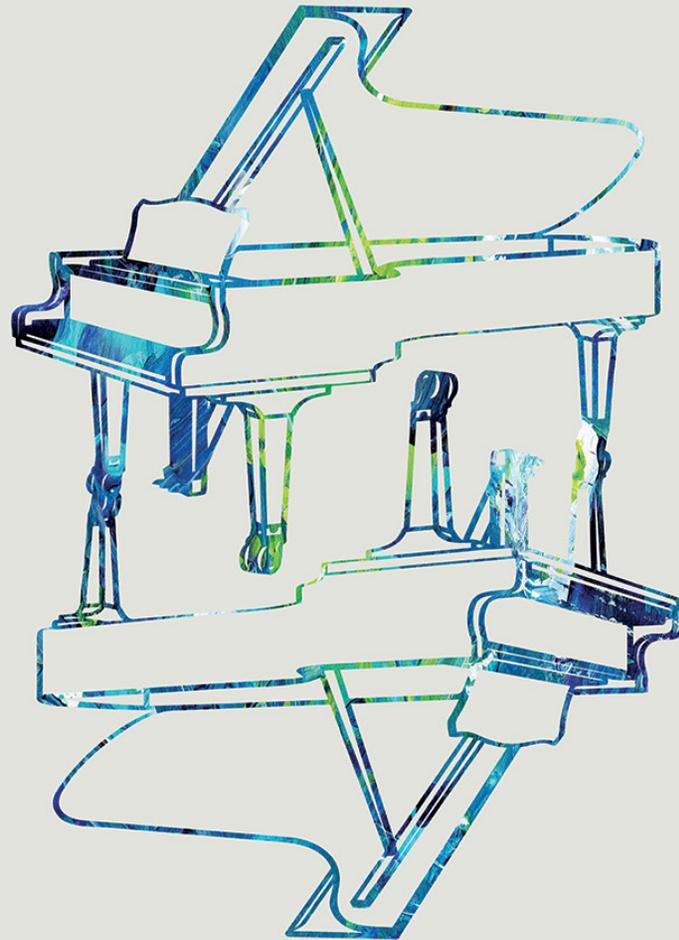




# THE ART OF AGONY

BRUMBY • DAVIDSON • DENSON  
FORD • GRAINGER • HAMILTON  
HINDSON • NEAL

AUSTRALIAN MUSIC FOR TWO PIANISTS



Viney-Grinberg Duo

**THE ART OF AGONY**  
**Australian music for two pianists**

- Percy GRAINGER** (1882–1961)
- 1 **Lincolnshire Posy – II. Horkstow Grange** (version for 2 pianos) (1937) **2:37**
- Robert DAVIDSON** (b. 1965)
- 2 **The Art of Agony** (2012) **3:26**  
Recorded spoken commentary: Percy Grainger; Wayne Howell (1921–1993) \*
- Percy GRAINGER**
- 3 **Lincolnshire Posy – VI. The Lost Lady Found** (version for 2 pianos) (1937) **2:18**
- Andrew FORD** (b. 1957)
- 4 **On Reflection** (2012–13) \* **9:38**
- Louise DENSON** (b. 1960)
- 5 **Mill Life** (2018) \* **7:55**
- Colin BRUMBY** (1933–2018)
- 3 Easy Piano Duets** (1980) \* **3:14**
- 6 No. 1. — 1:23
- 7 No. 2. — 0:45
- 8 No. 3. — 1:03
- Gordon HAMILTON** (b. 1982)
- 9 **Shorter/Longer** (2015) \* **4:57**
- 10 **Lullaby for Liam and Anna’s Kids** (2014) \* **2:50**
- Kate NEAL** (b. 1972)
- 11 **Etude 1** (2016) \* **2:50**
- Matthew HINDSON** (b. 1968)
- 12 **Visible Weapon** (2013) \* **10:39**

\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

**Viney-Grinberg Duo**  
**Liam Viney, Piano; Percussion** 5  
**Anna Grinberg, Piano; Percussion** 5

**BRUMBY • DAVIDSON • DENSON • FORD  
GRAINGER • HAMILTON • HINDSON • NEAL**  
**The Art of Agony – Australian music for two pianists**

This album features eight premiere recordings of Australian music for two pianists, including six works commissioned by the Viney-Grinberg Duo in recent years. A mercurially diverse collection, this album demonstrates the capacity for musical innovation generated by two collaborating pianists.

Across the album, the two pianists perform at different times on one piano, two pianos, and, in *Mill Life*, 22 pianos overdubbed and piled on top of each other. At other times, they improvise and perform at breakneck speed with electronic accompaniment (*Visible Weapon*), and accompany Percy Grainger's recorded speaking voice (*The Art of Agony*).

The album's title comes from an interview between an American radio show presenter and Percy Grainger in the 1950s. Grainger rejects the presenter's notion of his music as cheerfully one-dimensional and instead presents his belief that music derives from a much fuller range of primal emotions.

The triptych that opens the album – Grainger/Davidson/Grainger – provides an opportunity to reflect on music's true range and potential. After the revelations of Davidson's 'speech melody' composition, Grainger's two folk song arrangements take on deeper connotations. Even these ostensibly 'sunny' and 'cheerful' works somehow contain both melancholy and a harder edge at the same time.

Composer Robert Davidson writes of *The Art of Agony*:

'I wanted to, as it were, frame Grainger's voice like a painted portrait, using the pianos as the frames, to prime listeners to hear spoken language as music (this is my way of intensifying the emotional and distinctive

characteristic aspects of the voices). Each of the two pianos start the piece by tracking one of the men's speech, having their own parallel conversation by closely matching the spoken intonation. The pianos also add small dashes of word painting, such as impressions of gongs when mentioned by Grainger, and sometimes harmonise the spoken melodies. Two phrases are then highlighted: "music is after all derived from screaming" and "music is the art of agony", to underline Grainger's own emphasis on the darker side of his music. The two mantras, with their distinctive melodic flavouring, become accompanimental riffs, as each pianist takes turns with soloistic flights of athletic music somewhat reminiscent of Grainger's energetic aesthetic.'

Andrew Ford's *On Reflection* (2012–13) also subverts expectations. The composer writes:

'The phrase "on reflection" generally implies quiet contemplation, perhaps leading to a change of heart, but that's not what I had in mind here. Conventionally, in a piece for two pianos, the players sit facing one another, their instruments stretched out between them. They are mirror images of each other, and that is what this piece explores. The players' parts respond to and often imitate each other. Sometimes the imitation is rhetorical, but the piece also contains canonic writing in which the imitation is strict. *On Reflection* was composed for Liam Viney and Anna Grinberg.'

Louise Denson's *Mill Life* was composed for the 2018 iteration of the Piano Mill, an art event in northern New South Wales, Australia. The Piano Mill is a purpose-built structure housing 16 pre-loved upright pianos, some up to 100 years old. *Mill Life* was inspired by the idea that the Piano Mill is in fact a 'music factory'. The composer writes: 'The source materials for the piece were recordings of industrial noise in machine shops. The listener can imagine the factory firing up in the morning, and then walking from section to section hearing the sounds and rhythms of different pieces of machinery.' Viney and Grinberg created this studio version of *Mill Life* by using as many of the pianos in concert venues, practice rooms, and offices as they could access at the University of Queensland, School of Music.

Colin Brumby's belief was that music should be useful, and attractive to both performer and audience. His *3 Easy Piano Duets* were written for very youthful pianists, yet their elegant simplicity make them enjoyable for musicians of any age.

Gordon Hamilton's two piano duets are delightful new contributions to the genre. *Shorter/Longer* is a sound-mosaic in which a series of musical fragments are tossed about. Each recurrence of a theme gets progressively longer until the climax, and then shorter again. Thus the beginning and end of the piece are hyperactive, and the middle is more continuous.

Of *Lullaby for Liam and Anna's Kids* the composer writes: 'Given that I know that Liam and Anna practice together at home – possibly around bed-time – this is a simple melody for their kids to drift off to.'

Kate Neal's *Etude 1* is a beautiful contribution to a virtually non-existent repertoire – etudes for two pianists. In two distinct and contrasting halves, this short work evokes a glittering miniature world. Composed in 2016, *Etude 1* is dedicated to Anna Grinberg and Liam Viney.

Matthew Hindson writes: '*Visible Weapon* was written with the idea of confronting notions of violence in our society. We are constantly bombarded by violence in the media, especially from the US in which it feels solutions are found more often than not through the barrel of a gun. *Visible Weapon* responds to this culture of violence-without-consequences, of the glorification of triumph obtained via a brawn-over-brains mentality. The piano parts link in with the pre-recorded parts using extremes of virtuosity, as well as occasional improvisation. It is a tour-de-force for the pianists and was commissioned by Liam Viney and Anna Grinberg, to whom it is also dedicated.'

**Liam Viney**

## **Robert DAVIDSON (b. 1965): The Art of Agony (2012)**

(Text: Percy Grainger; Wayne Howell, 1921–1993 [recorded spoken word accompaniment])

*Interviewer* Leopold Stokowski and his symphony orchestra gave us Percy Grainger's *Early One Morning*, and now back to Percy Grainger himself, our guest today on *Favourites of the Famous*. Mr Grainger you've been called the one cheerful sunny composer living. To what would you attribute the warmth and the naturalness of your music?

*Percy Grainger* Well, I don't know that my music is consistently warm and natural, but I think the impression that it's, ah, what was it, cheerful? Comes from people not knowing most of my compositions, for I think I'm very morose musically.

*Interviewer* You suppose they're misinterpreting you like said before?

*Percy Grainger* Well they know one piece out of 20, and that one piece happens to be lively and they like that, and they ignore the other 19 as they generally do with most music.

*Interviewer* Well you don't actually feel morose, do you.

*Percy Grainger* Yes, I do. I enjoy it very much.

*Interviewer* You enjoy feeling sad?

*Percy Grainger* Yes.

*Interviewer* Haha! Well I think that's wonderful. I mean if you enjoy being sad, then you should be...

*Percy Grainger* No it isn't a question of whether I enjoy it so much only. But I think, erm, music is the art of agony. Music is the art of agony. Music is after all derived from screaming, not derived from laughing. Well, when you think most music originated in trying to placate hostile deities, like the Chinese banging a gong in a storm. And uh, screaming with fear and screaming with supplication are not so very far removed and music is of course the child of all that. Music is after all derived from screaming. Music is the art of agony. Music is after all derived from screaming. I think the best thing for a composer is to be badly treated in every way.

## Viney-Grinberg Duo

Liam Viney and Anna Grinberg enjoy an international performance profile as a piano duo, involving festivals, major series, live radio broadcasts, orchestras, and album releases. Lauded by *The Australian* and the *Los Angeles Times*, the duo is committed to exploring classics of the two-piano and four-hand repertoire, but also contributes to the ongoing expansion of that literature through commissioning composers. Viney and Grinberg's innovative and creative approach has resulted in collaborations with composers, artists, dancers, choreographers and other established performing ensembles, as well as writing book chapters and articles, and giving scholarly seminars and presentations. The Duo spent a decade in the US, including five years at California Institute of the Arts, before taking up their current positions as ensemble-in-residence at The University of Queensland, Australia. Professor Liam Viney is head of the School of Music at The University of Queensland, and Dr Anna Grinberg is head of piano.



This diverse programme features eight premiere recordings of Australian music for two pianists, including seven works recently commissioned by the acclaimed Viney-Grinberg duo. Demonstrating the innovative potential of this medium, these pieces range from duets on a single piano to *Mill Life* in which 22 pianos are overdubbed and piled on top of each other. Other highlights include *Visible Weapon*, pairing virtuoso velocity with electronics, and *The Art of Agony* – a musical picture frame for Percy Grainger’s spoken voice.



# THE ART OF AGONY

## Australian music for two pianists



- |   |  |
|---|--|
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\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

## Viney-Grinberg Duo

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 6 **1–3** **9** **10** and 28 **4** **5** April, 28 July **6–8** **11** and 13 October **12** 2019

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Producers: Liam Viney, Anna Grinberg • Engineer: David Spearritt • Editor: Chris Perren **5** **12** • Booklet notes: Liam Viney

Publishers: Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG **1** **3**, Australian Music Centre **2** **4**, Louise Denson **5**, Wirripang **6–8**,

Gordon Hamilton **9** **10**, Kate Neal **11**, Australian Music Centre (under license from Faber Music) **12**

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