

Australian Piano Miniatures, Book 3
Melbourne: Red House Editions, 1992. \$18, pp. 16

Late last year, Red House Editions released the third and final volume in their *Australian Piano Miniatures* series. Book 3 is a diverse collection of established and lesser-known composers, including: Larry Sitsky, Ann Carr-Boyd, Brenton Broadstock, Carolyn Connors, Andrew Schultz, and Julian Yu.

As in the previous books, every miniature is one page long, providing a tantalizing glimpse into each composer's style. I admire the editors for adopting a policy of minimal editing in typesetting these works: the idiosyncrasies of notation in each score are (usually) the composer's own. (Several inaccuracies crept into my own piece, but considering the complexity of the score I'm not surprised!) Faithfully reproducing the composer's manuscript is invaluable in revealing aspects of the composer's compositional processes and intentions, although I admit it may cause problems for performers upon occasion.

Sitsky's *Foucault's Pendulum* has long quaver lines that move like the tracings of a swaying pendulum. Repeated chords interpose melodic lines that expand around an opening motif. The harmonies are spiked with well-judged dissonance.

Connor's *My Hoss #2* incorporates her interest in semi-improvised performance. The outer lines of each hand are written out leaving the performer free to improvise the inner harmonies using a notated rhythm. *My Hoss #2* is a crisp, energetic piece: conceptually straightforward while aurally exciting.

...it gets complicated... by Roger Dean is a humorous comment on the complexity/accessibility debate. Dean juxtaposes notational nightmares aside rhythmically 'free' passages. A text to be spoken by the performer ties the piece together, although I have my doubts about the punchline, 'it complicates you'.

Julian Yu's *Jangled Bells* is a stylish composition based on simple, repeated figures. Charmingly 'perverse' references to a certain Christmas carol tease the listener.

In the Wind by Sarah de Jong is characterised by sonorous harmonies. My main criticism is that the piece verges on predictability at times, and in performance I would choose to be more subtle with the pedal than de Jong suggests, to preserve a sense of 'fleeting' movement.

Barcarole by Andrew Shultz utilizes an effective touch of prepared piano. A well-developed melodic line is supported by simple arpeggiated chords. Gong-like sounds (produced by preparing two bass notes) accentuate the expressive yet disturbing quality of the harmonies.

Nonary (of nine) by Graeme Gerrard is a collection of nine fragments to be assembled and repeated in the order of the performer's choice. The fragments tend to contrast sparse extremes of register with dense chords in the mid-range of the piano.

Helios—my own piece—is a portrait of the sun: of compressed, burning intensity; lazy afternoons; a furious solar flare. The unconventional approach to notation is to include elements of improvisation: if this piece was fully notated conventionally it would be pages long and unrealistically difficult to learn. For the record, the tenth bracketted chord should have a B flat (not A flat) in the right hand.

In contrast, Ann Carr-Boyd's *Maladies of Love* broods in crotchets and quavers: a portrait of sentimental, neurotic lovesickness. *Gamut* (Neil Kelly) and *Veil* (Lawrence Harvey) are capable examples of academic chromaticism. Other works in the collection are by Brenton Broadstock, Dalmazio Barbarè and Stephen Holgate.

The whole series of *Australian Piano Miniatures* is an extraordinary collection of 42 musically satisfying (well, most of them are) new works reflecting a wide range of styles and catering to various levels of pianistic ability. But... why were so few women willing or able to contribute to this project?

SHEILA LEARMONTH

