

Michael Blake

Afrikosmos



Antony Gray
Piano



Afrikosmos - Disc 1

1	Spotted Dikkop and Black Cuckoo	1:26
2	Linong tsa Lesiba (Song of the Birds)	1:09
3	African Doves (Homage to Messiaen)	1:50
4	If I had Wings I could fly (Trad. arr. Blake)	2:31
5	Walking Song (Homage to Percy Grainger)	1:53
6	Stroll to the Spaza Shop (Homage to Stanley Glasser)	1:43
7	Chorale (Homage to MMM)	2:17
8	Lyric Piece (Homage to Grieg)	3:45
9	Call and Response	1:19
10	Ntsikana's Bell (Ntsikana Gaba arr. Blake)	1:47
11	John Knox Bokwe's Plea for Africa	1:26
12	Heaven's Bow	4:36
13	iKos'tina	1:44
14	Variations on a Flute Tune	1:24
15	Emerging Melody	4:04
16	Stickfighting Song	0:53
17	Herding Song	1:18
18	Threshing Song	1:24
19	To comfort a child (Lullaby)	1:25
20	You are a real rascal	1:23
21	Canon at the Octave	1:14
22	Wedding Song	1:10
23	Night Music	9:43
24	Self Delective Song	1:27
25	Latshon'ilanga (The sun has set)	1:41
26	Song for the Evening (Trad. arr. Blake)	1:45
27	Unevensong	3:28



Afrikosmos - Disc 2

1	Dance in Seakhi Rhythm (Homage to Bartók and JP Mohapeloa)	3:21
2	Chaconne in Mbaqanga Style	1:40
3	In Goema Style	1:07
4	Tickey-draai	1:07
5	Daar kom die Alibama	1:11
6	Diary of a Dung Beetle	3:38
7	Scents of Childhood 1 (Homage to Robert Schumann)	1:33
8	Scents of Childhood 2 (Homage to Robert Schumann)	1:52
9	Scents of Childhood 3 (Homage to Schumann & Puccini)	7:37
10	Interlocking Hands	1:15
11	Changing Times with Repeating Patterns	2:37
12	Five Finger Patterns	1:29
13	Weave	2:18
14	Distant Cowbells	2:38
15	Lusikisiki	1:34
16	Giyani	4:39
17	There cried a hippo	3:17
18	Reedpipe Dance	2:40
19	Four-note Patterns	3:29
20	Slow Dance	1:41
21	Lebombo Bone	2:00
22	Broken Line	6:05

Total time 58:59



Afrikosmos - Disc 3

1	The music flows jolly as it won't stop forever (Perpetuum mobile)	1:39
2	March (Homage to Stefan Wolpe)	1:30
3	Message from the Nduna (Homage to György Kurtág)	2:06
4	Ituri Rain Forest (Homage to JSB)	1:36
5	Reflection (Homage to Erik Satie)	3:05
6	Two Modes Interlocking	2:15
7	In the Hexatonic Mode	0:49
8	Major-Minor	1:28
9	Patterns in a Heptatonic Field	4:17
10	Keep left, pass right	1:22
11	Geyser off! Hat on!	1:00
12	Stay on Path	1:24
13	The Seven Steps	1:15
14	Ostinato with Cross Rhythms	1:04
15	Smoke and Mirrors	1:06
16	Postcards from South Africa	1:28
17	Une Sonnerie pour G D	7:27
18	High Fives	3:18
19	Supermoon (Homage to Henry Cowell)	2:04
20	Sefapanosaurus	1:41
21	Thirds	1:28
22	Variations on 4ths and 5ths	1:38
23	Fifths	1:23
24	Seventh Must Fall	3:41
25	Haiku	1:57
26	Freedom Day Variation	4:26



Introduction

As a white South African-born composer, my identification with my birthplace has always been important to me in forging a compositional identity. My study of new music languages and forms both in South Africa and elsewhere has been equally important. Just as Villa-Lobos, Ginastera, Revueltas, Stravinsky, Janáček, Sculthorpe, Copland and notably, Béla Bartók used indigenous music from their respective countries to develop their musical languages, so have I. Unlike Bartók however, who recorded a great deal of music in the field, transcribing it, orchestrating it, and developing a folk-inflected modernist language, I have largely relied on the fieldwork of people who have worked in southern Africa, through their transcriptions and recordings. Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* was a major outcome of his fieldwork. It had a huge influence on me when I was a young pianist, and as a composition student I found it a vast and invaluable compendium of compositional techniques. It therefore became a model for my *Afrikosmos*.

Mikrokosmos and Afrikosmos

Mikrokosmos includes pieces, studies and exercises for beginners to more advanced pianists. The composer saw it as a series of pieces in different styles, representing a cosmos in miniature, the “world of the little ones, the children”, as Péter Bartók wrote in his Foreword to Boosey & Hawkes’ definitive 1987 Edition of *Mikrokosmos*. Since 2003, when I wrote a piano piece called *iKos’tina* for the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music’s Spectrum 4 (compiled by Thalia Myers), I have had in mind a project that follows Bartók’s approach in his six volumes, starting with the simplest pieces and working towards the more advanced ones in the final volume. In what became *Afrikosmos*, I explore in as comprehensive a way as possible the range of traditional music in sub-Saharan Africa. Each of my six volumes follows roughly the same format, with pieces that fall into the following genres: studies, pieces focusing on rhythm and texture, character pieces, dances, pieces exploring a mode or scale, folksong arrangements and variations, transcriptions, and homages.

Only a few pieces are piano transcriptions of existing music. Most of them draw on traditional African techniques that include the anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which is a five-note scale with no semitones (for example D-E-G-A-B); Xhosa bow harmony, which is basically two



triads built on the two fundamental pitches of an uhadi bow (for example C-E-G and D-F#-A); the hexatonic bow scale that results from the combination of bow chords (C-D-E-F#-G-A - not to be confused with the whole-tone hexatonic scale used by Debussy); interlocking, in which different parts alternate to create a single line and give an impression of great speed; and polyrhythm, where simultaneous contrasting rhythms combine to create complex rhythmic textures.

Themes Running Throughout Afrikosmos

The 75 pieces in Afrikosmos are arranged into three hour-long programmes, each spanning all levels of difficulty and broadly following similar themes such as 'song', 'homages', 'popular music', 'patterning', 'cycles', and 'musical nuts and bolts'. These themes run throughout Afrikosmos as I now explain. CD and track numbers are given in square brackets.

Song: Birdsong

The first disc opens with invocations of African birdsong. **Spotted Dikkop and Black Cuckoo [1.01]** explores the call of the spotted dikkop (or thick-knee), and introduces the black cuckoo's song as a coda. **African Doves (Homage to Messiaen) [1.03]** reminds us that their call is one of the most distinctive sounds of Africa and this piece uses three calls, transcribed, harmonised and elaborated – in the spirit of Olivier Messiaen. In between is a study for the left hand, **Linong tsa lesiba (Song of the Birds) [1.02]**, which paraphrases the music of the lesiba, the national instrument of Lesotho. This one-string mouth-resonated bow produces vibrations created by the use of a flattened quill, and the resultant scale is limited to a fundamental and three overtones.

Song: Xhosa Music

It is in the Eastern Cape on the south coast of Africa, that many pieces in Afrikosmos have their origins, using the Xhosa hexatonic scale or bow harmonies based on two adjacent chords. In the **Hexatonic Mode [3.07]** demonstrates these, with its six-note melody and its inversion and underpinned by a two-bar ostinato bass. **iKos'tina [1.13]** ('concertina' in



isiXhosa), conjures up one of the imported instruments adapted for local use. Cyclic form also plays a major role in music for the one-string bows (uhadi and umrhubhe) and isitolotolo (known elsewhere in the world as the jaw harp or Jew's harp), as demonstrated in *Heaven's Bow* and *Lebombo Bone*.

***Heaven's Bow* [1.12]** (a mis-translation of 'arc-en-ciel' or rainbow) reinterprets a song from the bow repertoire of the legendary Xhosa virtuoso, Nofinishi Dywili. The complexity of her rhythmic invention exceeded that of most other bow players in South Africa, and in this piece that complexity is synthesised with contemporary Western rhythmic techniques and phrasing. ***Lebombo Bone* [2.21]** is an ancient bone tool discovered in the Lebombo Mountains between South Africa and eSwatini (Swaziland), its incised 29 notches suggesting its use as a lunar calendar. My minimalist *Lebombo Bone* transcribes isitolotolo music and adds variations. ***Diary of a Dung Beetle* [2.06]** is based on the most well-known traditional Xhosa song *uGqongqothwane*, made famous as a popular song - *The Click Song* - by Miriam Makeba. The dung beetle is a familiar insect that produces a clicking sound as it makes its slow journey across mounds of animal dung and the title of this piece refers to *From the Diary of a Fly* in Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*.

Song: Hymns and Bells

***Call and Response* [1.09]** is cast in that centuries old song-form, as is ***Ntsikana's Bell* [1.10]**, an arrangement of Chief Ntsikana Gaba's 200-year old *Great Hymn*, in which the overtones of the piano, with bass keys silently depressed and held, resonate when the notes of the hymn are struck. ***John Knox Bokwe's Plea for Africa* [1.11]**, written later in the 19th century, is one of the most loved Xhosa Christian songs. Bells have often inspired composers and ***Une Sonnerie pour G D* [3.17]**, a memorial for Gabriele Delius, is made up of just two chords. Marin Marais's bell piece *Sonnerie de Sainte-Genève du Mont de Paris* (*The Bells of St. Genevieve*), on a three-note bass, provides a model in the background. The church bells in Bellagio, where *Afrikosmos* was conceived, inspired ***High Fives* [3.18]**, a sort of change ringing, varying short melodic cells. The music's high five-note clusters emulate the dissonant overtones of the bells.



There are bell sounds in Bartók too, and ***Emerging Melody* [1.15]** with its haunting melodies at extremes of register and passages of quartal harmony in constant changes of time-signature (4/4, 5/4, 3/4) is reminiscent of Bartók. Equally mysterious is ***Night Music* [1.23]** which, as a style, was pioneered by Bartók, notably in his piano suite *Out of Doors*, where unusual sonorities conjure up the sounds of the night. My *Night Music* is both calm and eerie, its middle section summoning up an ancient Xhosa melody played in octaves.

Song: Work Songs and Domestic Songs

These make up a large part of African traditional repertoire, as witnessed in ***Stick Fighting Song* [1.16]** based on a traditional Nguni tune, ***Herding Song* [1.17]** with the hands unusually mirroring each other and ***Threshing Song* [1.18]** accompanied by a finger click on the second beat of each bar. ***To Comfort a Child (Lullaby)* [1.19]** is based on a traditional Xhosa song, the melody divided between the hands, and is reworked as a ***Canon at the Octave* [1.21]**. (Canons often turn up in both *Mikrokosmos* and Xhosa music.) ***Wedding Song* [1.22]** is again adapted from a traditional song, and ***You are a real rascal* [1.20]** reimagines a Xhosa bow song, while the reflective ***Latshon'ilanga (The sun has set)* [1.25]**, is also the title of a Xhosa bow song for girls' initiation and of a popular song by Mackay Davashe.

From the north, again, is the easy-going ***Self Delectative Song* [1.24]**, based on the Tswana bow song *Ngana Wu Lela*. It is characterised by melodic variation, changes of time-signature and interlocking. ***Song for the Evening* [1.26]** is one of John Blacking's transcriptions of Venda songs and uses a pentatonic scale with an accompaniment derived from Venda panpipe music in 12/8 time, which most closely resembles the 12-beat pattern of much African music.

Homages

Western art music's role in my composition is equal to that of African music and so *Afrikosmos* has more than a dozen homages, to composers whose music has helped me forge my compositional identity. ***Stroll to the Spaza Shop (Homage to Stanley Glasser)* [1.06]** plays on the title of Glasser's *Walk to the Country Store* from his multi-volume piano collection, *Bric à brac*. (A spaza shop is the South African equivalent of a 7/11 store.) ***Lyric Piece***



(Homage to Grieg) [1.08], explores melodic variation based on the Xhosa scale with adapted bow accompaniment and references Edvard Grieg's ten books of harmonically adventurous *Lyric Pieces*.

Walking Song (Homage to Percy Grainger) [1.05] celebrates an activity ubiquitous on the African continent. It is composed in Seakhi rhythm - a SeSotho additive metre of 3+3+2 quavers, like the Bulgarian rhythm Bartók uses - and refers to Grainger's *Walking Tune*. The same metre lies behind **Dance in Seakhi Rhythm (Homage to Bartók and JP Mohapeloa) [2.01]**, whose melody uses just two pitches, D and E, and whose structure is akin to film editing, with techniques such as cross-cutting, gradually building into scale-like figures and becoming increasingly chromatic.

There are three homages to Robert Schumann, who music I have always cherished. An idea came to me walking in Newlands Forest, Cape Town as the scent of the pines transported me back five decades, when as a young boy I took walks there. **Scents of Childhood I (Homage to Robert Schumann) [2.07]** takes its material entirely from Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes of Childhood*), using the techniques of cut-and-paste (from collage) and chance (from John Cage). **Scents of Childhood (2) (Homage to Robert Schumann) [2.08]** applies cut-and-paste to Schumann's *Waldszenen* (*Forest Scenes*) as well, making a kind of rondo form. **Scents of Childhood (3) (Homage to Schumann & Puccini) [2.09]**, also draws on *Waldszenen* and adds another memorable scent from my childhood – chrysanthemums – by quoting from Puccini's string quartet I *Crisantemi* - which is overlaid with Schumann to create new chords.

Sotho composer Michael Mosoeu Moerane admired Schumann, and **Chorale (Homage to MMM) [1.07]** transforms and fragments one of his most beautiful choral songs *Sylvia*. **March (Homage to Stefan Wolpe) [3.02]** has an ostinato bass, and a melody characterised by diminution and augmentation of its note-values. **Message from the Nduna (Homage to György Kurtág) [3.03]**, transposes, inverts and combines in contrary motion a handful of notes, treating them rather like the twelve-note row in serial music. (The 'Nduna' is the chief or 'headman' in an amaXhosa village.) **Reflection (Homage to Erik Satie) [3.05]** has elements of French baroque unmeasured music and echoes Erik Satie's pared down soundworld.

As a kid, it was Bach who made me want to compose. **Ituri Rain Forest (Homage to JSB) [3.04]** was inspired by a field recording of flute music from the Ituri Rain Forest (Congo),



something about the musical figuration of which reminded me of Bach's writing for solo instruments, although its repetitive structure is closer to African and minimalist music. Another flute tune from the Ituri Rain Forest is harmonised, with variations - one faster, one slower - in ***Variations on a Flute Tune [1.14]***.

Popular Music

Snapshots of popular traditional styles form a group on the second disc. ***Chaconne in Mbaqanga Style [2.02]*** synthesises the classical baroque form with the popular South African three-chord style. ***Daar kom die Alibama [2.05]*** is a traditional song in the Cape Malay community about the American confederate ship arriving in Table Bay, and my arrangement evokes the sound of the guitars and banjos that these musicians play. ***In Goema Style [2.03]*** also evokes the rhythm and the goema drum of Cape 'minstrel' music, which is performed especially around the traditional 'second new year' (2 January). The minimalist ***Tickey-draai [2.04]*** evokes a traditional Afrikaans dance characterised by a tiny step moving in a circle, hence the title, which literally means 'turning on a ticky' (a threepenny piece in pre-decimal British currency).

Patterning

Making patterns is fundamental to dance-making, and some *Afrikosmos* pieces are particularly concerned with that skill, for example ***Five Finger Patterns [2.12]*** which makes melodic patterns with the pentatonic scale (G-A-B-D-E) and ***Four-note Patterns [2.19]***, a minimalist piece that systematically sets out all the possible intervallic and rhythmic permutations of the opening four-note figure. The melodic line is enhanced by the shimmering effect of overtones produced by the fundamental notes held down by the left hand. The hypnotic ***Slow Dance [2.20]***, built on two harmonies, also permutes three- and four-note melodic patterns. Then ***Changing Times with Repeating Patterns [2.11]*** draws on Tonga bow music from Zimbabwe, but casts it in (sometimes irregular) changing time-signatures, untypical of the original Tonga music.

Patterning is as integral to African weaving as it is to music, and cyclic form demonstrates this beautifully, for example in music for the 'mbira dza vadzimu' (thumb piano). ***Weave [2.13]***



brings together some old and new Zimbabwean mbira variations from my 1976 harpsichord piece *Ground Weave*. The mbira tradition was perhaps to South African composers what the gamelan was to French composers in the early 20th century. I like to think that inventive players can extend the piece by making their own variations.

Cycles

African traditional music is for the most part constructed in cycles, whether for reedpipe or xylophone ensembles or for solo instruments like the thumb piano and one-string bow. Steve Reich and other minimalist composers have made extensive use of cyclic form and several pieces in *Afrikosmos* are variations on cyclic patterns from several regions of Africa, including Uganda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. *If I had wings I could fly* [1.04] is a traditional Ugandan amadinda xylophone piece, characterised by interlocking rhythms - one or two players fitting their notes between those of another or others - and use of the pentatonic scale. In my arrangement, all the parts are of course played by one musician. *Patterns in a Heptatonic Field* [3.09] draws on another xylophone tradition, timbila, from Mozambique in south-east Africa. I explore melodic and rhythmic patterns here, with some passages in 5/16. Another cyclic piece is *Reedpipe Dance* [2.18], a transcription of the Tshikona panpipe or reedpipe dance of the Venda. The cycle is a sequence of seven chords which are continually re-voiced and rhythmically varied. A Tshikona performance may last an hour or more and so this piece gives a very short portrait of the dance. Similarly, *There Cried a hippo* [2.17] is a variation on the traditional Nyanga panpipe dance, focusing on its harmony rather than its interlocking rhythm and dance movements.

Musical Nuts and Bolts

Scales, intervals and rhythm are featured more centrally in a range of pieces scattered throughout *Afrikosmos*. It was Bartók's way of combining modes and keys that inspired *Two Modes Interlocking* [3.06], which combines the hexatonic Xhosa bow scale on C in the right hand (all white notes) with an anhemitonic pentatonic scale on C# (all black notes) in the left hand, resulting in bitonal or bimodal tonality. This solemn piece commemorates the passing of the great Ghanaian scholar and composer, J H Kwabena Nketia. *Major-Minor* [3.08], with left



hand in major and right hand in minor keys, suggests an ambiguous tonality - not necessarily African - and the music is propelled along by polyrhythm and interlocking.

Although the tuning of traditional African instruments would give intervals a different timbre, we can nevertheless approximate them on the piano. Several pieces based on one interval, for example ***Thirds* [3.21]** where the intervals are heard both horizontally in repeated quavers and vertically as widely-spaced chords. In ***Fifths* [3.23]**, the fifths and their inversions, fourths, are sometimes piled on each other, sometimes move in contrary motion, the extensive repetition of figures making this piece sound like a little Stravinskian machine. Bathed in pedal, ***Variations on 4ths and 5ths* [3.22]** explores the open-sounding sonorities of the two intervals which feature often in *Afrikosmos*. ***Seventh Must Fall* [3.24]** was a response to the 'RhodesMustFall' and 'FeesMustFall' student protest campaigns in South Africa during 2015-16, and I wrote it while visiting Cape Town during their height. It challenges the rule of common practice harmony in which a major seventh 'must' rise to the tonic and the minor seventh fall to the sixth. All the sevenths fall in this slow piece, which marks out a reflective space to which one can retreat in an often volatile and violent world.

Some very specific rhythmic ideas play out in pieces from the earlier volumes: ***Interlocking Hands* [2.10]** demonstrates a characteristically African technique; ***Ostinato with Cross-rhythms* [3.14]** has a simple 2 against 3 rhythm; ***Smoke and Mirrors* [3.15]** presents its material in an entirely symmetrical way with the bass working its way down from E to C; and ***Postcards from South Africa* [3.16]** had a bizarre genesis in my experience of the South African Post Office, when writer Stephen Gray sent me a postcard in December 2019 that arrived six months later and the next postcard took only three months. At that point we agreed the postal service was definitely improving. The piece borrows an idea from Bartók's *Increasing-Diminishing*, moving from semibreves to minims to crotchets and smaller note-values, and back again.

Melodic Line

Melodic line is often hidden or inherent in African music, and sometimes one performer's task is to make it clear. ***The music flows jolly as it won't stop forever* [3.01]** is a perpetuum mobile that explores the textures of harmony while melodic fragments pop out here and there.



Broken Line [2.22] is an essay in monody, the constant chordal elements simply propelling the linear design. The overall image is of a line that proceeds despite all attempts to overwrite, divert or break it. It's like those early Kandinskian lines that survive storms, cannons, knights on horses and crumbling castles. It is music with ragged edges and a silent core, a searching for inner silence. The enormous challenge to the performer is to identify that line and sustain it. **Unevensong [1.27]** melody pops up all over the place in uneven rhythms, with an accompaniment that is sometimes even in a different key.

Experiments, Signposts and Places

Henry Cowell's (1897-1965) early experiments with extended piano technique inspired **Supermoon (Homage to Henry Cowell) [3.19]** which calls for strumming directly on the strings of the piano. This eerie effect conjures up a supermoon, when the full moon coincides with the moon's closest approach to earth in its orbit and seems nearer and brighter than usual. **Sefapanosaurus [3.20]** is a graphic score using symbols to depict the long extinct sefapanosaurus (Sesotho 'sefapano' = cross and the Greek 'saurus' = lizard), an early herbivorous dinosaur, portions of which were excavated in the late 1930s in the Zastron district in South Africa, near the Lesotho border. The experiment here has the player wearing woollen gloves to easily execute glissandi and clusters on the keyboard.

Sometimes signposts can get ideas flowing. **Stay on Path [3.12]** is a familiar sign in the grounds of Villa Serbelloni (Bellagio, Italy) where *Afrikosmos* was conceived, to remind residents and visitors to keep off the grass. (It could also be a reminder to stay focused.) **Keep left, pass right [3.10]** came to me when I was travelling along the N2 in the Eastern Cape, where the sign 'Keep left, pass right' appears regularly for motorists, and as I was driving I envisaged a piano piece in which the left and right hands did just that. **Geyser off! Hat on! [3.11]** was a handwritten reminder on the back of our front door during a hot Cape Town summer; and **The Seven Steps [3.13]** refers to the seven degrees of the major and minor scales and modes. It is also a famous historical landmark in District Six, Cape Town, a once thriving multi-racial area of the city that was destroyed by the apartheid government. **Distant Cowbells [2.14]** was inspired by the sound you hear when walking in the hills around the village of Morija, Lesotho; the cowbells are represented by high semitone clusters in free rhythm, deliberately sounding cacophonous. **Lusikisiki [2.15]**, its onomatopoeic name



derived from the rustling of reeds in the wind, is a remote town in the Eastern Cape; and **Giyani [2.16]**, a town in Limpopo Province and the birthplace of dear friends, Musa Nkuna and Tintswalo Khosa. It paints a portrait of them and their family, and Giyani and is partly based on a Tsonga children's song, as transcribed by Thomas F Johnston.

Haiku [3.25] is inspired by Graham Dukas's poem about post-1994 South Africa, *The Archbishop's Lament*:

*Eventually
they dismantled the rainbow
colour by colour*

Musical pitches substitute for words in this haiku of 5-7-5 syllables, while the melody of the South African national anthem is reduced to 17 long sustained notes, blended together by continuous use of the sustaining pedal. **Freedom Day Variation [3.26]** uses a South African 'struggle' song, introduced to me by composer-activist Makhaya Mjana, in whose memory it was written. The theme is briefly quoted at bar 50, but otherwise the fragmented variations flow continuously together.

Note: The support of the Rockefeller Foundation is gratefully acknowledged. A residency at the Bellagio Rockefeller Center in June 2015 provided the initial impetus for *Afrikosmos* and I completed the project five years later in June 2020. In August 2021, Antony Gray premiered most of the pieces in a soirée held in Le Genesteix in the salon of Stephen Pettitt, near my home in France and he gave the first African performance of a selection of pieces in September 2022 in my home town, Cape Town. The pieces are dedicated to friends, colleagues, former students, and some who have passed.





Antony Gray - piano

The Australian pianist, Antony Gray was educated in Victoria, Australia. He graduated from the Victorian College of Arts where he studied with Roy Shepherd and Stephen McIntyre, winning several awards and prizes, including the Allans Keyboard Award two years running. In 1982 he received a scholarship from the Astra foundation to continue his studies in London with Joyce Rathbone and Geoffrey Parsons.

Based now in London, he has long been regarded as one of the most interesting and communicative performers of his generation. His career to date has encompassed solo and chamber music performances around the world, as well as regular recordings for CD and radio. He has been a (selective) champion of contemporary music and has premiered many pieces written for him. He has also championed many neglected composers such as George Enescu, Dussek and Martinu. From his time at College he has been a champion of many living composers, and his work with Australian composers Malcolm Williamson and John Carmichael has been particularly productive.

Antony Gray was one of ABC Classics' most prolific recording artists, having recorded fourteen discs of solo piano music for the label, as well as featuring on a recital disc for KNS Classical and a number of other recording projects. Recordings already released are the complete solo piano works of Eugene Goossens, Malcolm Williamson (this recording has been included in a recent survey of 1001 recordings to hear before you die) and John Carmichael, as well as the late piano pieces of Johannes Brahms, a 3 disc set of Bach transcriptions, including several written specially for the recording, and a 5 disc set of the complete piano works of Francis Poulenc, including a number of works recorded for the first time, all on ABC Classics.

Antony Gray's recent Divine Art albums of piano works by Saint-Saëns have met with great success and glowing reviews.

Michael Blake - composer

Michael Blake, South African born composer and pianist, was based in London from 1977, returning to the 'New South Africa' twenty years later. Apart from teaching composition at several universities, he was responsible for a number of post-apartheid New Music initiatives – including joining the ISCM, and setting up a new music festival and composers meeting – which aimed to improve the status of composition after the divisive years of apartheid. His musical language is partly the result of an immersion in the materials and playing techniques of African music, but also drawing on virtually any found material, and is influenced by both experimental film and African weaving techniques. His works have been widely played, in Toronto, New York, Havana, Buenos Aires, Mexico, Australia, India, Japan, and throughout Europe and Africa, and now appears on some 15 CDs. Since 2015 he has lived in rural France with his wife, musicologist and writer Christine Lucia, and their Breton spaniel Dollie, but spends part of each year in Cape Town, where he is honorary professor of experimental composition in the Africa Open Institute at Stellenbosch University.

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Il Maestro e lo Scolare

Antony Gray - piano

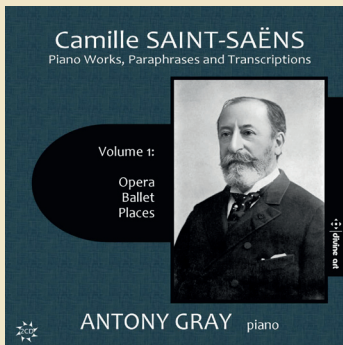
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Very few of these works have attained any sort of public awareness. Though written deliberately with one 'easy' part for the learner, the pieces are thoroughly delightful and never simplistic: indeed they display all the hallmarks of Romantic, Impressionist (and in two cases jazz-inspired) music-making of high quality and all make for extremely entertaining and pleasant listening.

"Everything here is a gratifying listening experience and the untainted enjoyment of Gray's participating pupils is palpable."
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DDA 21234





Camille Saint-Saëns: Piano Works, Paraphrases and Transcriptions, volumes 1 & 2

Antony Gray - piano

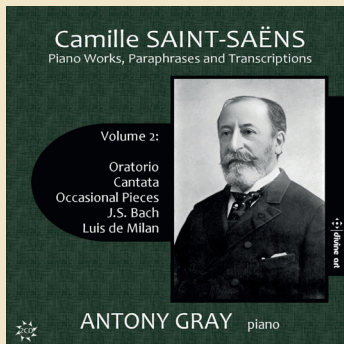
Saint-Saëns was a talented composer, conductor, pianist, and organist. He composed over 160 works, including operas, ballets, and symphonies, but much of his work is neglected today. He is mostly known for a few works such as the Organ Symphony, Samson et Dalila, Danse Macabre and Carnival of the Animals. His original piano pieces are considered light salon works but are enjoyable. He also made many transcriptions of his own works and others, but was overshadowed by Franz Liszt.

These companion albums include first recordings of some of his lesser-known keyboard gems, introducing them to a new audience.

"The notably-gifted Australian-born pianist Antony Gray continues his valuable traversal of the complete solo piano music of Camille Saint-Saëns. This second set of CDs maintains the high standard of insight, technical command and recording quality. A landmark in solo piano repertoire recording history. A remarkable and valuable achievement, comprehensively recommended." — Robert Matthew-Walker - Musical Opinion

Volume 1 DDA 21235

Volume 2 DDA 21236



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Antony Gray



Michael Blake