

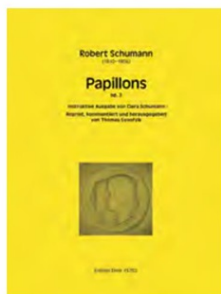


**Burge Twenty-Four Preludes for solo Piano**  
Red Leaf Pianoworks  
ISMN 979-0-9001494-04

Ontario-born composer **John Burge** (b 1961) has produced a significant contribution to contemporary piano repertoire with his *Twenty-Four Preludes* (2011-15). Taking their cue from Chopin in their key scheme, they succeed in creating atmosphere and conviction within accessible yet pastiche-free stylistic limits. The complete cycle takes about 65 minutes to perform, but pieces from the set could also be presented in groups, pairs or even individually.

Though there are about five or six fiendishly virtuoso numbers in the set, there are some that lie comfortably under the hand and could be tackled by a Grade 5- to 6-level player with relative ease. No 5 is a case in point – a remarkable essay in which the pianist's left hand silently depresses as many bass notes as possible before bar one. This creates a wonderful quasi-Bartókian 'Out of Doors' soundscape, which continues for all of the Prelude's 19 bars. In fact, there are lots of special effects in the cycle, with the player plucking strings and obtaining 'extra-pianistic' colours that recall sonorities first exploited by the American composer Henry Cowell at the start of last century (see Prelude 14, a piece in which the right hand is directed to 'slap the lowest strings inside the piano like a bass drum').

As one may expect, there are motivic and colouristic references to Chopin: the opening C major prelude, with its delicious inner melodies, seems like a commentary on Chopin's Op 28/1 as well as *The Swan* by Saint-Saëns. Also, don't miss the touching, and witty, reference to the 'Aeolian Harp' Etude in Prelude 17 – a striking essay in piano texture, dividing the instrument into four ranges (as decreed on many grands by the iron frame itself). Elsewhere there are nods in the direction of Kabalevsky and Prokofiev (No 3 'Playground Games') as well as hints back to Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (Nos 4, 6 and 15). There is lots of



**Schumann Papillons Op 2**  
Edition Dohr 13702  
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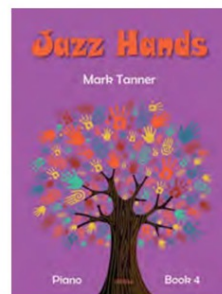
exotic rhythmic asymmetry (see No 7) as well as the potential to project exquisite colours and 'colour counterpoint' (8 and 21).

In terms of bravura and virtuosity the final Prelude in D minor pulls out all the stops, ensuring rapturous applause for whoever performs it live. Perhaps it is easier than the outsized Prelude in G-sharp minor, which requires lots of flexibility and élan. On a smaller scale, No 9 'The Singing Clock' is an effective concert study. But none of these are as memorable, nor as 'funky' as No 13, entitled 'One-Note Ostinato'. Overall Burge is not as melodically individual as one could have hoped, but these Preludes are pianist- and audience-friendly pieces that many will find persuasive.

In the years after **Robert Schumann's** death, Clara was understandably regarded as a great authority when it came to interpreting his music. Indeed, who could know this music better than her? Clara's own editions make this perfectly clear, as indicated by published statements such as 'Edited by Clara Schumann from the manuscripts and personal communication'. It is therefore fascinating and very useful to have this new reprint of Clara's 'instructive edition' of *Papillons*, with comments and fingering from Thomas Synofzik.

However, we should not automatically assume that Clara is the copyright authority on her husband's music. In the case of *Papillons*, she became involved with the notes only after Friedrich Kistner published them in 1832. In May of that year Robert wrote that Clara 'hasn't quite mastered' the work. Indeed, she only started to play the piece regularly in recitals after 1866. Caution should therefore be exercised in assuming that Clara's edition is superior to Kistner's.

It is fascinating and instructive to compare the two sources (Henle's edition of *Papillons* is largely based on the Kistner edition as well as autograph sources). As so



**Tanner Jazz Hands Book 4**  
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often when comparing editions, differences emerge mainly in the detail: thus Clara will opt for a sforzando rather than a forte, or will place a dynamic marking or pedal indication a beat earlier or later than Kistner. Ultimately, we can never know which edition is more authoritative when the differences are so slight.

Pianist, composer, writer and teacher **Mark Tanner** is a modern musical polymath who has already written over 60 books for the Spartan Press. More than 20 of his pieces have been set by ABRSM and Trinity for their grade exams and this current anthology of six Grade 8-level pieces in popular style (earlier volumes featured music for earlier grades) is typical of his accessible, user-friendly approach. The title *Jazz Hands* refers to the energised gesturing of cheerleaders and music theatre performers. The wittily constructed performance directions in evidence here are very much a Tanner trademark (following in the footsteps of Percy Grainger).

'Tongue 'n' Groove' begins as a Bizet 'Habanera' offshoot, and the pianist is asked to play 'With precision engineering!' The banter continues with 'In Mind of a Sunset' which is 'washed in a diapason of colour.' 'Silverfish' is equally exquisite in terms of colour counterpoint, and could be a good preparatory study for the final number in Debussy's *Images* Book 2. 'Look Before You Leap' takes us into the attractive world of stride piano and syncopated accentuation, while the filled octaves and isometric rhythms of 'Eating Cherries on the Front at Morecambe' have infectious vitality and lots of warmth. The cycle concludes with energetic gusto in 'Conquistador', inspired by soldiers from the old Iberian Empire. Lots of light-hearted but sparkingly witty music here from a master of the bagatelle.

MURRAY MCLACHLAN