

practise one of the rushes I became annoyed because the notes were too small to read. Co-ordination between the two pianists is difficult. The composer has spelt out some of the leger line notes which is a great help but I would like to see a lot more of this. The footnoted clarification of some of the chords should really not be required but with such tiny-sized notes they are it is a necessary evil. *rushes* is an uncompromisingly complex and difficult work which provides a great challenge. It would be stunning to play it as a piano duet. Till my eyesight improves I'll have to leave it to Michael Finnissy.

The binding and the sturdy cover of *Four Hands*, graced with the image of four disembodied floating hands, should stand up to the stresses of rehearsal, performance and travel. The paper quality is good and, with the exception of the note size in *rushes* and some ghosting on the contents page of one of the review copies, the print is clear and easy to read. Some editorial fingering in the works such as the *Reductions*, *Soft Tissue* and *rushes* would be welcome, and there is no biographical note for Chris Dench.

Red House Editions is to be congratulated for the publication of *Four Hands*, which makes a welcome addition to RedHouse's already impressive catalogue of contemporary music. Two-piano music is often perceived as timbrally limited and colouristically constrained, but by selecting works of such stylistic diversity the publishers show this need not be so. This smorgasbord of contemporary music styles is a must-have for piano duo teams who want to stretch their comfort zone. Bon Appétit!

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Helen Gifford, *The Gifford Collection: Piano Music*
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In recent years there has been quite a revival in attention given to Australian piano music through performances and compilation recordings of Australian piano works by artists such as Michael Kieran Harvey, Lisa Moore, Roger Smalley, Jeanelle Carrigan and others. There have also been a number of anthologies of piano music scores. But a publication such as this collection of piano works by one Australian composer is relatively rare and thus should be especially welcomed.

The Red House Editions volume consists of the complete solo piano works of Helen Gifford, Piano Sonata (1960), *Catalysis* (1963), *Three Pieces* (1966) and *Toccata Attacco* (1990). As a bonus *A Plaint for Lost Worlds*, a small ensemble piece involving piano, is included. Inside the front cover is a statement that the volume has been compiled in 'close association with the composer' and that the publisher 'would like to thank Zoe Sweett and Helen Gifford for their generous assistance.' There is, however, no indication of who the editor of the collection is. Certainly Zoe Sweett, who has written the Foreword, is not given this credit.

In many ways it is an odd package. The bulk of the volume is made up of works composed early in Gifford's career. The one recent solo piece is in wild contrast to these earlier works. Furthermore, it seems eccentric if not inappropriate in a volume of solo piano pieces to include a piece for piano, piccolo and clarinet. The reason given in Sweett's Foreword for its inclusion is that it is more in keeping with Gifford's investigation of timbre and extended techniques, and thus more representative of the composer's work. If this is the case then maybe Red

House Editions ought to be publishing works of Gifford that are more representative of her soundworld.

There are a number of ways in which the documentation of the collection could be improved. Sweett refers to and quotes little bits of program notes written by Gifford. It would have been a good idea to have these program notes included in full as part of the documentation component. This would have paved the way for a more critical contribution from Sweett. As it stands, the Foreword is an uneven piece of writing. It gives some sketchy background information, it develops an apology for Gifford's early serial leanings, implying that, although the composer used twelve-tone techniques, she didn't really believe in them, preferring a path of 'sensual and emotional' expression. Sweett draws on her interviews with Gifford and upon quotes from the program notes, rather than her own examination of, or response to, the music. Often it is difficult to determine what her personal response is to particular pieces. There is, I feel, a subtext of disapproval in the description of the *Toccata Attacco*: the work is 'relentless,' 'fragmented' and has an 'edge' she relates to Gifford's serious illness during the period of its composition. It would be appropriate for Sweett to reveal what she actually thinks and feels about this work. Certainly, if her in-progress biography of Gifford is to be of value in a critical and academic sense, she will need to sharpen up her responses.

My own responses to Helen Gifford's piano music must be seen in the light of certain biases. What seemingly allies me to Gifford are her love for Chopin's harmony (identified by Sweett in her Foreword), the importance she places on the expressive quality of music and the attraction to the sensuality of musical sonority. Where we may differ is in my belief that these states must be achieved through a rigorous approach to the crafting of musical structures on both micro and macro levels. For me the intent of the musical invention must be evident.

Gifford's Piano Sonata (1960) is impressive in many ways, especially considering it was only her third composition. It displays a broad range of early modern compositional techniques and instrumental idiom. The first movement has a strong rhythmic energy and a variety of rhythmic ideas. The pitch organisation is freely atonal but retains elements of triadism, bitonalism, and melodic patterning techniques. Rather than development of melodic cells there is an emphasis on exploration of textural concepts such as the similar motion two-hand idea first presented in bar 4. There is a high degree of freedom in the structuring, but enough reiterated and varied musical ideas to hold the movement together. The slow movement begins with the gradual unfolding of a series of delicate harmonic sonorities. This gives way to an attempt to exploit the technique of activating the harmonics of certain un-damped strings by playing louder chords with appropriate pitch content. In my view the result is not nearly as effective as it could have been had the composer made a more rigorous investigation of the possibilities. The third movement involves some similar textural ideas to the first movement, but the approach is more circumscribed. This limitation is offset by a vigorous metrical continuity and rhythmic vigour. Overall the piece gives the impression of youthful enthusiasm and passion without venturing into the angst sometimes associated with the musical language being employed.

Catalysis (1963) is influenced by more up-to-date musical trends, as Gifford had been living in London in 1962 and visiting countries such as The Netherlands and France to attend new music festivals. Accordingly, more formalised methods of pitch organisation based on twelve-tone theory are employed. For me this piece gives the impression of being merely an exercise in this approach to composition rather than presenting a personal musical vision. Contrary to Sweett's claims that the work is more 'individual' I believe the earlier Piano Sonata has a lot more character. *Catalysis* is more texturally and idiomatically limited and the melodic, contrapuntal and harmonic ideas are less inventive. Moreover there is an aimlessness in the way it unfolds to the listener, despite any underlying deep structure there may be.

Sweett writes that 'by the time the *Three Pieces* were written in 1966, Gifford had rejected conscious use of serialism.' None the less 'Cantillations,' the first piece, seems to take up where *Catalysis* left off: the score even looks a bit the same. Indeed it demonstrates some suspicious attributes of conscious composition processes. Virtually no tone that is sounded is immediately repeated; in fact there seems to be a pattern that sequences of about six different tones are used before any of them are repeated. However, being a shorter piece than *Catalysis*, it seems more texturally organic and structurally effective. The second of the *Three Pieces*, 'The Spell' is much more atmospheric and more in line with Gifford's interest in timbre and sonority. A melodic line idea features a slowly descending 3-2-1 pattern followed by several repetitions of the final tone. This is employed starting on different tones and entering at different points of the piece. The staggered counterpoint of these lines results in a dense cluster-like texture. Although it looks like an interesting idea on paper it would be difficult for the performer to articulate the idea in such a way that its design could be guaranteed to be revealed to the listener. The third piece, 'Waltz,' is clearly a twelve-tone piece (the first twelve tones of the piece take the form of a row), again casting doubt on the claim that Gifford had turned her back on this tradition. The atonalism and the often syncopated rhythmic design obscure any suggestion, even parodic, of a waltz, making one wonder what the point of the title is.

Toccata Attacco (1990) is by far the most assured piece in the collection. Commissioned by the indefatigable Sally Mays who has probably performed and recorded more Australian piano pieces than anyone else, it shows a mature understanding of contemporary classical piano idiom, a bold approach to challenging the technique of the virtuoso pianist, and a vast array of often startling textural concepts, each one so impressive that a lot of the structural intrigue of the piece is based on the shock value of what comes next. There are, however, a number of clearly defined musical elements that hold the piece together. The reiterated F sharps and A naturals, heard at the beginning of the work, return, sometimes in varied form, throughout the piece, and the idea of rapidly alternating (tremolo) chords in various guises is the central textural concept of Gifford's toccata approach. Interspersed with these are more dramatic and subtle sections that give relief from the relentless energy of the main ideas. It is a bold and brilliant work and immensely entertaining into the bargain.

Apart from a few flourishes, the piano plays a more supportive role in *A Plaint for Lost Worlds* (1994) for piccolo, clarinet and piano. This piece was ostensibly included to provide a glimpse of the real Helen Gifford, given that the piano as a solo instrument has played a minor role in her career as a composer. Although I disagree with its inclusion in a solo piano collection, I have to admit that the piece takes the listener into a completely different sound space with its elaborate but still delicate interplay among the three instruments, particularly between the clarinet and piccolo. There is more of an emphasis on melodic and decorative qualities rather than the textural emphasis of all the solo piano works. There are, as Sweett suggests, more 'carefully shaped musical gestures and subtle colouristic effects' in this kind of piece.

A high standard of musical typesetting and layout has been achieved in this publication. I was not able to spot any musical typographical errors or lapses in notational convention. It appears that even the page turns have been considered in the layout, although with a furious piece like *Toccata Attacco*, it would be impossible to achieve a totally efficient result. The layout of the Foreword is, however, a bit amateurish with its odd collection of photographic memorabilia and the text continuing after the short biographical note on the Foreword's author, Zoe Sweett. An attempted cover-up of a word typo in this biographical note looks shoddy and invites the reader to tear it off to discover the nature and dimension of the blunder beneath.