

Piano Professional Reviews

by Jenny Macmillan

Seven Piano Suites and Nine Piano Pieces

Lola Perrin

Printed by Lola Perrin, UK, 2009, www.lolaperrin.com

£20.00 per Suite

Music inspired by the visual arts – what a lovely idea! Lola Perrin has written seven Suites for piano inspired by paintings, photographs, sculpture, installations. These Suites, accompanied by descriptions of their inspiration, could be interesting for budding composers to study. They were composed between 1992 and 2009.

In the 1st Suite, *After Edward Hopper's 'Early Sunday Morning'*, Perrin has invented lives and dreams of people who are out of sight in Hopper's painting of a quiet row of houses at dawn. Piano Suite II, *Nine Images for Piano*, was written from memories of the atmosphere in Ansel Adams' photographs. The third piece, *Going on Bird Speed*, is a contemplative homage to Perrin's grandparents and imagines their thoughts while they watched birds circling their ship as they sailed towards a new life in America in the early 1900s. Eighty years later, the ninth piece, *Softer green sleeping*, is a portrait of two of their great grandchildren, sun-baked and sleeping in their room after a long afternoon in the park in the heat of summer.

The 3rd Suite was written after observing very young children exploring the piano keyboard without inhibitions. However, unlike the clusters to be played with fists and arms in Kurtag's *Jatekok (Children at Play)*, Perrin's techniques are conventional in this minimalist music. The starting point for Suite IV was artist Rachel Whiteread's sculpture showing where she'd cast into plaster the shape of the space underneath a bed. Perrin used a sequence of drawings by Nazzari Montag of the transfer lounge at Newark Airport Terminal NYC – a transient space through which motion is defined by its architecture.

The Silver Suite (No V) took as its inspiration Carsten Holler's Unilever Commission at Tate Modern in 2007 – five silver playground slides. Perrin takes the sense of abandoning (abandoning) oneself to the laws of gravity and speed when playing on a slide, but then inverts it, turning it into slow motion upwards. From one viewpoint, a slide looks like a trumpet – so the second piece is called *The Sound of Silver*. Suite VI, *The Theory of K*, where K=Kindness, was written for a symposium on Music, Science and the Brain. It is technically more difficult than the previous suites, some of the movements approaching grade 8 standard.

The 7th Suite explores the interest of Cypriot-born designer/artist Hussein Chalayan in the issues of cultural migration and displacement. There is also a further set of Nine Piano Pieces, *Standing Alone*, each inspired by artistic, literary or emotional events such as works by Hanif Kureishi,

John Bayley's telling of Iris Murdoch's latter years, and a girl requiring a bone marrow transplant.

I find Perrin's minimalist style of writing more attractive than her rather angular melodies and dissonant harmonies. Some of the movements incorporate interesting rhythms such as 3+3+2 over 8 and 3+4+3 over 8, reminiscent of Bartok's *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*. Perrin uses a wide range of keys, especially favouring those with several flats. Difficulty ranges from about grade 3 to 8.

These Suites are self-published, but reasonably well printed, wire bound. The front cover of each Suite shows artwork by John Kennedy which has been inspired by Lola Perrin's music. However, it would surely have been more interesting to have shown images of Hopper's painting, Adams' photographs, and so on. At £20 per Suite (the 1st Suite has only 13 pages of music, while Nine Piano Pieces has 43 pages), this strikes me as somewhat expensive music.

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The *Get to Know Classical Masterpieces* series includes works such as the Four Seasons, Magic Flute, Peer Gynt, Nutcracker, Pictures at an Exhibition, Carnival of the Animals and Peter and the Wolf. Apart from an introductory letter commencing with the ghastly "Dear Pianists" and ending "With best wishes, Hans-Gunter Heumann" which exhorts pianists to "be enchanted by Handel's wonderful Baroque sounds", this book offers an excellent introduction to the Water Music and Music for the Royal Fireworks. A brief history of each work precedes a selection of piano arrangements of about half of the short pieces which make up these Suites. The book is attractively illustrated by Brigitte Smith. ■

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