

Seria Ludo

Piano music by Graham Lynch

Paul Sánchez | Albert Kim

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Piano Music by Graham Lynch (b.1957)

White Book 3 (2020)	23:03
1 I. Seria Ludo	2:17
2 II. The Hesperides	4:42
3 III. Glow	2:20
4 IV. The Rhine	8:50
5 V. Landscapes with Angels	4:53
6 Absolute Inwardness (2020)	9:13
7 The Couperin Sketchbooks (2020)	9:26
White Book 2 (2008)	24:39
8 I. Undiscovered Islands	3:15
9 II. Night Journey to Cordoba	5:18
10 III. Dragon	4:26
11 IV. Inner Moon	5:20
12 V. The Sadness of the King	3:00
13 VI. Toques	3:19
14 Ay! (2006)	10:04
Total playing time	76:27

Paul Sánchez (tracks 1-7, 14)

Albert Kim (tracks 8-13)

The Music

(1) – notes by Paul Sánchez

Seria Ludo, with its focus on new piano works by Graham Lynch, came to life through a series of happy coincidences. In early 2018, I'd been working with colleagues in developing a colloquium on Sappho, bringing together classicists, poets, and musicians to celebrate Sappho's living legacy. A performance of my song cycle on Sherod Santos' translations of Sappho's poems – which I'd dedicated to my wife, Kayleen, as a wedding gift many years before – would be part of the final event. We'd invited Dr. Diane Rayor, one of the world's foremost translators of Sappho, to be the keynote speaker at that same event, and when she learned that music would be central to the festivities, she informed us that Graham Lynch had just composed a song cycle on her own Sappho translations. I wrote to Graham, and he graciously shared the score and offered Kayleen and me the opportunity to premiere *Sappho Fragments* at the colloquium. Kayleen and I were immediately struck by Graham's compositional voice: poetic, evocative, nuanced, aphoristic. We performed the world premiere in February, and sent a recording of the performance to Graham, who received it favorably. Thus began a lively and ongoing correspondence on music, art, poetry, philosophy, and life.

In June, with the momentum of the successful *Sappho Fragments* debut still fueling our discussion, Graham and I were in contact about the possibility of his composing solo piano works for me. Graham suggested a third *White Book*, and, having listened to the two then-extant *White Books*, I was delighted at the prospect. Just a

few months later, at the 2018 San Francisco International Piano Festival, my New Piano Collective colleague Albert Kim performed the United States premiere of Graham's *White Book 2*. Albert's performance, not surprisingly, was moving, insightful, sensitive and powerful. I approached him about the possibility of recording some of Graham's piano music together for an album, and including both *White Book 2* and also *White Book 3*.

Graham sent the first drafts of the first movement of *White Book 3* to me in March of 2019, and in September of 2019, the first sketch of the complete work. In March of 2020, Graham shared the score of *The Couperin Sketchbooks*, and in April, the first version of *Absolute Inwardness*. The two works seemed to be a natural fit alongside *White Book 2* and *White Book 3*, and so we decided to include them on the upcoming album. Given our shared interest in Spanish music, and in flamenco and *cante jondo*, in particular, Graham and I were very keen on including one of his earlier works, *Ay!*, as well. He continued to make minor adjustments to *White Book 3* all the way up until the week of the recording sessions, in June of 2020.

Graham's music speaks for itself, and in these recordings I've done my best to do justice to his work and at the same time to share my own understanding as interpreter. In case it may be of some interest, however, I'll share here a bit of my perspective from the pianistic standpoint. Graham's piano writing is *detailed*! An example from measures 7–9 of *Seria Ludo* may be illustrative. The right hand in these three measures has three distinct layers: the top voice is comprised of a lilting figure presented in two-note-slur groups, and this voice often crosses the middle voice; the middle and bottom voices are non-legato, and move in slower note values than the top

voice; the bottom voice is often tied while the top two voices move. Voicing – the act of deciding which voice will be most prominent at any given moment, which will be least-audible-yet-still-present, and which will be in the middle ground – is a technical challenge in this dense texture. The voice crossing within the right hand, in conjunction with the conflicting articulations, requires a tangled web of finger substitutions, all moving at breakneck speed. The left hand, meanwhile, is also comprised of a three-voice texture: its top voice is often tied over the two lower voices, which move more frequently; the bottom two voices are detailed and constantly shifting in articulation, moving between staccato, non-legato, and legato markings under the tied notes of the top voice. In these three measures, the various articulations of one hand almost never coincide with those of the other hand. Detailed dynamic indications are also present, and, of course, most importantly, the pianist's job is to execute the composer's writing in a manner that makes sense and is musically convincing. This level of detail is typical of Graham's piano writing.

Graham is a master of his craft, and so all of this detail is integral to the music. Technical challenges abound in his writing, and often stem *from* the detail, as the same notes could be played in much simpler ways if not for the requirements of the specific articulations and complex layering so integral to his music. Virtuoso passagework, in a more traditional sense, is also part of his writing, but is never present merely for show, for its own sake. Rather, it always serves a musical purpose, and is all the more effective for it.

Part of the great joy – and also the challenge – of learning new music is in exploring something that has previously only existed in a

composer's mind. We have no tradition to guide our interpretation, and so questions as basic as structure and phrasing are often a mystery to be wrestled with. In many moments, these questions have obvious answers, but in others, only a process of experimentation leads one to an understanding which, one hopes, is convincing (and may or may not be what the composer actually had in mind!). *The Rhine*, the fourth movement of *White Book 3*, is a densely constructed, highly textured, monstrously detailed work requiring both the utmost delicacy and also the most ferociously invested pianistic intensity. Its labyrinthine structure remained shrouded in mystery to me for many weeks, but its ways were slowly revealed as I grappled with its many pianistic challenges arising from the work's intricate layers, its virtuosic passagework and arabesque filigree.

While Graham's music is often highly complex, every note is vital and every marking essential. All has purpose, all comes together to create art that has been distilled to its essence. While the five movements of *White Book 3* are integral to the work as a whole, *Landscapes with Angels*, the final movement, is perhaps its spiritual heart. From a pianistic perspective, Graham has given me the opportunity to do my two favorite things at the piano in this movement: to explore color with sound, and to embark on an impossible-to-attain-yet-worthy-of-the-attempt poetic journey to a transcendent dimension. His work is a vast landscape rife with possibility; his angels are apparitions of terrifying aspect, inspiringly beautiful yet beyond our capacity to understand. Only a true genius, a master composer, could create a work of such numinous quality and profound meaning. I'm honored to share this new music by Graham Lynch with the world for the first time, and to be a part of its story.

Paul Sánchez

The Music

(2) – notes by the Composer

Seria Ludo - ‘serious matters treated in a playful spirit’. This is the title of the first piece from *White Book 3*, a set of five works that take their inspiration from the paintings and woodcuts of British artist Christopher Le Brun. This ludic spirit also characterises other pieces on the recording, with their lightness of touch, balletic fluidity of movement, and their sudden transitions and diversions. Set against these works is a more recent development to my composing, drawing on aspects of German Romanticism, and these more introspective and reflective characteristics appear in compositions such as *Absolute Inwardness*. This distinction between the ‘seen’ world – the city as spectacle, and the countryside as apparition – and the ‘interior’ world, runs through all of my works, as they position themselves on a spectrum between these poles of experience.

The pieces on this recording fall into two periods; after composing *Ay!* and *White Book 2* in 2006/8, I wrote very little for piano until a recent commission from Paul Sánchez inspired a number of pieces, *White Book 3*, *Absolute Inwardness*, and *The Couperin Sketchbooks*. Despite the chronological gap, and some stylistic evolutions, there are consistent themes and processes in all the music, notably its frequently close relationship to art and literature.

Central to my thinking is the notion that musical communication is more fully realised when structures can be perceived; and, furthermore, that each individual idea should have a sharply defined identity which also contributes to the unfolding discourse. If the language of the music has

clarity – through motif and melody, dissonance and resolution, lucidity of texture – then meaningful form becomes possible and this enhances the music's ability to reach out to a listener's sensibilities and emotions. Each piece is a journey in sound into an inner landscape, but whilst there are startling changes of direction or unforeseen encounters, the route is always clearly charted. In some pieces, such as *The Hesperides*, the individuality of the self-contained ideas builds into a mosaic structure; and in others like *The Rhine*, the more singular characteristics of the piece briefly emerge from the incessant flowing patterns of the music.

Another element in my work is the occasional use of dance rhythms; at times explicit, at other times as in *Night Journey to Cordoba*, more subtle and lurking implicitly in the depths of the music. For centuries, in composers as diverse as Purcell, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and even the members of the Second Viennese School, dance rhythms ghosted in the background, or leaped to centre stage in waltzes and mazurkas. However, many post war classical composers have consciously distanced their styles from popular music, and consequently the often intimate connection to vivid dance rhythms has been severed. At a much earlier point in my career I spent a couple of years writing music inspired by the spell of tango nuevo, and this experience, as well as a fascination with flamenco, had a deep effect on later works such as *The Sadness of the King* and *Ay!* At the same time, small waltz fragments are sometimes tucked away within more extended passages, creating momentary changes of colour and mood whose magical presences are almost gone before they can be assimilated. These emotional gear shifts, with their subtle changes of nuance and temperament, are like signs in the landscape pointing backwards to recollections and involuntary memories. Dance rhythms have their own intoxication that stay long in the mind.

I have never particularly engaged with the idea of music as a process of linear development that unfolds a musical argument towards a conclusion, and my piano writing has often been shorter in length, aiming for a compression and crystallisation of design. This tendency is best seen in the White Books, where each piece can often take a year or more to evolve, undergoing many transformations before reaching the final version in which every note has its part to play.

I have this desire to create stable worlds of musical meaning before opening doors and windows into other places, exemplified in the transcendent ending of *Landscapes with Angels*. In other pieces, different worlds coexist side by side, as in *The Couperin Sketchbooks*, where my own material, juxtaposed with small fragments from the *ordres* of Couperin, creates a balanced and connective relationship between two different composers. This is not musical quotation in the manner it's frequently used – a well known motif, like a musical personality, making a surprise appearance in an unconnected way – rather, I chose somewhat ordinary moments from Couperin's pieces that have the essence of his style, rather than better known and more easily recognisable themes.

Throughout this recording there is a continual ebb and flow between complexity and simplicity, each tidal change offering a fresh vision of a particular piece. Sometimes these create significant challenges for the pianist, such as in the opening of *Seria Ludo* where complex and subtle finger substitutions allow a halo to build around the sound, creating tiny dots of harmonic light. The pyrotechnics of *Dragon* require a different, but equally virtuosic approach that becomes a wild ride along a series of swirling lines. At the same time there is also restraint and simplicity, as in the section called *Sylvie, or the Virtuous One*, from *The Couperin Sketchbooks*. This childlike melody has an innocent quality springing from

one of Couperin's favourite musical markings, 'Naïvement'; Diderot shared Couperin's love of the idea, and consciously broadened the use of the word *naïveté* into an aesthetic credo: '*All that is true is not naïve, but all that is naïve is true, but with a truth that is alluring, original, and rare*'. What Diderot saw in the paintings of Poussin, one of my favourite artists, was that the figures were perfectly and purely what they ought to be. This is a quality that the music aspires to at times, where there is no transformation or becoming, but instead the detached and timeless nature of a self-complete idea. At other moments there can be an otherworldly quality which becomes evocative (*Undiscovered Islands*) or which allows the music to stand still, exploring the pure quality of sound as experience, harmony as expressive colour without function (*Inner Moon*).

This oscillation between the quotidian and the sublime, reality and dream, and music as process or symbol, means that there is no *a priori* compositional system at work here. Each piece is a long journey of discovery that absorbs many influences along the way, and the end point is often a surprise even to myself, where solutions emerge at the last moment to solidify the music into its final form.

White Book 3

The initial impetus for the White Books series came from the harpsichord ordres of François Couperin – short keyboard pieces which have been likened to miniature tone poems. The first two White Books, composed in 2001 and 2008, displayed a diverse variety of influences, including Matisse, Klee, and Lorca, amongst others, whilst the music evoked many real and imaginary places. However, with *White Book 3* there is a shift of creative direction, as the work of Christopher Le Brun provides a strong

unifying conception to the whole set. I have known the work of Le Brun for many years, although previous attempts to compose music responding to his paintings proved unsatisfying and never came to fruition. One of the appeals of Le Brun's art is its very wide range of emotional and technical outcomes, which includes both abstract and figurative paintings, as well as sculpture and woodcuts; each artwork has a clearly defined field of operation whose possibilities can encompass landscape, nature, archetypal imagery, and much more. Echoing my fascination with the visual arts is Le Brun's ongoing creative engagement with classical music, and this includes a recent exhibition and publication called 'Composer', within which are paintings with titles such as *Pelléas*, *Bax*, *Middle C*, and *Symphony*. His choices of music on BBC Radio 3's 'Private Passions' featured both Poulenc and Debussy, as well as Schoenberg and Wagner, and I made a point of echoing this French/German relationship in *White Book 3*.

The first three pieces of the set have surface qualities of colour and light, and move easily from one to the next. *Seria Ludo* has a playful, free-wheeling energy, spiced with syncopations and a devil-may-care attitude to every gesture that rushes past. *The Hesperides* tunes into the magical and enigmatic zone of imagery created by Le Brun's painting of the same name, at times conjuring translucent harmonies from the piano that counterpoint the balanced tread of the opening and closing sections. And finally, *Glow*, where constantly shifting foreground rhythms are framed within a more regular, formal architectural structure. These pieces, I suppose, reveal my predilection for the qualities of French music, but with *The Rhine* a new world opens out, one of a Northern European sensibility. This work is by far the longest of the set and the individual ideas are subordinated within the textures, sometimes breaking the surface of the music before falling back again – the abundance of the

notes threatening to blur the distinction between line and decoration, dragging the music into the world of the unconscious. This is music of a much darker nature, its primal energy gathering weight as it moves towards a climax, before concluding, with a nod to the Wagnerian Rhine, on a series of hushed E flat chords. Before the last sounds have died away, the lustrous opening of *Landscapes with Angels* begins. This is the one piece in the set in which the title is not from a specific Le Brun painting, instead reflecting a number of his works, including the studies for the Parables at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral as well as 'Travellers in a Landscape'. Angels walk among men, and the world is momentarily transformed by a heavenly presence.

Absolute Inwardness

Absolute Inwardness and *The Couperin Sketchbooks* are like two sides of a coin – interior and exterior, contemplative and theatrical. They represent a duality; and, coincidentally, Le Brun has also explored this concept in a recent publication 'Doubles'. For Hegel, the true content of Romanticism was absolute internality, the infinite subjectivity of the idea, spirit as pure thought. This music gazes deeply into itself, creating webs of events that sometimes reveal their connections, whilst at other times remaining mysterious in their relationships; the curious qualities of that third intangible essence, that can arise out of the juxtaposition of two unrelated ideas, is one of my key compositional interests. The music periodically re-energises itself, and at times opens into textures reminiscent of the late piano pieces of Brahms, alongside hints of distant chorales. Much of the material is muted and suggestive, and embraces a world of intense feeling and subjectivity reminiscent of Novalis or Hölderlin.



The Hesperides by Sir Christopher Le Brun (1990-91)

The Couperin Sketchbooks

This piece may come as a surprising contrast to the preceding one. The themes are clear-cut, and each enjoys its moment on stage before stepping lightly aside for the next entry. Structural stability, through repetition, is almost absent, and every scene plays its part with the spontaneous grace and charm of a figure in a painting by Watteau. My continuing fascination with the music of Couperin is expressed more fully here as the sections all have Couperinesque titles – *The Majestic Arrival*, *The Graceful One*, *The Departure*, *Sylvie or the Virtuous One*, *The Flowering Orchids*, *Waltz*, *The Restless One*, *Acrobats and Aerialists*, *Zephyr*, *Light and Dark*, *Pastorale*. Short passages from Couperin's own works are interspersed between some of these sections, always played with the *una corda* pedal, and in a manner that leaves the seamless flow of the music uninterrupted. The final bars are from an earlier harpsichord work of mine (*Pastorale*). Notated in the style of an unmeasured prelude, this weaves a further connection between my own work and that of Couperin and the era of the French clavecinists.

White Book 2

Composed in 2008 for Mark Tanner, and first performed at Wigmore Hall, this set of six pieces draws on a number of my interests at that time. The US premiere was given by Albert Kim in 2018. *Undiscovered Islands* evokes the music of an imaginary culture, and its unhurried and lyrical flow is punctuated by moments of more percussive playing, all steadily growing towards a peak of intensity. *Night Journey to Cordoba* takes its inspiration from a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca, which is full of foreboding and despair; dark colours and edgy insistent rhythms propel the music to its conclusion. Far from being a beast of fire and destruction,

Dragon is a response to the light and filigree dragon designs of China, with energetic keyboard writing that undulates and twists throughout the score. *Inner Moon* is the still centre of the set; enigmatic and weightless, its harmonies defy gravity, and leave the music floating in the air. A cut-out by Matisse provided the title for *The Sadness of the King*, the musical image of the original transformed into quiet tango rhythms, while a fragile melodic line searches its way through the music. *White Book 2* ends in an upbeat manner with *Toques*, a swirling, impressionistic fantasy of flamenco guitar playing.

Ay!

Ay! was originally composed for harpsichord many years ago when I was writing some tango nuevo pieces, a brief diversion on my journey from atonal music through to where I am now. In the background of the music is the characteristic rhythmic shape of eight quavers grouped into 3/3/2, moving forward in a quietly relentless manner, this rhythm being a favourite of the Argentine tango composer Astor Piazzolla. However, the harmonies are more reflective of flamenco music, and the mood of the piece is one of restrained grief and deep emotion, with 'Ay' being a Spanish exclamation of feeling.

Graham Lynch

Ay!, along with other works by Graham Lynch (and by Couperin) may be found played by Assi Karttunen (harpsichord) on "Beyond the River God" (DDA25120)

The Composer

Graham Lynch was born in London in 1957, and he studied at King's College (London) as well as with Oliver Knussen. His music has been played in over thirty countries, as well as being frequently recorded to CD and featured on radio and television. Performers of his music include the *BBC Symphony Orchestra*, *BBC National Orchestra of Wales*, *BBC Singers*, *Orchestra of Opera North*, *BBC Concert Orchestra*, *Mahan Esfahani*, and *El Ultimo Tango* from the *City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra*. He has also worked as an arranger for the *Belcea Quartet*.

His works have been played in venues as diverse as the South Bank, Wigmore Hall, Merkin Hall New York, Paris Conservatoire, Palace of Monaco, and from the Freiberg Jazz Club to a cake shop in Japan, and everything in between.

www.grahamlynch.uk

I'm deeply grateful to Paul Sánchez and Albert Kim for making this album happen, and for the way that they've brought my music to life. Their performances of my pieces are both technically brilliant and rich in interpretation, and they've understood every nuance of my compositional thinking right down to the smallest details. They are perfect collaborators, at every level of music making, as well as great friends.

And, to Colin Fell, thank you, as always, for your timely and insightful suggestions during the preparation of the text.

Graham Lynch



Graham Lynch



Travelers in a Landscape (Sir Christopher Le Brun, 1999)

The Pianists

Paul Sánchez

Praised as a “great artist” (José Feghali, 2013; Cecilia Rodrigo 2019), Paul Sánchez is a composer and pianist. Of his recent engagements performing music of Ives and Gershwin for Joseph Horowitz’ Music Unwound: American Roots, a program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Horowitz stated, “Sanchez’ account of Rhapsody in Blue was original - the most bewitchingly lyric I have ever encountered.”

In a Fanfare Magazine review of Sánchez’ 2016 CD Magus Insiapiens, featuring three of Sánchez’ song cycles, Colin Clarke declares, “This is one of the most beautiful discs in my collection.... Haunting in the extreme,” while WFMT’s Henry Fogel, former president of the League of American Orchestras and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, states, “This is hauntingly beautiful music.... works of originality and a distinctive musical personality.”

Sánchez is a recording artist with nine CD releases as of 2021, and his compositions have been featured on the Soundset Recordings and Albany labels. Releases in 2020/21 include *Mysteria Fidei* on Innova Records featuring new music by David M. Gordon; *Dreams of a New Day* with baritone Will Liverman for the Cedille label, which reached number 1 on Billboard’s “Traditional Classical Albums” chart; and spirituals of Shawn Okpebholo in collaboration with mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges and baritone Will Liverman.

Dr. Sánchez is Director of Piano Studies and the International Piano Series at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He is a co-founder of the San Francisco International Piano Festival, the Charleston Chamber Music Intensive, and Dakota Sky Foundation.

Sánchez, a Fulbright fellow from 2005–2007, earned his Master of Spanish Music degree under Alicia de Larrocha. He studied with Tamás Ungár at Texas Christian University, graduating summa cum laude, and with Douglas Humpherys at the Eastman School of Music, where he completed his Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees. Sánchez is a New Piano Collective artist.

Albert Kim

American pianist **Albert Kim** gave his solo debuts in the United States and Europe as a Carnegie Hall/European Concert Hall Organization Rising Star, followed by recitals at Ravinia, Caramoor and the Metropolitan Museum of Art as pianist of the former Kim-Jacobsen-Arron Trio. He has taught and performed widely throughout the United States and the People's Republic of China, and is a founding member of TableTop Opera and the San Francisco International Piano Festival.

He serves as Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Central Missouri, where one of his students first brought the musical world of Graham Lynch to his attention through George Gianopoulos's YouTube channel.



Paul Sánchez
photo:Paul Sánchez (self-portrait)



Albert Kim
Photo: Jiyang Chen



Sir Christopher Le Brun
Photo: Benedict Johnson

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Covers: "Seria Ludo" woodcuts by Sir Christopher Le Brun

"The Hesperides", "Rhine LIX", "Travelers in a Landscape", all by Sir Christopher Le Brun

Photo of Sir Christopher Le Brun by Benedict Johnson

Photos of Graham Lynch by Gavin Hicks

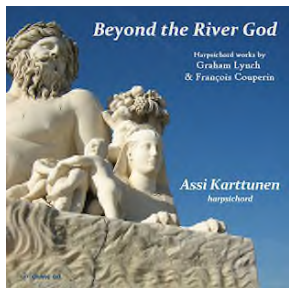
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Rhine LIX (Sir Christopher Le Brun, 1994)



“Beyond the River God”

Assi Karttunen (harpichord)

Graham Lynch:

*Beyond the River God * Admiring Yoro Waterfall*

*Petenera * Present-Past-Future-Present*

*Ay! * Secret Prelude*

And works by François Couperin

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Graham Lynch

