

# ***Parking an Octatonic Truck***

***Ten Explorations for Young Pianists***



***by John Burge***

**late Elementary/Intermediate**



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***PARKING AN OCTATONIC TRUCK*** is a set of ten solo piano pieces that explore a few different approaches to composition and the piano. This volume of pieces is a compilation that was primarily written in 1999 and 2006 with the two additional pieces created in 2013. Dating back to the early 1990's, I have spent time almost every year adjudicating music festival classes primarily in the area of piano performance. It is not uncommon to be asked to adjudicate sight-reading and quick study classes and in both cases, it is important that the performer be given a piece that is completely unfamiliar. Being a composer, one of the best ways to ensure that the student's assigned piece for quick study or sight-reading is completely unknown, is to sit down and write a short work at a suitable level of difficulty. For this collection I have brought together many of the compositions that I have used a number of times under these circumstances in the past.

The works are arranged in order of increasing difficulty, covering approximately Grade 1 to Grade 6. That said, I would be the first to admit that assessing an appropriate grade level can be quite challenging as I sometimes misjudge what I think should be easy. I would add though, that three of these pieces have been previously published in the Canadian National Conservatory of Music's ***Northern Lights Piano Series*** as follows: "High Fives" in Volume 2B, "Parking an Octatonic Truck" in Volume 4B and "Dodge Ball" in 5B.

I would like to thank Martha Hill Duncan for her encouragement and advice in bringing out this volume and in getting me to join the Red Leaf Pianoworks collective of Canadian composers. Martha is a fine composer and great inspiration and sometimes one just needs a bit of repeated prodding to take care of the details that often get overlooked. It has also been a true pleasure to work with Susan Griesdale who created the illustrations for this volume. I find it remarkable that such a successful composer also has so much artistic and creative talent with pen and ink drawings.

Now that these pieces are finally out in the world, I will have to start writing another set of quick study and sight-reading pieces to use for earlier grades but it is always good to have a list of composition projects.

John Burge, June 2013

# A Gentle Waltz

(In Two Keys)

This composition is structured such that while one hand outlines the key of C Major, the other hand implies the key of D Major. As these two keys share many notes in common, the effect of the combined keys is very gentle with only a hint of dissonance at times. It is best to keep the left hand much softer than the right hand throughout, always giving the downbeat a slight stress.

With an easy lilt (♩ = 120)

John Burge

2 5  
*p* (sempre)

2  
*mp*

6

11 1 3  
*mp* *mf* *mp*

16 3 4 2  
*f* *mp*

22

Musical notation for measures 22-26. Treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Dynamics include 'f' (forte) starting at measure 24. A large watermark 'SAMPLE' is overlaid on the page.

27

Musical notation for measures 27-31. Treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Dynamics include 'mp' (mezzo-piano), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), and 'p' (piano). A large watermark 'SAMPLE' is overlaid on the page.

32

Musical notation for measures 32-35. Treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Dynamics include 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano). Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. A large watermark 'SAMPLE' is overlaid on the page.



# PLAYING WITH PRISMS



With energy and brilliance

John Burge

[Depress these notes silently and hold until the end.]



12

*f* *f* (no dim.)

16

*f* *p* *p*

21

*f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *cresc.*

26

[hold] *ff* *p* *f* 15<sup>ma</sup> BE PREPARED TO WAIT

This composition makes use of the principle of sympathetic reverberation as the overtones of the silently depressed lower strings are reinforced by the right hand notes. Do not use the damper pedal in this piece or the colours created by the reverberation will be seriously compromised. Always play the staccatos with a bit of an accent, even when the dynamic level is soft as this will generate a rhythmic precision that is highly desirable. The fingering is suggested to encourage an accented touch that is even throughout. Please note that there is a wide range of tempos possible to successfully perform this piece. Finally, do enjoy the concluding resonance created by the glissando for a duration that is long enough to make the overtones mingle in an aurally intriguing fashion. I personally always like to play the last note of a rising right-hand glissando with my thumb by turning over the hand at the last minute. This provides lots of accent to the top note of the glissando and is very accurate.

# High 5's

Happily and steady (not too fast)

John Burge

AVOID  
EXCESSIVE  
SPEEDS

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The piece is in 5/8 time. The right hand plays a continuous eighth-note melody, and the left hand plays a steady bass line of dotted quarter notes. The dynamic marking is *mf*.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. The melody continues with a slight change in phrasing. A finger number '1' is indicated below the bass line in measure 8.

Musical notation for measures 9-14. The melody becomes more rhythmic. A *cresc.* marking is present in measure 12. Finger numbers '1' and '1' are indicated below the bass line in measures 13 and 14.

Musical notation for measures 15-19. The melody continues with a steady eighth-note pattern. The bass line remains consistent with dotted quarter notes.

20

*f*

(l.h.)

(r.h.)

(l.h.)

(r.h.)

25

*ff*

*p*

30

*mp*

*p*

34

*mf dim.*

*p*

*ff* (sub.)

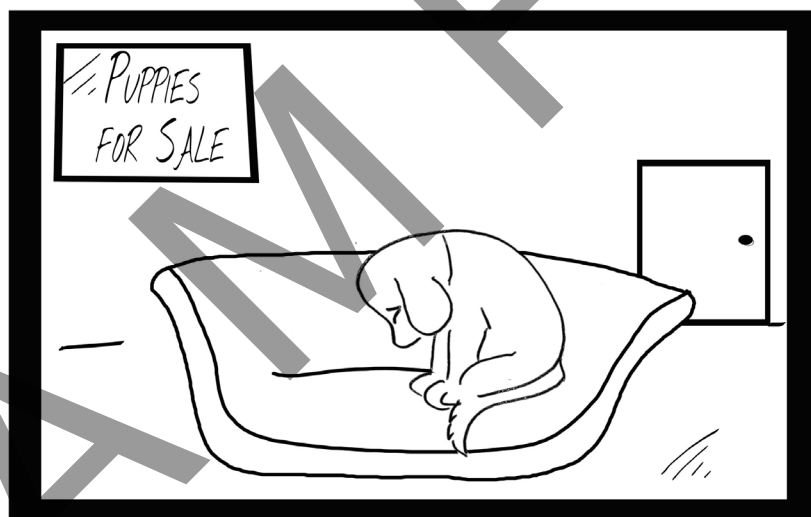
This is a cheerful, carefree kind of piece that needs to be played with a firm hand position with a slightly accented finger action especially for the staccato notes. It is important that all the eighth notes have the same volume which can be difficult because the fifth finger is often weaker than the others. In bars 9 to 20, it is suggested that both the left hand notes at the beginning of the bar be played with the side of the thumb to help reach the leap down to the quarter note that follows.

# Lonely

This piece is really in two different keys at the same time which is why the right hand has no key signature (C Major) and the left hand has five flats (E Flat Minor). The left hand actually consists of only eight different notes that climb through the piano's black keys.

There are a couple of ways to memorize the left hand easily. One method is to start on the low E flat, skip over the three black notes and play the next highest black note and repeat this process seven times. Alternatively, the actual black notes spell the name, ED BAG followed by the shortened form of just ED B (E flat, D flat, B flat, etc.).

To really capture the mood of this piece, it is important that the left hand be played as lightly as possible. Consider brushing these notes using the second and third fingers held together by simultaneously stroking the key or pulling the fingers towards your body. The right hand needs a bit more projection to help the longer rhythmic values of the melody project clearly but don't accent these notes.



**Adagio** (♩ = 44) **John Burge**

*mp*

*sempre p* *8<sup>vb</sup>* *8<sup>va</sup>* *8<sup>va</sup>* *8<sup>vb</sup>*

*ped.* (hold down for the entire piece)

The musical score for the beginning of the piece 'Lonely' by John Burge. It features a grand staff with a treble clef on the right and a bass clef on the left. The right hand plays a melody in C major with a tempo of Adagio (♩ = 44). The left hand plays a sequence of black keys in E-flat minor. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *sempre p* (sempre piano). Pedal markings *8<sup>va</sup>* and *8<sup>vb</sup>* are present. A *ped.* instruction indicates the pedal should be held down for the entire piece.

5 *mf* *mp*

8vb 8va 8vb 8va

9 *mf* *mp*

8vb 8va 8vb 8va

13 *mf*

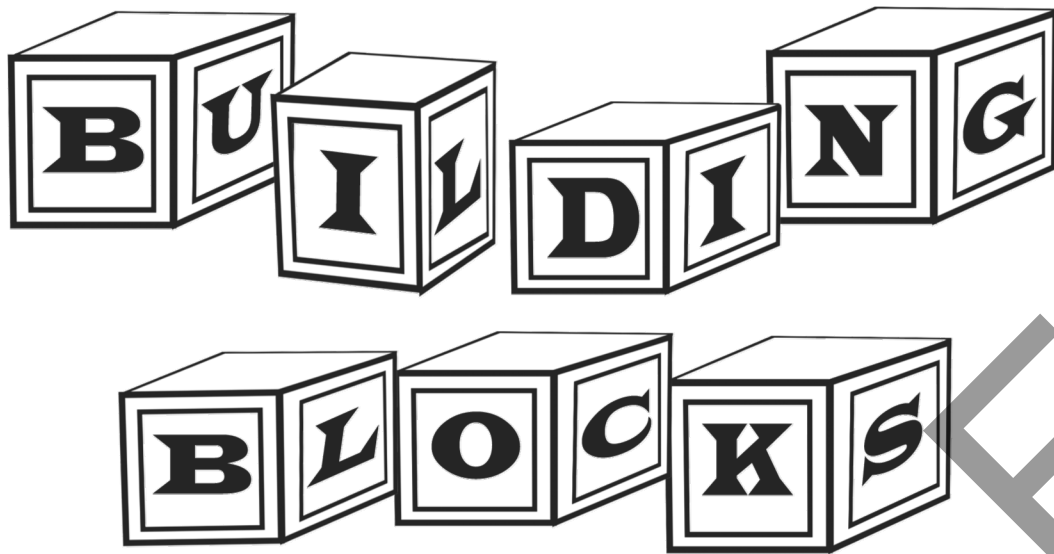
8vb 8va 8vb 8va

17 *f* *mp*

REDUCE SPEED NOW

(rit.)

8vb 8va 8vb 8va



Squarely (♩ = 60)

John Burge



13

\* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

17

*rit. e dim.*

\* Ped. \* Ped.

21

\* Ped. (hold pedal until bar 28)

25

*p*

*gliss.*

*gliss.*

*molto accel. e cresc.*

*fff*

**STOP**

By using solid triads and a crashing ending, this piece is obvious in the way that the compositional material and overall design reflect the title, “Building Blocks.” The two hands usually appear to be at odds tonally in a process that is often referred to as polytonality. For example, the first two bars contrast C Major with F# Major triads. Stravinsky made great use of these exact same pair of chords in his ballet, “Petroushka,” and for this reason, two major triads in root position played together a tritone apart are often called the “Petroushka chord.” The pedal indications are written such that the pedal is released on the left hand’s strong beat and engaged on the weak beats which will encourage the right hand to play with lots of accent.



Hallo?

(hah-LOH)

Dmitri?

Guten Tag!

(GOO-ten-tahk)

# Johann Phones Dmitri



Johann?

Privyet!

(pree-yyet)

Zdravstvujtye!

(zdrah-stvooy-tee)

In the German language the black notes on the piano have an actual letter name. In fact, the note we would call B flat in North America is simply "B" in German, while our B natural is referred to as "H". In this way a composer like Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) can spell his surname musically. This is something he occasionally did in his compositions as a kind of musical signature (for example, see the final Contrapunctus in his work, *The Art of Fugue*).

The note we call E flat is known as "S" in German and the Russian composer, Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), created his own musical signature by using the note names of his first name's initial followed by the first three letters of his surname as it would be spelt in the German language (D. Schostakovich). Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet is probably his most famous composition in which he uses these four pitches.

While this piece looks very chromatic it is actually quite simple in the way that the left hand always repeats Bach's note names in almost the same rhythm throughout. It is as if Bach only has one thing to say on the phone. The Shostakovich inspired right hand, however, expands his signature tune in a way that eventually arrives on the same note names that began the piece but placed an octave higher.



A slow march (♩ = 72)

[ D S C H ]

John Burge

*mp pesante*

[ B A C H ]



5

Musical notation for measures 5-9. The piece is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a long slur covering measures 5 through 9. The bass line provides a simple accompaniment of quarter notes.

10

Musical notation for measures 10-14. The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes, still under a long slur. The bass line continues with quarter notes.

15

Musical notation for measures 15-18. The melody features a chromatic descent in measures 15 and 16, followed by a rise. A *cresc.* (crescendo) hairpin is placed under the melody line, starting in measure 15 and ending in measure 18. The bass line continues with quarter notes.

19

Musical notation for measures 19-23. The melody is marked with *f* (forte) in measure 19, *mp* (mezzo-piano) in measure 21, and *dim.* (diminuendo) in measure 23. The bass line continues with quarter notes.

24

Musical notation for measures 24-28. The melody is marked with *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 26. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 28. The bass line continues with quarter notes.

# Parking an Octatonic Truck

An "octatonic" scale is a fancy name for any scale that has 8 different pitches. The more common major scale by contrast has only 7 different pitches (and for some reason is referred to as a diatonic scale).

The most common octatonic scales are created by systematically alternating intervals of semitones with whole tones. A number of composers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries incorporated the octatonic scale into their music. Two of the more notable composers to do this were Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992).

This piece uses the following octatonic scale by dividing it into two groups of 4 notes:

F # G A B ♭ C D ♭ E ♭ F ♭

Once you have learned this pattern you will see that the piece is put together very simply.

One other feature of this piece is that there are always four other pitches on the piano that will be left out of any octatonic scale. These notes have been used to audibly convey the warning beeps of a truck after it shifts into reverse and begins to back up.

Carefully (♩ = 52) John Burge

*mp molto legato* *mf*

*mf (no dim.)* *mp*

7

*mf*

*mf* *mp*

10

13

*mf*

*mf* *mp*

16

*mf*

19

*mf* *dim.* *p*

*mp*



# Dodge Ball

This is the kind of piece that has only a few patterns so committing the notes to memory right away is advisable. A teacher could also instruct the piece to a student by rote without ever showing the student the music which can work very well for younger pianists. The frenetic energy of dodge ball is best captured with an almost aggressive finger action. A good game of dodge ball gets down to just one person remaining at the end which is musically captured with the *ritardando* and *diminuendo* before the game starts all over.

Fast and accented

John Burge

5

9

13

17

Musical notation for measures 17-20. The right hand plays a sequence of eighth notes with slurs, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 20 features accents (>) on the final notes of both hands.

21

Musical notation for measures 21-24. The right hand continues with slurred eighth notes, and the left hand has a consistent eighth-note accompaniment. Accents (>) are present under the left hand in measures 21-24.

25

Musical notation for measures 25-28. The right hand has slurred eighth notes, and the left hand has eighth-note accompaniment. A *cresc.* marking is placed above the right hand in measure 28. Accents (>) are present under the left hand in measures 25-28.

29

Musical notation for measures 29-32. The right hand has slurred eighth notes, and the left hand has eighth-note accompaniment. A *ff* marking is placed above the right hand in measure 32, followed by a *rit. e dim.* marking. Below the right hand, the numbers 2 (legato) and 3 are written. Accents (>) are present under the left hand in measures 29-32.

33

Musical notation for measures 33-36. The right hand has slurred eighth notes, and the left hand has eighth-note accompaniment. A *p* marking is placed above the right hand in measure 35, and a *f* marking is placed above the right hand in measure 36. The tempo marking *a tempo* is placed above the right hand in measure 36. Fingerings 1, 2, 1, 2, 3 are indicated under the left hand in measures 33-36.

37

Musical notation for measures 37-40. The right hand has slurred eighth notes, and the left hand has eighth-note accompaniment. Accents (>) are present under the left hand in measures 37-40.

41

Musical notation for measures 41-44. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. A large, faint watermark 'SAMPLE' is visible across the page.

45

Musical notation for measures 45-48. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. A dynamic marking 'dim.' is present in measure 47. An octave sign '8va' is placed above the treble staff in measures 47 and 48. A large, faint watermark 'SAMPLE' is visible across the page.

49

Musical notation for measures 49-52. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. Dynamic markings 'p' and 'mf' are present in measures 51 and 52 respectively. An octave sign '8va' is placed above the treble staff in measures 49 and 50. A large, faint watermark 'SAMPLE' is visible across the page.





Allegretto (♩ = 80)

John Burge

CAUTION BUMPY ROAD AHEAD

5

9

13



17

*mf* *mp* *p* *cresc.*

21

*8va*

*f* *dim.* *p*

25

*f* *p*

29

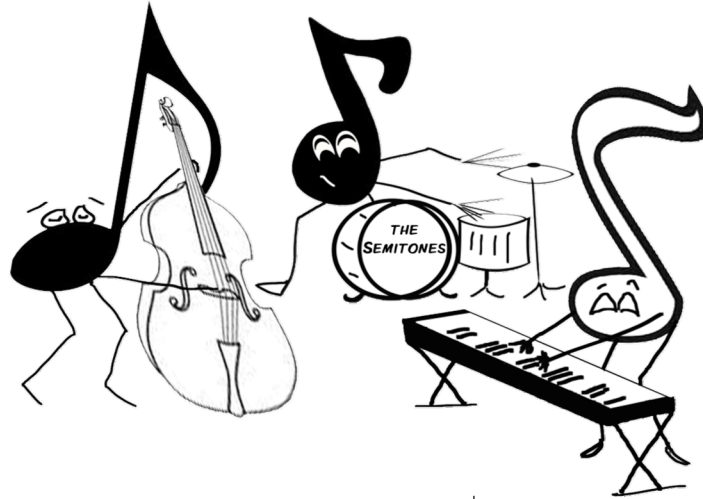
*f* *dim.* *p*

34

*8va*

*p*

# Cluster Blues



**SPEED  
LIMIT  
132**

With a steady groove and even eighths (♩ = 132)

John Burge

Musical score for piano in 4/4 time, featuring a steady groove of even eighth notes. The score is divided into four systems, each with a measure number (1, 4, 7, 11) at the beginning of the first staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, *mf*, *dim.*, and *(no rit.)*. The piece concludes with a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#).

15

*p*

Musical notation for measures 15-17. Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The music consists of eighth-note chords with accents (>) over each note. The bass line is a simple eighth-note accompaniment. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the first measure.

18

*p (sub.)*

Musical notation for measures 18-20. Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. The music continues with eighth-note chords and accents. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking with a subscript (*p (sub.)*) is present in the second measure.

21

*p (sub.)* *f*

Musical notation for measures 21-23. Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. The music continues with eighth-note chords and accents. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking with a subscript (*p (sub.)*) is present in the first measure, and a forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present in the third measure.

24

*(f)*

Musical notation for measures 24-26. Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. The music continues with eighth-note chords and accents. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present in the second measure.

27

*p cresc. e rit.* *f*

Musical notation for measures 27-30. Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. The music continues with eighth-note chords and accents. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the first measure, followed by a crescendo (*cresc.*) and ritardando (*rit.*) marking. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present in the fourth measure.

31

*p* *mf a tempo*

35

39

*mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *cresc.*

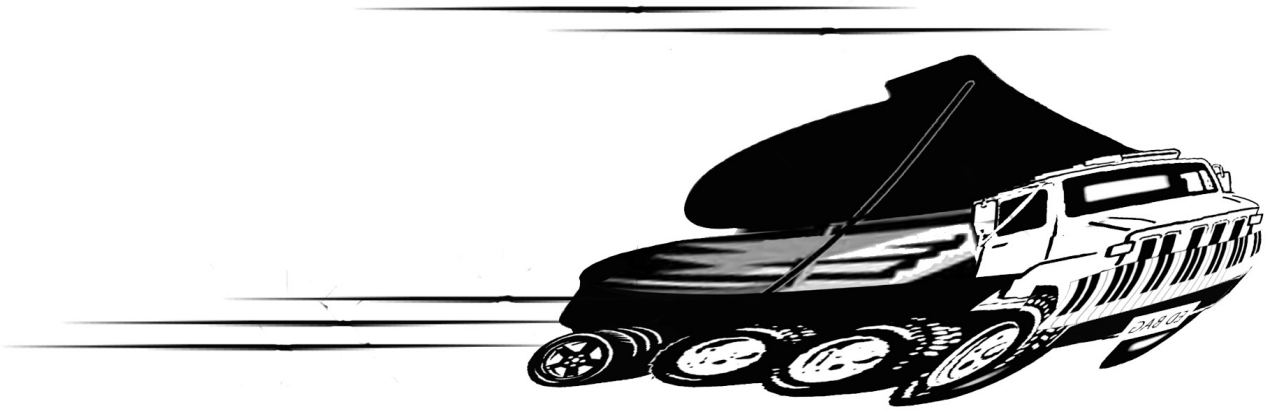
43

*poco rit.* (l.h.) *p*

*f* *mf* *mp*

*8vb*  
*Red.*

In music, a "cluster" is a group of notes that are very close together, often semitones apart and played simultaneously. In this composition, the clusters will be immediately apparent, but to many listeners hearing the first bar it might actually sound like a mistake has been made. However, once the semitone clusters are heard a few times in the subsequent bars, it will become clear that these dissonances are intentional. A great jazz player has the ability to make the "wrong" notes sound "right" so enjoy the clusters by really emphasizing their edginess. This blues is somewhat unusual in the use of modulation in each verse although the primary key of D Major will seem obvious once one realizes that the keys of G Major and A Major in the first two verses, are really the sub-dominant and dominant to the D Major tonic key in the final verse.



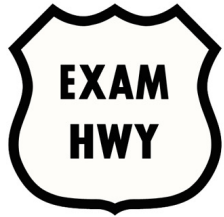
Dr. John Burge was born in Dryden, Ontario in 1961. While still in public school in Calgary, he received his Associate Diploma from the Royal Conservatory of Toronto in Piano Performance. He also holds degrees in Composition and Theory from the University of Toronto (B.Mus. and M.Mus.) and the University of British Columbia (D.M.A.). Since 1987 he has been teaching at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario where he currently holds the position of Full Professor at the School of Music.

John Burge has written a large body of vocal, chamber, and orchestral compositions. He is particularly well known for his choral music, which has been performed by such choirs as The Elmer Iseler Singers, The BBC Singers, The Amabile Youth Choir, The Toronto Children's Chorus and The St. Louis Symphony Children's Choir. Many of these choral works have been published by Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers. His composition, *Angels' Voices*, for choir and orchestra, received the 2006 Outstanding New Choral Composition Award from the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors and was performed in New York City's Carnegie Hall in 2005. The recording of his work, *Flanders Fields Reflections*, by Sinfonia Toronto on the Marquis Classics label, received the 2009 Juno Award for the Best Canadian Classical Composition. *Prelude Variations*, a set of variations on Chopin's C Minor "Prelude" for piano and orchestra, is one of Burge's most successful compositions. The work was collectively commissioned by the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Kingston Symphony Association and L'Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, in tribute of the bicentennial of Chopin's birth. All three orchestras premiered the composition with pianist, Janina Fialkowska, to whom the work is dedicated in the fall of 2010.

Over the years John Burge has had a long and productive relationship with the Kingston Symphony and their Music Director, Glen Fast. Since 1991 they have commissioned and premiered many of his orchestral compositions, including a *Piano Concerto*, *Clarinet Concerto*, *Trumpet Concerto* and two *Symphonies*. Since 1993, Burge has also written five chamber orchestra works for The Thirteen Strings of Ottawa. With titles like, *Snowdrift*, *Rocky Mountain Overture*, *Upper Canada Fiddle Suite*, and *The Canadian Shield*, it is obvious that a number of his works for large ensemble draw their influence from a distinctively Canadian perspective. Orchestras and audiences seem taken with these works as they have received numerous performances across Canada and even as far away as Brazil and Russia.

John Burge greatly enjoys working with young musicians and in addition to his teaching duties at Queen's University, he is in demand as an adjudicator at Music Festivals across Canada. From 2001-2003, he was the Composer-in-Residence for the National Youth Orchestra of Canada during which time they premiered his work, *Sonic Architecture*. A passionate advocate for Canadian music he was a member of the Executive of the Canadian League of Composers from 1993-2007, serving as President from 1998-2006. He is currently a board member for the SOCAN Foundation and the Music at Port Milford Summer Music School and Festival.

**EXIT**



**10 KM**



**RECITAL ROAD  
NEXT EXIT**



**John Burge has been an active composer since the 1980's and a professor of composition and theory at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario since 1987. As a pianist himself, he has had a lifelong affinity for this instrument and counts himself very fortunate to have composed music for such talented pianists as Janina Fialkowska, Brian Finley, Shelley Katz, Stéphane Lemelin, Dina Namer, Angela Park, Michel Szczesniak, Cynthia Tormann and Ireneus and Luba Zuk. With his extensive knowledge of the piano repertoire and an engagingly informative speaking style, John Burge is in high demand as an adjudicator of music festival classes in Canada. Over the years of adjudicating he has often found it enjoyable (and somewhat expedient) to sit down and compose short piano pieces to use for quick study and sight-reading classes as needed. When invited to join the *Red Leaf Pianoworks* collective of Canadian composers, a proposition he gladly accepted, it was suggested that bringing out an initial volume of pieces for younger pianists would be a great start. **PARKING AN OCTATONIC TRUCK** takes the best of the pieces composed for music festivals and adds two new works to create a collection of ten pieces that explore some of the more unusual approaches to composition such as polytonality, sympathetic reverberation, less traditional meters and clusters. Each piece is put together in a logical fashion making them easy to teach, memorize and most importantly, fun to play.**



Red Leaf Pianoworks

[www.redleafpianoworks.com](http://www.redleafpianoworks.com)