

Poetic Conceits for solo piano

A conceit, in literary terms, is an extended metaphor with a complex logic. It can govern an entire poem or poetic passage. By juxtaposing images and ideas in surprising ways, a conceit invites the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison.

In the six movements of the piano work, Poetic Conceits, musical complements to the titles, all taken from two poems by John Keats, are sought in the use of thematic character, statement, recall and elaboration.

These movements are grouped in to three larger sections; movements 1 to 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6. Within the work there are three main structural pivots (namely movements 1, 3 and 6) which share thematic and harmonic material. The literary definitions of the titles indicate the movements' role within the work. The other movements (2, 4, and 5) are independent thematically but were also conceived as focal points for specific areas of pianistic technique and musicality:

1 - Epigram (literary definition: A polished, pithy saying, one that contains generalised knowledge in a compact manner).

2 - Of Silence and Slow time (for Henri Dutilleux on his 90th Birthday): Managing textural and timbral build-up through pedal control; maintaining clarity through discreet pedalling of large chordal, glissandi or single line melodic passages.

3 - Epigraph (literary definition: A short quotation cited at the start of a book or chapter to highlight its theme).

4 - Cold Pastoral: in a manner reminiscent of the Baroque 'notes inégales' (where groups of notes are altered in length) the predominant feature is a rhythmic corruption, via expansion or diminution, of the initial regular quaver motion. The ongoing fluctuations should seem totally natural whilst balancing the demands of nuanced pedalling.

5&6 - Mad Pursuits/ Epitaph (literary definition: A poem that sums up a situation, also an inscription on a monument or tombstone): dexterity is exploited here as well as negotiating larger distances across the keyboard between hands and repeated notes and chords. The Epitaph forms a coda to Mad Pursuits.

Poetic Conceits is dedicated in friendship and gratitude to Daniel Becker