

Simon Powis
Classical Guitar Recital
God of the Northern Forest and Kinkachoo, I Love You

Phillip Houghton
1954

Sydney-based composer Phillip Houghton initially trained as a visual artist, moving to musical studies at the age of twenty.¹ The visual nature of his work, however, is still an integral part of his compositional style. Colourful harmonies, textures and timbres are used to very specific effect, utilising the instrument as a painter would a palette of colours. Houghton has composed for theatre, film and dance, writing music for both acoustic and electronic media.² It is his compositions for classical guitar, however, that have become immensely popular both in Australia and abroad.

Houghton did not take to the guitar immediately: his first exposure to the instrument at the age of nine resulted not in a new musical pursuit, but rather in a makeshift cricket-bat and it received the unfortunate fate of being in the way of a speeding 'fast ball'. Six years later the broken body was exhumed from the garage and repaired. Houghton soon discovered the delights of Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon and Julian Bream, further motivating him to study the guitar with Sebastian Jorgensen, to whom *God of the Northern Forest* is dedicated. Houghton studied with Jorgensen at the artists' colony Montsalvat, in Eltham, Victoria where he later lived and worked.³ The Eltham Copper Butterfly, which is peculiar to that area, is one of the inspirations for *God of the Northern Forest*, the other being Jorgensen's Nordic heritage and the Swiss painter Paul Klee's painting of the same name. The varied influences of jazz, rock, folk and classical music come through Houghton's compositional style, as does his interest in mythology and nature. Houghton explores new sonorities and timbral landscapes with his compositions motivating the editor of *Classical Guitar Magazine* to go so far as to label Houghton a 'genius'.⁴

To recreate the dark, brooding forest depicted in Klee's painting, Houghton has used a myriad of effects, including *rasgueado* (a flamenco strumming technique), *tambura* (a percussive effect that creates pitches), harmonics and a detailed use of right hand positioning to achieve desired sonorities from the guitar strings. The guitar's lowest string is tuned up a semitone to F, this being perhaps the most identifiable and characteristic effect used in the work. Houghton explains in his edition of the score: 'I did this because I felt the bass F captured something of the painting's 'resonance', especially the powerful inverted D minor chord it makes with the open A and D strings. The chord, played "like an anvil," dominates the opening of the solo before returning towards the end, and is the backbone of the piece.'⁵ The appearance of the Eltham Copper butterfly in the work is signified by the harmonic 'e', marked 'delicato (like a butterfly)'.

Kinkachoo, I Love You is a fitting counterpart to *God of the Northern Forest* as it also has the rather obscure F tuning in the bass. The work, however, was conceived separately, written five years later in 1998. It draws inspiration from the mythological world much like the *God of the Northern Forest*. Houghton writes under the title of his piece, '...the Kinkachoo, a mythical bird, once wounded in the Spirit-Realm, heals and flies into the world.'⁶ Houghton also gives very specific and synaesthesia-like instructions: 'With a sense of weightlessness; to hover and glow. Melody to have a rich, warm "mid" stroke'. This specificity in the performance directions gives the composer a strong ability to convey the original idea and essence of the piece, showing the musician exactly which colours from the palette to choose.

¹ Phillip Houghton Homepage, *Biography*, www.philliphoughton.com, accessed October 21, 2004.

² Australian Music Centre, *Phillip Houghton: Biography*, www.amcoz.com.au, accessed October 3, 2004.

³ Phillip Houghton Homepage, *Biography*, accessed October 21, 2004.

⁴ Paul Fowles, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, October 1997. Review of Peter Constant's and Marion Schaap's CD of Houghton's works "Light on the Edge," cited in *Reviews*, www.philliphoughton.com, accessed October 21, 2004.

⁵ Houghton, performance notes from *God of the Northern Forest* (Sydney: Moonstone 1993).

⁶ Houghton, performance notes from *Kinkachoo, I Love You* (Sydney: Moonstone 1998).

Introduction and Rondo in A minor Trois Rondos Brilliantes op. 2

Dionisio Aguado
1784-1849

Dionisio Aguado dedicated his life to the guitar. Born in Madrid, Aguado became a renowned guitar virtuoso, pedagogue and composer of the classical guitar. Initially receiving musical tuition from a monk, Padre Basilio,⁷ Aguado perfected his skills, fuelled by his own inquiring nature, in Fuenlabrada, a small village in which he stayed for twenty-one years. It was in this village that Aguado sought refuge from the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. The time in Fuenlabrada led to Aguado's analysis of the guitar down to its most minute detail and resulted in his *Escuela de guitarra* (Madrid 1825) and his *Colección de estudios para guitarra* (Madrid 1820).⁸ This method and his studies were extremely popular in the nineteenth century and were both republished numerous times; the impact they had upon the development of classical guitar technique can still be seen today.⁹

Aguado's lifelong dedication to the classical guitar is reflected in his works, for unlike his contemporary, Fernando Sor (1778-1839), with whom he is often compared, Aguado composed only for the solo classical guitar, not even veering so far away as to write a guitar duo, let alone compose for another instrument. Aguado's concert pieces for the guitar, of which there are few in comparison to his numerous didactic pieces, reflect in their virtuosity his exploration of guitar technique. The advances in modern classical guitar playing which Aguado contributed so significantly to, deserve a substantial recognition in the history of the classical guitar.

The *Introduction and Rondo in A minor*, from *Trois Rondos Brilliantes op. 2*, is a fine example of the virtuosic abilities that Aguado brought to the concert platform and is arguably the composer's masterpiece, enjoying a sustained popularity in the classical repertoire. Published in 1825, the opus marked the beginning of a twelve-year stay in Paris where Aguado would meet and befriend the guitarist, composer and fellow countryman Fernando Sor and enjoy the reputation of a virtuoso performer. The *Trois Rondo Brilliantes* highlight what a formidable technique Aguado must have possessed. Fiendishly difficult passages of arpeggios, slurs and scales are ubiquitous throughout the works with the second rondo standing out as a musical masterpiece as well as showcasing technical fireworks, as displayed in the following example (see ex. 1).

Example 1



⁷ A. Hobler, 'Dionisio Aguado', www.thirdhandmusic.com, accessed October 20, 2004.

⁸ Thomas F. Heck, 'Aguado, Dionisio', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 1, 168.

⁹ Brian Jeffery, Preface from *Dionisio Aguado; Selected Concert Works For Guitar* (Chanterelle London 1990) 4.

Elegie

Tarantelle

Johann Kaspar Mertz *1806-1856*

There are only two known sources of biographical information concerning the guitarist-composer Johann Kaspar Mertz; *The Memoirs of Makaroff*, by Nicolai Makaroff (1810-1890), a contemporary of Mertz and also a guitarist, and a short essay written by Mertz's widow, Josephine Mertz, forty years after her husband's death. The validity of Josephine's essay is questionable both for the amount of time that had passed since the death of Mertz and also due to the fact that this was the same wife that had administered an entire prescription of strychnine, which is essentially a poison,¹⁰ in one near fatal dose to her husband in 1846.¹¹ Needless to say there is little information regarding the composer, and the historical reliability on what information remains, is suspect.

According to Josephine's essay, Johann was born in Pressburg, now Bratislava, on August 17 1806 of poor parents. By 1840 he had moved to Vienna where he enjoyed the status of a virtuoso guitarist and flautist, being the recipient of the direct patronage of Empress Caroline Augusta. Johann toured Moravia, Poland, Russia and met his future wife in Dresden on a tour through Germany: the couple was married in Prague in 1842. Josephine is thought to have had a significant impact upon the composer. Josephine was herself a competent pianist and introduced Mertz to the contemporary repertoire of Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann and Chopin. These influences are reflected in Mertz's compositions, as he was the only guitar composer of the time to use harmonic language that was in step with the musical mainstream.¹² In his *Memoirs*, Makaroff writes the following observations of Mertz's music: '...the music played by Mertz, to which I listened with ever-growing rapture, contained everything -- rich composition, great musical knowledge, excellent development of an idea, unity, novelty, grandeur of style, absence of trivial expression and multiplicity of harmonic effects.'¹³ This glowing critique contrasts starkly to his opinion of other contemporary composers such as Matteo Carcassi (1792-1853) and Joseph Kuffner (1776-1856); '... worthless rubbish, cooked up by talentless modern composers...' The majority of other guitar composers of that day such as Ferdinand Carulli, Mauro Giuliani and Fernando Sor were composing in a rather anachronistic style that resembled that of the classical period. This anachronistic style was one of the main reasons for the instrument's wane in popularity by the 1840s and 1850s. The decline in the instruments popularity gives some reason for the limited information regarding Mertz and why his music lay silent until 1980 before it was re-discovered by American guitarist David Leisner.

Mertz's *Elegy*, written at the end of his life, is considered to be the composer's masterpiece.¹⁴ Its inventive use of harmony and complete exploitation of the guitar's melodic ability, display the height of Mertz's *oeuvre*. A slow introduction with piano-like arpeggiations in the accompaniment leads into a soaring romantic melody that is highly decorative. An indispensable technique adopted by Mertz was that of being able to differentiate the melody from accompaniment on the guitar. The guitars employed by Mertz were drastically different from those of today, being highly unbalanced in regards to projecting an equal volume from all six strings; these early guitars lent themselves to pieces that require projection of upper voices. Modern guitars, however, are far more balanced over the six strings and it is quite a technical feat to emulate the same independence in the melody. The work takes the listener on a profound emotional journey with its often operatic intensity.

The *Tarantelle* comes from volume 6 of Mertz's *Bardenklänge* (or bard-sounds), a collection of works that display Mertz's fascination with the miniature genre, likely to have been inspired by similar miniatures by Chopin and Schumann. The *Tarantelle* is the Austro- Hungarian version of the lively Italian

¹⁰ 'Strychnine', www.meridianinstitute.com, accessed October 21, 2004.

¹¹ Simon Wynberg, 'Introduction' from *Johann Kaspar Mertz, Guitar Works, Volume III*, (Heidelberg: Chanterelle, 1989).

¹² Andrew Danescu, Johann Kaspar Mertz, Concertino, an Analysis, *Guitar Review* 105, (1996), 18.

¹³ Nicolai Makaroff, *The Memoirs of Makaroff: Part III*, trans. Vladimir Bobri, www.guitarreview.com, accessed October 21, 2004.

¹⁴ David Leisner, Liner notes from *Le Romantique*, (Cleveland: Azica Records, 2003), CD ACD-71223.

dance of the same name. The *tarantella* was danced by victims of the tarantula's bite; the music progressively sped, up stirring the dancer into a mad frenzy by the end so that the victim would collapse from exhaustion, forcing the venom to leave the body. This work, while being technically difficult in a more conventional way with its speed and virtuosity, is still highly guitaristic and displays the composer's in-depth knowledge of the instrument.

Chaconne BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach
1675-1750

To me the Chaconne is one of the most beautiful, incredible compositions. On one staff, and for a small instrument, this man pours out a world full of the most profound thoughts and most powerful emotions... Could I imagine that I had conceived and made this piece, I am certain the unbearable excitement and shock would have driven me mad.
-Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)¹⁵

The *chaconne* is a dance that originated in Mexico and appeared in Europe by the early sixteenth century.¹⁶ By the late seventeenth century it had become a popular component of instrumental suites.¹⁷ Out of the many Baroque dance suite movements composed, the fame and compositional complexity of the *Chaconne* by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), composed as the fifth and final movement of his Partita in D minor for solo violin BWV 1004, has surpassed all others. It has long been regarded as a treasure of the musical repertory and has been adapted for many instrumental media other than that of solo violin. Its musical demands remain, regardless of the instrument it is performed on. Yet the wealth and depth of the reward are enough to warrant the efforts required of both performer and listener to experience and to understand the work.

The *Chaconne* is often considered as a separate entity from the rest of the Partita to which it belongs. Its size (larger than the sum of the remaining movements combined) and completeness as an independent work have lead some to believe that Bach composed it separately and later added it to the Partita. Analyses of the work as an independent piece have ranged from Schenkerian analysis to attempts to use numerology to find hidden messages within the work. The range of ideas surrounding the work and the little information that it has been possible to draw from Bach's documents and accounts have created an enigmatic and mysterious aura around the composition and have further isolated it as a stand-alone masterpiece.

The *chaconne* is a moderately slow, triple metre dance in variation form and it is often used interchangeably with the term 'passacaglia'. Its four-bar phrases are performed with a stress on every second beat; this coupled with its slow harmonic rhythm bears similar features to that of the *Saraband*. Highly elaborate variations are created, all stemming from the original theme; this characteristic made the *chaconne* a popular form for extended scenes from operas and opera-ballets.¹⁸ The strength of the work is derived from the insistent repetition of the original idea in numerous variations and Bach's genius is evident in how he creates such a large, coherent structure from small, repeated components. Abel Carlevaro, in his 'guitar masterclass' describes the chaconne as: '...a gothic cathedral which emerges virtually without supports and which is maintained aloft due to the perfect calculation of its internal parts and the combination of their elements as a whole.'¹⁹ The initial theme with its descending bass line (example 2) sets down the four-bar foundation upon which the ornate yet ever-coherent structure is developed. Example three shows a variation, closely linked with the initial theme. The example also shows a similar variation

¹⁵ Jon F. Eiche, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views*. (Indiana: American String Teachers Association, 1985), 19

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸ Eiche, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, 18.

¹⁹ Abel Carlevaro, *Abel Carlevaro Guitar Masterclass, Vol. IV J. S. Bach Chaconne BWV 1004*, (Heidelberg: Chanterelle Verlag, 1989), 7.

beginning in bar 16 displaying how some adjacent variations create the effect of development upon development, like the branches of a tree.

Example 2 The opening four bars of the Chaconne.



Example 3 Variations developing on the initial theme and previous developments.



The ubiquitous transcriptions and arrangements of Bach's *Chaconne* available for a wide variety of solo instruments and ensembles are a testament to the greatness and popularity of the work. Initially composers such as Robert Schumann (1810-1856) and Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) added piano accompaniments to the solo violin part; full transcriptions, however, were soon undertaken for more diverse and experimental forces. Arrangements by Johannes Brahms for left hand piano alone, Ferruccio Busoni for piano, Alfredo Casella for orchestra, Leopold Stokowsky for orchestra and William T. Best and Ulisse Matthey for organ are among the most prominent.²⁰ Fittingly the *Chaconne* has also been transcribed for the guitar; fittingly, because the guitar was the instrument upon which the popular form of the *chaconne* was originally performed.²¹ Some musicologists even speculate that Bach's *Chaconne* originated as an independent work written for the lute.²² These speculations are, however, only based on the chordal nature of the work and the similarity of the home tuning (D minor) on the lute.

The first performance of the *Chaconne* on a guitar was by Regino Sainz de la Maza in 1934.²³ Heitor Villa Lobos (1887 - 1959), claimed that he was the first to transcribe the work for guitar, although he never actually wrote it down: however, there are fragments of manuscript that indicate that Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909) attempted an earlier transcription.²⁴ It was not until Andrés Segovia published his transcription in 1947, that the work became a standard for the guitar. Segovia's version was heavily influenced by the piano transcription of Busoni, full of dramatic contrast and expanded harmonies. Not surprisingly, the version was more idiosyncratic to Segovia rather than to the performance practices of Bach's period. Many present day transcriptions, however, remain more faithful to the original violin score and to what is known of Baroque performance practices. Indeed the guitar is perhaps one of the more suitable instruments to be considered for transcription. Like the violin, it is a very expressive instrument and the guitar's lack of ability to sustain notes is compensated for by the ability to realise true polyphony and to

²⁰ Frederic Zigante, Preface from *Ciaconna*, (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 2000), V.

²¹ Sister Felicitas Curti, 'J. S. Bach's Chaconne in D minor: A Study in Coherence and Contrast', in *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, 75.

²² Eiche, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, 22.

²³ Frederic Zigante, *Ciaconna*, V.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, V.

create independent voices. Taking this added chordal ability into account, many transcribers for the modern guitar have added bass notes where perhaps they were excluded due to the limits of the violin. Of course, the more one adds to the piece the further away from Bach's original creation it moves, and much then relies on the good taste of the transcribers as to how much is effective and in the correct style. The precedent for this kind of transcription for the guitar can be seen in the Bach Lute suites: none of the suites were actually written for the lute but, rather, they were transcribed by Bach himself for the instrument from existing compositions such as the Violin Partita in E Major, BWV 1006.

Many theories have been expounded upon Bach's *Chaconne*, its structure, its meaning, and on possible hidden messages from the composer. Numerology, symbolism and cabbalism have all been employed to interpret the *Chaconne*. Hedi Gigler-Dongas, for instance, delves into symbolism around the number three that Gigler-Dongas argues Bach placed subconsciously into the work.²⁵ Gigler-Dongas argues that Bach uses the symbol three to view the work in terms of the holy trinity and as a metaphor for life itself. The work, Gigler-Dongas suggests, is comprised of microcosms within each four bar phrase, the three beats of each individual bar being the morning, midday and evening of a single day.²⁶ Gigler-Dongas goes further to give specific ages at certain bars, having the music reflect an impetuous youth, the wisdom of age and, finally, death. The argument made in the essay is compelling as are many other theories about the composition. Another theory is one that takes into context the time that the *Chaconne* was composed. From 1717 until 1723 Bach worked as Kapellmeister in Cöthen, this span of time being the longest in his life where he could dedicate his time to secular music rather than writing for the church. It was during this time that Bach's first wife died and many numerologists and Cabbalists believe that they have found encoded within the work the names of all of Bach's children and his own: the only name being absent that of his first wife. Finding these hidden messages required identifying certain pitch class sets and matching them with a particular alphabet.²⁷

Perhaps it is only because it is such a great work of outstanding quality that we look deeper for meaning or reason in its creation. Few other compositions have stirred up so much discussion. Indeed, there are many other works that are longer or as disproportionate to their respective suites, however, there is comparatively little written on other individual movements. Regardless of the reason for its composition, Bach's *Chaconne* remains a treasure of not only the violin repertoire but of all music. Perhaps searching for a story or meaning behind the work may give us a clearer or easier conception of the work, however the fact that the listening and performing experience of it may be so vastly different for each individual is perhaps what makes the *Chaconne* so special.

²⁵ Hedi Gigler-Dongas, 'Symbolism of the Cosmic Triad in Bach's Chaconne', in *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, 94-107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-107.

²⁷ Ruth Tatlow, *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3-4.

Felicidade (Happiness)

Antonio Carlos Jobim
1927-1994
Arranged by Roland Dyens
1955

Antonio Carlos Jobim is perhaps best known as the creator of the popular Brazilian style of music called *bossa nova*, meaning “new wave” or “new groove.”²⁸ Songs written by Jobim, such as *The Girl From Ipanema*, *Quiet Nights with Quiet Stars* and *One Note Samba* have become popular jazz standards and have enjoyed numerous recordings by artists such as Stan Getz and Carlos Barbosa-Lima. According to the Brazilian guitarist Laurindo Almeida, *bossa nova* is ‘a mood which comprehends many things at one time. It involves the combination of two styles of playing from two different countries. First, there is the idea of the *samba*, then the [jazz] improvisation: together, both make the marriage’.²⁹

Felicidade (happiness) was composed in 1957 for the film score of *Orfeu Negro* (*Black Orpheus*) which received an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for the best foreign film in 1959. It was this film that would take the smooth sounds of *bossa nova* to the United States while simultaneously exposing the performer João Gilberto, lyricist Vinivius de Moraes and composer Antonio Carlos Jobim to an international audience. The piece utilises many of the soft impressionistic harmonies that are idiosyncratic to the style. The long sustained melodies, pastel coloured harmonies and subdued sounds of *bossa nova* draw their origins largely from European art music.³⁰ This link to classical music undoubtedly came from Jobim’s classical training on the piano and his study with Paul Hindemith and Hermann Scherchen.

In Jobim’s *bossa nova*, the nylon stringed or classical guitar is ever-present acting in both the capacity of a solo instrument and in an accompanying role, providing a rhythmic beat and melodic support. João Gilberto, an innovator in the *bossa nova* style, succeeded in creating a very identifiable sound and technique, which would influence a whole generation of guitarists such as Luis Bonfá, Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Byrd. One recent guitarist to explore the *bossa nova* style is the French guitarist Roland Dyens. Dyens, also a composer and arranger, has arranged *Felicidade*, which was originally written for an entire jazz ensemble, for solo guitar. Dyens’ genius is evident in the piece with its incorporation of melody, bass lines, accompaniment and the use of virtuosic embellishments retaining the smooth and deceptively simple *bossa nova* feel. The arrangement, in A minor, is incredibly intricate with extensive instructions with regard to timbre, dynamics and stylistic effects such as percussive slaps, chord dampening and flurries of harmonics, all to be controlled at the lively tempo of a Brazilian *samba* (see example 4). The arrangement not only does the original composition justice but also breaks new ground in furthering classical guitar technique.

Example 4 Examples of harmonic flourishes, percussive effects and articulation stipulations in *Felicidade*.



²⁸ Wayne Whitwam, *Black Orpheus, the film and Bossa Nova*, <http://www.rootsworld.com/rw/feature/brazil-orpheus.html>, accessed October 13, 2004.

²⁹ Laurindo Almeida, “King of Bossa Nova,” *Guitar Review* 55, (1983), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.