



NORTH EAST HAUNTINGS

Piano Music by JANET GRAHAM

ALEKSANDER SZRAM Piano

Prima
FACIE



Janet Graham



Janet Graham was born near Consett, County Durham, in 1948. She studied Composition with James Iliff at the Royal Academy of Music (1966–71), where she was awarded several prizes for composition, and later studied with Elisabeth Lutyens. She married the organist Philip Deane in 1973. During the 1970s and 80s she worked in London and Hertfordshire as a composer and piano teacher and many of her compositions were performed in London and elsewhere. Several pieces were broadcast on Radio 3 and radio stations abroad, and she was one of the composers selected for the BBC Young Composers' Forum in 1978. In 1989, after working voluntarily for several years at a psychiatric hospital in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, she decided to focus on trying to help people in the community through music, and trained as a music therapist at the Nordoff Robbins Centre in London. After qualifying as a music therapist in 1990 Janet worked as a therapist and course tutor for Nordoff Robbins and for the NHS in Hertfordshire before returning to County Durham in 2007 to establish some music therapy work in the North East. Over her career as a music therapist she worked with most client groups, especially children and adults with learning disability and autism, including those with 'challenging behaviour', people with neurological conditions and older people with dementia. After retiring from music therapy in June 2013 she began composing again. She lives near Durham at Bishop Middleham, where she plays the organ in the village church and can sometimes be found singing or playing the organ, piano, fiddle or guitar at local churches, care homes, ceilidhs and small charity events.

A Note on my Piano Compositions

Although I have played the piano in one way or another since I was able to sit at the old rosewood upright in our family house and pick out tunes I had heard on the radio, I am not a particularly gifted pianist and am certainly no performer. I have always preferred improvising (or "doodling" as I call it) to performing and, during my 23-year career as a music therapist, this came in very useful, though of course I was improvising music which aimed to tune into the inner musical world of other people and it was as much their music as mine.



Aleksander Szram specialises in performing music of the 20th and 21st Centuries, and has released several albums of contemporary repertoire on the Prima Facie label, including the Piano Concerto by Daryl Runswick, Inner Landscapes (Douglas Finch), A Land so Luminous (Kenneth Hesketh), and the album Aztec Dances with the recorder player Jill Kemp. He has recorded for Nimbus with the flautist Wissam Boustany, and released three albums of solo piano music by Runswick with Dazzle Music. He has given premieres of works by Rzewski, Fujikura, Kittos, Gregson, Bedford, Gregory Rose, George King, Carl Witt, Houtaf Khoury and Yevhen Stankovych among others. As pianist in the ensemble Gemini, he has recorded three albums with Métier, including works by Jonathan Harvey, Sadie Harrison, Huw Watkins, Philip Grange, and the first recording of Mandala 3 by David Lumsdaine. He has performed in more than forty countries over six continents, and teaches piano, chamber music and academic studies at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where he is a Senior Teaching Fellow.

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Sonatina (1985)

Both Aleks and Tony have told me that this is the most technically-challenging piece in the programme and I would not disagree with that! It has 4 movements:

1. Trills. This starts quietly in the upper register, with fragments of melodic line played *sotto voce* against a background of trills and tremolandi. The texture thickens and the range widens to include the lower register. During a long crescendo the melodic line is picked out in grace-notes accompanied by trills, tremolandi and chords. The final section is based on the first but is now in the lower register of the piano.

2. Lament. A slow expressive movement in which the melodic line, based on that of the first movement, is allowed to establish itself. The theme starts mid-register, accompanied mostly by chords, then the texture thins out and it moves higher up the piano. The theme, in an inverted form, then resumes in a low register with a bleak sparse accompaniment.

3. Scherzo. Mostly staccato, the Scherzo is based on the notes which formed the accompaniment of the Lament. The almost continuous semiquavers give way to a more varied middle section in a lower register. In the final section the semiquavers are resumed, climbing to the top of the piano, and the movement ends with a progression of loud disjointed chords.

4. Finale. The final movement consists of a combination of elements from the previous three. It starts with a section based on the first and second movements, but the trills are now mid-register semiquaver ostinati with the melodic line thickened into chords. Some triplet semiquavers in the right hand (reminiscent of the Scherzo) lead to a low quiet section which builds up to a climax. The final section has the theme snatched out in widely-spaced grace-notes against a background of tremolandi and semiquavers.

Music therapy training opened up new sound worlds. We were encouraged to explore modes and idioms which were not on the syllabus when I was a student at the RAM, and this has undoubtedly had some influence on the music I have written in recent years. For instance I have re-discovered the folk music which I loved when I was a child, and it occasionally sneaks into my pieces. I no longer fear the octave or the "tyranny of the bar-line", or even melody and tonality.

While still largely "atonal", I think my recent music probably has slightly softer edges than some of my earlier pieces, though I hope it still sounds like me! At the risk of disapproval from some composers I admit to composing partly at the piano and do not worry too much about muscle memory or cliché. My hands are small and this undoubtedly affects the sounds I create, but this is not new and I for one have struggled over the years to play pieces written by composers with much bigger hands.

Many of the pieces on this CD were written for my dear friend Anthony Green, to whom I am very grateful for performing my piano music with enormous skill and insight since the mid 1970s, including the years when I wrote hardly any music other than music therapy songs. Naturally I am also very grateful to Aleks (a former student of Tony's) for his interest in my work, his energy and determination during the production of this CD and for his wonderful playing.

Janet Graham, 9th January 2019

Sonata (2017)

Having composed very few "substantial" pieces since 1990, I wanted to give myself the challenge of writing a single-movement piece. Its structure has elements of sonata and variation form, though these are used in a very free way. The 3 main ideas of the piece are set out in the opening (exposition) section. They are: 1) declamatory octaves of which the first 2 notes become important later; 2) quiet quicker passages; and 3) chordal progressions. The Northumbrian folk song "Sair fyel'd, hinny" is introduced during the quiet central section and becomes prominent towards the end. The final 2 notes of the tune, D and E, recall the opening notes of the piece.

Persephone (1980)

The Homeric "Hymn to Demeter" tells how Persephone was carried off by Pluto, Lord of the Dead, to be his queen in the Underworld. Her mother Demeter, the corn goddess, vowed that she would allow no crops to grow until Persephone should be returned to her. After an intervention by Zeus, Pluto agreed to allow Persephone to spend a third (some versions of the myth say a half) of each year in the Underworld, from which she would return each spring when the plants were beginning to grow. Persephone is thus a mythical personification of the seed, which is buried under the earth during winter before it can come to life in the spring.

This piece was commissioned by Philip Mead, who gave the first performance at the Purcell Room in February 1981. It is in 2 main sections, of which the 1st evokes the darkness of the Underworld and a gradual transition towards light. The 2nd section represents the arrival of spring with the appearance of Persephone on the earth. Although the piece is not tonal, the low rumblings of the opening evoking the Underworld assert B-flat as a general tonal centre. A high E, tentative at first, gradually becomes more prominent as Persephone ascends, and the B-flat is left behind.

Iris (1984)

Originally the personification of the rainbow, Iris later became known as the swift golden-winged messenger of Zeus and Hera. She was frequently sent to the earth with messages for mortals and the rainbow was the bridge by which she travelled. The piece is in arch form and consists of 5 sections played without a break. The 1st is characterised by quick continuous semiquavers, the 2nd is slower and more chordal and the central section is very slow. The 4th and 5th are variations of the 2nd and 1st respectively.

Hecate (1983)

Hecate, "the distant one", was a minor Greek goddess associated with the moon and, later, the Underworld. As well as having a beneficent influence on farming she was a teacher and protector of witches, ghosts and sorcerers and was believed to haunt tombs, crossroads and places where murders had been committed. This piece is in 4 sections played without a break: very slow, fast, very slow and faster.

80 notes for James (2002)

Written on the 30th December 2002, this was a small present for my former teacher James Iliff on his 80th birthday.

Piano Piece (2002)

A short piece written at the request of Tony Green, who gave the first performance.

North East Hauntings (2015)

These 4 short pieces attempt to evoke memories and lost landscapes of the area of North East England where I grew up and where I now live.

1. Snow Sky: the dark blue-grey colour of the sky before a snow storm, and the flurries of snow when it starts.

2. Sea Mist: the fishing industry and lives lost at sea. After a loud chromatic cluster in the middle of the piece, the tune of a traditional North East folk song, "Have you seen owt of my bonny lad", appears in quiet ghostly phrases interspersed with loud chords. The words of the song tell of a young fisherman who died at sea.

3. Lullaby for Lost Skylines: the collieries, shipyards, iron works, etc. and the dramatic and often angular shapes they added to the horizon before they were closed. The tune of another North East folk song, "Oh bonny's my lad as he walks down the street" is introduced about half-way through the piece. The words of the song are an affectionate description of a young coal miner by his sweetheart.

4. Red Dust: Consett in the days of the Iron Company, when the whole town was covered with dark pink dust at times, especially when it was windy (which, at Consett's high altitude and location at the edge of the Durham moors, it often was).