PIERS LANE GOES TO TOWN

1. KATHARINE PARKER (1886–1971) *Down Longford Way* No 2 of *Four Musical Sketches for Piano* ........................................... [2'34]
2. ALAN LANE (1932–2002) *Toccata* No 4 of *Suite* ................................................................. [4'31]
3. ANTHONY DOHENY (b 1938) *Toccata for Piers Lane* ............................................................... [1'53]
4. JOHN IRELAND (1879–1962) *Ballarina* .................................................................................... [4'39]
5. JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) / DAME MYRA HESS (1890–1965) *Jesu, joy of man’s desiring* ........................................... [4'03]
7. LÉO DELIBES (1836–1891) / ERNŐ DOHNÁNYI (1877–1960) *Naila Waltz* from *La source, ou Naila* ........................................... [7'29]
8. SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943) *Daisies* Op 38 No 3 ....................................................... [2'32]
9. ZEZ CONFREY (1895–1971) *Dizzy Fingers* ............................................................................. [1'57]
10. MARK SAYA (b 1954) *Barcarolles* operatic paraphrase after Offenbach and Chopin ................. [5'42]
    ALEC TEMPLETON (1910–1963) *Bach goes to town* Prelude and Fugue in swing ................................................ [3'05]
13. Prelude ................................................................................................................................... [1'25]
14. Fugue ....................................................................................................................................... [1'39]
15. ARTHUR BENJAMIN (1893–1960) *Jamaican Rumba* ............................................................. [1'01]
16. ROBERT KEANE (b 1948) *The Tiger Tango* No 3 of *Save the Animals Suite* .................. [3'20]
17. ANTONY HOPKINS (b 1921) *Variations on a well-known theme* ........................................... [14'13]
18. SIGFRID KARG-ELERT (1877–1933) *Arabesque No 1 in G flat major ‘Filigran’* Op 5 ........ [2'57]
20. PERCY GRAINGER (1882–1961) *Irish tune from County Derry* ........................................... [3'38]

PIERS LANE piano
WOULD BE SURPRISED if even the most avid pianophile knew every piece on this disc. The original intention was to record a selection of my most-often-played encores. However, they range from Lully to Dudley Moore, and it would have been difficult to make any sort of coherent programme of them. The field was narrowed to twentieth-century offerings, with maybe a glance or two backwards—you can decide for yourself whether Dame Myra Hess and Zez Confrey make good bedfellows! The order in which these pieces are presented is largely determined by key relationships, a sense of varietal spice, and a sandwich made of the Aussies Percy Grainger and his student and friend Katharine Parker. Considering the scope of these short pieces, Australian composers feature more prominently than one might expect, partly because several works were written for me by down-under compatriots.

Katharine Parker (1886–1971), also published as Kitty Parker, was born at Lake River, near Longford in Tasmania. She completed studies in Melbourne before travelling to London to be mentored by the redoubtable Percy Grainger. Her kinship with his style is palpable, as we can see in the two works at either end of this recording, both of which are in E flat major, and both ‘slowish’—Parker’s *Down Longford Way* is marked ‘Slowish but flowing’; Grainger’s *Irish Tune from County Derry*, typically and inimitably, ‘Slowish, but not dragged, and wayward in time’. Written in 1928, *Down Longford Way* is the second of *Four Musical Sketches for Piano*. Parker’s other works consist primarily of piano solos and songs.

My father, Alan Lane (1932–2002), was not yet an Australian when he composed his *Suite*, of which the *Toccata* is the fourth movement, in 1957. He was still living in his native London, where he and my mother, the Australian Enid Hitchcock, had married the year before, after meeting as students at the Royal College of Music. My father studied piano there with Norman Greenwood, and composition with Herbert Howells. He composed a cadenza to Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No 1, which Kendall Taylor (my mother’s piano professor and my own over twenty years later) performed at the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall. Emigration to Australia in 1958 was timely. My father commenced teaching at the newly established Queensland Conservatorium of Music, where he became a much-loved lecturer in harmony and counterpoint and an admired educator at a national level. Though he composed some film music, his main output was for piano. Many of his students have achieved notable success, none more so than the composer-violist Brett Dean. The *Toccata* contrasts biting quartal harmony and chromaticism with a sweepingly lyrical middle section.

I first met Anthony Doheny (born 1938) when I became a full-time student at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music in 1975. He returned to Australia that year from the United States (where he had completed a doctorate at Stanford and taught in the Yehudi Menuhin Program at Neua Day School for Gifted Children in Hillsborough, California) to take up a position at the ‘Con’ as Senior Lecturer of Violin. He was a Queensland boy, born in Rockhampton, and outrageously gifted in many ways. Violin and viola were his main instruments, but his teaching, piano playing and improvising are all highly distinguished. After the death of his wife Janet he left Queensland and entered the Conventual Franciscan Order in Melbourne in 1988, duly becoming Superior of the Order in Australia. During his years as a Franciscan friar, he started composing seriously and wrote a lot for piano, violin, viola and voice. He would often get up in the middle of the night to write down the germs of ideas before he forgot them. This happened with the *Toccata for Piers Lane*. In June 1999 he heard my Hyperion recording of Strauss transcriptions and was, as he put it, ‘over the moon with delight’:
I felt like indulging in pure nonsense. I’ve always loved Czerny and I think the influence shows … my germ of an idea suggested something over the top and ridiculous, but much fun to play. A few nights later, around 3 a.m., inspiration seized again and I was fleshing it out via Sibelius on the computer. It made me laugh out loud, so much so that next morning the young friar in the neighbouring bedroom wanted to know why I was laughing in the middle of the night. As you can imagine, I was thought to be a little eccentric …

Leaving the Franciscan Order in 2005 and his teaching duties at Melbourne and Monash Universities, Doheny now lives in Silicon Valley, where he is a Lecturer in Music at Stanford University and teaches at the Mountain View Community School of Music and Arts.

_Ballerina_ by **John Ireland** (1879–1962) may sound familiar, but this is in fact the first recording of a piece published only after the recording sessions. It is the early version of Ireland’s _Columbine_ (1951), originally called _Impromptu_, a title its composer disliked. For its recent publication it was renamed _Ballerina_, a working title used by Ireland on one of his sketches for the piece, now held in the British Library. It was originally commissioned in 1949 by the American screenwriter William Rose ( _Genevieve_, _The Ladykillers_, _Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?_ ) as a present for his wife Tania (née Price). Ireland reworked it before its publication as _Columbine_ two years later. Alan Bush, the trenchant British composer who studied with Ireland from 1927 to 1932, used to play this early version and preferred it to the revised _Columbine_, which he described as bowdlerized! After a performance I gave in Milan of Ireland’s Piano Concerto, Bruce Phillips, Director of The John Ireland Charitable Trust, asked me what other Ireland I was performing for the fiftieth anniversary of the composer’s death. I mentioned this recording and the possibility of including the delicious ‘valse lente’ _Columbine_; it was he who suggested I might consider _Ballerina_ instead.

_Jesu, joy of man’s desiring_ is as synonymous with the great British pianist **Dame Myra Hess** (1890–1965), who made this iconic transcription, as are the National Gallery wartime concerts she gave in London. It has become a mainstay of my repertoire. In 2009, as Artistic Director of the annual memorial Myra Hess Day at the Gallery, I commissioned Nigel Hess, Dame Myra’s great nephew, to write a script based on her own words from interviews and diaries about the wartime concert series so indelibly associated with her, and which Hess considered her lifetime’s prime achievement. Words and music were sensitively woven together in a show called _Admission: One Shilling_, which has now been performed in dozens of theatres and halls. The great actress Patricia Routledge narrates to a background slideshow of contemporaneous photographs, and I play a repertoire espoused by Hess during her career. Inevitably, this culminates in a performance of _Jesu, joy_, over which moving words are uttered, including Hess’s statement: ‘If I had died the day peace was declared, I’d have felt my life’s work was complete.’

Hess was inspired to transcribe the chorale after she heard a rehearsal for a Bach Festival in April 1920. The solo version was published in 1926, the duet in 1934. John Amis—a nonagenarian wonder who frequently turned pages during the wartime concerts, and whose memories still amaze listeners—mentioned recently that Dame Myra’s rendition of this transcription became slower and more dignified the more often she played it. The original Bach chorale—the tenth and final movement of Cantata No 147, _Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben_ (‘Heart and mouth and deed and life’), sung by a chorus accompanied by trumpet, strings, oboe, and basso
continuo—seems rather sprightly compared with the reverential tone with which we tend to imbue the transcription. That is partly because the English words (from which comes the title), by the poet laureate Robert Bridges, are not a direct translation of the German stanzas used by Bach, which suggest a lively hymn of praise.

Billy Mayerl (1902–1959) was a great favourite in the Lane household when I was growing up in Brisbane. My father used to entertain us with *Marigold* (1927) or *Song of the Fir Tree* or *Autumn Crocus*, and the gentle syncopations and attractive tunes proved irresistible. *Marigold* became Mayerl’s signature tune. He indicates it should be played slowly and lightly, but his own performances of it were often breathtakingly fast.

Mayerl was a natural. Born in Tottenham Court Road, right by London’s West End theatre land, he won a scholarship to study at Trinity College of Music while still a young boy, and soon after performed Grieg’s Piano Concerto at the Queen’s Hall. As a young teenager he played in dance bands and accompanied silent films, and a little later was the pianist in the prestigious Savoy Havana Band. His recordings and broadcasts brought him renown and in 1925 he gave the British premiere of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, his ‘lightning fingers’ filmed by slow-motion camera. He wrote for revues all over the country and composed musicals for which he formed a twenty-six piece orchestra. In 1926, with great enterprise, he went into business and started a ‘Correspondence Course in Modern Syncopation’, which proved popular and became a worldwide affair with more than 30,000 subscribers. The war interrupted proceedings and momentum was never fully regained. It finally closed in 1957, two years before Mayerl’s premature death. Like Dame Myra Hess, he did his bit for the war effort. He led his own band in a radio programme, *Music while you work*, designed to support wartime factory workers; its enduring popularity ensured
its continuance for a further twenty years. Mayerl’s prolific
and delightful, if somewhat eccentric, output demands a
proper revival.

It was my mother who introduced me to the "Naila Waltz," arranged by Erno Dohnányi (1877–1960) from a ballet by Léo Delibes. How I loved its heady pianism as a fifteen-year-old! The piece was popular, too, with Golden Age pianists like Rachmaninov, Wilhelm Kempff and Lev Pouishnov. The title, though, is somewhat misleading. The ballet it supposedly comes from is called La source ('The spring'; Naila is the name of one of the leading characters, a nymph), its music composed in 1866 not only by Delibes, but also by Ludwig Minkus. However, the ballet didn’t originally include this waltz. Delius composed it a year later as part of an additional divertissement (known either as Le jardín animé or Le pas des fleurs) for a revival of Adolphe Adam’s ballet Le corsaire. The music was then apparently pinched from Le corsaire for a later production of La source that used mainly Delibes’ music (considered more worthwhile than Minkus’s), given under the title Naila—hence Dohnányi’s transcription becoming known as the "Naila Waltz."

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943) has always been among my top five pianists. His ineffable sense of structure, tone, rubato, line, rhythm, touch and voicing demands respect, admiration and love. This tiny floral tribute is also bound up with my devotion to song and singers. Daisies is a transcription by the composer of the third of his Six Romances Op. 38, composed in 1916 to words by Igor Severyanin (1887–1941). The poem speaks with wonder and adoration of the abundance of wild summer daisies with their silken winged petals and implores the earth to provide dew for their flowers, sap for stems. Of course, the daisies are most likely a metaphor.

The career of Edward Elzear ‘Zez’ Confrey (1895–1971) had vague parallels with that of Billy Mayerl, albeit in the States rather than the United Kingdom. He was born in Illinois, the youngest of five children. At the age of four he was able to copy his eldest brother Jim’s piano playing by ear, and while still at school he played in and directed his own orchestra. He undertook classical music studies at the Chicago Musical College and when he was twenty he and Jim formed an orchestra, which recorded dance music hits for the Victor Talking Machine Company. During World War I he joined the navy and toured in a musical revue called Leave it to sailors, both playing and acting alongside a talented violinist—none other than the later television personality Jack Benny. After the war Confrey recorded piano novelties for the QRS Piano Roll Company and later for Ampico—171 rolls between 1918 and 1927. These led to recordings for companies like Brunswick, Edison and Emerson, and a music publishing contract. In 1924 Confrey was the first-half drawcard for the concert that introduced George Gershwinn’s Rhapsody in Blue—An Experiment in Modern Music with Paul Whiteman’s Palais Royal Orchestra. In the ’30s and ’40s Confrey composed more and more for jazz big bands, but largely retired from composition after the second World War. When he died from Parkinson’s disease in 1971 he left over a hundred piano solos, plus songs, miniature operas, simple beginners’ music and his 1923 book Zez Confrey’s Modern Course in Novelty Piano Playing, which had been continually in print for forty years. His first hit was Kitten on the Keys (1921), but Dizzy Fingers (1923), a cleverly written étude with enough rhythmic quirkiness to keep things interesting, has always come a close second in popularity.

In 2009 I performed Chopin’s Preludes at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada. A composer resident there at the time suggested that I might enjoy exploring Seven Preludes Revisited, a piece based on Chopin by an American composer friend of his, Mark Saya (born 1954).
He was quite right, I did enjoy it, as have the audiences I've since performed it to—it is clever, serious, lyrical, touching and boppy by turns. I was therefore delighted when the composer sent me a copy of his Barcarolles, which I also took up immediately and played in various places including the ever-inquisitive Husum Festival of Piano Rarities in northern Germany. Barcarolles, subtitled 'operatic paraphrase', transcribes Jacques Offenbach's famous operatic barcarolle Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour ('Beautiful night, oh night of love'), from Les contes d'Hoffmann. Interlaced with the Offenbach are several elements from Chopin's Barcarolle in F sharp major Op 60.

Mark Saya studied piano and composition at Indiana University South Bend and the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. Since 1992 he has taught theory and composition at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Barcarolles was first heard publicly in performances interpolated into John Cage's Europera V in Los Angeles in 2011. This is its first recording. This is also the first recording of Manning Sherwin's 1939 standard A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square in its arrangement by the French-Australian pianist Regis Danillon (born 1949). Regis was only a teenager when his parents emigrated from Bordeaux to Brisbane, and he studied piano with my own later teacher Nancy Weir, herself a student of Schnabel in Berlin and subsequently of Craxton and Matthay in London. I remember from my childhood wonderfully elegant performances by Danillon of Ravel's left-hand piano concerto and other French offerings. When I was a student at the Queensland Conservatorium he was a teacher there, and together we played various two-piano programmes of Mozart, Rachmaninov, Brubeck, Chabrier and others, all from memory. He dedicated this arrangement to me in 2005, inspired particularly by the transcriptions by Rachmaninov and Stephen Hough. Regis has always been fascinated by 'crossover' music and wanted to create a virtuoso piano piece in a popular style. His other arrangements include Evergreen, the Barbra Streisand love song from A Star is Born, and a medley of songs from The King and I.

The music of Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) has always appealed to me, its piquant harmonies and urbanity often masking a certain melancholy or biting despair. I remember the critic Felix Aprahamian, who knew Poulenc well, telling me of his shyness: when he accompanied Pierre Bernac in a London recital, he came on stage at the last possible minute, hoping not to be recognized. Poulenc composed eight Nocturnes, and No 4 (1934) is subtitled 'Bal fantôme'. Its brevity and rhythmic pattern are reminiscent of Chopin's A major Prelude. Delighting in bittersweet semitones, the scene is set by a few prefacing lines from the novel Le visionnaire by Poulenc's friend, an American born in Paris, Julien Green (1900–1998), to whom the piece is dedicated: strains of ballroom waltzes and reels waft through the entire house, so that the invalid on his sickbed can join in the fun, drifting into daydreams about the good years of his youth.

Alec Templeton (1910–1963) was an American born in Cardiff. He was blind from birth, but blessed with absolute pitch and an uncanny ability to improvise. He was only twelve when he began to be heard on the BBC, and studied at both the Royal College and the Royal Academy in London. At the age of eighteen he wrote a Trio for flute, oboe and piano that was praised by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Seven years later Jack Hylton, the British bandleader, took Templeton to the States, where he was broadcasting a series of radio programmes for the Standard Oil Company. Templeton remained there, becoming an American citizen in 1941. He had enormous success as a radio and television personality, appearing frequently on The Bing Crosby Show, later having his own
programme called *It’s Alec Templeton Time*. He recorded Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* for Columbia in the 1940s and later Gershwin’s Concerto in F with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Critics praised his musicianship and interpretation, while noting his somewhat limited technical prowess. *Bach goes to town*, subtitled *Prelude and Fugue in swing* and covered by Benny Goodman’s band in 1938, has become a perennial favourite. Templeton notes it was written as Bach might have written it, had he been alive today. He also noted that music doesn’t need to be ponderous to be good. It can be everything from Bach to jazz. His British sense of humour often revealed itself in his titles: *Mozart Matriculates, Scarlatti Stoops to Conga* and the *Pocketsize Sonata* for clarinet and piano. His more ambitious piano works include the *Concertino lirico* (1942) and the *Gothic Concerto* for piano and orchestra (1954).

**Arthur Benjamin** (1893–1960) was another expatriate composer. Though born in Sydney, he grew up in my hometown, Brisbane, until his exceptional talent earned him a scholarship in 1911 to study at London’s Royal College of Music. He studied harmony and counterpoint under Thomas Dunhill, and piano with Frederick Cliffe. Fellow students included Herbert Howells, the ill-fated genius Ivor Gurney, Arthur Bliss, Frederick Thurston, and three of the extraordinary Goossens family—Eugene (violinist, composer, conductor, and later Director of the Sydney Conservatorium), Léon (obrist) and Adolph (hornist). What a lineup! When war broke out three years later, he enlisted to serve in the infantry, but ended up a gunner with the Royal Flying Corps. Four months before the end of the war his plane was shot down over Germany and he was interned, along with Edgar Bainton, in the Ruhleben Camp, where the enlightened commander encouraged cultural pursuits: Bainton started a madrigal society (‘Bainton’s Magpies’), there was an orchestra, and the continuation of British university qualifications was organized and encouraged. Benjamin got on with his composition, but after repatriation he went back to Australia to be a piano professor at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. That didn’t last long though; he returned to London in 1921 and taught at the Royal College. He performed a lot in these RCM years, but in 1938, the year he published his two-piano *Jamaican Rumba* (based on a folk tune he brought back after examining in the West Indies for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools), he departed for Vancouver, where from 1941 he conducted the CBC Symphony Orchestra, played, composed, taught and gave a series of radio talks, becoming a major figure in Canadian cultural life until his return to London and the Royal College at the end of the war. His works include several operas, a harmonica concerto written, of course, for Larry Adler, vocal works, chamber music (including a really worthwhile Viola Sonata from 1942 that I’ve performed a number of times), film and orchestral music, and music for children. But it’s for the *Jamaican Rumba* that he was always best known—and that is still the case. The abbreviated solo version was published in 1945.

I have known **Robert Keane** (born 1948) for many years. He studied the piano with my main teacher, Nancy Weir, well before I went to her to be changed for life! His composition teachers included such luminaries as Edmund Rubbra, Benjamin Britten and Einojuhani Rautavaara, and his PhD from the University of London was awarded for his work on the songs of Jean Sibelius. He says: ‘I like to write serious music that is also fun; and fun music that can be pretty darn serious.’ Perhaps *The Tiger Tango* falls into the latter category. It was written after a visit to the Tiger Temple at Kanchanaburi in western Thailand. There, tigers rescued from the wild are raised by Buddhist monks for release back into a safe environment. *The Tiger Tango* is included in Keane’s *Save the Animals*
Suite for piano, with companion pieces about whales, elephants, bears and orang-utans. Keane says: ‘My idea is that maybe pianists can help to save endangered animals, so each piece is dedicated to a distinguished Australian pianist, The Tiger Tango to my mate Piers Lane.’ If you want to help Save the Animals, the music is downloadable at www.robertkeane.com.au.

The piece is cleverly written. The start of the tango tune, after a few bars of introduction, is constructed from the letters in the word tiger. The letters T correspond to the solfege B, G and E follow, and then with R sounding like A(h), the motif ends on A. The slower middle section uses the same notes in a different order and down a semitone: A flat, G flat, E flat, B flat. Happy hunting!

The English composer, radio presenter, pianist, conductor, author and lecturer Antony Hopkins CBE (born 1921) gave me a copy of his Variations on a well-known theme several years back, thinking I may find it useful at the Newport Music Festival, Rhode Island, where I was a frequent performer at the time. His name had been a bit of a legend to me when I was growing up. His lectures at the Royal College of Music were the only ones my parents never missed as students. His radio programme Talking about music, broadcast for thirty-six years on the BBC Transcription Service, made his distinctive voice internationally recognizable. His many books of musical analysis and perception promoted understanding in witty and wonderful ways. Above all he communicated the joy of music to thousands for decades. He has called himself a sort of musical odd-job man, because of his flair for producing what was needed at any time, often with a minimum of time available to do it in. He has composed operas, ballets, incidental music for radio and theatre, film music, including Here come the Huggetts (1948), The Pickwick Papers (1952), Cast a dark shadow (1955) and Billy Budd (1962), chamber works and of course pieces for piano. The Variations on a well-known theme was originally written between May and July 1976 for a BBC television programme to demonstrate the styles of various composers. Antony Hopkins says of this piece: ‘It may be seen as a sort of journey through the ages. In the process of writing the variations, I became so fascinated by the exercise in pastiche that I expanded them into what I hope will prove an entertaining concert piece.’

The theme, Happy birthday, is never actually stated: the television programme could only be fourteen minutes long and the variations themselves left no extra space for it to be added. It isn’t necessary anyway—its presence is felt, melodically or harmonically, in almost every bar of the piece. The composers who enter and exit form quite a Who’s Who in the music world. The opening variations are dedicated to Mozart, building them up the way Mozart himself does in his many sets of variations. There is a touching nod to the C minor Piano Concerto K491 and a graceful variation that perhaps triggers memories of the Sonata in A major K331. Beethoven eventually enters with hushed Adagio chords, like the slow movement of the ‘Appassionata’ Sonata Op 57—and he hangs around for the next three variations, with more than a passing nod to the Sonata in A major Op 101. Mendelssohn makes a brief and capricious entrance, lost in Midsummer Night Dreams, but is soon joined by Robert Schumann for a march in Études symphoniques style, which rhythmically (and appositely) ties in with the earlier Beethoven scherzando. Brahms, naturally enough, follows Schumann in two variations that contrast his lyrical style—remembered from parts of the Ballades, Rhapsodies and Intermezzi—with the grand chordal sweep of the final variation from his towering Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel Op 24. The touching simplicity of Chopin’s A major Prelude is recalled, but also the majestic rhythms of the Polonaise Op 53, before Liszt improvises unmistakeably
on a motif from the original theme, as in the lassan of a Hungarian Rhapsody. He tinkles and trills as he does in La campanella, makes life difficult for pianists, as in the fiendish Malédiction for piano and strings, declaims in a Wagnerian way, as in his transcription of Isolde’s Liebestod, or rockets off as in his first Piano Concerto. But he doesn’t get the final say. That is reserved for Prokofiev, in Op 11 Toccata mode. The variations cover about as much history as the nonagenarian Hopkins himself! Well, perhaps a bit more …

It was my second piano teacher (the first being my mother), Dr William Lovelock of harmony and counterpoint textbook fame, who introduced me to the music of Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877–1933) when I was twelve, through the Arabesque No 1 in G flat major ‘Filigran’, Op 5. Its gentle, elegant line and sympathetic pianism still touch me. It was written in 1900, an early work in an output primarily associated with the organ and, unusually, the harmonium, for which Karg-Elert remains the preeminent composer, with over a hundred works exploring its vast timbral resources. He was educated in the Leipzig Conservatory, where in 1919 he succeeded Max Reger as lecturer in theory and composition. Along with Reger, he ranks as one of the most important organ composers of the twentieth century. His own teachers included Carl Reinecke and Robert Teichmüller, but he was greatly encouraged by Edvard Grieg, whose music he hugely admired, along with that of Bach, Debussy, Scriabin and early Schoenberg. His thirty Caprices for flute were composed as exercises to keep a flautist friend occupied when he went off for active war service, but are still in use by young flute students everywhere.

I was a little reluctant when in 2008 Rainer Hersch, the conductor and comic, contacted me about appearing in Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall for a Comic Relief concert. It was to be just a couple of days after my return from a gruelling Australian tour and necessitated memorizing Dudley Moore’s Beethoven Parody, along with other more ‘normal’ musical excerpts, but also required me to dance on stage, to run through the audience and to participate in other antics that took me way out of my comfort zone. Something made me say yes. Since then the Beethoven Parody has become an anticipated encore at recitals and concerto performances in many parts of the world. I’ve even played it in such hallowed venues as London’s Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall. Rainer transcribed the piece from two available You Tube performances given by Dudley Moore at different points in his career. One of them introduces a snatch of the ‘Moonlight’ Sonata, which Rainer included. I was concerned at first that I wouldn’t be able to convey the necessary humour—but Rainer assured me that all I had to do was play (albeit adding Dudley’s stare at the audience at the appropriate moment and a desperate look over the shoulder at one point), because the music is so funny on its own. And it seems he was right. The experience might be rather different on a studio recording, but nevertheless the endless false endings and cadences, the clever use of Beethoven’s favourite key of C minor, the unexpected use of ‘Colonel Bogey’ as a theme, and the typical Beethoven scales and chords all inevitably wring a wry smile at the very least. The version I play here is based not only on the transcription by Rainer Hersch, but also the version published as And the same to you, from The complete Beyond the fringe.

As a loyal Australian I might be expected to appreciate the music of Percy Grainger (1882–1961), but I can’t imagine anyone not appreciating it. It’s so filled with humanity and imagination and glorious understanding of the instrument—nowhere better illustrated than in this setting of the Londonderry Air: Irish tune from County Derry (British Folk-Music Settings No 6). Grainger found it
in The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland. It had been submitted to the music collector George Petrie for publication in 1855, after Miss Jane Ross collected it from a local fiddle player. Grainger wrote:

For the following beautiful air I have to express my very grateful acknowledgement to Miss J. Ross, of New Town, Limavady, in the County of Londonderry—a lady who has made a large collection of the popular unpublished melodies of the county, which she has very kindly placed at my disposal, and which has added very considerably to the stock of tunes which I had previously acquired from that still very Irish county. I say still very Irish, for though it has been planted for more than two centuries by English and Scottish settlers, the old Irish race still forms the great majority of its peasant inhabitants; and there are few, if any counties in which, with less foreign admixture, the ancient melodies of the country have been so extensively preserved. The name of the tune unfortunately was not ascertained by Miss Ross, who sent it to me with the simple remark that it was ‘very old’, in the correctness of which statement I have no hesitation in expressing my perfect concurrence.

In 1902 Grainger set it for an a cappella mixed chorus. The solo piano version dates from 1911, but he arranged it eight times in all, including a rich version for piano quintet, which I’ve also enjoyed playing. The solo piano arrangement, with its tune starting in the tenor register, reminds one of all the sung Danny Boys one has ever heard. Grainger, like Chopin before him, knew perfectly how to make a piano sing. He also knew a thing or two about the emotional pull of certain harmonies. His fastidious pedal and expression marks complicate the page, but reveal again how much the man cared about music and its communication.

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Front illustration: Portrait of Piers Lane by John Beard (b1943)
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PIERS LANE

London-based Australian pianist Piers Lane has a flourishing international career, which has taken him to more than forty countries. Highlights of the past few years have included a standing ovation at Carnegie Hall for the massive Piano Concerto by Busoni, the premieres of Carl Vine’s second Piano Concerto with the Sydney Symphony and the London Philharmonic orchestras, concerto performances at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall, a three-recital series entitled Metamorphoses and other performances for the London Pianoforte series at Wigmore Hall.

Five times soloist at the BBC Proms in London’s Royal Albert Hall, Piers Lane’s wide-ranging concerto repertoire exceeds ninety works and has led to engagements with many of the world’s great orchestras, working with conductors including Sir Andrew Davis, Richard Hickox, Andrew Litton, Sir Charles Mackerras, Maxim Shostakovitch, Vassily Sinaisky, Yan Pascal Tortelier and Antoni Wit. Festival appearances have included Aldeburgh, Bath Mostly Mozart, Bard, Bergen, Cheltenham, Como Autumn Music, Consonances, La Roque d’Anthéron, Newport, Prague Spring, Ruhr Klavierfestival, Schloss vor Husum and the Chopin festivals in Warsaw, Duszniki-Zdrój, Mallorca and Paris.

His extensive discography for Hyperion includes much-admired recordings of rare Romantic piano concertos, the complete Preludes and Études by Scriabin, transcriptions of Bach and Strauss, along with complete collections of concert études by Saint-Saëns, Moscheles and Henselt, and transcriptions by Grainger. His recording of Eugen d’Albert’s solo piano music was nominated for a Gramophone Award. He has also recorded piano quintets by Bloch, Bridge, Dvořák, Elgar, Harty and Taneyev with the Goldner String Quartet.

Piers Lane is in great demand as a collaborative artist, and he continues his long-standing partnerships with violinist Tasmin Little and clarinettist Michael Collins. He has written and presented over 100 programmes for BBC Radio 3, including the popular 54-part series The Piano. In the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Birthday Honours he was made an Officer in the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished services to the arts. Since 2007 he has been Artistic Director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and also of the annual Myra Hess Day at the National Gallery in London.

In 2007 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University in Australia. In 1994 he was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, where he has been a professor for many years. He is Patron of the European Piano Teachers’ Association UK, the Old Granary Studio in Norfolk, the Tait Memorial Trust, the Youth Music Foundation of Australia and the Music Teachers’ Association and the Accompanists’ Guild in Queensland. He is also a Trustee of the Hattori Foundation in London, and Vice-President of Putney Music Club.