

FERRUCCIO BUSONI · Fantasia contrappuntistica
ERIK SATIE · 3 Morceaux en forme de poire
CLAUDE DEBUSSY · Khamma
ALFREDO CASELLA · Pupazzetti
ANTHONY HERSCHEL HILL · Nocturne
FRANCIS POULENC · Sonate

Julian Jacobson & Mariko Brown
piano duo

1 BUSONI
Fantasia contrappuntistica for two pianos 28:02

SATIE
3 Morceaux en forme de poire (four hands) [14:48]

2 Manière de Commencement 3:06

3 Prolongation du même 0:54

4 I Lentement 1:30

5 II Enlevé 2:47

6 III Brutal 2:45

7 En plus – Calme 2:00

8 Redite – Dans le lent 1:43

9 DEBUSSY – Khamma (four hands)* 19:37

———— *First recordings ————

CASELLA – Pupazzetti (four hands) [7:06]

10 I Marcetta 0:38

11 II Berceuse 1:27

12 III Serenata 1:14

13 IV Notturmo 2:21

14 V Polca 1:24

15 HERSCHEL HILL
Nocturne for two pianos* 3:46

POULENC – Sonate (four hands) [5:57]

16 I Prélude 2:09

17 II Rustique 2:00

18 III Final 1:46

Total Duration: 79:18

Recorded at the Yehudi Menuhin School on 14 & 15 July 2016
Pianos: Steinway model D (which is on left in duos) & Fazioli F278 (duos only, on right)
Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor
Front cover photograph: Julian Jacobson & Mariko Brown © Roger Harris Photography
Design: Andrew Giles

© & © 2017 SOMM RECORDINGS · THAMES DITTON · SURREY · ENGLAND
Made in the EU

FERRUCCIO BUSONI
Fantasia contrappuntistica

ERIK SATIE
3 Morceaux en forme de poire

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Khamma

ALFREDO CASELLA
Pupazzetti

ANTHONY HERSCHEL HILL
Nocturne

FRANCIS POULENC
Sonate

Julian Jacobson & Mariko Brown
piano duo

"Take it for granted from the beginning," **Ferruccio Busoni** wrote in 1898 (in one of the endless flow of letters to his wife, Gerda) "that everything is possible on the piano, even when it seems impossible to you, or really is".

The piano was at the centre of Busoni's musical life. It was the fulcrum on which he balanced his careers as a concert pianist, composer and teacher, and his relationship with the instrument was one marked by awe of its abilities and a far-reaching ambition to extend its vocabulary.

In that respect, the piano was as much a philosophical proposition as a musical provocation. It prompted Busoni to a restless interrogation of the instrument throughout his life; an intellectual and creative pursuit that returned time and again to the precision and poise of JS Bach. Busoni had a life-long fascination with his illustrious predecessor, spending more than three decades producing critical editions of his music, his academic engagement coupled with copious arrangements and transcriptions that have become a cornerstone of the contemporary repertoire.

Nowhere was his veneration for Bach more apparent than in the *Fantasia contrappuntistica* of 1910, a work of dazzling technical insight and virtuosic exposition that takes up where *The Art of Fugue* left off. (Nor, arguably, was there a more acute demonstration of Busoni's own prowess at the piano.) Bach never completed his seminal exploration of counterpoint, his death in July 1750 truncating its final movement (Contrapunctus XVIII) at the point where three subjects conjoin in readiness for a fourth to create a concluding quadruple fugue.

Interrupted and pregnant with possibility, Busoni regarded it as an embryonic statement that could still be brought to fruition. Others were also preoccupied by the tantalising prospect of completion. The German-born, American-domiciled teacher and theorist Bernhard Ziehn had long been mulling over solutions to one of music's great 'what ifs'.

When the two met in Chicago in January 1910, it was a meeting of minds – Busoni described Ziehn as a fellow traveller in pursuit of "a gothic art in serious stillness, gazing inwards". When Ziehn showed his visitor how Bach might have completed *The Art of Fugue* by borrowing its initial theme, it proved an epiphany that spurred Busoni to complete the work he had begun sketching on the long sea voyage from Europe.

By October the same year, the *Fantasia contrappuntistica* – originally conceived for solo piano – was complete, although Busoni would re-visit it in 1912 to create a simplified "study edition" and again in 1921 when he arranged it for two pianos.

The *Fantasia's* structure and technique is strictly rooted in the antique idioms of Bach. Cast in 12 parts, it begins with a prelude of variations based on the chorale *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Her'* ('Honour be to God alone on High', BWV 260) followed by three fugues (the third built on the motif B-A-C-H, at the writing of which Bach is said to have died), an intermezzo, three variations of accruing complexity, a cadenza, fugue and chorale before ending with a febrile *stretta*. But its distinguishing features belong wholly to Busoni and modernity.

The technical demands of the *Fantasia* had gnawed persistently at Busoni, leading him to the conviction that a version for two pianos was the only logical solution to a work that had proved "a disproportionate task for 10 fingers, whereas divided between 20 it would be easy and transparent for player and listener alike".

Logic dictated to the deeply intellectual Busoni a departure from the strict and confining harmonic rules that Bach had employed. The result was an agglomeration of "new harmonies" derived from a use of counterpoint markedly more expansive than Bach but no less controlled, together with systematic inversions of – and chromatic modifications to – the source and wholly original material, notably in Fuga IV, where Busoni is simultaneously bound and liberated by Bach.

The eminent American critic Harold C Schonberg tellingly noted of the *Fantasia contrappuntistica*: “Busoni started from Bach and, without losing the contrapuntal character of the music, seemed to move through the 19th century, into the 20th”.

Anthony Herschel Hill, who died in July 2016, was a distant relative of the pioneering astronomer and discoverer of the planet Uranus, William Herschel, who was also the composer of 24 symphonies, 14 concertos, 33 organ voluntaries and much else. Born in Shropshire in 1939, the son of the eminent psychiatrist Sir Dennis Hill, he studied composition with Herbert Howells at the Royal College of Music in London (where he himself later taught) and with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. His piano tutors included Louis Kentner and Cyril Smith – through whom he can claim a prior association with Somm Recordings. His wife, the noted piano teacher Joan Havill, was a fellow pupil of Smith’s with the label’s founder, Siva Oke. (No less serendipitously, Julian Jacobson also studied with Kentner and Mariko Brown with Joan Havill.)

As a pianist, he gave recitals throughout the UK and concerto performances with the London Philharmonic and Philharmonia orchestras. He was also Director of Music at St Simon Zelotes, Chelsea for more than a quarter of a century.

Nocturne is an arrangement for two pianos of an earlier work composed in memory of his father. One of several (predominantly solo) piano works composed in the early 1980s, it reveals a voice of singular individuality. Uncharacteristically intense for an English elegy, it is marked by undulating major and minor broken chords (notably so in the unsettling underpinning of its forlorn melody) and recurring shifts in time signatures that seem to stubbornly salt the wound of recent loss. There is something gnomic, too – an emotion too private, perhaps, to voice – in the withholding of the key’s true identity until the very last bar. (Mariko and Julian would like to dedicate this performance in memory of Anthony.)

Although enamoured of the idea of writing for the stage, **Debussy** began more ballet scores than he completed. *Khamma*, the *légende dansée* commissioned by Canadian dancer-choreographer Maud Allen in 1910, seemed doomed from the start, Debussy candidly admitting it was undertaken “for reasons of money needed at home”. Allen was already notorious for her provocative rendition of ‘The Dance of the Seven Veils’ in the 1906 Viennese production of *Visions of Salomé*. She hit the headlines again in 1918 when she unsuccessfully sued an MP for libel after he claimed she had a lesbian relationship with wartime German conspirators.

Set in ancient Egypt, *Khamma*’s eponymous heroine dances in prayer to the deity Amun-Ra to deliver the kingdom from invaders. When the barbarians are repelled, she drops dead in apparent thankful self-sacrifice to the gods. Its writing was plagued by misunderstandings between Debussy and Allen. What would now be called ‘creative differences’ meant the orchestral score was never finished – although Debussy did complete a piano transcription – and only staged 25 years after its abandonment in a completion by Charles Koechlin in 1937.

Debussy’s most exotic-sounding creation, it boasts strange harmonies that anticipate the later *Jeux* while polarised timbres and bitonal episodes push against a dark-hued narrative hemmed in by a controlling formality of expression. The plentiful addition of notes above and below the stave in the piano score – considered optional for those without the necessary dexterity – come richly into play in the version for four hands.

It was in response to Debussy’s complaint that his music lacked form that **Erik Satie**, the clown-prince of early-20th-century French music, composed his *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* in 1903. Its characteristically tongue-in-cheek title served as a sardonic riposte to his peer and confidant: “You cannot criticize my *Pieces* in the shape of a pear. If they are *en forme de poire*, they cannot be shapeless”.

Where logic for Busoni was an imperative, for Satie it was an incitement to subversion. Long before the Dadaists found their way to Paris after the First World War, Satie had been testing the boundaries of contemporary musical mores, rejecting the nomenclature of ‘musician’ in preference for his self-styled ‘phonometrician’ (‘someone who measures sounds’). Above all, he was an iconoclastic refusenik, equally unwilling to be defined – or confined – by the old or the new.

That rebelliousness is evident in the three central *morceaux* that comprise the seven-part *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* – wrong-footing titles were as much a part of Satie’s seditious lexicon as his musical idiosyncrasy. *Poire* can be translated, in French slang, for ‘head’ and also refers to a child’s spinning top. Both meanings find resonance in the cerebral quality of the *Trois morceaux* and in the swaying ebb-and-flow repetitiveness of the outer movements – contrastingly marked *Lentement* (‘Slowly’) and *Brutal* – that smacks of the heady otherness of the *Gymnopédies* and pre-figures minimalism and serialism. Drawn from earlier cabaret songs, the ebullient middle-movement *Enlevé* (‘Detached’), like its companions, tests the proprieties of four-hand piano etiquette with playful ingenuity.

Francis Poulenc shared Satie’s reputation as a joker and mischief-maker, qualities that prompted the critic Claude Rostande to memorably describe him as “moitié moine, moitié voyou” (‘half-monk, half-rascal’). It is claimed that Poulenc deliberately manufactured the contributions of the two pianists in his *Sonata for Piano, Four Hands* (completed when he was not yet 20 in 1918 and revised in 1939) to oblige his attractive student partner to greater physical proximity than might otherwise have been deemed appropriate. Its jesting quality is typical of his early work.

The Sonata’s title (as much as its length) deports itself with a knowing wink. This is a sonata in silhouette only, its three-movement structure offering a glancing nod towards

classical form, its content a helter-skelter collage in which the *ostinato* thumbprint of Stravinsky, melodic directness of Satie and Bartók’s dancing appropriation of folk tunes are smudged by the vitality of the jazz music that enthralled a Paris then recovering from the Great War.

A boisterous and propulsive ‘Prélude’ with colliding chords gives way to a guileless ‘Rustique’ middle movement – a classic Poulencian turn-on-a-sixpence mood-swing contrasting sparkling, high-spiritedness with delicately framed sentiment. The concluding ‘Final’ is a head-long rush of emphatic exuberance requiring the utmost flexibility and co-ordination between four acutely tasked hands. It’s tempting to hear in the Sonata the basis for the Concerto for Two Pianos of 1932, which shares similarly contrasted emotions and attitudes.

Like Busoni, the music of **Alfredo Casella** has struggled to find its place in the concert hall, although his orchestral output has been relatively well served on disc. Born in Turin into a musical family (his cellist grandfather was an intimate of Paganini’s) his studies at the Conservatoire de Paris – piano with Louis Diémer; composition with Gabriel Fauré – led to a prolonged stay in the French capital. There, he struck up influential friendships with Debussy, Stravinsky and Ravel, the first performance of whose Piano Trio he led in 1915.

Casella’s time in France helped cement his determination to resist the inherited assumption that Italian composers, by dint of birth alone, should produce operas. In the event, he produced seven works for the stage (four of them ballets) and his only full-length opera, *La Donna Serpente*, in 1931. But Casella’s allegiance to the ambition of the *Generazione dell’ottanta* (the post-Puccini ‘Generation of [18]80’ that also included Respighi and Malipiero) to eschew the operatic mainstream and create, instead, a new ‘Italian’ instrumental repertoire proved irresistible.

The piano duet *Pupazzetti* ('Puppets') dates from 1914 and hints at a pedagogical intent in Casella's description of it as "five easy pieces". More pertinently, it taps into his overlooked but central contribution to writing music for children and his often magical re-imaginings of childhood.

The notion of marionettes coming to life was hardly new. Casella had conducted the Italian premiere of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and its wayward melodies and spiky, peristaltic rhythms are there to be found in *Pupazzetti* as they variously pinion, punctuate and propel Casella's glittering kaleidoscope of colours to ever-greater emphasis and extravagance. Echoes of Satie are heard in its tonal brightness and of Ravel in the melting liquescence of the second-movement 'Berceuse'.

But the abiding quality, belonging solely to Casella, is of a sensuous Italian charm lit up by strikingly extended harmonies verging on atonality. The material was sufficiently rich to encourage him to write versions for chamber nonet (1918) and full orchestra (1920).

* A bonus here is the original, extended version of *Pupazzetti's* opening 'March' that boasts a level of difficulty greater than, perhaps, Casella felt the work in its final form could comfortably accommodate. Its relative complexity serves to ink in the music's strident immediacy with telling definition.

Michael Quinn



* For reasons of space, the bonus track is only available on download.

Julian Jacobson and Mariko Brown piano duo

Since their formation in 2011 the piano duo of Julian Jacobson and Mariko Brown has quickly established itself as an ensemble of rare distinction, vitality and originality. Following their critically acclaimed debut in the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe's Summer Festival in July 2011, they have given many concerts in venues including Southbank Purcell Room (2014 and 2015), St John's Smith Square, Fairfield Halls, Blackheath Halls, Royal Academy of Music ('Music Past and Present' series), the Lower Machen Festival, Markson's Bösendorfer series, Warwick University, Brighton Fringe Festival, and throughout the UK. Abroad they have performed twice in the Madeira Piano Fest at the Teatro Municipal, Funchal, and they perform annually in France in the festival *Rencontres Musicales en Eygalières*. Their first CD, of music by Julian's father Maurice Jacobson, was released in 2014 on the Naxos label by the British Music Society.

With a repertoire firmly centred on the classics for piano duo repertoire, they also have a strong commitment to searching out neglected masterpieces, and – as composers as well as pianists – they maintain a strong and active involvement in contemporary music. Mariko's *Travels Through a Mist of Chinese Mountains* and Julian's *Palm Court Waltz* (in memory of Sir Richard Rodney Bennett) have both been performed to great acclaim. They gave the world première of the revised version of *After Braque* by Gary Carpenter in their Southbank debut in April 2014, and of Nathan Williamson's *Instinctive Ritual* in 2015. They have revived Debussy's neglected ballet masterpiece *Khamma*, performing it as a collaboration with dance. 2014 also saw the première at St John's Smith Square of Julian's virtuoso transcription of Gershwin's Second Rhapsody, which received excellent reviews, and in 2016 they premiered Julian's new transcription of Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. Also in 2016, in Manchester Art Gallery, they gave the premiere of Edward Lambert's *Aspects of Work*, written for the duo and inspired by the painting *Work* by Ford Madox Brown which is part of the gallery's permanent collection.

Julian Jacobson

In a career spanning more than four decades Julian Jacobson has won consistent praise as a pianist of uncommon range and distinction, giving concerts throughout the UK and in more than forty countries world wide. He has been particularly acclaimed for his many cycles of the complete Beethoven sonatas, three of which were "marathon" performances in a single day, and he has also been a strong advocate of contemporary music, giving UK premieres of composers such as Ligeti (Etudes Book 1, 1987), Xenakis, Takemitsu and Schnittke. A much sought after duo and ensemble pianist, he has partnered many leading UK and international soloists.

Jacobson was Head of Piano at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and is currently a Professor at the Royal College of Music London and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and Guest Professor at Xiamen University, China. He is Chairman of the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe.



Mariko Brown

Mariko Brown began her piano studies with Martyn Dyke. She made her first concerto appearance age nine under Ruth Gipps, subsequently studying at the Guildhall School Junior Department with Joan Havill where she won the prestigious Lutine Prize, leading to concerto appearances at the Barbican Hall and in the City of London Festival. She took up composition with Gary Carpenter and was awarded the Principal's Prize on graduation from the Junior Department.. She graduated from the Senior Department in 2000.



A dedicated teacher, Mariko taught for many years at Junior Guildhall and currently teaches at the Yehudi Menuhin School.

Most recently, in 2016 & 2017, Mariko performed the Grieg piano concerto with the Amati orchestra and LRO.