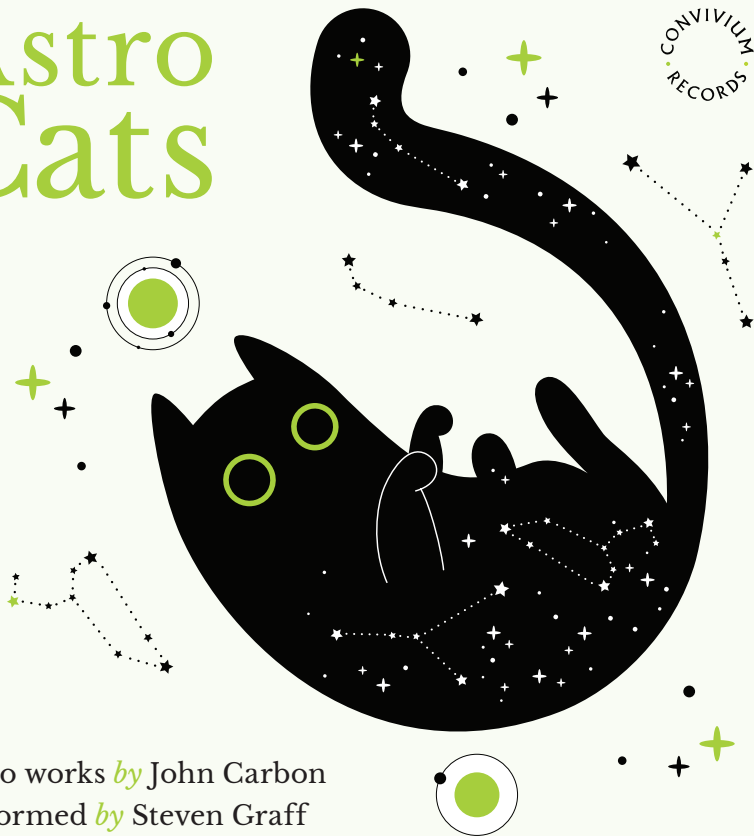


Astro Cats

CONVIVIUM
RECORDS



Piano works *by* John Carbon
Performed *by* Steven Graff

Tracklist

Astro Cats

1	Saharan Cheetah (Sagittarius)	4.32
2	South African Lion (Leo)	3.55
3	Peruvian Pampas Cat (Aries)	5.51
4	Maine Coon Cat (Taurus)	4.14
5	Bengal Tiger (Virgo)	7.52
6	Cheshire Cat (Libra)	6.35
7	Siberian Lynx (Capricorn)	7.55
8	North American Panther (Cancer)	4.07
9	Siamese Cat (Pisces)	5.16
10	Snow Leopard (Scorpio)	6.35
11	Spotted Hyena (Gemini)	5.31
12	American Shorthair (Aquarius)	5.24

Total running time **1:07.47**

Programme Note



Astro Cats (2023) is a sequel to *Astro Dogs* composed in 2019. Since the world is at times polarized between dog and cat lovers, I found that as soon as *Astro Dogs* for piano was released people started asking me “Why not Astro Cats?” The premise in this oft-requested sequel is slightly different. Whereas each sign of the zodiac is represented by a different domestic dog breed in *Astro Dogs*, the present collection only features three domestic cat breeds: American Shorthair, Siamese, and Maine Coon. The other cats included (each assigned to a different zodiacal sign) are wild felids, such as lions, tigers, leopards, and other wild cats. There is a parallel to *Astro Dogs* regarding the inclusion of one fanciful creature, the werewolf in the previous collection and the Cheshire Cat in the present work. In this set, these are

more substantial pieces: the entire work lasts about an hour, whereas *Astro Dogs* lasts half that long. One controversial choice I made was to include the hyena in the present collection. According to José E. Castello, writing in *The Princeton Field Guide to Felids and Hyenas of the World* (2020), “Despite their dog-like appearance, these animals [hyenas] are more closely related to cats and other feliform taxa than to carnivores, such as dogs or bears.”

As in *Astro Dogs*, in which a different dog breed is assigned to each zodiac sign, in the present collection I again assign a different felid to each sign. My choices are based on popular sun-sign astrology, although some of the choices are also based on more esoteric astrology and my associations with people I have been close to who

Programme Note

share the sign of the zodiac in question, or the personalities (more imagined than scientific) of the cat chosen to represent the sign. For example, for Pisces I chose the Siamese Cat. I wrote this piece shortly after my Mother passed away. She was a great cat lover, in fact the dedication at the beginning of the work, "Think Cats!" is a reference to a sign she had on her screen door for decades meant to remind us about her indoor cats and their attempts to venture out into an unsafe world filled with coyotes and other dangers. Perhaps her favourite cat was a Siamese named Sam, and Mom's sun sign was Pisces, hence the pairing of these two categories. I draw upon my feelings about the sign Pisces, the Siamese Cat and my mother's passing in this piece. Other pieces share similar creative catalysts.

As in *Astro Dogs*, where I have owned a few of the breeds included in the collection, various members of our family have had several of the cat types included in the present collection, notably the Maine Coon (one of our favourites) and American Shorthair. In the case of the latter, my father's piano is "played" (as in real life) by an American Shorthair. The ascending theme from composer Domenico Scarlatti's "Fuga del gatto" (Sonata in G minor, K. 30) acts as a recurring motive and harmonic underpinning for this piece. There is a legend regarding Scarlatti's cat, Pulcinella, who supposedly walked across the composer's keyboard, suggesting the subject of the fugal exposition in the piece, which was published in 1739. The composer never used the title "Cat's Fugue" but the story, true or not, persisted, as did the

theme, used by other composers such as Handel and Reicha.

Other inspirations drawn from cats include their kinetic behaviors. At times I've indicated articulations such as "with little cat feet." Pouncing, crouching and sprinting are all alluded to, maybe not so consciously, but in the composition I found myself drawing on elements of the hunt and the more mysterious, crafty nature of both domestic and wild cats. The predator cats inspired a wide range of expression from the cuddly and cute to the ferocious. As mentioned above, I included the Cheshire Cat in this collection. Although most of what we associate with this entirely fictional breed of cat is due to its appearance in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where the cat can disappear, grin enigmatically, and give frustrating non-answers to Alice's

pointed questions, the literary invention of this imaginary cat and its various qualities dates back to as early as 1788. One other influence the listener might hear would be the nationalistic qualities associated with the cat types due to their habitats, for example the Peruvian Pampas Cat or Saharan Cheetah, in which I was only very subtly inspired by thoughts of the habitat and how the cat interacts with that environment. This is perhaps most apparent in the case of the Snow Leopard, which favours steep terrain, which I think influenced some of the figuration in this more agile piece.





Biographies

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 a 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. 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 many major ensembles, including the New York Chamber Symphony, the Prague

Radio Symphony, and the Alaria Chamber Ensemble of New York. Carbon's music has been widely recorded, including releases on the MMC, Delos, Convivium, CGS, Zimbel, Navona, and Emeritus labels. Performers and ensembles who have recorded his music include clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, violinists Peter Zazofsky and Claire Chan, pianists Steven Graff and William Koseluk, double bassist Richard Frederickson, the Warsaw National Philharmonic, the New York Chamber Symphony, the Slovak Radio Symphony, the Prague Radio Symphony, the Concordia Chamber Ensemble, and Franklin & Marshall Opera Theater. From 1984–2020, Carbon was a member of the faculty of Franklin & Marshall College, where he was the Richard S. and Ann B. Barshinger Professor of Music (and upon his retirement was named Richard S. and Ann B. Barshinger Professor of Music Emeritus).

www.johncarbon.com

Biographies



Biographies

Since his concerto debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the age of 15, Steinway Artist **Steven Graff** has enjoyed a thriving career as both a performer and educator. Born in Chicago, he moved to New York to attend The Juilliard School, where he received Bachelor's and Master's Degrees as a Petschek scholarship awardee and studied with Adele Marcus, Beveridge Webster and Herbert Stessin. He received his Doctorate of Musical Arts from The Graduate School of the City University of New York. A sought-after recitalist and chamber musician, Dr. Graff was most recently the pianist at the New York Philharmonic Education sponsored Chamber Music series. Additional memorable performance venues include the Weill, Zankel and Stern Auditoriums at Carnegie Hall, Merkin and Alice Tully Halls in New York City, and tours of Norway and Japan. Concerto performances include a nine-city tour of China playing Gershwin's *Rhapsody*

in Blue with the Manhattan Symphonie and the world premiere of John Carbon's piano concerto, *Fantasy Nocturne*, at the Barshinger Center in Pennsylvania. He often improvises his own cadenzas for Mozart concerto performances, most recently in New York City with the New York Symphonic Arts Ensemble and the Spectrum Symphony. An advocate of new music, Dr. Graff has premiered and recorded numerous contemporary works, most recently on the Centaur, Capstone, Zimbel, and Convivium labels with Naxos distribution. His performances have also been broadcast in Oslo and Honolulu, on New York's WQXR, Chicago's WFMT and on South Carolina Public Radio. Dr. Graff has given lecture-recitals and master classes at the Gina Bachauer International Piano Festival, Bar Harbor Music Festival, Aloha International Piano Festival, and colleges throughout the United States. He spoke on "sustaining future audiences for classical music" at the Macaulay Honors College, and

Biographies



on "incorporating improvisation into the classical piano lesson" at recent MTNA conferences. A frequent competition adjudicator, Dr. Graff has judged for The Steinway Piano Competition, The International Keyboard Institute and Festival, and France's Fontainebleau Festival. Steven Graff joined the faculty of the Petrie School of Music at Converse University in fall 2020, having previously served on the faculty of New York's Hunter College, the Macaulay Honors College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He recently won a Steinway Top Teacher Award.





Astro Cats

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