

**John
McCABE**

piano

Don
BANKS
Barney
CHILDS
Wendy
HISCOCKS
Graeme
KOEHNE
David
MASLANKA
George
ROCHBERG
Peter
SCULTHORPE



Mountains

the 'lost' Australian recording



Mountains

John McCabe piano

Peter Sculthorpe (1929-2014)

1 Mountains 6:29

Wendy Hiscocks (b.1963)

2 Toccata 3:01

David Maslanka (1943-2017)

3 Piano Song 7:39

Don Banks (1923-1980)

4 Pezzo Dramatico 4:58

Graeme Koehne (b.1956)

5 Twilight Rain 7:14

George Rochberg (1918-2005)

Carnival Music (25:33)

6 I Fanfares and March 4:05

7 II Blues 4:57

8 III Largo doloroso 5:33

9 IV Sfumato 5:52

10 V Toccata-Rag 5:05

Barney Childs (1926-2000)

11 Heaven to clear when day did close 7:44

Total duration 62:40

The 'lost' John McCabe recording

Introduction by Monica McCabe

The survival and re-emergence of this piano recording is quite remarkable, and the story begins in the 1980s. My husband, John McCabe, visited Australia on numerous occasions (as he also did America), touring widely, and forming many close relationships, including with Earle Page College, part of the University of New England, NSW, and with the Australian Piano Trio. Between them these two initiated the commission and recording of his Piano Trio, *Desert III: Landscape* (1982).

In early June 1985, at the end of one such Australian visit, John made this solo piano recording. From whence the funding came is lost in the obscurity of the years. However, the choice of music was quite definitely his own. The tape was edited, and a copy sent to John, by now back in England, for him to approve. He commented that there were still one or two points needing attention, including, for example, a note touched in passing in Wendy Hiscocks' *Toccata*. For whatever reason, possibly through lack of immediate funding, the re-edit went on the back-burner, and the recording was never issued.

Time passed. Australian colleagues retired, moved on, or died, and the studio where the recording took place closed down. The tapes seemed irretrievably lost. John, though disappointed, was very busy, and the recording was forgotten. Fast forward to 2016. John sadly had recently died of brain cancer. Out of the blue, Wendy Hiscocks contacted me, wondering if such a recording had taken place; if so she would love to hear it. I replied that I would check John's files and try to find details, even though I personally believed that it was a lost cause. To my surprise I located the Dolby cassette copy of the master tape which had been sent to John, put it in a 'safe place' - never a good thing - and promptly forgot where. I apologised to Wendy, but a year went by before I re-located it. I listened to the tape on my little cassette player, and thought it sounded surprisingly good, so I had it put on CD by Dinmore Records, who had previously salvaged archive tapes of Nielsen and Grieg piano music performed by John.

I was bowled over by the quality of the sound from the cassette, after so many years. There remained some problems, ranging from the uncompleted editing, to several instances of post-echo and 'noises off'. Nevertheless I felt that it was a viable, very interesting archive recording by John, and fortunately Divine Art agreed with me and arranged for the complete restoration and remastering of the recording by Paul Baily of ReSound UK following which some final edits were carried out by Oscar Torres.

Many of the works on this recording have a very strong connection with John. He knew, to a greater or lesser extent, all the composers. He was a close friend of Don Banks and Barney Childs (whose piece is dedicated to John and another pianist). The Maslanka work was actually written for him. He frequently played the Sculthorpe, Banks and Maslanka pieces in recitals. This was his first recording of the Rochberg – thinking that it would remain unissued he later re-recorded it for Continuum. Those who associate John's piano-playing with Haydn may be surprised by his idiomatic performance of the Blues in *Carnival Music*. John played music he believed in, and did his best to further its acceptance by audiences. On more than one occasion he added *Piano Song* into a recital, telling the audience, 'This is a surprise item – a modern work which you will enjoy!' They always did, and it is my hope that others will too.

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The music

Peter Sculthorpe (1929 – 2014)

Mountains

The performance of *Sun Music I* at the Commonwealth Arts Festival 1965 focussed international attention on the strikingly individual work of Peter Sculthorpe, and since then a steady stream of characteristic works has firmly established him as a major force in the musical world. His output is substantial and varied, including the opera *Rites of Passage*, but he has concentrated especially on orchestral and chamber music, including an impressive series of string quartets, the four *Sun Music* pieces for orchestra, and many other orchestral works including *Mangrove*, *Kakadu*, and *Earth Cry*. Among his major preoccupations have been the Australian landscape and culture, and the musics of the East, from Bali to Japan. He has achieved a consistent, instantly recognisable style by synthesising these elements together with what he has required from European traditions.

Mountains is dedicated to Rex Hobcroft, and was commissioned by the Sydney International Piano Competition 1981 with assistance from the Music Board of the Australian Council. It is 'a response to the mountainous terrain of Tasmania, often known as "The Isle of Mountains", where the composer was born'. The outer sections are majestic and grave, while the central part marked Estatico is more flowing, reaching an impassioned climax. *Mountains* is typical of Sculthorpe's music both in the individual use of particular intervals and in its rich, clearly defined harmonic style.

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Wendy Hiscocks (b. 1963)

Toccata

Wendy Hiscocks was born in Wollongong, studied with Peter Sculthorpe at Sydney University 1981-4, and has spent most of her subsequent years in Europe. Her music includes a song-cycle for Shura Gehrman, and in 1984 she was commissioned with funding from the Music Board of the Australian Council to write the score for the Art Installation Peace and Nuclear

War in the Australian Landscape, touring the country in 1985. She has written much keyboard and chamber music. This Toccata was written in 1983 for a Sydney Schumann Society masterclass, and has proved popular with performers and audiences. A short piece, intended to be enjoyable, it shows one of her main concerns, 'the importance of linear compositional thought, parallel to melodic thought without the actual employment of melody'. The obsessive nature of its intervallic relationships adds freshness and individuality to an excellent example of this familiar genre.

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David Maslanka (1943 – 2017)

Piano Song

A native of Massachusetts and a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory and Michigan State University, David Maslanka currently lives in New York. His compositions include several which have been recorded, including Three Pieces for clarinet and piano, and *Heaven to clear when day did close* (Fantasy on a theme of Barney Childs for tenor saxophone and string quartet), and a large number of highly successful works for symphonic wind band. Like his Concerto for Piano, Winds and Percussion, they all demonstrate his interest in instrumental virtuosity and acutely contrasted styles – *Piano Song*, written in 1978 at the MacDowall Colony in New Hampshire, is an example of his liking for textures of great simplicity. It is subtle and evocative in its handling of harmony and keyboard sonority – Maslanka stated that it represents 'the cumulative unhurried atunement to the New Hampshire summer'.

© 1988 John McCabe

Don Banks (1923 – 1980)

Pezzo Dramatico

Born in Melbourne, Don Banks studied in London with Mátyás Seiber from 1950 and later with Dallapiccola in Florence. Until 1970 he lived in London, producing a substantial output of outstandingly musicianly and imaginative concert works marked by a distinctive craftsmanship, and also working extensively in films, jazz and electronic music. The natural

rhythmic subtlety of his concert music owes much to the spontaneity of jazz improvisation, and all his works testify to his acute and precise ear. In 1971 he returned to Australia, and until his sadly premature death in 1980 served the cause of Australian music with integrity and commitment, as composer, administrator and teacher.

Pezzo Dramatico was published in 1956 in an album of Contemporary British (sic) Music, and is a single movement consisting largely of two fast sections framing an elegiac, richly harmonised slow part. The dramatic element is the intense contrasting of register and dynamics, marked by strong accents. The piece clearly shows Banks's precise judgement of structure and balance as well as both his elegant musical thinking and his ability to turn serial technique into a personal communicative language.

© 1991 John McCabe

Graeme Koehne (b. 1956)

Twilight Rain

This work is an early example of Koehne's work. It was written while Koehne was a student in Adelaide with Richard Meale and the composer describes the piece as being an attempt to reconcile a modernist style with expressive poetic intentions. The harmonies he uses are heavily influenced by Impressionism, particularly the works of Debussy in the two books of Preludes for the piano. In these Preludes Debussy uses rhythmic motives and harmony to create visual images. It appears that Koehne adapted some of these techniques to create a sound world which reflects the title.

For the performer the main difficulty in performing the work is the absence of any dictated pulse. The composer's indications are relative within sections and not related to an overall ongoing tempo. This allows the performer to create almost a sense of improvisation in the work, evoking twilight colours.

© 1997 Jeanell Carrigan

George Rochberg (1918 – 2005)
Carnival Music

George Rochberg, who studied at Mannes School of Music, New York, achieved international prominence during the 1950s, with a series of carefully-crafted, powerful and expressive serial works. During the 1960s the influence of Ives and his use of the juxtaposition of clearly defined and different musics led him to ‘recognize the severe, binding limitations in serialism’, and his search for a rediscovery of the past ‘to reconcile my love for that past and its traditions with my relation to the present and its often- destructive pressures’ led him through various phases. His Third String Quartet (1972) was a remarkable return to tonality and in some sort neo-romanticism, and has been succeeded by a number of major works, including the three *Concord* String Quartets (Nos. 4, 5 and 6), the Violin Concerto and a Fifth Symphony.

Carnival Music, written in 1970 for the American pianist Jerome Lowenthal, illustrates his period of seeking a response to the problems of serialism. He has said ‘the work as a whole “hangs together” largely through contrasting intensities of opposites: different musics which refer either to “popular” sources (marches, blues, rag-time) or to more “serious” musical traditions’. This juxtaposition is shown in the first movement, alternating powerful fanfares and a marching-band tune. It leads to the Blues, a tough-minded piece of considerable power.

The central Largo Doloroso is the only thoroughly chromatic movement, rich in mysterious harmonies and distantly related to the Bachian arioso. The title of the next piece, *Sfumato*, refers to a term in painting signifying figures emerging from veiled backgrounds – here the shadowy figures are those of Bach and Brahms. This quietly intense mood is sharply broken by the Toccata-Rag, contrasting a gently-swinging rag-time with an aggressive player-piano tune – fanfares from the first movement return to increase the tempo, and after a reference to the end of the Blues the work ends with a final rag-time flourish.

© 1988 John McCabe

Barney Childs (1926 – 2000)

Heaven to clear when day did close

Barney Childs was born in Spokane, Washington, and was one of the most independent-minded American composers. He studied English Literature at Oxford in the post-war years and became Professor of Composition at Redlands University, California, where he also served as Professor of English Literature. His enormous output shows a special emphasis on chamber and instrumental music, with great interest in varied musical techniques and unusual instruments and combinations.

Heaven to clear when day did close dates from 1980 and is dedicated to two pianists, Dianna Thomas and John McCabe. The title is a line from a Ben Jonson poem and the composer says, 'About two-thirds through, after a jazz-directed section, the music moves into an ever-quieting series of chords, and its concluding melodic line works for me in evoking the luminous stillness summed up by the Jonson poem'.

© 2001 John McCabe

The above programme notes, with the exception of that for Graeme Koehne, are all by John McCabe, and date respectively from 1988 (Maslanka, Rochberg), 1991 (Banks) and 2001 (Sculthorpe, Childs, Hiscocks). As a result they are in themselves archive material, and represent a brief illustration of the composers' achievements at the time of writing. However, being written by John himself, and with his usual appreciative enthusiasm for the works, and composers in question, it seemed a good idea to use them. Sadly, since that time, a number of the composers themselves, as well as John, have died.

For some reason John did not seem to have written a programme note for Graeme Koehne's piece, and I am deeply grateful to the Australian composer, pianist and academic Jeanell Carrigan, for allowing me to use her own note, written for her recording of this work.

Monica McCabe

**John
McCabe**



The pianist: John McCabe

(1939-2015)

John McCabe's distinguished career during his lifetime established him as one of Britain's leading classical musicians. His set of the complete Haydn Piano Sonatas, recorded in the 1970s, still stands as a landmark. Widely praised at the time, the set, now on 12 CDs, has never been unavailable, and continues to sell across the world after 40 years. McCabe's love for the music of Nielsen was also deep, and his two LPs of what was regarded at the time as the complete Nielsen solo piano music were recorded around the same time as the Haydn. In April 2015 they were re-released as a 2-CD album by Somm, as a tribute to McCabe and in honour of Nielsen's 150th anniversary of birth.

McCabe's devotion to music, and especially to unjustly neglected music of great value, led him to explore and perform the music of composers of many different kinds – Bax, Grieg, Rawsthorne, Hindemith, Howells, Copland, Satie, Ireland and Joubert are amongst the many whose work he recorded. He was deeply interested in contemporary music also, performing and promoting with great generosity the work of his fellow composers, and in due course, that of younger composers. He also made outstanding recordings of his own piano music.

As a composer, McCabe also enjoyed international stature, with seven symphonies, the ballet *Edward II* (Stuttgart 1995), and the two full-evening ballet, *Arthur Pendragon* (Birmingham Royal Ballet 1999/2001), *The Chagall Windows* and *Notturmi Ed Alba* among his leading works, together with much chamber, keyboard, and vocal music. *Cloudcatcher Fells* is considered to be a classic of the brass band repertoire. Among his recent works were *Symphony On A Pavane* (London Philharmonic Orchestra), *Symphony No. 7, Labyrinth*, (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and his Cello Concerto, *Songlines*, written for Truls Mørk and the Halle Orchestra.

Showing great courage, three works were composed by John McCabe while suffering from the brain tumour which ended his life. *Joybox*, was written for the Proms 2012 (BBC Philharmonic Orchestra) , a Sonata On William Byrd's *Haec Dies* for the Deal Festival 2014 (Simon Desbruslais trumpet/ Clare Hammond piano), and most recently *Christ's Nativity* for double choir/organ premiered by the Halle Choir/Jonathan Scott (December 2014).



John McCabe was appointed CBE for services to British music in 1985, and in 2006 the Incorporated Society of Musicians honoured him with their Distinguished Musician Award.

In May 2014 he was the recipient of the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors IVOR Award for Classical Music, while the Iles Medal was awarded to him in September 2014, for services to the brass band movement.

The recording

This album was recorded in 1985 at EMI Studio 301 in Sydney, Australia, but no details of exact dates or studio personnel are known. Approaches to Warner Music (successor to EMI) to locate the original master resulted in no response. The recording was transferred from a Dolby cassette copy to CD by Paul Arden-Taylor (Dinmore Records) with some audio enhancement, and restored and remastered (2018) by Paul Bailly of ReSound UK. Final edits to track 10 by Oscar Torres.

Photographs of John McCabe (1980s) on pages 10 & 12 by Reg Wilson

Photograph of John McCabe on back cover by Peter Thompson

Programme notes by John McCabe, Jeanell Carrigan and Monica McCabe

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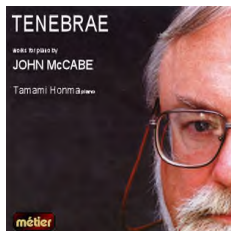
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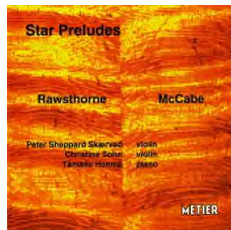
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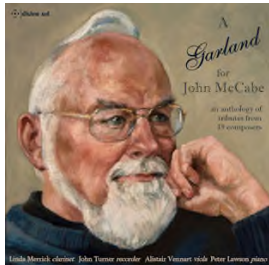
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"Fine performances and a good recording... shows the toughness and sheer musicality of two fine British composers writing at full stretch." –

International Record Review

"Exceptionally fine account by Peter Sheppard Skærved and Christine Sohn" – *Gramophone*



'A Garland for John McCabe'

A collection of tributes from 19 composers:

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"The 19 works collected here form a wonderfully balanced sequence of pieces large and small. Although the prevailing mood is elegiac-to-wistful, there are plenty which remember John's engaging, pithy sense of humour. The musical styles are many and varied, from the formally dramatic, the abstract, and straightforwardly tonal. Beautifully performed by all four players and recorded to match." - *Gramophone*

"A fitting memorial to John McCabe, one in which his friends, colleagues and former students pay him homage in some beautifully performed music. As a whole this is a wonderful set of pieces, with a great variety of styles and make up of ensemble, but throughout the performances are excellent, with all performers having a significant part to play in my enjoyment of this disc." - *MusicWeb International*

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+44 (0)203 239 9088 +1 802 247 4295

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