

Álvaro
CASSUTO

Return to the Future

Song of Loneliness • To Love and Peace • Visiting Friends

Antonio Rosado, Piano

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Cassuto



Álvaro Cassuto (b. 1938)

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My musical education started at home through the initiative of my German grandparents, who used to play violin and piano duets. In my early teens, I started to compose for my preferred instrument, the orchestra, and only then did I study music theory with professional composers, mainly with Fernando Lopes Graça (1906-1994). Although my training was entirely based on tonal harmony, my years of autodidacticism led me to explore new musical trends which had not yet been adopted in Portugal in the 1950s, especially the twelve-tone technique and the musical styles of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, which I promoted through public lectures and articles.

While I was preparing for my entry examination to Law School, I composed my first *Sinfonia Breve* at the suggestion of Joly Braga Santos (1924-88), who conducted its première in 1959. It was the first twelve-tone work by a Portuguese composer, and its success led to immediate repeat performances as well as to a series of commissions, including one for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Eastman School of Music in the United States. Realising, however, that I had to acquaint myself with the trends of the avant-garde, I spent most of my summers in Darmstadt, where I studied with Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen, and other leading composers. As a result, in each new work which I composed between 1960 and 1970, I used a different technique, changing style from work to work.

Simultaneously, in 1961 I started my conducting career, and the intimate acquaintance I acquired of traditional styles and those of the avant-garde, led me to the conclusion that the Darmstadt school ultimately led to a dead end, having eliminated some basic building blocks of music: tonality and rhythmic continuity, among others. I therefore introduced in my works reminiscences of the tonal past, which was far from fashionable at the time, but in tune with the gradual "liberation" from the "dogmas" of the avant-garde and in favour of tonal revivalism. Gradually I adhered to the saying, attributed to Schoenberg, that there was still good music to be written in C major.

While selecting the works for this recording, my criterion was to choose works I had composed after having "outgrown" my experimental period, and to address as large an audience as possible. I therefore chose two works composed in the early 1970s, one for small ensemble and the other one for large orchestra, and another two written in the mid-1980s, one for orchestra and the other one for piano and orchestra, all of which are clearly postmodern in concept, approach and style. On this recording, however, they are not presented in chronological order, but rather in an order which I think is more satisfying musically.

Song of Loneliness (1972)

Written for the New Music Group of the Philadelphia Musical Academy and its conductor, the Greek composer Theodore Antoniou, *Song of Loneliness* is scored for fourteen solo wind, brass, strings and percussion players, but it can also be performed with additional strings, as in this recording. The instruments are to be miked through an echo chamber and loudspeakers in the hall, so as to surround the audience. It is my first totally "tonal" work, a "return to basics", to reinvent a new future (a concept which I used as a title for a work written in 1985 and included on this recording). It concentrates on the harmonic exploration of a specific key (F minor), and on the development of the chord's latent melody: the sequence of notes of the F minor chord, and of its dominant. It starts softly in A minor and builds up to an F minor section featuring the piano solo, after which it subsides into a series of variations. Finally, a melodic line appears in the distance. It is endlessly repeated until it fades away, leaving the chimes alone with its upper three notes. The solitude of this ending determined the title of the piece.

To Love and Peace (1973)

The title is related to my opera *In the Name of Peace*, a political satire. It was composed for the Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra with which I conducted its première. Similar to my *Song of Loneliness*, it is based on the tonal exploration of a single note, the E of the open fourth string of the double bass, traditionally the lowest note of the orchestra. It starts in fortissimo with a tone-cluster in the strings encompassing all chromatic notes between the low E and the E five octaves above. After a diminuendo, all players slowly move in "glissando" from the notes they were playing toward E in unison in five octaves, as if dark and ominous clouds gradually evaporate, and lead to a pristine blue sky.

This opening is followed by a series of variations, always on the note E, leading to a middle section in which the tone-clusters reappear, now in the free improvising winds, brass and percussion. A series of fortissimo clusters in the strings leads to a third section in pianissimo, based on the seventh dominant chord of C major (the E being its lowest note), and a melodic line based on the notes of the C major chord appears in the piano and percussion. A crescendo leads from C major to D flat major in fortissimo and then to A flat (or G sharp).

At this point I needed a timeless, hymn-like, melody, to conclude these "variations on E". Therefore, it struck me like a revelation, when I stumbled upon the famous chorale so often used by Bach in his *St Matthew Passion*, precisely in E major and starting precisely with a G sharp. I did not hesitate, and placed it in the brass, surrounded it by a murmuring crowd improvising in different keys, until everyone converges into a final E major chord, lifting my variations to the lofty heights of a Lutheran chorale, celebrated by none other than Johann Sebastian Bach.

The work is scored for three flutes, three oboes, four clarinets, three bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, marimba, vibraphone, piano, percussion and strings.

Return to the Future (1985)

The New York première of the *Fourth Symphony* by the distinguished American composer George Rochberg (1918-2005) which I conducted in Carnegie Hall in 1985 revealed to me a Romantic style used by a composer who had dedicated most of his life to "modernism", before he found it "*empty of expressive intent*". And when, a few months later, I conducted the *Six Brandenburg Concertos*, the "obstinate" *moto perpetuo* of the *Sixth* haunted me day and night. So I thought: "Why not pick it up from here, and see where it leads me?".

While Bach's concerto is scored for a small ensemble of strings and continuo (harpichord), my work is scored for full orchestra. But I retained the essence, the rhythmic pulse, and while Minimalism was far from my thoughts, it shares with it the steady repeat of a rhythmic cell. On the other hand, since Bach was such an admirer of Vivaldi, and certainly approved the brilliant scales so often used by the Italian master, I also brought them in. Within these frames I placed a variety of lyric sections, contrasting with the main sections, but not based on any specific formal plan.

The work was commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon with whose orchestra I conducted its première.

It is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, electric keyboard (replacing the Baroque harpsichord), percussion and strings.

Visiting Friends (1986)

I wrote *Visiting Friends* as an essay, not intending it to be performed, and imagining a meeting with composers whose music I like best. In such an unlikely event, to develop meaningful exchanges of ideas, I had to use a language based on formulae and expressions (styles) with which they were familiar. The result is similar to a pastiche, a work which pays tribute to previous eras, as occurs in Mozart when using the Baroque style in his

religious works or in his *Piano Suite, K.399*, or in Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*, in Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and *Dumbarton Oaks*, to name only a few. A pastiche does not pretend to innovate, it rather observes the past from a different angle, and casts on it a different light. In this context, a work written in the 1980s can still be considered a pastiche. Since then, however, this designation has lost most of its meaning, since the use of styles from the close or remote past has become almost the rule in more recent times.

While it was not meant to be a piano concerto, the piano plays a similar soloistic rôle, except for the third movement, which is for strings alone, punctuated by a vibraphone. Structurally, the first and third movements are slow introductions to the fast second and fourth. The first resembles a foggy landscape, and the listener should be unable to focus on anything except for the obvious and pompous melodic line in the winds, brass,

and later, strings. The third movement is an interlude based on a widely used melodic descending line, which appears and reappears timelessly in many works, including Handel's *Messiah* ("He shall feed his flock like a shepherd"). The second and fourth movements are extrovert and based on variations.

True to my original intention, the work has never been performed. However, now, after more than a quarter of a century, I thought I might share my dreamed up visit with my living friends.

The work is scored for two flutes (the second doubling on piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings and solo piano.

Álvaro Cassuto

Antonio Rosado



Photo: Augusto Cabrita Filho

Antonio Rosado graduated from the Lisbon Conservatory and from the Conservatoire in Paris where he studied with Aldo Ciccolini. He was a laureate of the Maurice Ravel International Academy, of the Vianna da Motta Competition, and a winner at the Alfredo Casella competition in Naples. He has performed throughout Europe, America and Asia, and participated in many festivals, including the Rossini Opera Festival and the Europalia. His recordings include albums dedicated to Enescu, Vianna da Motta, Liszt and Schumann. For BMG he has recorded Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 22* and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*.

Royal Scottish National Orchestra



Photo: Tom Finnie

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra was formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra and became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950. It was awarded Royal Patronage in 1991. Throughout its history the orchestra has played an integral part in Scotland's musical life, including performing at the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including George Szell, Sir John Barbirolli, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Neeme Järvi, Walter Weller, Alexander Lazarev and Stéphane Denève. In 2012 the RSNO welcomed British-Canadian musician and conductor Peter Oundjian as its latest Music Director and Danish conductor Thomas Sondergård as Principal Guest Conductor. 2012 also saw the appointments of two new Leaders, James Clark and Maya Iwabuchi. The RSNO has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings, receiving two Diapason d'Or de l'année awards for Symphonic Music (Denève/Roussel 2007; Denève/Debussy 2012) and eight GRAMMY® Awards nominations over the last decade. Over 200 releases are available, including the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Glazunov (Serebrier), Nielsen and Martínú (Thomson), Roussel (Denève) and the major orchestral works of Debussy (Denève). The RSNO is one of Scotland's National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government. For more information, please see www.rsno.org.uk.

Álvaro Cassuto

Álvaro Cassuto is Portugal's foremost conductor. He has been Music Director of the Portuguese National Radio Symphony Orchestra, the University of California Symphony Orchestra, the Rhode Island Philharmonic, the National Orchestra of New York, the Israel Raanana Symphony Orchestra, and the Lisbon Metropolitan Orchestra. He was also the founding Music Director of three other Portuguese orchestras, the Nova Filarmonia Portuguesa, the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra and the Algarve Orchestra. Born in Porto, he studied in Lisbon, and after establishing himself as one of the most promising young composers of the avant-garde of the early 1960s, went on to study conducting with Herbert von Karajan in Berlin. After graduating from the Law School at the University of Lisbon, he obtained his conducting degree in Vienna. A recipient of the Koussevitzky Prize in Tanglewood among many other honours, he has enjoyed a career of high international acclaim, and spent almost two decades in the United States where his annual subscription concerts at Carnegie Hall with the National Orchestra of New York were enthusiastically received by *The New York Times*. He has been a frequent guest of many leading orchestras, including the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and dozens of others across the world, and has a discography encompassing over fifty recordings with a variety of orchestras and for different labels, among which a highly successful ongoing series for Marco Polo and Naxos, initiated in 1997 and dedicated to Portugal's most important composers, which has met with enthusiastic, unanimous praise from the international press. In 2009 the President of Portugal bestowed on him the award of Grand Officer of the Military Order of Sant'Iago da Espada, the highest honour granted to a musician.

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Photo: Anita Ayash

‘My musical passions have always been the Classics and the orchestra and, therefore, to become both a composer and a conductor was a natural progression. However, intrigued by the sounds of the avant-garde, I adhered to the twelve-tone system and then to the Darmstadt school, until I realized that both had led me away from my musical origins, and to a dead end. All the works on this recording, written after I had “outgrown” my experimental period, are intended, therefore, to address the widest possible audience.’ – *Álvaro Cassuto*



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1	Return to the Future (1985)[†]	19:25
2	Song of Loneliness (1972)[†]	10:59
3	To Love and Peace (1973)	18:46
	Visiting Friends (1986)*[†]	24:14
4	Introduzione (Lento) –	5:44
5	Allegro strepitoso	7:19
6	Intermezzo (Adagio andante)	5:25
7	Allegro scherzando, tempo giusto	5:46

[†]**WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS**

***Antonio Rosado, Piano**

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

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Recorded at the RSNO Centre, Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow, Scotland, on 18th and 19th June, 2013

Produced and edited by Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Engineer: Mike Clements

Publisher: AvA Musical Editions, Lisbon • Booklet notes: Álvaro Cassuto

Cover photograph: *Museu Paula Rego, Cascais, Portugal* by Joao Sousa (Dreamstime.com)