

An interview with British / Australian composer Julian Cochran – Animation Suite –

Aidan Frazier – February 2016



Aidan Frazier: I thoroughly enjoy playing your orchestral waltzes. They have this Russian and orientalism aesthetic. Why they were titled as *valse*s?

Julian Cochran: They emphasize the first beat as waltzes do, and they have the sense of rotating in the musical subjects. Actually, the Latin origin of the word, *volver*, means to rotate, so I wanted to call them something closer to that origin. I know that *valse*s is also the French term, but besides emphasizing revolving I also wanted to bring the approach to playing them closer to the minuet. The minuet is a more formal dance and it translates as fine and delicate. It is too easy to

make inferences about the waltz because of early incubation in Vienna leading to massive popularization everywhere, and then the spreading to light entertainment and now sentimental treatment. So composers make parodies of waltzes or treat them sentimentally. I have done what I can to avoid that, and if I was to rename them I would gravitate towards *volver* than towards waltz.

AF: I would like to place our attention upon your work, which I have a real fascination with – *Animation Suite*. How should we interpret the term 'Animation' within the title? It is literally for film animation?

JC: The subjects of each movement are intended to be represented in the imagination of the pianist and the animation should take place in the pianist's imagination, so I refer more to the earlier origin of the word. Yet what is the difference between real life and beautifully rendered cartoon? The cartoon is inherently more abstract, more vivid, and so it can be exaggerated, the subject made even more clear, and the subjects in the music should be likewise expressed more extremely.

AF: Can you describe something about each of the different dances within *Animation Suite* – what are some of the ideas that makes each dance distinct?

JC: There is *Tin Sentinel*, *Matryeshki*, *Clockwork Doll*, *Goat's Dance* and *Flydian Galop*. The first piece, *Tin Sentinel*, was written after the first movement of my first piano sonata and likewise uses the Octatonic scale through most of it. Being made of tin furthers the abstraction. Also, when writing both of the first two pieces, I had my piano literally covered with *matryeshki* – the Russian wooden dolls – and glazing upon them, I wrote the second work, originally even smaller and then expanded a few years later. I love how so much of Eastern-Europe makes such optimistic and intelligent use of color, and really miss this in the west. There is the humble, drab, grey culture of color that is more fashionable there. But the colorful *matryeshki* are so optimistic and represent girls of different ages and stages in their life, and you can observe how they communicate together within the music. The next piece, *Clockwork Doll*, is the most abstract – as with *Tin Sentinel* it is largely in the

octatonic scale and the central theme is the act of the music winding, and then something being released from the stored energy after the winding, or at other times changing gears to a lower rotation. Then *Goat's Dance* combines the pastoral harmony with the unpredictable jumping nature of young goats. The title of the last piece, *Flydian Galop*, combines the letter F with the Lydian. This is because it uses the Lydian Scale and centered upon F.

AF: Most of your works do not often use these metaphorical titles, for example sonatas, mazurkas, scherzi and preludes. What is the difference with *Animation Suite*?

JC: Right, I generally don't think in this way when composing – and of course all the works have metaphorical elements, but not in such a way that can be described in a title. Unless the title is purposeful and sincerely relevant, I think it is primitive to use titles because they can restrict or delude the pianist's natural imagination, and the imagination is the primary force. I placed these particular short works with *Animation Suite* because they are more focussed and to have collection in which the pianist is encouraged to raise the color contrasts and dynamic contrast. This is simply written into the music, but generally I would like the pianist to apply the contrasts more bravely, strikingly and colorfully than they are accustomed to these days, and the metaphorical titles are in service to that.

AF: Thank you for this opportunity.

JC: Of course, it was a pleasure.