

CONVIVUM
RECORDS

A stylized, blue silhouette of a dog's head, possibly a German Shepherd, is positioned behind the main title text. The dog's head is facing left, with its ears perked up and its snout pointing towards the left. The silhouette is semi-transparent, allowing the background to show through.

Astro Dogs

& Other Piano Works

composed by John Carbon
performed by Steven Graff

TRACKLIST

Piano music by John Carbon played by Steven Graff

Madeleines (2016)

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------|
| 1 | Mémoire triste dans un café | 1.38 |
| 2 | Il pleut à Brest | 2.02 |
| 3 | François et ses yeux dangereux | 2.48 |
| 4 | Promenade dans la
ménagerie de Versailles | 4.56 |
| 5 | Madeleine déteste les devoirs | 2.35 |

Three Impromptus (2014)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| 6 | Adagio e cantabile | 5.10 |
| 7 | Adagio e sostenuto | 7.06 |
| 8 | Allegro | 4.03 |

Astro Dogs: Twelve Zodiacal Pieces (2019)

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 9 | Beagle (Aquarius) | 1.33 |
| 10 | Basset Hound (Taurus) | 2.05 |
| 11 | Bichon Frise (Gemini) | 1.53 |
| 12 | Saint Bernard (Leo) | 2.35 |
| 13 | Standard Poodle (Libra) | 2.17 |
| 14 | Presa Canario (Scorpio) | 4.12 |
| 15 | Labrador Retriever (Sagittarius) | 3.13 |
| 16 | Chihuahua (Pisces) | 3.42 |
| 17 | Toy Boston Bull Terrier (Virgo) | 2.50 |
| 18 | Pekingese (Cancer) | 2.27 |
| 19 | Werewolf (Capricorn) | 3.06 |
| 20 | Irish Wolfhound (Aries) | 4.33 |

Total duration **64:43**

Commissioned illustration 'A Canine Zodiac' (2019) by **Colby Cooman** ►



PROGRAMME NOTES

Madeleines

Composed in 2016, *Madeleines* is similar to my two sets of *Spanish Lessons* (1988 and 2001) which are both suites of character pieces for piano inspired by my admittedly limited travel in Spain. *Madeleines* is inspired by a much earlier hair-brained trip I took to France (and the rest of the Grand Tour) with my sister when I was in college.

The title refers to Proust's *Episode of the Madeleine*, in which involuntary memory overwhelms the protagonist when he bites into one of these small cakes. I also sometimes experience poignant memories from our fondly remembered trip triggered by various catalysts.

These five episodes in this set of pieces attempt to capture the essence of some of these memories. The first piece, *Mémoire triste dans un café* (sad memory in a café), serves the purpose of a prélude. One might conclude that the madeleine is sampled in this location.

Il pleut à Brest (It is raining in Brest) evokes memories of the wet weather in

Brest, a city in Brittany near the coast. I was curious about this area because, during our travels, we met a boy in Paris with dark and dangerous eyes named François (*François et ses yeux dangereux*) who was from that area. In *Il pleut* the sound of rain alternates with church bells and fog horns (one of the poetic sensations I remember vividly about Brest).

The third piece (*François*) is a blend of a barcarolle and a funeral march. I continued to send one-way letters to François after we returned home, and one day the French police called to tell me that he was dead and that they had found one of my letters on his body, which had been tossed into the Seine. They wanted more information, and they revealed that he had been smuggling drugs out of Turkey.

I think the next piece, *Promenade dans la ménagerie de Versailles* (Walk in the zoo at Versailles), is tempered by later memories of a trip I took to the zoo at Schönbrunn palace near Vienna, the oldest Baroque zoo, which was in a terrible state of decay when I saw it, hence the wistful air.

The finale of the set, *Madeleine déteste les devoirs* (Madeleine hates homework) is a bow to the French primer I grew up with, which had as one of its main characters a little girl who I *think* may have been named Madeleine. I know her father was named François. My memories are mixed up: the actual François Thibaud is remembered as the inventor of the fast-track method of learning French, which was in vogue when I first studied it in 6th grade. The idea here is that Madeleine, the daughter of François, is having a tantrum and playing with her hoops or a bike rather than doing her English homework.

Three Impromptus

Unlike much of my music, *Three Impromptus* does not rely on any extra-musical impetus. The primary inspirations here were works in the same genre by Schubert and Chopin. I've always thought that Chopin and Schubert's Impromptus didn't sound extemporaneous or improvised. They don't give me the impression that they were tossed off without any preparation, except maybe in the case of the shortest and earliest efforts. I wasn't attempting to

write something that sounds spontaneous either. Instead, my Impromptus have obvious formal boundaries.

The first of the three is in an ABA' form, with a *cantabile* melody enclosing a more turbulent middle section. The second movement is a very slow sustained waltz with several secondary themes in duple meter. The last of the set of three is a syncopated dance with macabre undertones cast in rondo form.

Astro Dogs

Astro Dogs, the most recent of the pieces included here, was completed in 2019. This work is a sequel to a much earlier guitar suite I composed named *Astro Cats*.

Unlike the structure of the earlier work, in which there is an unspecified cat type for each sign, the idea here is more elaborate in that each sign of the zodiac is somewhat casually associated with a specific dog breed. The inspiration is largely drawn from dogs I have either owned or known and the agility class I have taken with my yellow Labrador Retriever, Tukker.

Some of the choices regarding which dog represents which zodiac sign are

due to an interest in esoteric astrology and some choices have more to do with popular (sun sign) astrology.

In the mix is also my impression of particular dogs I have known that are members of each of these breeds. People typically want to know why I chose each type of dog for each sign. In the end run, my choices were whimsical, not driven by hard science.

Beagle

I chose the *Beagle* for airy Aquarius because this sign of the zodiac represents all that is universal and humanitarian. An example might be the Peanuts character, Snoopy: not much fuss, everyone's dog.

Basset Hound

Taurus is an earth sign, and *Basset Hounds* are close to the ground. The middle of the piece reveals this hound as being a sober thinker, even deeper than we might have thought.

Bichon Frise

The tiny, unpredictable *Bichon Frise* is portrayed here as the highly-strung air sign Gemini, whisking around the dog agility

course, through tunnels over hurdles, weaving through obstacles.

Saint Bernard

Sun-ruled Leo was the obvious choice for the *Saint Bernard*. I owned one and he was both proud and heroic, standing to face the blowing snow and howling wind.

Standard Poodle

I also have met a *Standard Poodle*, in this case depicted as the Venusian sign Libra. The dog was vain, pompous, imposing, and slightly crazy.

Presa Canario

The *Presa Canario* (Canary Mastiff) presents an imposing and formidable countenance that only a mother could love. I chose the spooky water sign Scorpio for this breed, reflecting the macabre, intensely focused nature of the dog. I think the music suggests the beast is longing for recognition of its inner beauty.

Labrador Retriever

Jupiter-ruled Sagittarius was the obvious choice for the *Labrador Retriever*. Roaming over large expanses with a goofy gait,

the sign fits my dog's personality and some of the more mundane traits of the Sagittarians I've known.

Chihuahua

The *Chihuahua* has always seemed somewhat sad to me, at times fragile and wistful, just as sensitive as the emotional water sign Pisces. The music begins as a melancholy tango, only to be interrupted by a rowdy Mariachi band during the middle section.

Toy Boston Bull Terrier

My mother had a *Toy Boston Bull Terrier* when she was young. I have a photo of her clutching the dog in her arms perhaps on the way home from school. Mercury-ruled Virgo captures the industrious, practical side of the breed, but the music may be more influenced by the tenderness captured in the photo.

Pekingese

Pekingese dogs, in my experience, bark quite a bit, and circle the table rapidly. I chose Cancer, ruled by the Moon, as the sign in this case because of the domestic food-loving qualities of this canine.

Werewolf

Saturn-ruled Capricorn has associations with the horned goat, the devil. The *Werewolf* was the obvious choice.

Irish Wolfhound

The set ends with the happy antics of the *Irish Wolfhound* which is known for its bravery, like those born under the sign of Mars-ruled Aries. These variations on "The Irish Washer Woman" capture some of the energetic playfulness of the breed.

Programme notes by John Carbon



Recorded October 10, 2019 at

Futura Productions,

Roslindale, Massachusetts, USA

BIOGRAPHIES

John Carbon

Born in Chicago in 1951, John Carbon studied composition at Rice University and at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where his teachers were Thea Musgrave, Paul Cooper, and Peter Racine Fricker. Carbon's music continues to gain prominence due to an increasing number of high-profile performances and recordings and his output includes three full-length operas, *Marie Laveau*, *Benjamin*, and *Disappearing Act*, along with over 70 choral, orchestral, vocal, and chamber works. Carbon has a special flair for the virtuosity and drama needed for concertos and has completed works in this genre for clarinet, violin, viola, piano, and double bass.

Mr. Carbon's work has been performed in New York at Merkin Concert Hall, Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher and Alice Tully Halls at Lincoln Center, Boston's Symphony Hall, and Prague's Smetana Hall. Premieres of Carbon works have been presented by the New York Chamber Symphony, the Czech



Radio Orchestra, and the Alaria Chamber Ensemble of New York. His *Rhapsody for Clarinet and Orchestra* (premiered under Gerard Schwarz at Avery Fisher Hall in November of 1997) was hailed by New York Times critic Allen Kozinn for “its demandingly agile clarinet line that wove its way through a variegated orchestral fabric... rich in coloristic effects of the sort that create a sense of depth rather than artificial glitter.”

Recordings

Recordings of Carbon’s music include his *Violin Concerto*, released on Three American Concertos (MMC 2059) performed by violinist Peter Zazofsky with Gerhardt Zimmermann conducting the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra. *Fanfare* critic, Robert Maxham, praised the concerto for the “...finale’s dazzling kinetic virtuosity”, and in *American Record Guide*, Bill Faucett commented on the concerto’s “...many moments of genuine beauty”. Also becoming well-known is the *Clarinet Concerto*, in a spectacular and highly-acclaimed performance with soloist Richard Stoltzman on MMC 2031 with the Warsaw Philharmonic, and *Notturmo*

for Trumpet, Harp, and Strings, performed by Gerard Schwarz (with Jeff Silberschlag on trumpet) and the Seattle Symphony on Delos. (New Yorkers had a chance to hear *Notturmo* live when it was performed by George Manahan leading the New York Chamber Symphony in Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center in April, 1999). Other recordings include two orchestral works — *Hommage à Trois*, played by the Slovak Radio Symphony under Szymon Kawalla on Vienna Modern Masters 3011, and *Inner Voices* on MMC 2003 with the Warsaw Philharmonic under Robert Black — also a chamber work for flute and guitar, *Paseos*, on CGS 1024223.

Performances

Past performances have included several premieres by Ensemble Giverny, with members of the Portland Symphony Orchestra, at the Portland Art Museum, as part of the release of a widely broadcast compact disc recording released by Moonbridge Recordings, *Waterlilies; Musical Visions of Monet*, in conjunction with the opening of the museum’s exhibit centering on the late paintings of Monet. The much-acclaimed chamber

music group Alaria, with guest clarinetist Doris Hall-Gulati, performed a new work by Mr. Carbon in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in 1999 as part of their chamber music series. Premieres also included those by the Philadelphia Trio in Weiss Center for the Performing Arts at Bucknell University of *Do Not Go Gentle* and a new chamber music setting of arias from the composer’s opera *Benjamin* in Merkin Concert Hall, New York City. Other notable performances have included those by the Philadelphia-based Network for New Music, Trio Fedele, cellist Stephen Balderston, pianist Edith Orloff, and an appointment as American composer in residence at the 2nd Annual Santa Barbara Chamber Music Festival in June, 2004.

Works

Mr. Carbon has written a number of works influenced by Spanish culture. Presented as part of “Músicos del Norte,” *Fantasy for Harpsichord and String Quartet* was performed by harpsichordist María Teresa Chenlo in 2003 at Casa de América-Palacio de Linares in Madrid, and more recently, *Six Spanish Songs* for

soprano and piano, settings of poems by Federico García Lorca, was performed at the College Music Society International Conference in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, by Colleen Neubert, soprano, and Nanette Solomon, piano.

In July 2002, MMC Recordings released John Carbon, a recording of the composer’s *Piano Concerto*, *Rasgos*, *Rhapsody for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra* and *Ghost Town Sketches*, with conductors Vladmír Valék, Maron Alsop, Gerard Schwarz, and David Stock conducting the Czech Radio Orchestra, the Concordia Orchestra of New York City, the New York Chamber Symphony, and the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, with soloists pianist William Koseluk, violinist Claire Chan, clarinetist Doris Hall-Gulati, and members of the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble. The CD was hailed by Peter Burwasser in *Fanfare* as the work of “an extraordinarily talented and compelling composer.” The premiere recording of *Endangered Species*, a doublebass concerto commissioned by bassist Richard Fredrickson, was released on MMC 2138 performed by the Slovak Radio Orchestra in Bratislava, Slovakia, in November 2002.

John Carbon's works can frequently be heard on the Franklin and Marshall College campus. In January 2006, as part of the Franklin celebration, *Benjamin*, Carbon's full-length opera (composed in 1987, revised in 2005) to a comic libretto by Franklin and Marshall Professor Emeritus Sarah White was given three staged performances in the Roeschel Center for the Performing Arts and a recording of the complete opera was subsequently released by Zimbel Recordings in early 2008.

Commissions

Additional commissions and performances have included the premiere of a new song cycle, *Queen Victoria's Journey*, based on music from Carbon's Houdini opera, *Disappearing Act* (2007, libretto by Dorothy Louise) in New York City at Diller-Quaile School of Music. Mr. Carbon also gave a faculty master class in composition at Diller-Quaile in February 2009. Several performances of *Ghost Rags* (for soprano sax, viola, bass clarinet and piano) were presented in February 2009, featuring Doris Hall-Gulati, clarinetist. Other activities in 2009 included the first

complete performance of John Carbon's song cycle *Letters from Abigail* by soprano Elizabeth Wiggins at the University of Southern Illinois, Carbondale, in March, and the premiere of a new Duo Sonata for double bass and viola at Penn State, State College, by bassist Robert Nairn at the annual conference of the International Society of Bassists. In 2010, Zimbel Recordings released *John Carbon Played by Steven Graff*, a compilation of John Carbon's piano music. The CD features music composed from 1985–present, including the composer's *Piano Sonata* completed in 2009. Violist Heidi von Bernewitz and double bassist Robert Nairn recorded Carbon's *Duo Sonata* for the Emeritus label in 2014, and most recently, in 2018, Zimbel Recordings released a compilation of his clarinet music that includes two new works for Grammy Award winning clarinetist Doris Hall-Gulati, *John Carbon, Clarinet Music*.

Recent Performances

Recent performances of John Carbon's music (2010–present) have been presented in Stockholm, Beijing and Salzburg. His works have also been heard at the

Bulgarian Embassy in Washington D.C., played by *Trio Clavino*, and in New York City at Hunter College, performed by pianist Steven Graff. In 2015, Lancaster Choral Society and Lancaster Symphony in collaboration with Franklin & Marshall College Chorus members presented the premiere of a new oratorio, *Soldiers of Remembrance* (libretto by Sarah White) and in 2016, Todd Sullivan and the Allegro Chamber Orchestra presented a new work for viola and orchestra, *Harlequinade*.

Most recently, clarinetist Doris Hall-Gulati has given the premiere of John Carbon's *Three Fantasy Pieces* for bass clarinet and piano.

Steven Graff

Since his concerto debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has appeared nine times, the American pianist Steven Graff has been the recipient of numerous distinguished awards and glowing critical praise.

Graff was born in Chicago where he began his musical training. A string of scholarships led to studies at The Juilliard School where he received Bachelor's and

Master's Degrees as a Petschek scholarship awardee, and a Doctorate of Musical Arts from The Graduate School of CUNY.

Steven Graff is at home on stage, over the airwaves and in the classroom. His appearances on the Nickelodeon Channel and the QE2 enlightened audiences with his interpretive performances, and tours of China, Norway, Japan, and in cities across the U.S. have thrilled music-lovers everywhere.

A sought-after recitalist and chamber musician, Graff has performed at Weill, Zankel and Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall, Lang Recital Hall and the Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College, Merkin and Alice Tully Halls in New York City and his performances have been broadcast in Oslo and Honolulu, on New York radio stations WQXR and WNCN, and Chicago's WFMT. He has performed at the New York Philharmonic Education sponsored Chamber Music concerts. He is a member of the Artemisia Trio, which performs regularly at the Takaezu Studio Concert Series.

A champion of new music, Graff has premiered and recorded contemporary works, most recently on the Centaur,



Capstone and Zimbel labels. Having studied with Adele Marcus, Beveridge Webster and Herbert Stessin, and performed in master classes for Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler and Misha Dichter, Graff often leads his own master classes at colleges and universities, most recently at the University of Arizona at Flagstaff, Franklin & Marshall College and at Special Music School in Manhattan.

Graff's many summer festival performances include the Bar Harbor Music Festival in Maine. He was also re-engaged as a featured teacher and performer in Hawaii's Aloha International Piano Festival where he gave master classes and was presented in a solo recital, as well as appearing in a multi-day Festival in Salt Lake City, sponsored by the Gina Bachauer International Piano Foundation, where he was heard in recital.

Recent concerto performances include a nine-city tour of China playing Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Manhattan Symphonie. He premiered John Carbon's piano concerto, *Fantasy Nocturne*, at the Barshinger Center in Pennsylvania with the Allegro Chamber Orchestra. The concerto was dedicated

to Mr. Graff. He often improvises his own cadenzas for Mozart concerto performances, most recently in New York City: Mozart's Concerto No. 20 with the Spectrum Symphony and Mozart's Concerto No. 21 with the New York Symphonic Arts Ensemble.

A frequent competition adjudicator, Graff has judged for The Steinway Piano Competition, The International Keyboard Institute and Festival's annual piano competition, France's Fontainebleau Festival, the Gina Bachauer Jr. Competition, and the Music Teachers' National Association. He spoke on "sustaining future audiences for classical music" at the Macaulay Honors College's bi-annual Topics and Tapas series.

In addition to teaching at Hunter College, Steven Graff has served on the faculty of The Macaulay Honors College and The Graduate Center of CUNY, and Special Music School. In fall 2020, he joined the faculty of the Petrie School of Music at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina as a full-time professor of piano.

Steven Graff is a Steinway Artist.

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