
Geoffrey Allen
Complete Piano Sonatas
Murray McLachlan -Piano
métier

DISC 1

Piano Sonata no. 1 Op. 5/24 (1959/1995)			19:08
1	I.	Allegro assai	9:35
2	II.	Adagio cantabile	4: 29
3	III	Moderato	5:04
Piano Sonata no. 2 'Sonata Espanola', Op. 14 (1989/1990)			29:18
4	I.	Salamanca	8:00
5	II.	Lagrimas de Sangre	6:21
6	III.	Los Tres Encinas	5:01
7	IV.	Danzas Sevillanas	9:56
Piano Sonata no. 3, Op. 25 (1995-6)			23:00
8	I.	Moderato delicato	7:47
9	II.	Theme and Variations	7:32
10	III.	Intermezzo	4:03
11	IV.	Rondo Burlesque	3:38
Piano Sonata no. 4, Op. 29 (1997)			10:00
12	I.	Moderato	
	II.	Allegro non troppo	
		Total Time	81:36

DISC 2

Piano Sonata no. 5, Op. 32 (1998)			20:40
1	I.	Lento Molto	7:47
2	II.	Prestissimo	1:09
3	III.	Poco andante	5:29
4	IV.	Allegro giocoso	6:15
Piano Sonata no. 6, Op. 39 (2000)			24:06
5	I.	Moderato non troppo	10:08
6	II.	Presto	13:58
Piano Sonata no. 7, Op. 40 (2000)			19:28
7	I.	Allegro vivace	7:15
8	II.	Adagio poco sostenuto	5:44
9	III.	Allegro giocoso	6:29
Piano Sonata no. 8, Op. 46 (2002)			20:02
10	I.	Tempo di valzer	6:07
11	II.	Presto giocoso	2:48
12	III.	Lento	4:51
13	IV.	Allegro ma non troppo	6:16
		Total Time	84:27

DISC 3

Piano Sonata no. 9, Op. 47 (2002)			25:20
1	I.	Commodo	9:57
2	II.	Largo	4:11
3	III.	Presto ben marcato	2:20
4	IV.	Andante	8:52
Piano Sonata No. 10, Op. 52 (2003)			22:38
5	I.	Moderato	10:26
6	II.	Allegro giocoso	1:06
Piano Sonata no. 11, Op. 55 (2004)			21:21
8	I.	Lento	6:24
9	II.	Andante cantabile	5:41
10	III. IV.	Vivo come il buffone - Allegro	9:16
		Total Time	68:26

DISC 4

Piano Sonata no. 12, Op. 66 (2006)			23:16
1	I.	Allegro inquieto	9:36
2	II.	Largo, ma non troppo	5:25
3	III.	Maestoso	8:15
Piano Sonata no. 13 Op 73 (2009)			22:51
4	I.	Allegro non troppo	6:36
5	II.	Presto	3:13
6	III.	Lento piacevole	5:58
7	IV.	Allegro con fuoco	7:04
Piano Sonata no. 14, Op. 77 (2011)			22:19
8	I.	Allegro moderato, sempre rubato	9:10
9	II.	Adagietto	5:56
10	III.	Allegretto molto espressivo	7:13
Rhapzonata, Op. 51 (2003)			
11	I.	Rhapsody (over the Moon)	9:39
		Total Time	78:18

DISC 5

Rhapzonata, Op. 51 (2003)			8:43
1	II.	Canzonetta (In a Perfumed Garden)	4:33
2	III.	Toccata (Only on Wednesday)	4:10
Piano Sonata no. 15, Op. 80 (2012)			28:23
3	I.	Prelude: Lento, sempre sostenuto	4:06
4	II.	Allegro moderato, ma sempre tempo flessibile	10:34
5	III.	Andante con moto, ingenuo	8:52
6	IV.	Allegro non troppo, frivolo	4:51
Piano Sonata no. 16, Op. 86 (2015)			12:59
7	I.	Andante moderato -	
	II.	Piu mosso e ritmico -	
	III.	Andante cantabile -	
	IV.	Meno mosso -	
	V.	Adagio -	
	VI.	Andante cantabile -	
	VII.	Poco Più Mosso -	
	VIII.	Allegro non troppo -	
	IX.	Tempo 1 -	
	X.	Vivace, leggiero	
Piano Sonata no. 17, Op. 97 (2019)			26:15
8	I.	Moderato	8:39
9	II.	Molto lento, di sogno	5:18
10	III.	Allegro giocoso	5:54
11	IV.	Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo presto	6:24
		Total Time	76:28

Geoffrey Allen

The Pianist's Havergal Brian?

Piano Sonatas 1-17 and Rhapzonata, op. 51

Essex born Geoffrey Allen (1927-2021) composed nearly one hundred works and has made a lasting influence on Australian music through his extraordinary work in publishing as well as in recording. Though not officially trained as a musician, his commitment to composition started in his teenage years and was always of enthusiastic importance to him. After reading Geography at Oxford University and emigrating to Australia in 1952, he eventually settled in Perth, WA, initially working in the Library at the University of Western Australia. In 1967 he was appointed as Foundation Librarian of the newly established Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) which later became Curtin University. He retired from the post of University Librarian in 1992.

Back in the 1950s Allen helped create the Recording Society of Australia, remaining its secretary until 1961. A considerable number of LPs were released, including works by composers including Edgar Bainton, Nigel Butterley, Margaret Sutherland, and Larry Sitsky. With the foundation of the Keys Press in 1990s, exclusively for the publication of Australian classical music, Allen was arguably one of the most significant and influential musical figures in his adopted country. By 2015 the publishing house had produced over five hundred individual works by fifty composers, living and deceased including Roy Agnew, Miriam Hyde, Ann Ghandar, and Larry Sitsky. Fortunately, many of Allen's own compositions were also included in this collection, making his music lucid and accessible for future performances.

How can one describe Geoffrey Allen's music? It is all too easy to start classifying and referring to new or unfamiliar music via references to music that is familiar. What is really interesting and special about these sonatas is the fact that though they may initially look orthodox on the page, initial play-throughs lead to much that is surprising and thought-provoking. Allen has a unique way of combining the familiar with the unfamiliar: The sonatas are certainly consistently well-crafted/ tactile friendly… but as soon as you begin virtually any phrase you find the composer pulling the carpet from under your feet. Nothing is quite as it appears!

Though Allen started composition in his teenage years and worked steadily throughout his life, albeit with something of a hiatus in the 1960's and 1980's due to his professional commitments, it was in his retirement years that his productivity dramatically increased. It is remarkable to note the chronology of sonatas from 1989-2017 and to realise that in his final year Allen was hard at work on Sonata no. 18. To produce such a substantial body of piano music in his so called 'retirement years' is deeply impressive, though not entirely without precedent: The English symphonist Havergal Brian (1876-1972) was similar in that he wrote the vast majority of his thirty-two symphonies in the last three decades of his life. Is Geoffrey Allen, through his sonatas, the piano world's equivalent of Havergal Brian? Certainly, there are striking similarities in the way both figures continued to work with energetic resolution well into their nineties. Neither Brian nor Allen was allowed the privilege of hearing many live performances of their music, but their tenacity and productivity continued resolutely, nonetheless. In terms of stylistic approach, it is tempting to parallel the ways in which both Brian and Allen were able to forge their own individuality without completely 'reinventing the wheel.' Neither embraced dodecaphonic techniques or ventured into the post Messiaenic worlds of Stockhausen and Boulez… but it would be wrong to call either composer unoriginal. Far from it! Brian's symphonies are characterised by a sense of restlessness. Pictorial settings and characterisations seem destined never to outstay their welcome. Contrasted interruptions are essential features of many major works.

In an analogous way, Allen's wrong-footing piano sonatas refrain from settling into routine. True, they use traditional structures, including sonata-allegro form. They have pitch centres. They have melody lines. Rhythmically they can become complex, but they stay within the recognisable area of sophistication that was evident in the first half of the twentieth century (one thinks of sonatas by Scriabin and Bax in particular). Was Allen influenced by his colleagues in his adopted country? Has he found an 'Australian' voice for the late twentieth century piano sonata? The composer himself answered this question when I was in e mail correspondence with him in preparation for these recordings several years ago:

'Although I came to Australian in 1952, when I was only twenty-four and became an Australian citizen a few years later I do not think my music is in any way "Australian". I feel my music language was mainly influenced by the English composers I grew up with, - Delius, Walton, Ireland, Vaughan Williams etc - and also by French music from Debussy on to which I am quite addicted. But there are many other composers I would acknowledge - Prokofiev, Scriabin, Hindemith, Villa Lobos etc. So, I don't think it is appropriate to mark me down as Australian, and in any case, music today has become quite international'

To appreciate Allen's achievements to the full we need to celebrate all the influences they contain, and then realise that the music takes these influences as points of departure. We can view them as works which springboard from past conventions, moving forward in particular from the French and English 19th and 20th century master composers that Allen acknowledged as influences on his style. Allen's music has an abundance of melodic motifs which are often lyrical, even 'romantic' in the sense that they can be sung with poetic feeling and intensity. But they are often subjected to accompaniment textures that can be disturbingly dissonant, fearfully unstable and unsettling. The opening of the slow movement of the eleventh sonata is a good example of this. The melody itself is conventional in a stepwise movement. It begins in F minor, but with the added A natural at the end of the second bar, the music becomes increasingly unstable, leading with unpredictable shifts of key centres to stridently dissonant moments from the fourteenth bar onwards. I am

reminded of the opening of Busoni's first Elegy - which seems the musical equivalent of an apple gradually over-ripening: In bar one C major gradually 'decays' from note to note, moving the music forwards towards its eventual F sharp major destination at the end of line one. Allen seems to extend this approach throughout his eighteen sonatas- he is evidently something of a specialist in the art of harmonically 'waxing and waning' in alternation from simple to complex passages. To use another metaphor, he is constantly changing the focus on his musical binoculars, oscillating in and out of pitch centres as a means of moving the music forward for dramatic, structural, and colouristic reasons. He frequently returns to melodic phrases and textures that use no black notes whatsoever. This gives many a passage a 'pentatonic' flavouring- albeit a taste that is never allowed to remain for longer than a passing moment.

Allen's ever-shifting harmonic soundscapes make his sonatas extremely challenging at first- for both performer and listener. Professor Larry Sitsky wrote that Allen's music 'looks conventional until one tries to play it, and then the pianist discovers that the patterns are quite unpredictable and don't lead where one thinks they will go.' Indeed, this delightful, fascinatingly novel approach to harmonic movement is notable in even the smallest of chordal progressions throughout the cycle. It is unquestionably one of the most fascinating, intriguing, and memorable features of Geoffrey Allen's music as a whole. Accidentals wrong-foot the unwary on a regular basis! In the piano sonatas quite frequently the use of flats seems at first to require 're-spelling' by the performer as sharps--- until one realises that such an approach would be to completely miss the point: When Allen surprises us with chromatic notes, it is usually because he has made new colouristic discoveries. The 'musical dizziness' that often results in the mind of the prospective performer during these sonatas is there because the music manages to redefine the inbuilt harmonic expectations we may have about where particular chords have (or have not) to venture! As performers and listeners, we rediscover chromatic colouring in a way that endorses Arnold Schoenberg's famous remark, made decades after his first use of the twelve-tone technique, that 'there is still plenty of good music to be written in C major.'

Piano Sonata no. 1

This sonata was completed after the second sonata in 1989. The composer explains: 'The first pages of the 2nd and 3rd movements were penned in 1959/60. At that time, I was really fumbling with the concept of a sonata. I put them aside and did not take them up again until after I had written sonata 2 in 1989. I then realised that all I had were beginnings and proceeded to extend both pieces up to what they are now. Originally, I had thought of the current movement three as the first movement, but changed my mind, and then wrote an entirely new movement one. I was aware that Prokofiev had allotted a double opus number to one of his sonatas, reflecting the use of material "from his notebooks," so I did the same!'

In its completed form the work begins with an extended first movement, opening in tempestuous symphonic mode with much bravura before quieter, almost child-like music appears. Messiaen-like slow moving chromatic chords evoke an ethereal, almost ecclesiastic mood before the stormy music of the opening returns. The music is developed sequentially and in different pitch centres in modified sonata-allegro form.

The second movement is much simpler, using a melody that could almost come from a popular French cabaret 1930's song! It is presented in verse form, with extensive and sophisticated chromaticism in the accompaniment part to prevent any sense of sentimentality.

The third movement contrasts austere Hindemith-styled counterpoint with more tempestuous gestures reminiscent of the music from the opening of the first movement. Wistful melancholy is added into the mix as the third element in a volatile cocktail of contrasting moods, bringing the sonata to a dramatic conclusion.

Piano Sonata no 2 op 14, 'Sonata Espanola'

1989 was especially crucial for Allen's artistic development. A visit to Spain had an enormous impact on his piano Sonata No. 2 and after this work a great momentum – a great rush of energy and creativity – unquestionably occurred. The composer has written that the work reflects on 'the impact made by the topography of the country, the turbulent history and struggles of the Spanish people to maintain their independence, and not least the hospitality and vitality of Spain today.' Colouristically the work seems particularly orchestral. The opening movement. Salamanca unfolds evocatively over 150 bars with beguilingly expressive motifs and some rhythmically energised figurations. 'Lagrimas de Sangre' ('tears of blood') may be more intimate but contains powerful dissonances and some exotically enticing filigree demisemiquaver passage work. 'Los Tres Encinas' (The three Oak trees) turns the instrument into a Spanish Guitar, though the flamenco rhythms quickly metamorphosise into Waltz tempo as the music gathers pace. The finale, 'Danzas Sevillanas' is a broadly ambitious symphonic canvas- one senses an epic narrative with heroes and tragic consequences round every turn. Certainly, there is no lack of excitement as the music gathers pace 'Allegro molto' for the final flourishes in the closing pages- even though the final lines are marked 'nostalgicamente.'

Peter Sievewright gave the world premiere of the sonata in the Callaway Auditorium at the University of Western Australia, on August 4th, 1995.

Piano Sonata no. 3 op. 25 (1995/96)

Sonata 3 begins beguilingly with an exotic, almost Latin-American hint to the rhythmic syncopation that is featured. Before too long Allen's penchant for 'white harmony' appears. Here it acts as a contrasted foil to the Latin-American flirtatiousness. As the music continues almost in whispered mode at 'Meno mosso,' one senses that we are living in the shadowlands, hinting, and acknowledging possibilities rather than stating facts directly. It is only in the recapitulation that the 'white note' theme finally is allowed to be presented forte.

In complete contrast the theme of the second movement could hardly be more child-like. This is a wistful set of variations, though by 'Poco Meno mosso e pesante' (variation five) austerity, even fear does not seem far away. The final coda resolves matter with a degree of statesmanlike grandeur and finality. The third movement shows Allen's fondness for beginning with simplicity and extending the density of chromaticism in each phrase until considerable instability is the order of the day. Finally, a light-hearted dancing rondo guaranteed to get toes tapping and hands clapping! Music that can be heard internally on recorders and flutes that shows the lighter, more child-like qualities of this composer's range. Though the characterisation is naïve, the pianistic layout is crafted with masterful sophistication. The throw-away ending should always make the listener smile!

Piano Sonata no. 4, op. 29 (1997)

Though small in relation to the third and fifth sonatas, the two movement fourth is a significant, concentrated and richly varied work of substance. Remove accidentals and it would remain as a relatively simple, wistful pastorale. There is something quaintly English about the melodic lines and textures here that most certainly evokes the world of Finzi, Howells and Vaughan-Williams. However, it is the constant shifting sands of accidentals in the subsidiary lines below the melody that makes the work so intriguing and richly layered. Chromaticism features from bar one in the opening Siciliano-styled thematic group, as well as in the more heroic secondary group. The transition between both themes reaches an almost overwhelming level of dissonance at times, and in the development that follows reaches the central climax is especially striking: Atonal bravura in arpeggiated demisemiquavers is lavishly distributed over the entire range of the keyboard. The Allegro non troppo movement second movement is more direct in that it consistently needs energy. But its rhythms are sophisticated, and the dancing characterisation requires precision as well as athleticism from the executant as figurations scamper on with relentless mischief.

Piano Sonata no. 5, op. 32 (1998)

Perhaps the most 'Australian' sounding music in this cycle of sonatas occurs in the opening pages of the fifth sonata, where the parallel fifths and long silences whilst sounds decay seem to evoke something of the vast, fearful mystery that is the Outback. Certainly, the effect is most striking, contrasting completely with the ensuing quasi-pastoral energy of the figurations that follow. Along with the naivety there are deeply expressive phrases showing tenderness and much cantabile. The second movement Prestissimo is a thrilling bit fleeting linear outpouring of transcendental virtuosity, whist the third movement presents another example of the composer extending simple material into chromatic complexity as phrases open out and develop. The final begins with innocent optimism though eventually the darkened fifths of the opening movement return, bringing a sense of moving full cycle to a work that is most impressive in totality.

Piano Sonata no. 6, op 39 (2000)

Allen's sixth sonata was written at the time of the Kosovo and East Timor conflicts and is dedicated to the peoples of both regions. The composer's strong feelings are noticeably clear in his introductory remarks: 'I commenced writing my sixth piano sonata, in the second half of 1999, in a mood partly of despair, partly of anger, and partly of horror. This was the time when the people of Kosovo were being systematically raped, murdered and evicted by the government of the former Yugoslavia, which eventually led to the armed intervention by the European Union, and later in a gesture of sympathy, the provision of temporary respite in Australia for some thousands of Kosovars. Later the same year the agreement by the government of Indonesia to a referendum in East Timor on the future status and alignment of that territory, just to the north of Western Australia, unleashed a brutal and cynical attack on the largely defenceless and innocent population. While my sixth sonata does not have a programme, I commenced writing it in what I imagine was the mood in which Prokofiev wrote his now famous "war" sonatas. I wanted to make a statement, in sympathy with the victims, and in horror at the brutality of the aggressors.

The sonata is constructed in two extremely large-scale movements and begins quietly. Reflective nostalgia continues through the 162 bar first movement, with hints not only towards popular song, but also specifically at Brahms' A major Intermezzo op. 117 no. 2.

The second movement makes its initially through powerful dissonance and energetic passagework. The ferocious pianism from the opening bars certainly brings to mind the barbarism, terror, and sheer violence of war. The rapid quaver figurations from the second bar are in the Locrian mode and recur throughout the movement, which is structured loosely in rondo form.

Allen has written that there is no specific 'programme' in the sonatas as a whole, 'but in the second movement the sudden quiet, almost pathetic, incidents came from an image in my mind of a small child isolated by the violence and wandering lost looking, presumably, for his mother.' The distant sounds here make a distinctive impression, as does the central funeral march and the quiet spacious pianistic gestures in the closing pages.

Piano Sonata no. 7, op. 40 (2000)

In the published edition of this sonata, Allen writes: 'having completed the first movement of my sixth sonata, which is generally sombre, and having planned and started the second movement as a catechism of violence, I was finding difficulties in completing it in the two-movement format I had planned. I turned aside and wrote the much gentler, and more formal. Variations and Fantasia on an original theme, the Epilogue of the sixth sonata, and also a movement that I initially saw as a slow occasional piece. However, the latter grew in proportion, structure, and import to be yet another reaction to the terror which was still continuing in East Timor. I felt that this was not a slight piece, but the heart of yet another piano sonata. And so, I moved on to write the first, and then the third movements of this seventh piano sonata, while continuing in parallel to work on the second movement of the sixth sonata. As it turned out the seventh sonata was completed while a small section of the sixth remained to be written, but the temporal sequence is irrelevant. Despite the fact that the slow central movement of this seventh sonata continues the sombre and introspective mood of the first movement of the sixth sonata, the general thrust of the

seventh sonata is a release from the tensions that generated the sixth sonata. That release is to be seen particularly in the Meno mosso section of the first movement which returns in extended form in the last movement, where it is to be played sognando, and in the Allegro giocoso specification for the main theme of the finale. Nevertheless, the seventh sonata may not have entirely purged the trauma of the sixth sonata.'

Indeed Sonata 7 is full of intensity and struggle. Whilst the first subject has energy aplenty, the second subject which follows almost quotes the British National Anthem and gives a heroic flavour and significance to the piece as a whole. The second movement's spartan wistfulness evokes a more distant era, complete with lilting Siciliano rhythms and elegant cadential breaks. The finale's highly energised accents and cross rhythms may remind us of Bartok's Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm. Certainly, they seem East European in Flavour, though the contrasted episodes bring more lyricism- albeit tempered by often extreme dissonance- into the picture. A powerful and exciting conclusion to a richly layered sonata.

Piano Sonata no. 8, op. 46 (2002)

The composer has written: 'This sonata started life as an idea for a prelude, a number of which I had been writing at the time. But the idea grew into what has become the first movement. During this time, it occurred to me to attempt to write a complete sonata in waltz, or at least three four, time. I discussed this idea with Larry Sitsky, who indicated that to his knowledge there was no such sonata in the literature, and after seeing the completed score he has given it his blessing as an interesting innovation.' The first movement glides around the proverbial ballroom from key centre to key centre, bringing surprising twists and turns of colour along the way. This is always a dance of the unexpected! In the second movement the word of 'Petrushka' never seems far away. This is a more rustic world- or perhaps it is the commedia dell'arte? Certainly, one could imagine puppets in action, moving with formalistic poise in time to the hurdy-gurdy figurations that are a hall mark of the music in the many 'wrong note' phrases. In contrast the third movement is more reflective, nostalgic, and wistfully longing. The sonata was dedicated to Alison Scott.

Rhapzonata (Rhapsody, Canzonetta and Toccata) for Piano, op. 52 (2003)

Though not officially included in the numerical series of Geoffrey Allen's piano sonatas, Rhapzonata is closely related stylistically to the cycle. The writing is concentrated and terse and not without its share of charm and humour. The first movements wistful dancing energy includes poetry and cantabile aplenty. Though the melodic lines are innocent enough, the chromaticism that adorns the accompaniment textures makes for striking, at times resolute characterisation. This is particularly significant at climax points where the declamatory gestures seem orchestral in conception.

In the Canzonetta second movement, subtitled 'In a Perfumed Garden,' Allen's style is at its most direct, simple, and individual. Though the textures could hardly be more spartan and the writing less economical, the chromaticism and colours obtained by the slightest of harmonic shifts makes for a unique compositional flavour. It is fascinating to take each phrase in turn and note the way in which simplicity is subtly decorated with added dissonances, resulting in novel colours and sounds. Though only seventy-three bars long and of moderate technical difficulty, this particular piece seems to reflect on the essence of Geoffrey Allen and his unique approach to keyboard writing.

The third movement Toccata is intriguingly subtitled 'Only on Wednesday,' as though to warn the listener not to expect a conventional virtuoso finale. Indeed, the motoric, virtuoso aspect of this piece is but only one element of several. The writing may be ferociously dissonant at times but is also amusingly volatile in terms of changes of dynamics, texture, and mood: Allen's love of dolce cantabile makes its impact as early as the 39th bar, and though there is much that does seem etude-like in terms of pianistic fireworks, the movement is especially striking for its jaunty cross rhythms and, at times, wrong-footing cross-rhythms. An intriguingly energetic mix of physical challenges and quirky mood shifts, though at all times the writing is economical and linear.

Piano Sonata No. 9, op 47 (2003)

In the ninth sonata Allen extends flexibility with rhythm by experimenting in selected passages without bar lines: 'My intention was to get an even flow of the music without emphasis.' This is especially striking in the ecclesiastical second movement in which bell-like sonorities at the top of the keyboard create an ethereal, timelessly expansive aura that is unique in this sonata cycle as a whole.

The opening bar of the ninth sonata is also without bar lines, though this movement feels more familiar as it uses compositional techniques exploited in earlier sonatas. There are bitonal passages and 'white note' themes in this sonata-allegro, which features tarantella rhythms in its most energised passages. Hints at popular melodic fragments appear throughout, and though the music is never consistently melancholic, there are certainly darker moments- notably in the final line when 'Dies irae' makes an ominous appearance in the tenor register.

In contrast the eighty-six bar third movement is a wittily energised scherzo similar to the second movement in the fifth sonata, but with a little more rhythmic sophisticated by virtue of its changing metres. In the fourth movement finale sombre sustained music alternates with lighter scherzando textures to give a sense of rondo structure. The slower phrases evoke string sonorities with much cantabile whilst the more angular and energised passagework that always follow brings a contrasted sense of kinetic energy, with flutes, oboes and clarinets implied in the writing. String poetry prevails at the conclusion, with much lyricism and a touchingly expansive melodic climax before the quiet contemplative coda brings this contrasted sonata to a serious conclusion.

Piano Sonata No. 10, op. 52 (2003)

The composer's introductory comments on this work make for fascinating reading: 'My piano sonata no.10 was written between the beginning of the year 2003 and March 6th. While it has no programme in the sense of trying to follow a story or illustrate particular scenes, it was strongly influenced by the international events unfolding during those first months of 2003, and still unresolved by the time the work was finished. I refer of course to the campaign by US President Bush to gather support for the invasion of Iraq, and the concurrent military build-up and tension in the Middle East. During this unsettled time Australians protested publicly, and in unprecedented numbers, their antipathy to a war against Iraq, and particularly to the involvement of Australian forces. I made the gesture of attending one such protest, and I sent letters to the US Consul and to members of the Australian Parliament commenting on the situation. I was therefore writing this sonata in a mood somewhere between anger and despair and recognising my own impotence to affect the course of events. Despite the atmosphere of the times, this sonata is not all tears and gloom. If there is a logic to its internal moods then the first movement could represent the continuing comfortable existence that Australians enjoy, and the brief second movement is almost a frolic of children at play. But the last movement is dominated by the mood of war, although the doves of peace have their moments, for instance in the Fauré like cantabile melody that first appears at bar thirty-nine. However, the movement progresses inevitably to the concluding funeral march which all reasonable people must have been fearing at the time. That in fact there were no Australian casualties in the ensuing invasion of Iraq, does not lessen the protest that many Australians had made. The loss of Iraqi lives, and the devastation of much of that country, serve only to confirm the futility and inhumanity of war which ultimately can have no justification in a civilised society.'

Piano Sonata no. 11, op. 55 (2004)

Dedicated to Sally Mays, this work extends the economical pianism already explored in Rhapzonata op. 52 but utilises a large colouristic range, nonetheless. The composer wrote: 'This sonata has been conceived in four movements, each linked to the next by a short section derived from the introductory twelve bars. While not therefore strictly a one movement sonata, there should be no major breaks between movements in the performance, although pauses as indicated should be adhered to.' Particularly striking are the central movements, with melodic memorability over sophisticated chromaticism (second movement) and harlequinesque energetic unpredictability in the 'Vivo come il buffone' (third movement). The finale's character and some of the figurations remind us of the very first sonata, though perhaps the 'Allegro feroce' conclusion has more in common with most dissonant passages in the last movement of the sixth sonata.

Piano Sonata no. 12, op 66 (2006)

In many ways this sonata looks with greater nostalgia to the nineteenth century than any other work in the series. It uses C minor as a pivot point and utilises more conventional romantic pianistic figurations than any of the other Sonatas. In the first movement diminished seventh arpeggiation are especially prominent in textures reminiscent at times of the sonatas of Arnold Bax, Medtner and early Scriabin. The sonorities evoke full symphonic colours at climaxes but there is also intimate relief in passages of rhythmic subtlety where a more filigree touch is required. As is always the case in these works, the music has a powerful sense of cantabile, and in the first movement this becomes jazz- inspired with the brief passage marked 'moderato- quasi blues'.

Broad expansiveness in a richly chromatic homophonic texture is especially evident in the outer sections of the ternary structured slow movement. Heightened activity and dissonance for expressive effect gives some urgency to the central compound time section before the more restrained opening material reappears. A totally unexpected subito forte outburst of the Dies irae motif in the closing lines certainly makes a striking impact.

The finale alternates passages of impassioned neo-romanticism (flashbacks to the 1940s Hollywood era?) with fearful, energised motoric writing similar to that used in the sixth sonata. Poignant expressivity emerges from the melodic line as the music finds tragic resignation in its final epilogue. Marked 'Lento, un poco doloroso' these final thirteen bars sound as a distant chorus would, intoning fragmented hints and memories of a sentimental hymn tune, or even a new world spiritual? Certainly, the final 'niente' chord feels pessimistic and tragic.

Piano Sonata no. 13 op 73 (2009)

This exquisitely crafted, fine-honed, and economical four movement work exploits a wide emotional range within its concentrated framework. The first movement contrasts gentle dissonance and interplay between parts with lighter, dancing textures which eventually expand into waltz time. The intricate polyrhythms and filigree passagework in the second movement scherzo makes a striking impression, though nothing is quite so dramatic as the conclusion, which literally evaporates before the listener's ear. In the third movement the piano appears to change into an organ, evoking visions of distant stars and the vastness of the great unknown. In the finale we are back again in the world of the sixth sonata, with the influence of Bartók's 'Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm' again much to the fore. The sonata ends optimistically with a sense of glowing radiance in the final bars. This is in complete contrast to the ending of the previous sonata where the mood was much more sombre.

Piano Sonata no. 14, op. 77 (2011)

The evocative stillness present at the beginning of the fifth sonata reappears at the opening of this sublimely reflective work. Though it shows elements of sonata-allegro form there is a sense of improvisatory discovery about the movement as a whole, which floats leisurely and approximately through what can loosely be viewed as exposition, development, and recapitulation sections. As is so often the case with Allen, the structural impetus seems primarily driven by melodic considerations. Wistful cantabile is combined with subtle rhythmic interplay as compound duple bars are juxtaposed with simple triple time. As the music unfolds the music opens out into nostalgic waltz rhythm, bringing a heightened sense of regret- or perhaps a melancholic longing for past times?
Expressive longing continues in the expansive slow movement, though the opening and closing ten bars are foreboding, ominous and quietly dissonant. We are in an atonal organ loft and the influence of Messiaen seems particularly strong. The whole tone texture from bar twenty-two provides an impassioned foil, a brief but intense outpouring of passion, before memories of waltzes bring further nostalgia. Throughout the movement, the melodic line gives direction and impetus. It is the vital thread that connects everything.

Waltz rhythms and white note melodic fragments return once more in the introverted final movement. This is a hushed, resigned reflection, a further essay in remembrance that exploits dance rhythms with subtlety and reserve. Cross accentuation, syncopation and hemiolas along with imaginative chromaticism add colour and intensity to music which seems extra pianistic, even orchestral in character. Not that the movement is ever blazingly public. On the contrary, it seems designed for private reflection. True, Allen does allow for one heart-on-sleeve direct climax from bars 75-90, but the percussive dismissal of the passionate melody at the end of this passage makes the mood swiftly return to reserve and melancholy. The ending is especially sombre and pessimistic.

Piano Sonata no. 15, op 80 (2012)

In introductory remarks on the score of this sonata Allen writes that 'the genesis of this sonata was hearing the final sforzando chord of Glazunov's last Prelude and Fugue in E minor which he composed in 1926, the year before I was born. The first chord of this sonata repeats that impact, but otherwise there is no connection between Glazunov's work and mine. Another relationship may be seen between the opening of Bax's Third Piano Sonata and a short section in the middle of the second movement of this sonata, where the marking minaccioso occurs. After writing this passage the similarity in mood to the Bax piece struck me and I checked up on the latter score. The Bax passage is the first statement of his first subject. While the notes, time signature and key are all different, the shape of the melodic phrase is remarkably similar, and the overall effect is one of brooding. Bax goes on to make extensive use of his motif while I make only passing references to mine. I have been fond of the music of Arnold Bax since my teenage years and therefore make no apology for echoing his work in this instance.'

The first movement opens with evocative splashes of pianistic colour that seem influenced as much by Szymanowski as Bax, though some of the chordal sequences also seem close in style to the Messiaen of 'Vingt Regards.' Harmonic richness and chromatic exploration continue apace in the enormously expansive second movements (some 165 bars in length) though the third movement is significantly more focused and economical in terms of texture. In complete contrast the finale is virtually a miniature, running for a mere fifty-nine bars and opening with a wistfully flowing pastoral motif. This is abruptly interrupted by march rhythms, and the sonata concludes- as is the composer's preference in so many of the later sonatas- with a sense of ominous pessimism.

Piano Sonata no. 16, op. 86 (2015)

In his published note for the sonata, Allen writes: 'This sonata has few, if any, connections with classical sonata form. It is in one continuous movement, but this is made up of seven, or perhaps eight, sections, each with its own melodic and other motifs. However, the first three sections share these elements with sections five to eight. In overall structure the work has a kind of arch shape, the materials of sections A, B and C reappearing as the materials of sections E, F and G, in that order. In a sense the first three sections could be seen as representing the exposition while sections five to seven are the development. The central section D, marked precipitoso, ad lib, has some of the character of a cadenza, while the short concluding section might be seen to stand as a Coda of sorts. Certainly, the writing shows a new quasi stream of consciousness approach. It is as though in his late works the composer is refining his ability to 'melt' feeling with form, giving less of a strictly corseted approach to structure and more of an effortless dovetailing aesthetic. Having said that, the sonata is consistent with the earlier works in that it continues to exploit chromaticism as an oscillating device for development. This is immediately evident in the opening where exclusive use of white notes quickly changes as flats and then sharps are gradually introduced into the texture, making the music immediately darker and more unstable. The central cadenza shows particularly innovative pianistic writing, with filigree textures demanding much by way of co-ordination and dexterity from the pianist.

Piano Sonata no. 17, op. 97 (2019)

This final, extended sonata opens with wonder and fantasy. The improvisatory spirit is quickly contrasted with more rhythmic figurations, and a sense of duality and contrast between freedom and motoric drive permeates all of the first movement. The first movement is rhythmically flexible, with a notably sombre but poetic episode entering midpoint from bar sixty-three. Allen's characteristic preference of combining simple melodies with intense chromaticism can be throughout the whole work, as can great precision over notation of rubato- a feature of his later

sonatas in general. It is also fascinating to see the precise and practical suggestions for use of the middle pedal in this final sonata- though it is unusual for composers to notate so specifically in this way, Allen's suggestions are always practical and to the point.

The ternary structured second movement maintains a strict left-hand pulse throughout its outer sections, with shimmering right-hand figurations and bell-like colours above. The music is marked 'di sogno' ('in a dream') and most certainly beguiles with a sense of reverie.

Though the virtuosity in the scherzo (third movement) is stylistically close to the second movement of the fifth sonata, it is fascinating to note the rhythmic sophistication by way of cross accentuation within the duple compound time in this later work. An angular and energised challenge for the performer- in terms of figurations and accidentals! As is his penchant Allen consistently wrong foots and surprises with sharps and flats, taking the music in surprising directions- which only in hindsight can be seen as 'logical'!

The finale is characteristically symphonic in colouring, with declamatory dissonant gestures, percussive figurations, and hushed sentimental melodies acting as the foil. We are not given a triumphant victory conclusion in the epilogue, marked 'Marcia solenne. Largo' Allen's journey is brought to a sombre, hushed and not entirely resolved conclusion. The final chord of this final sonata contains the tritone interval within it- perhaps symbolic of the huge part chromaticism plays in these works as a whole. Certainly, Allen's eighteen sonatas for piano redefine our expectations harmonically. He has found something unique to say through the instrument, creating a new universe of keyboard discovery in the process.

Murray McLachlan - Piano

Murray McLachlan teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester where he has been Head of Keyboard since 1997. He is the founder of the Manchester International Concerto competition for young pianists as well as the Founder/ Artistic Director of the world famous Chetham's International Summer school and festival for Pianists, Europe's largest summer school devoted exclusively to the piano. As a teacher McLachlan continues to be very busy and in demand. Many of his students have won prizes in competitions and continued with their own successful careers as performers.

As well as performing and teaching, Murray is well known internationally for his numerous articles on Piano technique and repertoire. This includes extended columns which have appeared in 'International Piano' 'Pianist' and 'Piano' Magazines. He was editor of 'Piano Professional' Magazine from 2007-14. He is currently editor of Piano Journal. His books for Faber, 'Foundations of Piano Technique' and 'Piano Technique in Practice', were issued in 2014 and 2015 to wide acclaim. In 2012 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Dundee for outstanding services to music and education. This follows on from a knighthood awarded in 1997 by the Order of St John of Jerusalem in recognition of his services to music in Malta. Murray McLachlan is artistic director of the Camel House Concerts in Lanzarote, Vice President of the North East of Scotland Music School and a patron of the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe and the Grampian Region Youth Orchestra.

McLachlan's discography now includes over forty commercial recordings, including the complete sonatas of Beethoven, Myaskovsky and Prokofiev, the six concertos of Alexander Tcherepnin, the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Rodion Shchedrin, Ronald Stevenson's 'Passacaglia on DSCH' the major works of Kabalevsky, Khatchaturian and the complete solo piano music of Erik Chisholm.

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Murray McLachlan on Geoffrey Allen

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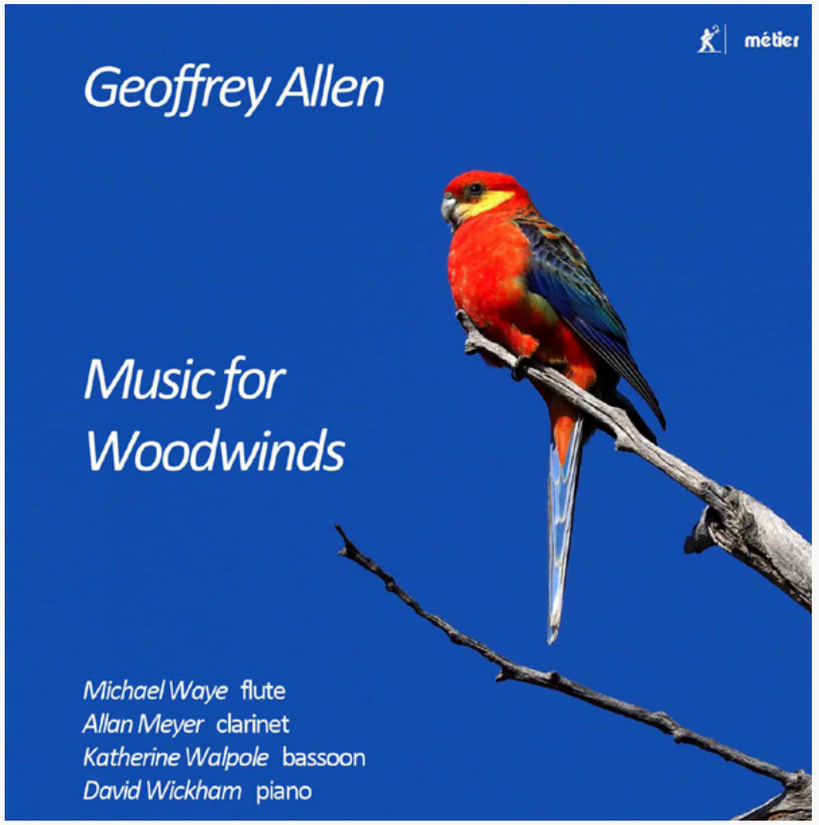

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