

## The 'Pataphysical Piano

'Pataphysics has always existed, although it took a French literary madman, Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), to recognise it and give it a name. Jarry defined 'pataphysics as "the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments". He said: "pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one". He also observed that 'pataphysics extends beyond metaphysics as far as metaphysics does beyond physics.

Although Jarry's 'pataphysics is characterised by a certain anarchic euphoria, the collection of pieces on this album generally reflect the more studious and imperturbable aspects of 'pataphysics since Jarry. They nevertheless contain both the subterranean humour and ironic mystery that are common to *the* science. They are 'imaginary solutions' to the problem that faces anybody who wishes to write for piano: how to create something that has not already been created for this instrument, which has been comprehensively explored by previous generations. The album therefore often makes reference to existing music that sits at the edges of piano repertoire, as well as applying unusual compositional techniques and constraints, or adding electroacoustic sounds, in its search for something exceptional. The piano is monolithic.

The apostrophe at the start of the word 'pataphysics indicates that a prefix, perhaps the pataphysical prefix, is missing. The word is frequently seen these days without the apostrophe, and in this sense is generally understood to signify *unconscious* Pataphysics. We are all pataphysicians - it's just that some people *know* they are.

### 1. Pianolith (2003)

*Pianolith* was originally written for the pianist GéNIA and comprises ten ritualistic rock grinds with piano, separated by lengthy silences. The piano material owes something to Scriabin and is bound mysteriously to the rocks. *Pianolith* is dedicated to Louise.

### 2. Sonneries Parfumées (2000)

*Sonneries Parfumées* explores the limits of J. S. Bach's influence. Two composers stand at those limits: Erik Satie and Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji. Both revered Bach, and both knew they had to go beyond him in their different ways. In Satie's case, this took the form of a rejection of 'correct' harmonic procedure - in mid-life he even went back to school to be sure he was destroying Bach properly. Sorabji's music expanded 'Bachian' counterpoint to such an extent that the multiple lines would merge into a single shifting sonic structure. *Sonneries Parfumées* is therefore a synthesis of Satie's harmonic and melodic ideas with Sorabji's keyboard style. The title of the piece reflects this fusion. 'Sonnerie' was a word often used by Satie in the titles of pieces

from his Rose+Croix period, and 'Le Jardin Parfumé' was the title of one of Sorabji's best-known 'tropical nocturnes'. *Sonneries Parfumées* was premiered at the Piano2000 competition (where it was a prizewinner) in the Casals Hall, Tokyo, and is published by Zen-On Music Publishers, Japan.

### **3. Fête Donnée par un 'pataphysicien anglais... (1996)**

This short piece is - in the spirit of Satie's *Fête Donnée par par des Chevaliers Normands en l'honneur d'une jeune demoiselle* - a somewhat grave and dignified chorale. An orchestral version was premiered by the Philharmonic at UH/Burrell under the title *St. George's Island Chorale*.

### **O Pax Aetherna (1993)**

O Pax Aetherna is scored for multiple pianos and is a memorial for His Magnificence Baron Opach, 3rd Vice-Curator of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, who died 4 Gueules 120 (29 January 1993 vulg.) It was originally published, (cassette and score) by the Cymbalum Pataphysicum.

### **4. Le Collège de 'Pataphysique en deuil [The College of 'Pataphysics in mourning]**

The pianos work their way through identical and ever-expanding material, simultaneously yet independently of one another.

### **5. Clinamen**

'Clinamen' was the name given by Epicurus (341-270 BC) to the slight swerve or bias of atoms in continuous motion that causes the collisions and chain reactions that give rise to matter.

### **6. Opach**

Baron Opach presided over the occultation of the Collège, which re-emerged into the light in the year 127 EP (2000 AD).

### **7. L'Ethernité**

'Ethernity' is a portmanteau-word invented by Jarry, combining notions of the heavenly ether and eternity but also evidently informed by his predilection for drinking strong alcohol in the form of ether from chemical laboratories and its consequent effects of dislocation from the physical world.

### **8. Catalogue de Grenouilles (1988)**

The Catalogue of Frogs was originally written for the 'George W. Welch' ensemble and has been performed and broadcast many times around the world. This revised version has been made especially for this CD.

*Catalogue de Grenouilles* is inspired by the writings of Jean-Pierre Brisset (1837-1919), who theorised that Man is descended from the Frog. His books are enormous catalogues of puns that demonstrate the evolution of language from short phonemic frog cries to fully formed words and phrases (mainly in French).

The music comprises a collection of frog calls from around the world, organised into three groupings: background choruses; middle-ground duets and trios; 'diva' soloists. These are triggered fairly randomly (there are some loose constraints), so every performance of the piece is different. The piano traces a responsive and meditative path through this miniature amphibian opera, at once accompanying and leading, both soloist and orchestra. The title is an obvious nod to Messiaen's 'Catalogue d'Oiseaux': a piece that has always delighted and puzzled me in equal measure. Why use a *piano* to imitate *birds*?

When I first wrote *Catalogue de Grenouilles*, good quality recordings of frog calls were fairly difficult to find. I was fortunate to discover (after much searching) that a colleague of mine at Leicester Polytechnic, Dr Rob Oldham, had made hundreds of recordings which he then very generously let me use. In the intervening years, the world has changed and the internet has made possible the free and rapid exchange of audio recordings. I am very grateful to the following people who responded so readily to a call to the Sonic Arts Network <http://www.sonicartsnetwork.org> and The Freesound Project <http://freesound.iua.upf.edu> (where appropriate, their names are followed by the location of the frog recordings):

[Acclivity] of Freesound (River Tarn, Cevennes, France)  
Alistair MacDonald (Ribouisse, Languedoc, France)  
Barry Truax & World Soundscape Project, Simon Fraser University (Nanaimo, British Columbia; Rennes, France; Mission, BC)  
Bram de Jong (Mediterranean coast)  
Catherine Clover (Birrarrung, Melbourne, Australia)  
Dave Miller [daveincamas] (Pacific chorus)  
[Dobroide] (Marsh Frogs)  
Eric Leonardson (Tree Frogs)  
Ghenghis Attenborough (Odayam, Kerala, India)  
Inchadney (Berggarten, Hanover)  
John-Mark Austin [Greysound] (USA, Ranch)  
Joseph Young (Lewes, Sussex)  
Kjell Persson (Small frog chorus)  
Markus Hablitzel [markushablitzel] (Victoria, Australia)  
Martin Clarke (Wszerecz, Poland)  
Michael John Noble [omjn] (Pyeonghwa-dong, Jeonju, South Korea)  
Murray Littlejohn (Victoria, Australia)  
Peter Cusack (Chernobyl, Walthamstow Marshes)

Reinhard Meissner [reinsamba] (Cologne, Germany; St. Sernin, France)  
Sébastien Cirotteau [oyez] (Ain, France)  
Simon Kunath (La baie d'Authie)  
Tony Myatt (Heather Bank, York)  
[WIM] (Ghent, Belgium)

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## **9. Bride, teeming with sweet to the Bridegroom (1981)**

The title was made by combining two fragments of Sappho:

Bride, teeming with...  
...sweet to the Bridegroom

The music similarly conjoins two fragments from Granville Bantock's setting of those fragments by applying a systematic procedure of substitution and addition such that the first gives way to the second. A small error in the process is retained: the flaw in the union. Stephen Banfield first drew my attention to Helen and Granville Bantock's setting. The piece was published by Forward Music in 1989.



Photo by Tony Myatt



Sketch for the *Midivisualiser*  
(Alan Graves, Chris Hand, Andrew Hugill)

#### About the composer



Andrew Hugill (b. 1957) is a composer, writer and Director of the Institute Of Creative Technologies (IOCT) at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, where he also founded the Music, Technology and Innovation programme in 1997. He is the author of *The Digital Musician* (Routledge, 2007) and *The Origins of Electronic Music* in 'The Cambridge Companion to Electronic Music' (Cambridge University Press, 2007). He edited and contributed to an issue of *Contemporary Music Review* (Routledge, 2006) on 'Internet Music', and curated a CD and booklet called '*Pataphysics* (Sonic Arts Network, 2006) which has received rave reviews in almost every European language.

Hugill is an Associate Researcher at the Université de la Sorbonne, Paris, and is a National Teacher Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. In 2007 he was Highly Commended for the 'Most Imaginative Use of Distance Learning' by the Times Higher Education Awards. His internet project with the Philharmonia Orchestra, *The Sound Exchange*, was nominated for the 2004 BT Digital Music Awards. He has been a consultant for the Wigmore Hall,

London, the BBC 21st Century Classroom project, the National Grid for Learning, the Phoenix Arts Centre and the Digital Media Centre project, Leicester.

Hugill studied composition with Roger Marsh at the University of Keele between 1976 and 1980. After university he earned a living as a music copyist and as musical assistant at the Lyon and Paris opera houses. In 1983, he founded the ensemble "George W. Welch". He began lecturing at Leicester Polytechnic in 1986, working alongside Gavin Bryars and Dave Smith, eventually becoming subject-leader for the BA in Performing Arts (Music) and then Professor of Music.

Hugill's compositions have been performed and broadcast worldwide. They include internet music projects such as *Symphony for Cornwall* (1999) and electroacoustic compositions such as *Island Symphony* (1995). *Timestretch* for orchestra and live electronics, was premiered by the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2001. *Les Origines humaines* (1996), a large-scale choral work for 36 unaccompanied voices, was commissioned by the Elysian Singers. *Nocturne* for two pianos and percussion, was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 in 1997.