

***From the Surreal and Sublime Intimations of a True Blue
Australian Quiet Achiever to
Music for an Imaginary Italian Film***

A Musical Love Letter from Latvia

My Dear Ann Carr-Boyd!

I have now had your newest 2018 two-CD set ***Fandango Returns!*** in my possession for a significant amount of time and have listened to it again and again at various times of the day ... early in the morning, late at night, during the *siesta* (with *Tea for Tugger*) ... and in various states of mind ... cold sober and wide awake; slightly tipsy after a glass or three of the finest South Australian Chardonnay (most suited as an accompaniment to your fascinating palette of sound) and, even, dare I admit it ... as a passive background to my other creative pursuits ... such as my favourite activity of writing long-winded epistles to people I truly care about.

I believe my reaction then is honest and relatively unbiased ... if you recognise and accept me as a non-discriminatory but critical listener ... albeit partially in a 'fourth wall' persona, especially in view of the fact that you really did risk your reputation by performing a significant work from your through-composed music with me as your associate artist. For me that was an *American Dream* come true, but more of that later.

Your love for those cool cats of the feline kind is infectiously delightful not only in the *Rag for Razz* performed by John Martin and with its brief but witty allusion to a 1929 hit tune called *Making Whoopie* made famous by none other than Eddie Cantor ... but it is just a first jumping off spot for the entire *Suite for Razz* performed by the youthfully exuberant Sydney Symphony Fellows: Manu Berkeljon, Victoria Jacomo-Gilmovich, Yilin Zhu, Patrick Suthers on strings and David Papp on oboe. Their colours and musical shaping in *Mysterious Kitty*, *Fandango for Fifi* and *Fluffy Boy* are on the same wave as *Tea for Tugger* with its Shostakovichian (!) allusion to the famous *Tea for Two* theme. All of these were so lovingly performed and in tune with You as composer and your cool cats (and let's not forget *Luigi* who scored a solo violin escapade all to himself).

This suite is in a profound contrast to perhaps one of the largest symphonic works you have created to date (if we don't count your Symphony Nr 1.) – and that is the ***Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*** 1991 – which, in this recording reflects the absolute best of solo pianist Sally Mays with her total commitment and thoroughly prepared performance of the work. As I understand it she had actually commissioned the work and the recording came about by the very kind graces of the ABC and its facilities in Tasmania.

The score calls for large orchestral resources and actually requires two pianos – one of them 'prepared' to sound a bit like the Hungarian Cimbalum! There are bass clarinets, double bassoons and tubular bells to be heard in the score not to mention the orchestral 'whip' and

much credit goes to the players and to their conductor (Maestro Patrick Thomas MBE) for bringing it all together to a very creditable level of performance with an absolute minimal of rehearsal time. As everybody surely knows, such recording ventures are hugely expensive feats to realize and the pressure and stress of limited rehearsal time is always an extra-musical commitment from the musicians that cannot be taken out of the equation.

Bearing that in mind, the end result is in fact quite miraculous.

In your programme notes you mention that the second movement is based on an aboriginal theme passed on to your father by a fellow member of the Sydney Symphony.

As I listened to it I was also reminded of an indigenous Eskimo *Mic Mac* melody that I heard in a symphonic concert in Canada many years ago. A slow, meandering and somewhat hypnotic sound. I could also hear what appears to be a very difficult part for the Contra-Bassoon evident in this second movement with long slow notes most ably performed by the solo player.

The third movement employs a clever orchestral device of unison writing – a rare and occasionally scary technique – but together with some outstandingly colourful two-part counterpoint for support and a celestial upper drone effect it all comes together most successfully in this performance.

This now brings me to the simply mesmerising performance by cellist Susan Blake and pianist John Martin of your 2004/5 suite: *Beneath the Yellow Moon* in its three parts of which the final *Dreamtime Haze* movement simply left me in a state of transcendence.

Susan Blake's cello sound and her understanding of your colours together with John Martin's totally integrated accompaniment makes this work a very powerful expression of the timelessness of what is meant by the 'Dreamtime'. And, literally, I have on several occasions 'drifted off' while listening to these sounds and woken up not long after with a totally refreshed state of mind and a clean 'whiteboard' on my work-a-day mind that allows me to move on.

And what a move on with the work *Titan* from 2004 with John Martin picking up from a very sober and appropriately subdued moonscape opening few bars to a brilliant and flamboyant Jazz piano saloon bar and Boogie Woogie close out to the first of the 2 CDs. Talk about taking the Bass line for a walk down Park Lane!

I was no less impressed by the exciting clarinet and piano rendition of *On the Shores of Aswan* by Paul Champion, Principal Clarinet of Orchestra Victoria and Tony Baldwin, one-time official pianist to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. The instrumental mastery and ensemble work reflects the total dedication of both musicians to finding the core meaning of your travel memoirs in the mid 1990s.

Speaking of travel memoirs, I always knew that you had this 'secret piece' known as *Music for an Imaginary Italian Film* 1985. Well, now I have listened to this most Romantic music performed by the Sydney Mandolins directed by Adrian Hooper. One can imagine that Adrian

and his ten member band must have been on that same Dream track that led you to create this music.

For me, each time I listen to it and the unique colours of the mandolins in particular, I am instantly transported to my own memories of the beautiful summer of 1977 that I spent in the cradle of Umbria, with frequent trips to Assisi in Perugia, and to Siena and Florence in Tuscany from my Umbrian hilltop base in Orvieto. Just listening to that relaxed and yet temperamental music makes me want to go out and buy a fresh bottle of Orvieto White Wine vintage 1977. If you have ever been to Umbria or seen the iconic film *My Home in Umbria* you will know exactly what I mean. Romance, Mystery, Temperament, and more Romance.

A writer friend of our mutual acquaintance recently quoted somebody called Roland Barthes who was of the opinion that: once a work of performance art leaves the drawing board of its creator, it has a life of its own; that it is then in the hands of its interpreters – its new ‘owners’ to pass off as their own work.

We just have to think of flautist Maxence Larrieu, uno di mos famosi flautisti del Monde! and his total micro-possession of Mercadante’s Flute Concerto – a performance like none, not even matched by the great James Galway.

And then there are the Bruckner symphonies – apparently recognised and ‘finally understood’ and performed by less well-known orchestras than the Berlin Philharmonic or New York Philharmonic, and conducted by ‘Bruckner’s Slave’ Maestro Georg Tintner.

Tintner never met Bruckner in this life but did study with Bruno Walter and Felix Weingartner who DID know Bruckner. In my recollection of having worked with Georg Tintner, and of being ‘On Tour’ with him and the Australian Opera 1978 production of *Don Pasquale*, in Northern NSW, there was one occasion when we were returning to our digs in Tenterfield after a performance in nearby Inverell. We were travelling along the Bruckner Highway late at night and Georg yelled out from the back seat of my car: “***No No, that should be the Bruckner Highway!***” He must have been as delirious after having just conducted a three hour opera as I was exhausted that for all of our sakes we made a pit stop in our trip to gather enough energy to continue. And to breathe in some fresh air. It could have all ended there and then. Road kill for the mourning (sic) vultures of the Music World!

This little anecdote aside, it is an indication and a lesson that a REAL musician will do everything to connect with the true source of the music – the one and only COMPOSER – and only then attempt to offer an ‘interpretation’. Sort of like being a Sales Rep. for Christian Dior or Channel.

Now that we are entering the discussion space of ‘interpretation’, one seemingly always gets into a perpetual state of controversy when performing the so-called Early Music – such as that performed by your regular contact with Robert Goode and The Consort of Sydney which later led to your association with that musician’s musician and outstanding harpsichordist Diana Weston. Her THOROUGHBASE ensemble three-year project of restoring some 30 of your

works for The Consort has borne fruits of such delight that would leave many other wannabe *Early Musicke* groups simply floundering.

I'm so pleased that Diana Weston and her musicians have not resorted to the as yet insufficiently authentic rhetorical gesture posturing that is so much in vogue these days. Diana's harpsichord playing has a distinctive plucked strings effect that is a perfect accompaniment to Tara Hashambuoy's haunting violin tone in your work *Nadir* from 1973.

The *Flying West* suite from 2014 in which Joanne Arnott's wonderfully fragrant Recorder [not Blockflöte!] sound inter-meshes with Angus Ryan's rhetorical cello [not Gamba!] and Diana's once more erudite but subtle Harpsichord [not Clavecin!] is wonderfully free of any musty feeling that is often associated with that genre. Your music is truly 20th Century (did I just hear an allusion to 'From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli?') in track 9 as in the theme song of the United States Marine Corps!

And this brings me to the last (but by no means least) work in my review of your 2-CD musical offering and that is the *Suite for Flute and Harpsichord* c. 1990.

I was privileged to be your associate recording artist for this amazing work. My career had been going along just fine at the time but I had not yet achieved my 15 minutes of fame, that we are all supposedly entitled to if we persist in the life and profession of music.

It was just wonderful to discover those unique and distinctively Australian bush sounds in the *Prelude* and *Badinerie*. I remember being somewhat intimidated with the requirement to make a chromatic slide between adjacent notes. Thankfully you weren't inspired to make your flautists attempt a Gershwin style chromatic smear in the style of that solo in *American in Paris*. Whew!

But then, with the third movement *American Dream* we were instantly transported to your recollection of a commemoration service for Martin Luther King in Hartford, USA. My new *Sankyo Artiste* flute was required to adopt the rhetorical meander of a preacher addressing his congregation represented by your own distinctive Harpsichord accompaniment and occasional interjections ... Praise the Lord ...

It was all so serious and wistful and then the music instantly became a jolly romp powered by a Boogie Woogie harpsichord such as I had never imagined possible other than by TV-land's famous Lurch in the Addams Family.

It had me so much in stitches that during the actual recording which took place in the most unlikely setting of Rosemary Parle's living room at her Greenwich suburban home, that I almost unconsciously blurted out: 'Hey Man, Dat's Real Cool'. Talk about Improv theatrics and ... you just kept so cool as you took the bass line for a walk.

The concluding Toccata was/is still reminiscent and an allusion to Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man.

I think we did a great job of it. And readers of this review should know that we had next to no rehearsal for the end result which was effectively recorded in one take after a short pre-recording bite to eat of a few slices of quiche and a glass or two of some delicious Rose. Charles Barton was the sound recording engineer who quite possibly enhanced my wobbly and shy natural sound and turned it into the powerful sound that my life flute teacher James Carson actually had in person and maybe dreamed that I might emulate him. I dreamed that *American Dream* as well ... for almost 20 years and it all came together. My formidable last flute teacher, a Bohemian by nature, once told me that c. 1993 he was listening to the ‘magificent flute and harpsichord music’ on ABC radio as he was driving home and ... nearly had a heart attack when the announcer identified ME as the flute player! :) :) :)

Isn't technology amazing!

So, Dear Ann ... I hope you accept my observations as they are intended – In *Bona Fidae*.

Your 2-CD compilation *Fandango Returns!* really is a mirror of sound that has these past few days compressed for me the memories of our thirty four years of musical association into two hours of pure reminiscence and personal indulgence.

These two discs are my most treasured – for all the above mentioned reasons.

It is true that no recording device is capable of fixing exactly that which the human ear can perceive live in concert, but all compliments to the available digital technology which allows me to well receive this most erudite compilation of your work as it has now been preserved in Time and Space.

I offer these observations in continued honest friendship and in the realisation that nothing is final ... ever ... between true friends.

With much love and profound respect.

Cheers!

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Elected Member of the Latvian Council of Creative Unions