

## Anthony Powers: Complete Piano Music 1983-2003

Richard Casey piano

### Piano Sonata No.1 (1983)

I: Allegro energico

II: Lento sereno

III: Lento moderato – Theme and Variations – Allegro molto – Presto

This Sonata, written between August and October 1983, was commissioned by Paul Roberts who gave the first performance at the Purcell Room, South Bank Centre, London on 1 May 1984. Paul is best known for his performances of Debussy and Ravel (and has written excellent studies of their piano works). Whilst the slow movement of my sonata has definite affinities with those composers, perhaps because 1983 was his 150th anniversary year the composer most in my mind, and to whom I wanted to pay my own tribute, was Brahms. The first movement is a taut, compressed sonata-form, but without its expected recapitulation, opening with a distorted but clear reference to Brahms' 'signature' rising F-A-F ("froh aberfrei") motif which for example begins his third symphony. The slow second movement is an extended intermezzo, and the finale comprises an introduction, theme and variations, transition-development leading to the delayed recap of the main ideas from the first movement, and a short coda. The material of the sonata derives entirely from the falling-thirds opening of Brahms' well-loved Klavierstück op.119 no.1, a piece as remarkable as it is beautiful. Glimpses may be heard elsewhere, but only at the very end can this be immediately recognised in direct (but brief!) quotation.

### Piano Sonata no. 2 (1986)

I: préludes/bagatelles

II: études/fantaisies

The Sonata is in two parts, the second being much the larger. In Part I, six little pieces of contrasting types and characters are framed and separated by music exploiting the resonances of overtones from silently held chords in the left hand. The structure is deliberately rather discontinuous, and in retrospect can be seen as an exposition to the developments which take place in Part II. Here the characteristics of the six pieces of Part I are projected onto a much bigger time scale: a huge arc describing an overall rising from the depths to the heights and from very slow music to very fast. All the material of Part I is re-worked, in extended and constantly developing forms, and is here swept up into a continuous musical argument. There are several glimpses of the special sonority of the 'framing' music (resonances of harmonics) from Part I and these moments are eventually to the fore in the final section of the fast music and then, more spaciouly attained, in the slow coda. The titles of each part may be understood as those of their traditional musical genres, though 'Etudes/Fantaisies' also refers specifically to the compositional techniques employed in that movement, parts of which are very strictly worked and parts of which are much freer in conception. Sonata no. 2 was written for, and is dedicated to, Stephen Kovacevich, who gave the first performance on 18 August 1986, at Dartington Hall, Devon.

### Vista (2003)

*Vista* is the first in a sequence of five works, written between 2003 and 2011 and with the overall title *A Book of Italian Gardens*, for varied and increasing instrumental forces all including the piano. The sequence forms a multi-faceted reflection or interpretation of aspects of Italian renaissance and baroque gardens. These gardens sometimes told a story, typically derived from mythology as filtered through Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. Change, growth, and the purposely limited content of most of these gardens, all suggested a musical equivalent in variation form which is what the sequence of pieces mainly explores.

The three most important elements of 16th/17th century Italian garden design were green planting (cypresses, box, yew, and including mazes, avenues and 'green theatres'), sculpture (generally allegorical or symbolic, often light-hearted or grotesque) and water (active and capricious in fountains, cascades and scherzi d'acqua (water jokes); still and reflective in pools and stone basins – or both, in 'water theatres').

*Vista* translates these three elements into musical images which are varied and developed as the piece evolves. Ideas are heard, as it were, from different perspectives and distances; and like a garden vista they reveal possibilities to be explored later, in this case in the subsequent four pieces of the sequence.

*Vista* – like *The Memory Room* – was written for William Howard, who gave the first performance as part of the 2003 Cheltenham Festival.

### Sensing (2003)

*Sensing* was written for Helen Reid, in response to her double request for a 'prelude' to Scriabin's Ninth Sonata, and for a short piece to use in a multimedia project on synaesthesia. By way of tribute to Scriabin the music explores a variety of keyboard touch and harmonic or textural colour / 'taste', moving from a hesitant, fragmentary opening towards music more sustained and expressive.

Helen gave the first performance (alongside the Scriabin 9th, the so-called 'Black Mass' sonata) at the Wigmore Hall, London in November 2003.

### The Memory Room (1991)

The Memory Room consists of 16 short, or very short, pieces. The title refers to the Renaissance 'memory theatres' in which a collection of images stimulates the memory but, more specifically, I imagined the hall in which a piano recital is heard – even the piano itself (now of all instruments the most laden with memories of its own repertoire) – as a memory room. So, the music evokes and alludes to a wide variety of keyboard styles, from the 16th to the 20th centuries and from classical to rock. The fourteenth piece contains memories of these memories, whilst within the overall cycle there is a secondary thread formed by four tiny pieces (I, VIII, XIII, XVI) which starting in clear, bright colours become progressively darker and more clouded. The Memory Room was written for William Howard who gave the first performance at the 1992 Lichfield Festival.

I: (senza tempo)

II: Martellato, furioso

III: Andante tranquillo

IV: Mesto, espressivo

V: Vivo

VI: Adagio non troppo

VII: Largo

VIII: (senza tempo)

IX: Presto e leggiero

X: Lento, meccanico

XI: Tranquillo

XII: Allegro energico

XIII: (senza tempo)

XIV: Allegro molto

XV: Lento e calmo

XVI: (senza tempo)

### Anthony Powers

Born in London in 1953, Anthony Powers studied at the universities of Oxford and York, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. He taught at Dartington College of Arts before being appointed composer-in residence to Southern Arts (1980-2). Since then, he has lived in Herefordshire and until 2010 taught at Cardiff University. He is a former chairman of the Association of Professional Composers.

Powers' music, most of which is published by Oxford University Press, includes two large-scale symphonies (the first premiered at the 1996 BBC Proms), a number of concertos and other orchestral works, notably the BBC commissions *Stone, Water, Stars* (BBCSO, 1987) and *Terrain* (BBCNOW, 1992), vocal and choral works, including *A Picture of the World* (2001, Warsaw Autumn Festival) for countertenor Michael Chance and the BBC Singers, and the John Donne cantata *Air and Angels* for the 2003 Three Choirs Festival. His catalogue also includes a large corpus of instrumental and vocal chamber music. Powers' String Quartet no 3 was written as the test piece for the London International String Quartet Competition in 2000. He collaborated with Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney on *From Station Island* (for speaker, baritone and ensemble), commissioned for a German premiere and broadcast by RTE from the 2005 West Cork Chamber Music Festival with Heaney himself taking the role of speaker.

Powers' work is typically characterised by strong architectonic frameworks that support a language of poetic intensity and magical sonorities, the music often taking its inspiration from the tension between different states, be they physical properties, landscapes, seasons or emotions.

### Richard Casey

Richard Casey was born in Manchester in 1966 and started playing the piano at the age of seven. After graduating in Music and Modern Languages at St John's College, Cambridge, he studied piano at the Royal Northern College of Music with Marjorie Clementi and Martin Roscoe, and later with Ronan O'Hora. In 1997 Richard won first prize in the British Contemporary Piano Competition, an achievement which attracted a series of solo engagements in the UK and abroad. Based in Manchester, Richard complements his solo career with a strong commitment to chamber music. He frequently gives 2-piano concerts with his duo partner, Ian Buckle, specialising in repertoire from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Since 1994 he has been pianist with the New Music Players and has performed frequently as a guest with the London Sinfonietta, Lontano and Liverpool-based Ensemble 10:10. Richard was also a founder-member of the Manchester-based contemporary music ensemble Psappa. From 1991 to 2014 he has performed over 400 works with the group throughout the UK and in tours of Spain, Holland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Hong Kong, Australia and the USA. Richard has recorded the complete piano works of Camden Reeves, Anthony Gilbert and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, as well as Edward Cowie's epic *Rutherford's Lights* and Edward Dudley Hughes' *Orchids* for solo piano and has recently released Volume 1 of Anthony Burgess' *Piano Works*. Richard also teaches at Manchester University. Future plans involve recording the complete piano works of Paul Newland.

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