the complete piano works of Williamson, Goossens and Poulenc as well as discs of Grainger, Bach transcriptions and the late piano works of Brahms. He has appeared on Australian and British radio and television, both as soloist and with other artists including Mischa Maisky, Sherban Lupu and Martin Robertson. He has performed at London's South Bank, Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square and as soloist with the Young Musicians Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican, as well as at several British and continental festivals.

He is an active champion of new music, and in 1994 gave the first complete performance of the four sonatas by Malcolm Williamson, having premiered the third in Australia in 1993. He has given many other first performances, including several works written for him, and he was a

member of the jury for the 1994 Cornelius Cardew composition competition. Among the distinguished contemporary music groups with which he has worked are Ixion, The Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, London New Music, Tapestry, The Cambridge New Music Players and Double Image.

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John Carmichael's music is available through his website, johncarmichael.com.

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