

The current series of solo recordings, which will eventually include four CD's, is the result of my lifelong love of music from both the classical and jazz traditions. This second volume includes Preludes VII through XII, from a projected series of twenty-four, with one in each of the major and minor keys.

Preludes VII and VIII are based on the chord changes of the standard tune, "Pennies From Heaven", in the keys of E \flat and C minor, respectively. They were inspired by two of my favorite pianists and composers, Clare Fischer and Lennie Tristano. Prelude VII also includes a substantial contrasting theme which follows the improvised choruses. Prelude IX is a multi-thematic piece, whose musical idioms range from folk and gospel music to impressionism. Prelude X has an ABCDCBA arch form, with the middle section open for improvisation. The piece was inspired by the mazurkas of Chopin. Prelude XI was inspired by a continuing fascination with eastern and middle eastern classical music, both in its pure form and as reflected in the music of the American composer, Alan Hovhaness. It is based on the sixth mode of the F "gypsy minor" scale: D \flat -E-F-G-A \flat -B-C-D \flat . This mode is similar to that of an Indian raga I once heard, which was strangely suggestive of the blues scale. I was amazed to learn that this particular raga is traditionally thought to express the yearning of a longing soul, a theme which is often expressed, specifically or indirectly, in blues music. Prelude XII contrasts the prime form of the B \flat "gypsy minor" scale (B \flat -C-D \flat -E-F-G \flat -A-B \flat) with a surprising twist into D major in the middle section. This piece was inspired by the piano music of the Spanish composer, Federico Mompou.

"Moon And Sand" is a hauntingly beautiful Alec Wilder song, with a great lyric by William Engvick. Like many of Alec's tunes, this one deserves to be heard more often.

"Odds Against Tomorrow" is a great John Lewis composition which is heard throughout the movie of the same title, an interesting late 1950's bank robbery film which starred Harry Belafonte, Robert Ryan and Ed Begley. Like much of Lewis' best work, this piece perfectly

blends the vocabularies of eighteenth and nineteenth century European classical music with the blues.

In the world of jazz, Duke Ellington was ahead of everyone. "The Clothed Woman", from 1947, offers still another case in point. The opening and closing sections make use of an incredibly abstracted blues form, more mature and concise than anything Monk would come up with for at least a few years, and already anticipating later developments by Cecil Taylor and others. The middle section pays respects to one of Ellington's early influences and mentors, Willie "The Lion" Smith. In Ellington's solo improvisation over the harmonically static left hand vamp, he anticipated modal improvising by at least a decade. "New World A-Comin'", inspired by Roi Ottley's book, was originally composed in 1943 as a sort of "mini concerto" for solo piano and jazz orchestra (Ellington as soloist with his own orchestra). It was later orchestrated for symphony orchestra and performed by Ellington and numerous classical pianists with orchestras throughout the world. Ellington also recorded the piece several times as a solo piano vehicle. While intentionally maintaining a strong connection with these Ellington versions, I have added quite a few personal harmonic touches, and opened up two sections for more extensive improvisation.

Hopefully, these performances reflect a balance of continuity and contrast with those heard in the first volume. That is, I feel, what most creative musicians have always strived for: a connection with tradition in the midst of constant evolution. Of course, the most important thing is the impression which the music makes on the listener. Without the listener's participation, the music's potential cannot be fully realized. And the most lasting impression is made on a purely intuitive level. Like Ellington was fond of saying "If it sounds good, it IS good!"

I would like to dedicate this recording to my father, whose encouragement and love have been, and continue to be, a source of strength and a deeply valued gift.

Bill Dobbins (October, 1995)