

“Finally, after a long journey, the intrepid pianist and the magic piano arrived at the distant land. T’was lonely and silent. They slept for two days. Then, after a change of tyres and breakfast, it was safety belt on and ignition! They whizzed off. The pianist, gripping the steering wheel and peering into the distance looking for a vague musical pathway and the piano

sniffing up the music with its acoustic nose.

This was fun!

Back at the camp the pianist sat in a tub of hot water eating honey on toast while the piano printed out the music which it had recorded.”

“ **‘Piano Topography’** is deliberately not avant-garde. I wrote it to provide an uplifting and life-enhancing musical experience for an audience. Writing avant-garde music, venturing easily into for example atonal music, runs the huge risk of doing the opposite: requiring listeners to take tablets to relieve headache or depression or to go to night school classes to understand what’s going on. Such music has its place but not here. On the other hand, to sound refreshingly different, even original, mostly cheerful and thrilling while still using mostly diatonic melody is much more difficult. After almost every bar a little voice tells you that it sounds like a bit of someone else’s music. You can easily end the day surrounded by a jeering wall of screwed up paper. “

Although basically diatonic, other scales slide in and out of the melodic line while subtleties of rhythms, sonorities and expressions have to be attended to. For these reasons it is deceptively difficult to play. In some places the music slides off the Richter scale (Sviatoslav). These pieces do not sound “difficult” like some works by Scriabin or Prokofiev but they are and to play them seamlessly while putting your own personality into a performance is quite a challenge.

It is not necessary to perform all 20 Topographs at a concert: the first 10, or second 10, or a group of just a few, played in any order, can be an exciting part of a programme or just one, for example No. 19, as an encore to finish off the “show”.

Usually the plan of each Topograph is A B A with the second A remaining in the same key so that the pianist does not have to learn a new set of fingerings. The B theme is usually slower.

Each Topograph is about the same length, 10 pages, or 5 to 6 minutes, a satisfying length – neither too short to be considered trivial nor too long to be considered tedious. They are characterised by tripping melodies, urgent rhythms and pungent sonorities.

No. 1 starts inauspiciously for the pianist – no memory hooks on the first 2 pages. It is the most abrasive of the 20.

No. 2 Between the quick scale passages are delightful, slow, chordal passages which bring you back to terra firma.

No. 3 This is a deceptively difficult piece to pull off on account of the subtle quicksilver movement required of the left hand across the lower octaves.

No. 4 Is the shortest of the Topographs. It involves left hand jumps of a 10th: and delicate handling all through.

No. 5 Once set in motion you are in for a rapid ride with stabs and jerks adding to the excitement followed by a respite in waltz-time before the hell-bent journey back.

No. 6 Left hand octaves and chords progress menacingly while the right hand scampers across 4 octaves. After new rhythms and sonorities comes the return, but no: it’s a cheeky jazzy and totally unexpected sidestep and a perfect contrast before the returning thunder which ends in a memorable, sublime and relaxed sequence of chords.

No. 7 The first part of this piece consists of fragments and changing time-signatures every few bars which seem to merge into one continuous musical experience: “I am listening to this but only a moment ago I was listening to that. How did it get from that to this without my knowing it?” Eventually a stately theme emerges treated in 3 distinct ways before the first motif is heard followed by almost an inversion treated in a big way leading to a catchy reprise. This Topograph is a kind of chess involving pianist and listener.

No. 8 Opening with a mercurial scherzo this piece proceeds into a joyous melody for right then left hand then treated with extra notes for the right hand and 10th: leaps for the left; the scherzo returns and moves into a simple *adagio* before the finale.

No. 9 The 21 bar opening phrase is repeated leading to nearly 3 pages of cascading broken chords punctuated with an occasional bar of aggression. This central section moves into a gentle passage in waltz-time. The opening 4 bars return reshaped into new material which runs into a reclining and declining 6/8 *waltz*.

No. 10 By now you will be prepared for the unexpected. In this respect No. 10 comes as no surprise! Its first 3 pages of calm and delicate music require extreme control of fingers and feet... deftness and subtlety being uppermost. But it is not long before a 7/4 endearing melody takes over and those first 3 pages have been forgotten – but you will be reminded.

No. 11 explodes into a delicate *allegro* which develops into a bouncy memorable tune. The next 4 pages consist of a beautiful *adagio* whose melody is supported by difficult close finger work. The earlier passages return to round off this musical journey.

No. 12 An *allegro* takes us careering into uncharted territory where we reside for a while in a melodic haven of *largo* jazz before going home.

No. 13 A melody in 7/4 and 8/4 is immediately followed by a hymn-like phrase which you will notice jumps into place several more times. The first melody is developed and later into a motif using triplets which moves into a *burllesque* soon to find the hymn-like phrase. Quiet and luscious sonorities in triplets follow leading to an *adagio*, a thrilling *andante*, and a *Larghetto*, gently tickling the upper octaves. 6 bars of frightening dexterity lead us back over 2 pages to the initial statement.

No. 14 A shattering opening 2 bars, a breath and we are off. With a left hand rhythm and right hand running in 3's you are taken headlong, with little respite, across undulating terrain. Will it end? Yes, with a peerless, exquisitely crafted processional *Larghetto*, which switches into a gentle dance finishing with shimmering cascades in 13/16. A place to linger before the reminder.

No. 15 This Topograph is one of the most "playful" of the 20. It is a page and a half before you know what's going to happen. The technique used in much of this piece is for one hand to play just before the other and played *presto* you hear a stab just before a chord. This inescapable rhythm keeps the music moving comfortably – you want to hear more. A simple tune jumps out from nowhere and when it comes again you've forgotten how it all began.

No. 16 The first 3 bars of this Topograph is the central idea. The opening 2 pages set the soundscape before descending sonorities lead to the swinging bell motif – embroidered over nearly 4 pages here and there with filigrees of triplets. Then you are taken pell-mell downstream, lifted up and plunged down in an unstoppable torrent before the safety of the opening theme and the bell-swinging motif.

No. 17 A simple melody involving a lot of action leads to a plaintive tune in 4/4 with jazz chords and later to a new idea over a jerky rhythm. The plaintive tune repeats in 7/8 to be followed by the running undercurrent of notes with the simple melody above.

No. 18 A playful and surprising introduction, then a subtle, delicate passage where right hand and left hand mysteriously take on and release the melodic line to the other. This is developed even venturing into 7 flats. A melody in 10/8 on 3 staves using some jazz chording takes over giving way to that delicate passage again.

No. 19 Wide-ranging sonorities open this Topograph. The first part of this piece consists of a tripping melody which is repeatedly held up by a motif played in the high octaves. Then a magnificent melody emerges low down from the overlying handfuls of flowing notes which eventually climax in telling sonorities written on 3 staves. The tripping melody returns soon to be replaced by the deep impending octaves of before, finishing with *double forte* jazz chords.

No. 20 The *allegro* introduction leaves one on tenterhooks – then it comes: a clatter of notes and some powerful chords, easily memorable, followed by 5 ideas in nearly 2 pages before the "main tune" is repeated and moved on to motifs with tremolos and slicing grace notes. *Andante* chords now lead into a sleepy melody, treated later to jazz sonorities, then again simply; eventually leading to those grace-noted chords which slip gently downwards and inevitably to that triumphant first tune.

A challenge to the listener is to give a nickname to some or all of the Topographs to help remember which is which... not easy.

If you wish to analyse these Topographs in detail (a challenge for any degree student or musicologist) the 2-volume score can be obtained from Da Capo Music Ltd., 26 Stanway Road, Whitefield, Manchester M45 8EG England.

"**Piano Topography**" was first performed in the Sir Adrian Boult Hall, Birmingham, England on October 24th. and in the Cadogan Hall, London, England, on the 28th by **Gusztáv Fenyő**.

Euan Moseley, b. 1943 Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England, lives near Chesterfield with his wife, Margaret. "My wife built the house (in 1976) and I made the sandwiches." They have two children and two grandchildren, a dog and a dwindling number of hens. Euan taught mostly geography and history then latterly music before retiring. After a few years he decided to try composing. Written in 2001, "P.T." is his first work.

"It was a new year's resolution ... a piece each week. 20 seemed to be the right number. The biggest problem was keeping the Steinway clean while fitting the engine. In February tinnitus caused a six month lay-off. I remember starting No.7. There were those surreal 9/11 T.V. pictures. A couple of weeks after Christmas was spent tidying up the pieces, seeing where the music looked better with rather than without key signatures and discarding a half-finished No. 21. 20 was the right number. In any case there was only enough food and petrol to get home."

"I try to keep fit so I can climb safely; this means most mornings scampering across the moors or cycling for a couple of hours."