

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

Prelude XIII has definite leanings toward impressionism and late romanticism. Both of these historical styles have much harmonically in common with the American traditions of popular songwriting and jazz. The mixture of these elements in this particular piece seems quite natural and organic. Prelude XIV was inspired by a beautiful and powerful song for voice and mbira by the Rhodesian musician Simon Mashoka. His command of both extremely low and extremely high vocal registers creates the impression of two completely different voices, as in the opening themes of this rondo-like composition. The rhythmic independence between the right and left hands attempts to suggest the rhythmic independence between Mr. Mashoka's singing and his mbira accompaniment (a sort of "thumb piano" with metal keys on a wood base which is played inside a large gourd resonator). Prelude XV developed from my interest in the rich musical heritage of Latin America. Prelude XVI uses musical vocabulary which is charac-

teristic of the Spanish impressionist composers and the tradition of flamenco music, which was one of their primary sources of musical material. The left hand plays an important melodic role in this piece. Prelude XVII is a simple, lyrical piece for the left hand alone. This piece was inspired by the simple pieces for the left hand by Alexander Scriabin and Federico Mompou, among others. The main theme of Prelude XVIII is based on a blues progression in C# minor, which is initially abbreviated to ten measures instead of the usual twelve. As in Prelude XVI, the constant shifting from groupings of three eighth notes to those of two or four eighth notes provides the principal rhythmic content of the piece.

"Lotus Blossom" is one of Billy Strayhorn's most beautiful pieces. Of all his compositions, this is the one which he most liked to hear Ellington play. An especially moving and totally impromptu Ellington interpretation was captured at the end of the recording session for the album, "And His Mother Called Him Bill", which was made shortly after Strayhorn's death in 1967.

"Thingin'", by legendary alto saxophonist Lee Konitz, is based on the chord progression of "All the Things You Are", but with the second half moving from the original key of Ab to the tritone key of D. Unlike Lee's rhythmically and chromatically complex melo-

dies of his earlier years, this simple and quite singable line sounds as if it might be a recently discovered gem from the American songbook. Lee played this tune with the rhythm section of the WDR Big Band here in Cologne in 1997, in a concert which I had the pleasure of directing. Since about that time Lee has been living in Cologne, and it's great to have such a renowned jazz master in the neighborhood.

"I Never Told You" is a memorable and melancholy ballad by Johnny Mandel, perhaps the greatest living composer in terms of continuing the great tradition of American songwriting. In contrast to the ever increasing deluge of completely forgettable music in the contemporary pop world, his work never fails to inspire and to communicate on a deeply human level. I have loved this particular tune since I first heard Toots Thielemans' soulful harmonica rendition on a Quincy Jones recording in the early 1970s.

"Blue Rose", by Duke Ellington, is from a 1956 recording by the same name, which featured vocalist Rosemary Clooney. Her tasteful treatment of the wordless vocal melody is not the only point of interest on the original recording. Ellington's introduction includes the main thematic material and the exact harmonic voicings of Miles Davis' modal tune, "Milestones", and

the main theme contains the harmonic sequence which was used by John Coltrane in "Giant Steps". "Blue Rose", however, predates the Davis and Coltrane recordings by several years. This is simply one more example of how advanced Ellington remained and how often the possibility of his influence tends to be overlooked.

"The Single Petal of a Rose", also by Duke Ellington, is from "The Queen's Suite". It is one of his many exquisite impressionistic miniatures. As with much of his work, his ability to create an indelible image with a minimum of notes is like a lesson for aspiring composers.

So, here is the latest installment of some of my favorite musical repertoire along with some new preludes. In my experience, the best of music from all traditions and styles has much more in common than is usually realized or even suspected. I hope that these recorded performances reveal a few of these common threads.

I would like to dedicate this recording to my sister, Ilene. As I continue my journey through this life, I appreciate her unique qualities more and more, and realize how fortunate I am to have a true friend who also happens to be my sister.

Bill Dobbins (Cologne, September, 1998)