



Christopher Fox

YOU, US, ME

Music for piano (Ian Pace)
and voice (Amanda Crawley)



All the music on this CD has a relationship to the work of other artists. This sort of exchange across time and media is important for me as a means of placing myself within specific histories. It is not so much that I have difficulty in inventing musical ideas, rather that I am interested in finding out what sort of ideas I will invent if I do so in partnership with other artists - Schwitters, Beuys, Finlay - whose work fascinates me. The pursuit of originality has always struck me as a peculiarly vain and foolish quest; after all, many of the most original artists of the 20th century (Stravinsky, Matisse, Robert Wilson, Gunter Grass) have been those who most consciously drew our attention to their borrowings. On the other hand I'm not interested in art that only exists as an intertextual *I-Spy* - the work must speak for itself and not just as a collage of references for a knowing audience.

A-N-N-A Blossom-time (1987-8)

A-N-N-A Blossom-time consists of settings of nine poems translated from the German originals of Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). Most of *A-N-N-A Blossom-time* was written in West Berlin during the latter part of 1987, while I was a guest of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm, and 'Dumb Animals', 'Morning', 'Anna's Book of Chinese Proverbs', 'Country Life', 'All about A-N-N-A' and 'Lullaby' were premiered by Amanda Crawley at the British Centre, Berlin on 4 December 1987. I played the piano parts. 'You', 'All Cut Up' and '1, 2, 3' were finished the following summer.

The decision to translate the idiomatically playful German of Schwitters' poetry into English may seem perverse, but I felt that by so doing I would in some way appropriate the texts for myself. Often this act of appropriation went beyond translation; I justified my re-inventions on the grounds that Schwitters would have wanted his German 'nonsense' to have become equally authentic English nonsense. 'Lullaby' is perhaps the most distant from its original, not only textually but also musically:

Schwitters' 'Gluhwürmchen' parodied a song popular in '20s Berlin to whose tune his words were to be sung; my 'Lullaby' makes reference to an English nonsense tradition (Lewis Carroll's 'Twinkle, twinkle, little bat / How I wonder what you're at') by introducing a quite different tune as *cantus fermus*.

Schwitters had translated 'an Anna Blume' into English but his translation renamed Anna as 'Eve' (although she too is 'just the same backwards as forwards'): I kept her as 'Anna' and she reappears throughout the set. Otherwise I more or less kept faith with Schwitters. I tried especially to locate my songs within musical conventions which were extant during the 1920s and '30s when the Anna Blume verses were written. If *A-N-N-A Blossom-time* is, therefore, eclectic I feel that this eclecticism is also authentically

Schwittersisch. Like Schwitters, who could make Dada-esque sound-texts, expressionist landscape paintings, classic Modern typographic design, nonsense lyrics, realistic portrait paintings, large-scale sculptural installations and tiny collages, my A-N-N-A tries to embrace as much as possible, while still remaining herself.

The following poems by Kurt Schwitters (used with the kind permission of his publishers, COSMOPRESS, Geneva) provided the originals for the texts of A-N-N-A Blossom-time: (1) 'Stumm', (2) 'Die Welt', (3) 'Poesie', (4) 'Nennen Sie es Ausschachtung', (5) 'Banalitäten', (6) 'Du', (7) 'Dorf', (8) 'an Anna Blume', (9) 'Gluhwürmchen'.

You, Us, Me (1992)

In 1990 I met the Dutch pianist John Snijders for the first time. Since then I have worked regularly with him and with the Ives Ensemble, which he directs with Richard Rijnvos. For John I wrote the piano pieces *lliK and relliK* and when in 1992 he asked for another piece, to form part of a set of Carmen-related works, I happily obliged. He gave the premiere of *You, Us, Me (Haba era)* in the Zaal de Unie, Rotterdam on 21 April 1994.

My interest in *Carmen* was stimulated by Susan McClary and Catherine Cléments' writings about the opera and in particular by their identification of the sinuous chromaticism of the 'Habañera' with Carmen's sexuality. Cléments also writes that 'The opera is constructed on alternations: by day Carmen in prison; by night Carmen triumphant' and since I had noticed a similarity between the falling chromatic line of the 'Habañera' and Cole Porter's song 'Night and Day' it seemed appropriate that my piece should marry elements of the two pieces. The title is a quotation from Cléments' book *Opera, or the undoing of women*: 'Carmen has died alone, her only spectators her murderer, you, us, me'.

Louisiana (1991-2)

Between 1985 and 1994 I taught in the School of Art and Design at Bradford College, working particularly closely with the art historians Patrick Eyres, Wendy Frith, Louise Parsons and the printmaker Ian Colverson. It was Louise who suggested that Ian and I should collaborate and we eventually decided to make two groups of five triptychs, each triptych consisting of a page of text (as in *A-N-N-A Blossom-time* these are based on Schwitters' poetry), a page of music setting the text and a graphic image relating to both music and text. Separating the two groups would be a single piece of music without text or image. The eventual gallery work was rather different from this initial plan but in my songs I was able to carry it through. Each song occupies a single page of score and the sixth movement, 'Worthless Leather' is a song without words. 'Valse' refers to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, 'Simile' to my own *A-N-N-A Blossom-time*.

MERZsonata (1993/1998)

MERZsonata is a homage to Schwitters' sound-text masterpiece, the *Ursonate* (1922-1932) and is based on the sonata-rondo structure of the last movement of that work. Every sound in my piece has a biographical connection to Schwitters (for example, he wrote a sneezing poem, and he used to bark like a dog each night during his time in the Hutchinson Square Internment Camp on the Isle of Man during the Second World War) but takes its particular place according to its own timbral, rhythmic and pitch characteristics. Like the materials of a Schwitters collage, each element is both itself and part of something new.

I am indebted to the Schwitters scholar, Klaus Hinrichsen, for permission to make extensive use of his voice. Two short phrases from the first movement of the *Ur-sonate* and from 'an Anna Blume' are spoken by Kurt Schwitters (although it has not been possible to establish the provenance of these recordings). An earlier version of this work, together with versions of 'Worthless Leather' from *Louisiana* and *Cylinders Barn, 1947*, was broadcast by the BBC in 1993 as *Three Constructions after Kurt Schwitters*. The present version was made in 1998 in the studios of the University of Huddersfield with the technical assistance of Ruth Thomas.

Second Eight (1978-80, revised 1982)

Second Eight is the only surviving part of *The Piano Catalogue*, a music-theatre extravaganza which I wrote in the early stages of my postgraduate studies at York University. *The Piano Catalogue* put elements of the piano repertoire through all kinds of radical transformations (a Brahms Intermezzo was 'played' entirely on the struts of a grand piano at one point) and accompanied them with video and a parallel text to be read during the performance. Christopher Norton (later of 'Microjazz' fame) and I gave two performances of *The Piano Catalogue* in 1980 to audiences who were more or less baffled by the whole experience, but the final section, *Second Eight*, did seem worth saving. It reassembles the pitch material of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück VIII* into regular groupings and moves them all into the upper reaches of the piano, with the rest of the instrument providing a cavernous resonance throughout the piece. My father, who had an annoying knack for noticing what I was up to, likened it to 'a blackbird marking out his territory'.

Block (1992)

The starting point for *Block* was the collection of work by Joseph Beuys in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt. This permanent four-room installation is the largest surviving single group of his work and is known as the Block Beuys. Between 1982 and 1996 I was a regular visitor to Darmstadt, going every two years as a guest of the Internationale Ferienkurse für neue Musik. During the Darmstadt Ferienkurse I always

made a point of visiting the Block and in 1992 I wrote a short prepared piano piece for Kate Ryder as a response to the experience of being in the Block. The choice of piano was of course a reference to the presence in many of Beuys's installations of a grand piano. In Beuys's work the piano was usually mute; in mine it is muted with Blu-tack, the closest, piano-friendly material I could find to Beuys's favourite material, fat.

Cylinders Barn, 1947 (1993/1999)

Cylinders Barn is a small stone building, a little way off the main road between Elterwater and Chapel Stile in Cumbria, and was the site of Schwitters last installation, the *MERZbarn*. For much of the Second World War Schwitters lived in Britain, detained as an 'enemy alien', and after the war he settled in Ambleside. This small provincial town in the English Lake District is an unlikely setting for one of the 20th century's most innovative artists but Schwitters made luminously beautiful work there. The sensuously curving organic forms of the *MERZbarn* are preserved in the Hatton Gallery in the University of Newcastle.

My piece is conceived as a series of audio snapshots of Schwitters at work in the *MERZbarn*, a sort of imaginary documentary, and includes the voices of Harry Pierce, who owned Cylinders Barn, and Harry Bickerstaff, an Ambleside schoolmaster who befriended Schwitters. The revised version of the work on this CD was made with the technical assistance of Rob Scorah in the studios of the University of Huddersfield.

I Sing for the Muses and Myself (1991)

This short work for piano is in three parts and was written in 1991 as a celebration of the work of the poet and visual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay. I also embedded Finlay's name in the music itself, extracting the notes A, B natural (i.e. 'H') and F as the kernel of the bass part and the numerical proportions 3:8:6 as the repeated rhythm of the middle part. The upper part is in part a setting of three Finlay texts, 'Fruitful vine be in time' (track 26 index 1), 'Evening will come they will sew the blue sail' (index 2) and 'Light fills my sails' (index 3), which are inscribed over the latter bars of each part of the piece. They can be sung, but if the title is read as a performance direction then these texts should be a private invocation. I had been introduced to Finlay's work by the art historian Patrick Eyres and *I Sing* was published in his *New Arcadian Journal* (Vols. 33/4) and first recorded by the composer on a cassette which accompanied the journal.

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Christopher Fox was born in 1955. He studied composition with Hugh Wood, Jonathan Harvey and Richard Orton at Liverpool, Southampton and York Universities and was awarded the degree of DPhil in composition from York University in 1984. Since 1994 he has been a Senior Lecturer in Composition at the University of Huddersfield. His work has been performed and broadcast world-wide and has featured in new music festivals from Montreal to St Petersburg and London to Sidney. Between 1984 and 1994 he was a member of the composition staff of the Darmstadt New Music Summer School in Germany; during 1987 he lived in West Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Berlin Artists Programme. His work was featured in the BBC Promenade Concerts for the first time in 1997.

As a composer Christopher Fox has worked with many of the leading new music ensembles and soloists, including the Arditti Quartet, Arraymusic (Toronto), Anthony de Mare, Roger Heaton, Rolf Hind, Ensemble Köln, Ensemble Bash, Philip Mead and the late Yvar Mikhashoff. Most recently he has established close relationships with the new generation of performers. In the Netherlands he works regularly with the Ives Ensemble, for whom he wrote the ensemble cycle, *Themes and Variations*; they will premiere a new evening-long 'music event' by him in March 2001.

His writings on music have been published widely, in the journals *Contact* (of which he was an editor), *Contemporary Music Review*, *Contrechamps*, *Musical Times* and *Tempo*. More recently he was co-editor of *Von Kranichstein zur Gegenwart* (1996, Daco Verlag, Stuttgart), a history of 50 years of the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, and of *Uncommon Ground*, a book on the music of Michael Finnissy for Ashgate Press (1998, London).

Fox has been hailed by Andy Hamilton in *The Wire* as 'a tantalising figure in British music'; Paul Driver in the *Sunday Times* has described his music as 'impressive, thoughtful, entertaining and extremely varied'. His work regularly extends beyond the conventional boundaries of the concert hall and includes the radio piece *Alarmed and Dangerous*, commissioned by the BBC in 1996, gallery installations in collaboration with video artists and printmakers, a 'musical box' made with the poet Ian Duhig, and a 'pocket opera' for the percussion group Ensemble Bash. Paul Griffiths, writing in the *Times*, has said of Fox's work that 'he takes simple ideas but he makes them sound quite wonderful'.

Amanda Crawley was born and educated in London. Her singing studies commenced at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Joyce Newton, continued at Liverpool University under Doreen Wedgewood and later at York with Yvonne Seymour. As a singer Amanda has performed as a recitalist and soloist in Britain, Germany, France and the Netherlands. Her operatic roles have ranged from Dido and Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, to the Soprano in the UK premiere of Tom Johnson's *Four Note Opera*. In the concert hall her wide-ranging repertoire extends from lute songs through the sacred and secular music of the Baroque, to Lieder, chanson and English song, as well as the music of Cole Porter, Noel Coward and George Gershwin. She has a special interest in contemporary classical music, performing the avant-garde vocal repertoire of composers such as Bussotti, Cage and Kagel alongside new pieces by younger composers, including Judith Weir, Roger Marsh and Lisa Reim, a number of which she has herself commissioned.

Ian Pace was born in Hartlepool, Cleveland, England in 1968. He studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's College, Oxford, and then as a Fulbright Scholar at the Juilliard School, New York, with the Hungarian pianist Gyorgy Sandor, a student of Bartok. Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international pianistic career, performing in the U.K., U.S.A., France, Spain, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Italy and Hungary, with a particular focus upon music of the 20th Century. In the last three years alone he has given over 80 world premieres of solo works, by such composers as

Richard Barrett, Michael Finnissy, Howard Skempton, Gerhard Stäbler, Ian Willcock and Walter Zimmermann. He has played a major part in introducing to the U.K. the work of important composers from Europe and the U.S. He also plays a very large and varied repertoire from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, including 45 concertos and most of the major works of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Busoni, Ives, Debussy, Ravel, Janacek, Bartok, Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Concerto performances have included works of Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, Bartok, Shostakovich, Gershwin, Messiaen and Xenakis.

In 1996 Pace's London concert series of the complete piano music of Michael Finnissy, to celebrate the composer's 50th birthday, was acclaimed in Classical Music as 'One of the great piano marathons of our time'. During the same year, he also gave performances of the complete piano works of Brian Ferneyhough at the International Bartok Festival, Szombathely, and Helmut Lachenmann, at the Sonorities Festival, Belfast, and in 1997 he presented in London a four concert series including the complete piano music of Howard Skempton.

Pace's debut CD, of the piano works of Christopher Fox, (Metier MSV CD92022) was 'highly recommended' in *The Wire*, given a 5-star rating in Classic CD and described as 'exceptional and insightful'; the *Sunday Times* describes the playing as exhibiting 'clarity and fervour throughout'. He has recorded a solo CD of Ferneyhough, Dench, Fox, Erber and Barrett for NMC; further CDs, of Finnissy's *Verdi Transcriptions*, *Gershwin Arrangements*, the complete *Folklore* cycle and a mixed recital disc, have also been recorded for Metier.

Ian Pace is artistic director of the ensemble Topologies and plays regularly with many other groups; he appeared with the Arditti Quartet at Wien Modern in 1998 and at the 1999 Cheltenham Festival. He is on the piano faculty of the London College of Music and is also active as a writer on new music. He is a co-editor (with Henrietta Brougham and Christopher Fox) and major contributor to the book *Uncommon Ground: The Music of Michael Finnissy* (Ashgate, 1997).

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Christopher Fox

Music for piano, voice and tape

Amanda Crawley - soprano Ian Pace - piano

A-N-N-A Blossom-time (1987-8)		
1	Dumb Animals	1:04
2	Morning	1:49
3	1, 2, 3	1:06
4	Cut-Up	1:46
5	A-N-N-A Blossom's Book of Chinese Proverbs	2:11
6	You	2:11
7	Country Life	0:58
8	All About A-N-N-A	4:00
9	Lullaby	0:54
10	You, Us, Me (Habañera) (1992)	6:44
Louisiana (1991-2)		
11	Valse	0:40
12	Yearning	0:50
13	Simile	0:42
14	Ice Watch	1:39
15	The Dreaming Country	1:18
16	Worthless Leather	2:09
17	The Critic	0:21
18	Book-keeping for Small Businessmen	0:27
19	Going Gone	0:24
20	Reconstruction	0:27
21	Hands	0:26
22	MERZsonata (1993/1998)	10:41
23	Second Eight (1978-80, rev. 1982)	8:00
24	Block (1992)	3:33
25	Cylinders Barn, 1947 (1993/1999)	6:18
26	I Sing for the Muses and Myself (1991)	2:51



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