

PRELUDE TO A PRELUDE is modeled on the “Prelude in C Major” from J. S. Bach’s first book of *Prelude and Fugues* (as will be immediately obvious to most musicians). Burge adapts Bach’s one-bar pattern using a more jazz-like colouring, often adding a melodic gesture above the pattern that is very easy to project by sharing these notes between hands, although this does require careful hand crossings. Like Bach, Burge changes the pattern just before the end to provide a stronger sense of closure.

This work is dedicated to Ian Burge, the composer’s oldest son who in his early teens was a far better pianist than his father will ever be. John Burge will always remember teaching the Bach “C Major Prelude” to Ian when he was five years old by simply showing him the hand position for a new bar every few days. Even today, over twenty years later, John cannot hear or play the Bach Prelude without thinking of Ian playing this piece so musically with his small hands.

PLAYING TAG employs one of Burge’s favourite compositional techniques in the way that the music often divides black- and white-note patterns between hands that are easy to memorize and for young students, can even be taught to them by rote.

This work is dedicated to Jin Sandbeck and the Peel Music Festival where John Burge has adjudicated many times. Indeed, once he finishes adjudicating there he is often immediately booked for a return visit in three or four year’s time. Music festivals rely greatly on the organizational skills and dedication of many volunteers and Jin does a particularly good job taking care of all the details. She is also a wonderful piano teacher.

VARIATIONS ON A SIMPLE THEME has the following acknowledgement underneath the title, “With a tip of the hat to Kabelevsky’s *Easy Variations*, Op. 40, No. 1.” The Kabelevsky work referenced here is based on a simple descending D major scale that is transformed into a series of contrasting variations that increase gradually in intensity until reaching a satisfying ending. Burge attempts no less a goal but with a theme based entirely on a ‘rising’ C major scale.

This work is dedicated to Janet Fothergill and the Alliance for Canadian New Music Projects, an organization with the wonderful mandate of commissioning, promoting, and preserving “...Canadian contemporary music as a cornerstone of our national heritage by fostering its performance among students, teachers, and performers through education, festivals, and workshops.” Since 1975, each fall in cities across Canada, ACNMP runs an event called Contemporary Showcase, a non-competitive festival often presented in a master-class format. John Burge was an executive member of the Canadian League of Composers when ACNMP was awarded the CLC’s 1997 *Friends of Canadian Music Prize*—a well-deserved honour—and has been a keen supporter of the organization ever since. Janet is an extraordinary volunteer in the Toronto ACNMP branch and is very much in demand as a festival adjudicator, clinician and piano teacher.

PASTELS is very impressionistic in the evocative way that the music takes advantage of the piano’s sustain pedal and the built-in decay to create a sonic fabric that is richly resonant. The music’s textural complexity often requires three staves giving the visual reference to the later scores of Debussy and most of Messiaen’s piano music. There is a polytonal flavour to the piece that is in part created by the division of white- and black-note material between hands. Unlike **PLAYING TAG** though, here the two pitch collections often occur simultaneously but often with different dynamic indications.

Martha Hill Duncan is the well-deserved dedicatee of **PASTELS** in appreciation her encouragement to have John Burge to join Red Leaf Pianoworks. Martha has composed a wide range of music but is certainly well known for her piano compositions that connect immediately with teachers, students and professionals. Of all the pieces in this collection, **PASTELS** reminds me the most of Martha.

ONE-NOTE GROOVE is a kind of companion piece to Burge’s “Prelude No. 13” from his *Twenty-four Preludes* (JBComps-003). This F Sharp Major prelude is subtitled, “One-Note Ostinato,” and always repeats an F# on every eighth-note beat using four different registers of the piano. This prelude has a high degree of difficulty due in part to the speed and syncopated rhythms. Burge decided that it would be great to use this prelude as a model for a slightly easier composition in the same vein but with the repeated note limited to just one single absolute pitch. The resultant work has an ABA form in which the middle section tends to bury the repeated note in the repeated chords while modulating away from the outer section’s tonic key of E flat major.

This work is dedicated to Alex Nediak who in his formative years studied harmony, counterpoint and composition privately with John Burge. As well as being a very mature and thoughtful composer for his age, he is a fine pianist and Burge felt that Alex would appreciate the self-imposed limitation of the music’s design.

DANCING ARPEGGIOS is really a follow up to **DANCING SCALES** found in the *Parking An Octatonic Truck* collection, but is also published in the Royal Conservatory of Music’s *Grade 6 Etudes* (Frederick Harris Music Company Limited). While **DANCING SCALES** is a fast, polka-like piece with running scales that often change key, **DANCING ARPEGGIOS**, emphasizes a flowing waltz meter with the left hand providing most of the melodic material. The arpeggiated figuration in the right hand is relatively unforgiving in the technical requirements needed to overcome the chromatic shifts that are only relaxed slightly when the left hand takes over the arpeggios at the end.

Leo Nediak, the music’s dedicatee, is a young pianist and composer of prodigious talent and Burge has certainly enjoyed working with both boys at various times on harmony, counterpoint and composition studies. Because Leo is such a formidable pianist he never hesitates to incorporate difficult broken chord and arpeggio figures into his own piano music. It is hoped that this work will provide him with some creative encouragement.

O CANADA was composed by Calixa Lavallée (1842-1891) in 1880. Although it was used as Canada's national anthem for many decades, it was only officially recognized as such by an act of parliament in 1980 (one hundred years after the song was first published). There are numerous arrangements of this tune and one of John Burge's favourite is by Godfrey Ridout with whom Burge studied counterpoint at the University of Toronto. Like many pianists, Burge has often found himself in situations where he has had to play "O Canada" on the piano and over the years his own arrangement has become quite stylized in a somewhat virtuosic fashion. He has also incorporated the study and analysis of this tune into many of his theory and analysis classes at Queen's University, especially around the date of a federal election. During the year that Stephen Harper was first elected Prime Minister of Canada, Adèle Barclay, a student of one such class, summarized Burge's treatment of the national anthem in the *Literary Review of Canada* (July/August 2015, p.9) while reviewing Brian Thompson's biography of Calixa Lavellée (*Anthems and Minstrel Shows: The Life and Times of Calixa Lavellée*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015):

During my first-year music theory course at Queen's University, Professor John Burge demonstrated a particular harmonic sequence using the opening chords of "O Canada" as an example. The first three chords are a basic enough riff off Pachelbel's Canon, but in "O Canada" their resolution is relaxed, making the familiar strong chords tentative—which is a curious construction for what is supposed to be a patriotic march. Anthems typically boast at the onset, pursuing unflinching triumph rather than coy lyricism. Burge pointed out that this particular harmonic design dovetails with the unassuming Canadian identity. He suggested that this coincidence was possibly due to intuition of the part of the composer or, perhaps, that this inaugural delicate pathos appealed to later generations when they adopted "O Canada" as our national anthem.

Burge timed the lesson to fall on an election day and interrupted the class to answer a fake phone call from Prime Minister Paul Martin—the purpose of which was to inspire the class, predominantly 18-year-olds, to vote for the first time. After hanging up the phone, Burge launched into a full-fledged performance of "O Canada" on the grand piano. The music majors sang with their practiced voices a compelling and impromptu rendition of the national anthem. Burge's performance was a lesson on the relationship between music and nationalism.

This arrangement is dedicated to Mary and Peter Burns. Mary was John's harmony, counterpoint and analysis teacher when he was growing up in Calgary and she was certainly a great help in completing all of the requirements for the Associate Diploma of the Royal Conservatory of Music while he was still in high school. A fine pianist herself, Mary was in demand as an accompanist and kindly played the orchestral reduction for a number of piano concertos that John learned at the time. Successful arrangements of existing tunes often rely heavily on harmony and counterpoint and as such, this particular dedication seems very fitting.

OSCILLATIONS was written in tribute to Dr. Arthur B. McDonald, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Physics, Engineering Physics and Astronomy at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, in recognition of his co-winning of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Physics. Along with Takaaki Kajita of the University of Tokyo, this particular prize honors their key contributions to the experiments that demonstrated that neutrinos change identities or "oscillate". Dr. McDonald's research took place at the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory (SNO), a cutting-edge research facility located two kilometres underground in an active nickel mine. The experiment demonstrated that neutrinos from the sun were not disappearing on their way to earth and were captured with a different identity when arriving at SNO. Meanwhile, Dr. Kajita presented the discovery that neutrinos from the atmosphere switch between two identities on their way to the Super-Kamiokande detector in Japan. This "metamorphosis" requires that neutrinos have mass and collectively their findings solved a puzzle that physicists had wrestled with for decades as summarized in the Nobel Academy's announcement:

For particle physics this was a historic discovery. Its Standard Model of the innermost workings of matter had been incredibly successful, having resisted all experimental challenges for more than 20 years. However, as it requires neutrinos to be massless, the new observations had clearly showed that the Standard Model cannot be the complete theory of the fundamental constituents of the universe.

The request for a musical acknowledgement of this award came from Dr. Alan Harrison, Provost of Queen's University at the time. Queen's University, like the city of Kingston where it is located, is a relatively close-knit community and John Burge knew Art McDonald prior to his becoming a Nobel laureate, as they are both fellow members of the Royal Society of Canada but also from occasionally seeing each other at concerts. Indeed, Art's wife Janet is a retired pianist and piano teacher and John and Janet are both members of the Kingston branch of the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association. It is for this reason that John shaped the tribute as a solo piano composition and dedicated the work to both Art and Janet.

Other John Burge compositions published with Red Leaf Pianoworks:

- ***Parking an Octatonic Truck*** – a collection of Elementary to Intermediate solo piano pieces (JBComps-001).
- ***Everything Waits for the Lilacs*** – a six-minute Diploma-level piano solo (JBComps-002).
- ***Twenty-four Preludes*** – a collection of Late Intermediate to Diploma-level piano solos in all major and minor keys some of which involve imaginative (but tonal) extended instrumental techniques (JBComps-003).