

Composers Series
JOHN ANTHONY LENNON
Five Pieces

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Edited by
MICHAEL LORIMER,
DANIEL STANISLAWEK, DAVID STAROBIN,
DAVID TANENBAUM and BENJAMIN VERDERY

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Gigolo
The Fortunels (Forbidden Dances—As She Sings—Sacred Idylls)
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Here are five John Anthony Lennon solo guitar masterpieces that were written over two decades and represent a gamut of his work and a diversity of lengths, styles, and development. Included are a miniature in popular style, a three-movement suite, a concert etude, and two works of medium length—one dramatic and abstract, the other lyrical and narrative. Notes on each composition follow.

Gigolo

John Anthony Lennon recounts, “David Starobin asked me to write a short piece for his “Newdance” collection. Until I heard the pieces he collected I thought David wanted a true dance, so I composed something ‘en el estilo’. It is a tango that takes on the personality of the gigolo—dashing, self-aware and a little overstated.”

The *Gigolo* was premiered by David Starobin on July 27, 1996 in the Guild Hall at the Bath International Guitar Festival in England.

Gigolo is recorded on David Starobin’s Grammy-nominated *Newdance* (Bridge BDG 9084) and on Daniel Stanislawek’s all-Lennon *Player’s Fair* (Albany TROY-827). Both CDs are available at www.amazon.com.

The Fortunels

Serenata (Concert Etude)

During 1999 and 2000, Lennon wrote for David Tanenbaum *The Fortunels*, a suite of three movements—*Forbidden Dances*, *As She Sings*, and *Sacred Idylls*. Lennon also wrote an epigram for each movement concerning the fortuitous, the accidental, or the destined, which reflects his thoughts and feelings about life in general and his preoccupation specifically with the fortunes of four of his friends.

On Lennon's mind when he wrote *Forbidden Dances* were two childhood friends—Jim Goebel and Nancy Larson—who had both recently been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Realizing that soon each would only be able to imagine the pleasures of dance, but never dance again, Lennon wrote *Forbidden Dances*—a piece in which three dance themes come to life, spin together and then come to rest. The beginning strains of *As She Sings*—strands which developed into a beautiful elegy and an accompaniment to Lennon's grief—came to Lennon in the winter of 1998 when he learned that his friend and first composition teacher Mack Crooks was fatally ill. *Sacred Idylls* was inspired by the pianist David Gratto who as a student at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music played Lennon's first composition. Gratto had been Lennon's friend for over thirty years and died in March 2000. Lennon says, "We were kindred spirits. David Gratto touched me and so many others. His memory has

become a special poem and this music is my memory of his spirit."

The title of Lennon's suite derives from "fortunel" (pronounced "for'chen-el")—an ancient adjective meaning "fortuitous" or "accidental." "Fortunel" first appears in the great 14th-century English poet Geoffrey Chaucer's translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy* by the Roman philosopher Anicius Boethius (ca. 475-525 AD). Boethius's *Consolation* was for hundreds of years second only to the *Holy Bible* in the number of translations into western languages and was known until the 17th century in its original Latin or its many translations by almost every educated person in the western world. It addresses the sorts of questions raised by the Book of Job in the *Bible*, questions Lennon pondered thinking of his friends—in modern terms: "Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people? How does one cope with misfortune and injustice?"

Like architecture such as the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., music such as the blues and flamenco's deep song, and certain poetry, *The Fortunels* mutates emotional pain into art which is sustaining and beautiful. Each movement has affinity to funeral music of the 17th and 18th centuries such as the two harpsichord pieces called *Tombeau pour Mr. Blancrocher*, one by Louis Couperin (ca.1626-1661) and the other by Johann Jacob Froberger (1616-1667), which I have arranged for guitar (Michael Lorimer Editions MB93916 and MB93918 respectively). Other examples are the *Tombeau sur la mort de M. Cajetan Baron D'Hartig* and the *Tombeau sur la mort de Mr. Comte d'Logy* by the great baroque lutenist Silvius Leopold Weiss (1686-1750) which David Tanenbaum plays on his recent recording of music by Weiss (described further at www.DavidTanenbaum.com).

Like the earlier *tombeaux*, Lennon's laments grieve, they evoke and extoll the individuals they honor and—also like the early models—they are free in form and intuitive in development. Unlike the baroque music, Lennon's pieces are in modern musical language and they capitalize upon the resources of the guitar—the left hand slur, the string bend, the unique tuning of our instrument, the contrasting sounds of the different registers, the range of colors from bright to dark, and the strum, pizzicato, and harmonic. The guitar not only provides the voice for Lennon's musical spirits, it molds each one's form and guides each one's unique path.

Lennon composed *The Fortunels* as a suite of three movements in the order in which they appear in this

edition. However, he thought the movements might also be played in other orders, in pairs, singly, or in combinations with his other works—for example the *Sonatina* (p. 30) and the *Gigolo* (p. 4) which were composed about the same time and share a similar musical idiom. Indeed, David Tanenbaum has often played *Forbidden Dances* and *As She Sings* and then ended with the ecstatic *Serenata* from Lennon's twelve exquisite *Concert Etudes* (ML405). Tanenbaum's dramatic suite is so felicitous that the *Serenata* (1984)—a study of *rasgado*, rhythm and voicing—is here included as a complement to *The Fortunels*.

Lennon dedicates *The Fortunels* to David Tanenbaum about whom he says, "David plays the music well so that it comes to life. He is able to recreate the spirit and follow it through." David Tanenbaum premiered *The Fortunels* as follows: *As She Sings*, November 4, 1998 on the Gala Radio Broadcast of California State University, Sacramento's annual New American Music Festival; *Forbidden Dances*, July 2, 1999 at the Darwin Guitar Festival in Darwin, Australia; and *Sacred Idylls* and the complete *Fortunels* suite, December 11, 2000 at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York.

The Fortunels and the *Serenata* are on Daniel Stanislawek's all-Lennon CD *Player's Fair* available at www.amazon.com.

Thirteen

Thirteen is the longest single movement in this collection and it is also the most ambitious work in development, harmonic language, rhythmic complexity, dynamic and dramatic contrasts, and technical demands on the performer. A single explosive note kicks off *Thirteen* and then thirteen thematic elements emerge and dialogue over the piece's nine-minute duration. Rapid, jagged passagework juxtaposes meditative, lyrical sections and atonal lines set off moments of brooding, pungent harmonies.

Lennon tells us, "Sketches for this solo guitar work were composed in 1997 and the piece was completed in Bellagio, Italy at the Rockefeller Center at the end of that year. The work was inspired by abstract visual art that allows for multiple interpretations of textural line and shape. The shape of the music is much like the line of the brush stroke that transforms thematic material across a canvas. *Thirteen* is named for its motives that interact and morph as the piece unfolds. *Thirteen* is dedicated to Daniel Stanislawek, a guitarist of great ability who is able to make music of its virtuosic demands."

Daniel Stanislawek has recorded *Thirteen* on the all-Lennon CD *Player's Fair* available at www.amazon.com.

Sonatina

Lennon recalls, "I wrote the *Sonatina* in Cassis in France's Provence, near to Cavaillon, where Benjamin Verdery who commissioned the piece once lived. The music seems to have taken on some of its French character there. For me this piece evokes the image of an enchantress. She steps from the shadows of my imagina-

tion and draws me irresistibly closer, but I don't know if her sound can lead me from an abyss. The *Sonatina* was premiered in 1977 by Benjamin Verdery at the Classical Guitar Festival of Great Britain."

Verdery plays the *Sonatina* on *Soepa: American Guitar Music*—a CD available at www.amazon.com.

John Anthony Lennon

John Anthony Lennon (born 1950, Greensboro, North Carolina) has written guitar music—concert solos, studies, chamber music, and a concerto—championed by a generation of performers, notably the American guitarists David Starobin, David Tanenbaum and Benjamin Verdery.

Lennon has a special affection for the guitar, an instrument that has fascinated him since childhood and was always close by as he grew up in Mill Valley, California. His concept of how the fretboard tuning actually works to create music first came to him when he was fourteen at a concert by the great Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia in San Francisco. From this initial inspiration and from the taste he later had for the playing of the American country guitarist Chet Atkins, the English blues/rock guitarist Eric Clapton, the Belgian-gypsy jazz legend Django Reinhardt and others, Lennon became impassioned to create guitar music with both a lyricism and harmony crafted around the idiosyncrasies of the fingerboard. For Lennon, a melodic fragment, an arpeggiation, or a harmonic motion might suggest development in unexpected ways as the music navigates the asymmetry of the guitar's design. He says, "the best pieces spring from small ideas and follow a path as though they compose themselves."

Known for his lyric style and works with evocative titles and subtexts written for solo instruments, chamber groups and the orchestra, Lennon has been commissioned by the John F. Kennedy Theatre Chamber Players, the Library of Congress, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, the National Endowment for the Arts Orchestral Consortium, the Fromm Foundation and many others.

In addition to the Rome Prize, Guggenheim, Friedheim, DAAD, and the Charles Ives Prize from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Lennon has received numerous other awards, and has held fellowships at Tanglewood, the Composers Conference, the Charles Ives Center for American Studies, Villa Montalvo, Yaddo, the Atlantic Center for the Arts and the MacDowell Colony as a Norlin Foundation Fellow. A professor of composition and theory at Emory University, Lennon lives in Atlanta.

Lennon earned a liberal arts degree at the University of San Francisco, and holds a master's degree and doctorate from the University of Michigan where he studied with Leslie Bassett and William Bolcom.

Lennon's music is published by E.C. Schirmer, C.F. Peters, Woodwind Services, Michael Lorimer, Frederick Harris, Columbia University Press and the Oxford University Press. Recordings are with CRI, Bridge Records, Capstone, Open Loop, MMC, and Laurel.