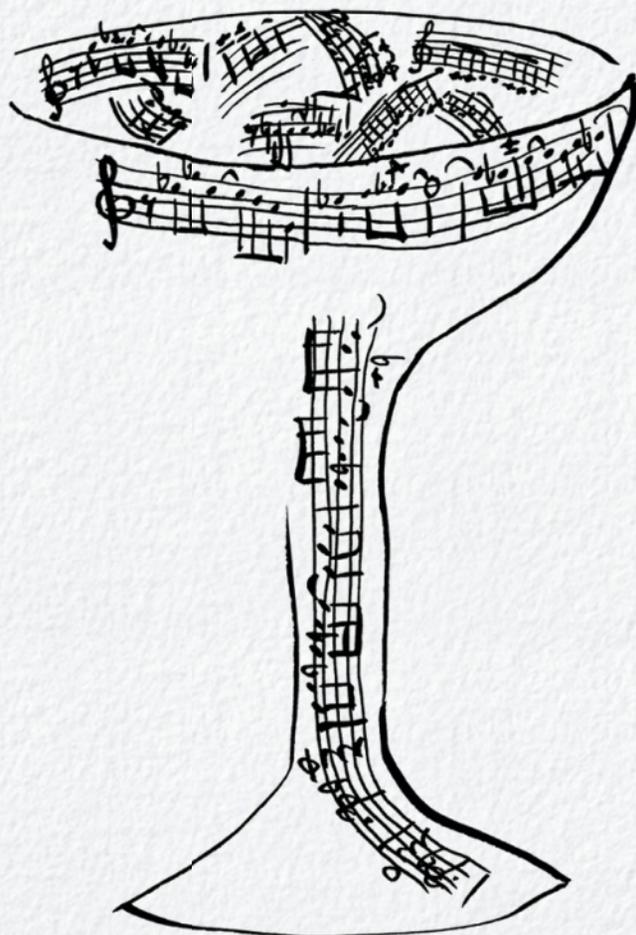




ELENA KATS-CHERNIN
unsent love letters
meditations on Erik Satie



TAMARA-ANNA CISLOWSKA
PIANO

The sound of dreams on velvet

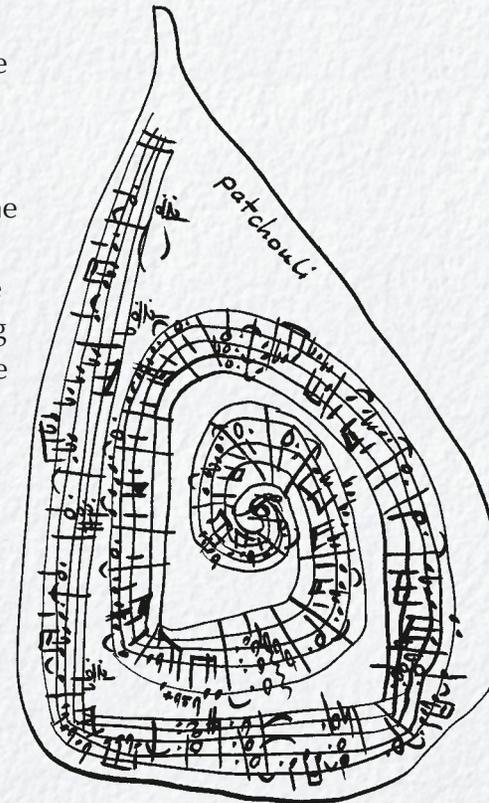
In this age where no-one has any time, diaries are chock-a-block, schedules bursting and calendars stuffed, it could be said that what is missing is the space to miss things, even space. This album is a first step to redressing some of the balance between the time to think that we know we don't have, and the frenzy of saving the dates, must-dos and urgent deadlines. I would like to suggest we wind back the clock a moment, or throw out the clock.

Taking Satie's life and work as a central theme, the album is a collection of personal ruminations from Elena Kats-Chernin on the great eccentric Erik Satie. You could think of it as a musical memoir from one composer to another. A folding and unfolding of Elena's thoughts and observations. The 26 pieces outline the concerns, convictions and loves of a man who was sensitive, singular and contradictory. He was also brilliant, unguarded and unconventional, and able to mix the devil-may-care with the stiff-upper-lip.

Satie's life was a fascinating, fervoursome affair; from the first strike of love and then lifelong estrangement with artist and muse Suzanne Valadon, to the unexpected celebrity and conflict of his last ten years. After he died, friends gaining access to his apartment, for the first time in almost three decades, found conditions both perplexing and romantically fastidious in their own way: two grand pianos one atop the other, one chair, one table, seven velvet suits and the love letters – many, many unsent love letters.

May this album contribute to full and sanctioned repose and supine meditation, the egress of anxiety and a temporary fix to everyone too concerned with the outer life. Which is probably everyone.

Tamara-Anna Cislowska



- 1 love token** 1'19
- There are little chimes that begin this first piece. I think of them like the first taps on a young heart. When Satie fell in love with femme fatale Suzanne Valadon, he asked her to marry him from the very first day (she said no). It stays mainly in major keys, the repeated arpeggios quietly bubble underneath the melody. Something new is beginning and a heart is fluttering.
- 2 unsent love letters** 4'37
- I've often wondered, as we all do, what was written in all those unsent love letters found inside Satie's apartment. I found myself using material with a G-flat major chord as the centre and thinking about two things: tenderness and obsession. I kept doubling back (a little like a mind fixated) and that makes this piece a slow reveal. The climax is in the middle, when the material suddenly moves more quickly from key to key, drawing back the veil on much warmer feelings.
- 3 behind your pearls** 2'28
- behind your pearls* is a portrait of Suzanne Valadon, Satie's one known amour. I still want to know why she tried to burn all Satie's love letters to her. Pictures of her show a wide-eyed and mysterious beauty. She was obviously an intriguing and alluring character.
- A few years ago I was asked to include a song called 'Be Kind to Your Parents' in one of my commissioned pieces. I misheard the name as 'Behind Your Pearls' and for a long time I was confused as I could not find this song anywhere! I liked the title and it seemed right to use it here.
- 4 le chat noir** 2'51
- Le Chat Noir was the cabaret club in bohemian Montmartre that Satie performed in and frequented. I thought that the style of music and ambience might be laid back like an easy stroll down a Parisian street.
- 5 threads of grey velvet** 1'26
- In the wardrobe of Satie's apartment his seven identical grey velvet suits were discovered. In fact, they were the only items hanging there. I love velvet myself and the music that came to me seemed to weave around, ravelling and unravelling itself...

- 6 sarabande** 2'19
- One of my first introductions to Satie's music were the made-up ritual dances *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*. This chromatic little tune came into my head and it seemed to have something from the far-off distance about it that approached, for me, the scent of music from other places that Satie was so drawn to.
- 7 garden gothique** 1'50
- Like *sarabande*, *garden gothique* centres around G tonality, but in this case the centre is more ambivalent. It's one of those pieces that simply catches a moment in time. I imagined a formal garden or a petrified forest, and the stillness that one can feel in such a place.
- 8 very shiny** 0'56
- Of all the directions to the performer that Satie wrote in his works, I think 'very shiny' is the one that stays with me the most. For me the major seventh of D, F-sharp, A and C-sharp has a particular lustre to it.
- 9 absynthe cocktail** 3'23
- Never having had one myself, I wrote this piece as something that could complement such an experience and try to capture the particular élan of those times. I thought that such a dangerous and irregular beverage needed an irregular melody, so I wrote a syncopated one that spreads over more than two octaves.
- 10 the gymnast** 2'56
- There was reportedly an incident where Satie, in a rage, pushed Valadon from a third-storey window. Because of her acrobatic training, she miraculously survived, unhurt. *the gymnast* unfolds as if in slow motion. In such emergencies, time often seems to stretch, and I imagined a body travelling and tumbling from a height towards the ground, almost frame by frame.
- 11 one table, one chair** 1'19
- After his ill-fated love affair Satie chose to remain single for the rest of his life. This piece is reminiscent of a waltz but one to be danced alone.

- 12** **eggshell** 7'22
Fragility and cracks. In *eggshell* each note measures the passing of time at its own pace. It is written in a major key but the sentiment is not without regret.
Valadon left Satie after six months and I don't think his broken heart ever quite mended.
- 13** **imaginary building** 1'55
Satie was also well known for his sketches of imaginary buildings – he even advertised them in the newspaper for rent or purchase. I wondered about what was in his mind: what did these buildings look like? What kind of peaks and troughs, what size and shape?
The piece is based on three constructed chords. These chords, both in full and fragment form, are the basis of all the material.
- 14** **piano tower** 1'47
Satie kept two grand pianos, one on top of the other. In an absurdist frame of mind I wondered what they would sound like, were they played together. I wrote a piece that might lend itself to repetition and replication by another instrument (if there was one at hand!) as well as being played either on two pianos, or on one in different registers by two pianists.
- 15** **phonometrician** 5'17
Rather than describing himself as belonging to any particular musical school, Satie coined the term 'phonometrician' – one who measures sounds. I got an image in my head of a ruler and someone measuring the air around them in an attempt to capture the passing notes.
- 16** **modern romantic** 2'37
This was another coined term that Satie used about his music. He was known to speak at length about his total lack of interest in musical development. 'Modern Romantic' means lyrical music with no development and no resolution.
- 17** **maple in the evening** 2'43
In *maple in the evening* I devised an original folk tune as if heard from a distance, from the shade or in the background. The piece features two themes and both are repeated. I left it to the performer to interpret the repetitions as they wish, both in dynamics and articulation.

- 18 tuesday suit** 4'54
- There were seven grey velvet suits found in Satie's wardrobe, I guess he wore one for each day of the week. He died on a Wednesday and I imagine he might have been buried in his Tuesday suit. The piece features quintuplets and has a mesmeric, rather reflective tone.
- 19 wonder about yourself** 1'02
- 'Wonder about yourself' is another of Satie's directions which is enigmatic, ambiguous, yet straightforward as well. I like not knowing what it really means. My piece is actually like a series of questions: I tried to never complete a phrase, in keeping with the idea that I am quite sure I will never know everything there is to know about myself, no matter how much I wonder about it.
- 20 patchouli** 1'16
- The origin of many perfumes; exotic, aromatic. There is a sense of looking back, of signals unheeded, and of lonesomeness. In the harmonies I used, I thought about the early 20th century and what a time of flux and newness it all was.
- 21 notebooks** 2'39
- I read that Satie kept a series of notebooks containing sketches, a lot of them unused. I keep a lot of sketches myself and I started thinking about the fact that there are so many fragments of material that never make a transition into a completed work. I began looking through some of my notes and found something that I thought deserved a new life! I felt that it had melancholy to it, and it stirred something in me.
- 22 postcard to a critic** 2'56
- When Satie's ballet *Parade* premiered, the critics were not as kind to the composer as he might have anticipated – quite the reverse. Satie struck back and sent a series of postcards to one particular critic, Jean Poueigh: these were addressed very politely, but included an array of unprintable insults! My waltz is similarly genial on the surface, but I was imagining a message being delivered to someone through gritted teeth or a fake smile. Satie actually went to jail for eight days for his actions, after being sued by the critic and sent to trial.

23 **dance in 7/4** 4'39

This piece comes from a ghostly impression that I had, where it seemed in this half-dream that spirits from the past were circling. Unresolved and unheard, they motion about menacingly.

24 **biqui** 3'48

This is the nickname Satie used for his one and only Suzanne, who was never forgotten and never replaced. Did she dominate his thoughts toward the end? The music here is as though spiralling; the movement is very restrained but the emotion behind it runs high. My feeling is that this relationship cast a pall over Satie's whole life and that his memories of her would have maintained their tension and monopoly on his psyche right to the end.

25 **darkness** 3'16

darkness is a melody I used in the ballet *Wild Swans* for a scene in a cemetery. It has an intensity about it that I thought related to Satie, his illness and his final days.

26 **for whom it tolls** 1'45

Bells have always held a fascination for me; probably my experiences growing up in the Soviet Union have shaped that acquaintance and familiarity. The chimes I use in the first track, *love token*, are more clock-like (an awakening), whereas these are the large carillons of a more funereal or religious kind. In any case, they honour Satie. He has come to be like a friend to me over the course of this project; for me he is the shiny one.

Annotations by Elena Kats-Chernin



ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Elena Kats-Chernin studied music in Moscow, Sydney and Hanover.

She has created works across nearly every genre, from intimate compositions for piano to pieces for chamber ensembles, full-scale choir and symphony orchestras, as well as ballets and operas. Her music was used at the opening ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2003 Rugby World Cup. She is a recipient of many prestigious prizes including Green Room, Helpmann, *Limelight*, Sounds Australian, Sydney Theatre and Sidney Myer Performing Arts Awards.

Companies setting ballets to her scores include Nederlands Dans Theater, Ballet Theatre Munich, San Francisco Ballet and the Stuttgart Ballet.

The extraordinary reach of Elena Kats-Chernin's music also spans the worlds of film and television. *Eliza Aria*, from her score for Meryl Tankard's ballet *Wild Swans* (commissioned by The Australian Ballet), was used by British bank Lloyds TSB in their celebrated ad campaign *For the Journey*. Her *Russian Rag* was used in the claymation feature film *Mary and Max*, by Oscar-winning director Adam Elliot. Both pieces have featured as the theme for *Late Night Live* on ABC Radio National. Her ten-hour adaptation of Monteverdi's opera trilogy at the Komische Oper Berlin, directed by Barrie Kosky, was broadcast live on the 3SAT TV channel across Europe in 2012. Elena Kats-Chernin was featured in *Creative Minds*, a six-part TV portrait documentary series by Robin Hughes.

For the centenary of World War I, Elena Kats-Chernin's five-movement work *Meeting the Sun* was commissioned by the Kokoda Memorial Track Walkway and performed by the Royal Australian Navy Band and the Sydney Children's Choir at the Anzac Day Dawn Service. Her movement *Landing* was featured in the *Gallipoli Symphony*, which premiered in Istanbul in August 2015.

In 2015 Elena Kats-Chernin's children's opera *Schneewittchen und die 77 Zwerge* (Snow White and the 77 Dwarves) was premiered at the Komische Oper Berlin and her widely praised episodic opera *The Divorce* was watched by more than one million viewers on ABC TV. This pioneering work, with libretto by Joanna Murray-Smith, was commissioned by Opera Australia and featured such artists as Kate Miller-Heidke, Lisa McCune, Marina Prior and Meow Meow.

Her groundbreaking concerto for eight double basses and orchestra, *The Witching Hour*, was premiered in September 2016 by the Australian World Orchestra in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House and in Singapore. The orchestral work *Singing Trees* was premiered by the Australian





Chamber Orchestra at the Melbourne Recital Centre. In 2017 Elena Kats-Chernin is Composer in Residence with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

In recent CD releases, her work *Prelude and Cube* is featured in the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra's 25th Anniversary album *Brandenburg Celebrates*, and *Torque* is on the Australian Chamber Orchestra collection *Celebrating 40 Years*. The double album *Butterflying: Piano Music of Elena Kats-Chernin* was released in May 2016.

Elena Kats-Chernin's music is published exclusively by Boosey & Hawkes / Bote & Bock.

TAMARA-ANNA CISLOWSKA

Tamara-Anna Cislowska is one of Australia's most acclaimed and recognised pianists for both her solo and chamber performances, and the winner of the 2015 ARIA Award for Best Classical Album for her recording *Peter Sculthorpe: Complete Works for Solo Piano* (ABC Classics). She has performed worldwide with repertoire spanning five centuries, and won international prizes in London, Italy and Greece, including the Rovere d'Oro.

In Australia, Tamara-Anna Cislowska has earned accolades such as the 2012 APRA-AMCOS Art Music Award for Performance of the Year (ACT), the prestigious David Paul Landa Memorial Scholarship for pianists, and the Freedman Fellowship (2003). The youngest pianist to win the ABC Young Performer of the Year competition – at age 14 – she gave her first public performance at the age of two, playing music by Bartók. She commenced studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music four years later, and gave her first orchestral performance at age eight. She is the most awarded prizewinner in the history of the Sydney Performing Arts Challenge, and has toured Japan and the United States as a cultural ambassador for Australia.

Tamara-Anna Cislowska is a regular guest of orchestras and festivals in Europe, America and Australasia, including as soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and all the major Australian symphony orchestras, with conductors such as Matthias Bamert, Edo de Waart, Asher Fisch, Johannes Fritzs, Christopher Hogwood, James Judd, Markus Stenz and Yaron Traub. She has toured with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and performed as a recitalist at the Purcell Room in London, the Kleine Zaal of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Frick Collection in New York, and the Sydney Opera House. Highly sought after for chamber

collaborations, Tamara-Anna Cislowska was a founding member of Berlin's Mozart Piano Quartet, touring North and South America in this ensemble. She is a frequent guest of festivals, including Pierre Cardin's Festival de Lacoste, the Kurt Weill Festival, Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Canberra International Music Festival, MONA FOMA, Fremantle and Perth Festivals, Musica Viva, and Soundstream: Adelaide New Music Festival.

Her most recent engagements include tours to France, the UK and Singapore, appearances as soloist with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Sydney and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, and Sydney Youth Orchestra, and solo and chamber recitals around Australia including for the Huntington Estate Music Festival, Darwin Festival, Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Australian World Orchestra Chamber Festival, and for Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Recital Centre, and Riverside Theatres.

In 2017, Tamara-Anna Cislowska performs for the Perth International Arts Festival, Canberra International Music Festival, Castlemaine State Festival and Bellingen Festival; tours and records with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and is Music Director for two concerts for Sydney's City Recital Hall. She is a regular broadcaster for ABC Classic FM and an editor for Boosey & Hawkes (Berlin), alongside her busy performing schedule, which also includes recitals at Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Melbourne Recital Centre, the Art Gallery of NSW, Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre and as part of Monash University's Piano Series.

As a recording artist, Tamara-Anna Cislowska has albums on Chandos, Naxos, ABC Classics, Tall Poppies, Artworks and MDG (Dabringhaus und Grimm). She has received four ARIA nominations and much critical acclaim, with seven solo albums featuring in the classical charts, including *Butterflying: Piano Music of Elena Kats-Chernin* (ABC Classics), which reached No. 1 on the ARIA charts, and her solo 2014 release, *Peter Sculthorpe: Complete Works for Solo Piano*, which remained at No. 1 in the ARIA Classical and *Limelight* charts for several weeks and was selected as 'Editor's Choice – Instrumental' in *BBC Music Magazine's* January 2015 edition. Earning five-star reviews, the landmark recording was described as 'Australian piano gold' (*BBC Music Magazine*), 'a profoundly affecting release' (*Gramophone*), and 'an Australian treasure' (news.com.au).

www.tamara-annacislowska.com.au

After the death of Erik Satie, dozens of unsent love letters were found in his Paris apartment. Now composer Elena Kats-Chernin and pianist Tamara-Anna Cislowska send those letters off, in 26 meditative and passionate piano miniatures inspired by Satie's extraordinary life and music.

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Recording Producer and Engineer Virginia Read

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