

'Best Since Barber':

Contextualising the Piano Sonatas of Robert Muczynski

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NOTE:

These figures have been inserted in to the electronic copy on the page following the indicated points throughout the text.

Addendum:

Robert Muczynski died on May 25, 2010 from complications arising from leukaemia. At the time of his death he had not spoken publicly or at length about his music to anyone in over a decade, and he made it very clear from the outset of this investigation that I was to be no exception. Nevertheless, he was a true gentleman, always responding to my queries promptly and with great kindness (even if it was to simply say he had 'nothing to say'), and he gave the project his full support and blessing.

One of the reasons he gave for declining to talk was that, in his words, "I always thought that anything I had to SAY could be said by way of the music itself" and, indeed, through close study of his highly personal music over many years, I feel I probably understand him much better than I would have through hours of probing interviews. The emotional piquancy felt from having to adjust the tenses and syntaxes in this paper as a result of his passing was just one of many strong feelings that made me realise the fondness I had developed for this man.

It is my hope that the recordings of his music that have been produced as a result of this PhD are a fitting tribute to his memory and herald the beginning of serious study and appraisal of the output of this wonderful composer, whose oeuvre is now complete.

LH

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Abstract

The American composer Robert Muczynski (1929-2010) is a somewhat under-represented figure in twentieth-century art music. Despite the fact that he has left a substantial body of engaging and well-crafted music for which scores are readily available, there is still a lack of serious scholarship regarding his compositional output, and a paucity of recordings of his works. If one cannot blame the quality of the music itself for its lack of dissemination, it is likely that the cause lies with Muczynski's own reticence towards self-promotion. The range and number of works available to pianists to perform can often be overwhelming, and the most aggressively marketed works will reach the public consciousness first – not always correlating with the works that are perhaps most artistically worthy of attention. Muczynski's three piano sonatas, between them, capture every facet of his art. From the eccentric, Soviet-influenced violence of the first, to the masterful and supervirtuosic second, through to the enigmatic and utterly individualistic third sonata, the three works lie on a continuum that shows Muczynski's journey towards an increasingly unique and original voice. In an internet age where anyone can publicise an opinion without qualification or substantiation, viewing a composers' output objectively becomes increasingly difficult. So if we cannot rely on currently available information to enhance our understanding of the performance practices of these sonatas, we should actually use other *music* as our guide.

Firstly, the gaps in the continuum of Muczynski's sonatas can be filled by his own intervening sets of piano works: pieces like *Diversions*, *Fables*, the *Suite*, the *Toccat*a, *A Summer Journal* and *Seven* show Muczynski's experiments with pianistic texture and technique, workshopping ideas that would come to fruition in the sonatas themselves. Secondly, we can see what Muczynski absorbed, consciously and subconsciously, from the great American composers that came before him: Ives, Copland and Barber all provided masterful piano sonatas that serve as a model in some way for Muczynski's own. Finally, we can place this continuum of 'Americana' in the much greater context of twentieth-century piano sonatas in general and find works from other nations that influence Muczynski's style and that have been influenced by him. From the mosaic-like structure of Tippett's *Second Sonata* through to the driving Argentinian rhythms of Ginastera's *Second Sonata*, Muczynski's sonatas share characteristics with many other masterworks in varying proportions. As we continue to compare and contrast Muczynski's sonatas with the other great sonatas of the twentieth-century, we can gradually build up a Muczynski 'galaxy' – a worldview that has Muczynski's sonatas at the centre and other sonatas in 'orbits' around them at a distance that roughly correlates with the affinities they share. What this ultimately shows us is that while sonatas by Charles Ives and Carl Vine may lie in closer orbits than sonatas by, say, Rachmaninov or Boulez, no composer lives in a vacuum and Muczynski's sonatas are 'post-modern' in the truest sense – showing influences from, and providing links between even the most stylistically disparate composers.

Learning and recording the Muczynski sonatas with all this in mind helps us understand them better – certain piano figurations and motifs become more recognisable, the hand-shapes one needs to adopt become more familiar, the textures one strives for can be pictured in the mind's eye before even being played on the keyboard. In this way, Muczynski's sonatas are given credence and meaning against an established historical background. They are **contextualised**.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by other persons, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my exegesis (excluding the accompanying CDs) to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Signed

Leigh Harrold

Date

1/12/2012

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I am utterly indebted to Kevin Roper at the ABC, Adelaide, for his indefatigable support, enthusiasm and expertise throughout the five-year recording process encompassed by this project. It is not an exaggeration to say that this all would have been quite impossible without him.

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Thanks also to my supervisors, Emeritus Professor David Lockett and Professor Charles Bodman Rae, for their prudent advice, pragmatic approaches and academic insights.

Heartfelt thanks to my partner, family and friends, many of whom must feel as though they have practically recorded all these works and written all these words with me. I am grateful to them for putting up with my various rants and worries with patience and understanding.

To Coady.

About the recordings

The works included on the four compact discs were all recorded by the author expressly for the purpose of this investigation.

The works were recorded in Studio 520 at the ABC Centre in Adelaide on a Hamburg Steinway 'D' using two Schoeps microphones, and mixed and edited using *Protools HD*.

The recording sessions took place between January 2006 and January 2010. In all sessions the set-up was identical.

The works have all been recorded and edited to current commercial industry standards.

Citations and Nomenclature

Due to the large number of score citations in this exegesis, any portion of a work referred to that **has been recorded for the project** does not have the relevant excerpt of the manuscript included in the body of the text. In all cases, clarification can be sought by listening to the cited portion on the enclosed CDs. A complete track listing of all four CDs included with this submission can be found in the **Appendix**. For the purposes of examination, full scores of all the works recorded have been provided in a separate volume on the understanding that they will be destroyed once examination is complete. Should the casual reader wish to consult a score, they are directed to the bibliography where all details of the works recorded are given, including relevant publishing houses.

For the sake of space conservation and unnecessary duplication, a shorthand notation has been adopted when citing a portion of a work that has been recorded for this project.

The work itself is referred to by an abbreviation, as follows:

Barber: Sonata, Op.26	Ba
Berg: Sonata, Op.1	Be
Copland: Sonata	C
Ginastera: Second Sonata, Op.53	G
Ives: First Sonata	I
Muczynski: A Summer Journal, Op.19	MASJ
Muczynski: Diversions, Op.23	MDi
Muczynski: Fables, Op.21	MFa
Muczynski: Seven, Op.30	MSe
Muczynski: First Sonata, Op.9	M1
Muczynski: Second Sonata, Op.22	M2
Muczynski: Third Sonata, Op.35	M3
Muczynski: Sonatina, Op.1	MSo
Muczynski: Suite, Op.13	MSu
Muczynski: Toccata, Op.15	MTo
Tippett: Second Sonata	T
Vine: First Sonata	V

Then the movement number will be given followed by the relevant bar numbers. After this, the number of the CD will be given followed by the track number and the relevant timing points. So, for example, a citation that reads **[M1 2b1-10; CD1 Tr2 (0:00-0:12)]** refers to 'Muczynski's First Sonata, second movement, bars 1-10, which can be found on track 2 of CD 1 from the beginning of the track up to the twelve-second mark.

Where a piece of music that has *not* been recorded for this project is referred to, any relevant score excerpts appear in the body of the text and the citation appears as a footnote in the usual way.

1. Chopin: <i>Berceuse</i> , Op.57, bars 1-5.	32
2. Chopin: <i>Berceuse</i> , Op.57, bars 50-2.	32
3. Chopin: <i>Berceuse</i> , Op.57, bar 41.	32
4. Janáček: Piano Sonata '1.X.1905' (ii), bars 40-1.	73
5. Bartók: Piano Sonata (iii), bars 225-37.	74
6. Prokofiev: Piano Sonata No.7 Op.83 (i), bars 86-97.	75
7. Hindemith: Second Piano Sonata (iii), bars 1-7.	76
8. Sessions: Second Piano Sonata (i), bars 140-50.	77
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