ABC Classics

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SALLY WHITWELL

the Good, the Bad and the Awkward

Prologue:
WHY?

Why do musicians record? To make sure their expression is accessible to a great number of people? Because theirs is, they believe, the best interpretation of that operatic work, or that violin concerto or that jazz standard? Because nobody but them is going to record that work (i.e. it's rare or too contemporary, or something 'only a fan could love')? What I feel matters in a musical life, or more broadly speaking in a creative life, is that you communicate something that *means* something to you. Otherwise it means nothing to everyone.

Following the success of my first album *Mad Rush*, ABC Classics offered me this second album contract. Their original suggestion was an album of music from French cinema. Being something of a fan of French film, particularly Jacques Tati and François Truffaut, I found it a rather attractive idea. Immediately, I set about researching French film from the 1960s (which I view as their cinematic 'Golden Age') right up to the present day. Whilst I discovered many films I'd never encountered before, with marvellous soundtracks to match, I just had a nagging feeling of dissatisfaction with the theme for my album. It was too broad, too vague, too… generic? I felt it was really not *mine*, that anyone could (and indeed *has*) done an album like this, a compilation of film music.

So I went back to the source, the reason that the ABC producers came to me with the French cinema idea in the first place. And her name was Mademoiselle Amélie Poulain.

Yann Tiersen's soundtrack to the film *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* had made an appearance in a recital I performed at the Sydney Conservatorium one Spring evening in 2011. Now I started thinking about why I feel so attached to the film and particularly to her, how I identify with her and feel her joys and sorrows so intensely. It's all about being a bit socially awkward, about how even awkward people eventually can find their place in the world, can ultimately triumph. Here was an experience I wanted to share.

At this point, the title for the album popped into my head, *The Good, the Bad and the Awkward*, and also a subtitle, *The Adored, the Abhorred and the Too-Easily-Ignored*. It's a kind of love letter to a collection of characters via the music that has been used to describe them, their feelings, their actions. I hope that you come to love these characters from the cinema as I love them, incredibly imperfect, beautifully blemished and fabulously flawed.

Sally Whitwell

It is only a gossamer veil.
I see your eyes
shine through.
Show your face,
play your tune,
shout your name,
light your fire,
And I shall paint your
portrait, fair lady.

THE GOOD

1 **Gelsomina** 2'01
Nino Rota arr. Sally Whitwell
for Gelsomina, *La Strada* (1954)

2 **Candlefire** 3'17
Michael Nyman
for Anne, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1995)

3 **Gnossienne No. 1** 3'24
Erik Satie
for Kitty, *The Painted Veil* (2006)

4 **I'm Going to Make a Cake / The Poet Acts** 7'43
Philip Glass arr. Michael Riesman
for Virginia, *The Hours* (2002)

5 **Impromptu in G–flat major, D899, Op. 90 No. 3** 5'44
Franz Schubert
for Isabel, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996)

6 **Big My Secret** 2'39
Michael Nyman
for Ada, *The Piano* (1993)

I don't know why I'm here.
How is it you have
lured me in,
captivated me so?
With your beguiling
eyes and seductive smile
you have deceived me,
Yet willingly I submit?
Beneath the snow white
jasmine and roses
forever entwining,
Let us descend together...

THE BAD

7 **L'Exécution** 1'26
Angelo Badalamenti arr. Sally Whitwell
for La Pieuvre, *The City of Lost Children* (1995)

8 **Falling** 5'18
Angelo Badalamenti arr. Sally Whitwell
for Leland, *Twin Peaks* (1990 & 1991)

9 **Flower Duet** from Lakmé 5'10
Léo Delibes arr. Sally Whitwell
for Miriam, *The Hunger* (1983)

10 **Clair de lune (Moonlight)** from Suite bergamasque 4'46
Claude Debussy
for Danny, *Ocean's Eleven* (2001)

11 **Adagio e cantabile** from Piano Sonata in E-flat major, Hob.XVI:49 6'08
Joseph Haydn
for Lestat, *Interview with the Vampire* (1993)

12 **C'est le vent, Betty (It's the wind, Betty)** 3'52
Gabriel Yared arr. Sally Whitwell
for Betty, *Betty Blue* (1986)

She wipes the fog
from the glass,
Gazes out upon a world
of grace and beauty.
"They will never
understand me,"
she sighs,
A single tear tracing
a path down her
flawless facade.

Maybe you're
just different?
Don't worry,
I'm with you.

THE AWKWARD

13 **Delicatessen: Title Music** 1'48
Carlos D'Alessio arr. Sally Whitwell
for Julie, *Delicatessen* (1991)

14 **Prelude in C Major, BWV846** from The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I 2'18
Johann Sebastian Bach
for Salomo, *Bagdad Café* (1987)

Six Pieces for Piano, Volume 2 (Selections) [14'51]
15 La Dispute (The Argument) 2'11
16 Sur le fil (Just in time) 3'54
17 Comptine d'un autre été: L'après-midi (Nursery rhyme from another summer: Afternoon) 2'27
18 La Valse d'Amélie (Amélie's Waltz) 2'50
19 Le Moulin (The Windmill) 3'29
Yann Tiersen
for Amélie, *Amélie* (2001)

20 **Russian Rag** 4'43
Elena Kats-Chernin
for Max, *Mary and Max* (2009)

It needs three legs to
stand up on its own,
or so they say.
Our trio of tenets?
Courage,
Understanding,
Empathy
Consider this a final
toast to all of them,
and to all of you
Good,
Bad and
Awkward.

EPILOGUE

21 **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly** 2'32
Ennio Morricone arr. Sally Whitwell
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

Total Playing Time 77'46

Sally Whitwell *piano, toy piano, harpsichord, recorder and melodica*

Scene One: GOOD

The kind of cinematic characters for whom I feel the greatest admiration are those who remain, whilst enduring great hardships, true to themselves. Many of these characters meet with tragic ends but there is a fighting spirit, an inherent goodness, that endures somehow beyond the grave. Allow me to introduce you to my list of heroines.

Italian director Federico Fellini cast muse (and wife) Giulietta Masina in his Academy Award-winning 1954 film *La Strada (The Road)*. Masina plays the character of Gelsomina, a young girl sold to an itinerant performer Zampano, a strongman played by Anthony Quinn who subjects her to continual psychological and physical intimidation. Zampano casts her in the role of a clown, introducing his performances with trumpet and drum, and the ensuing tragicomic antics are amongst the most beautifully bittersweet moments in European cinema history. Nino Rota's ***Gelsomina*** theme, performed by her upon her trumpet throughout the film, symbolises her strength of spirit against the odds and, as often happens in tragedies, comes back to haunt Zampano in the end.

Anne no nikki (dir. Akinori Nagaoka, 1995) is a Japanese Anime film based on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The familiar story of a Jewish family forced into hiding, chronicled so poignantly by Anne, is beautifully realised as an animated feature. The opening sequence, which follows a flock of birds as they trace a path through the sky above Amsterdam's canals in the early morning mist, is particularly evocative. Michael Nyman's **Candlefire** accompanies a touching scene of the family's first night in hiding, Anne's father lulling her to sleep, the shadow of their embrace cast upon the wall by the light of a single candle. For me, this candle represents Anne's optimism despite the great danger she and her family face.

Based upon the novel by Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil* follows the tale of Kitty and her marriage to Walter Fane, a bacteriologist based in Hong Kong. Her reasons for marriage are somewhat questionable – at the outset it is certainly nothing to do with love – and in China, far from her comfortable English life, she feels isolated and bitter. When Walter discovers she is having an affair, he quickly moves them both to a more remote region of the country, where he has volunteered to assist efforts to control a cholera epidemic. Here is where I feel Kitty comes of age, finds meaning. She assists the nuns in the local convent by nursing children and teaching them music. During one 'lesson', her playing of a popular dance tune causes much rowdiness from the children. She is quickly interrupted by one of the nuns and is asked to play "perhaps something a little more soothing". That soothing piece is Erik Satie's **Gnossienne No. 1**. On the original sound track recording, it's performed by Lang Lang but I prefer Naomi Watts' own performance in the abbey's classroom on a dreadful honky tonk piano that's a major third flat. Singularly moving. Walter watching from the classroom door, sees the real Kitty: courageous, caring, at once both fragile and resilient.

Ever since I first read *A Room of One's Own*, as an impressionable and idealistic first year university student, I've had something of a fascination with the life of Virginia Woolf. Stephen Daldry's film *The Hours*, with a stunning screenplay by David Hare, paid fitting tribute not only to Woolf's life and work, but to the legacy she left to the feminist movement. Philip Glass's soundtrack always feels to me as a Greek chorus, commenting on the actions and reactions of the three central female characters, all good people with sound ideals but unable to function in line with societal expectation. The music of **The Hours** communicates beautifully the struggle between these inner and outer worlds.

Not so much a struggle between inner and outer worlds as between old and new worlds is Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady*. It was adapted for the screen by Laura Jones and directed by Jane Campion. Coming from a 'new world' country myself, I feel a connection to stories of tension between the ostensibly strict tradition-bound social mores of old Europe and the comparative freedoms of new world countries. In the Victorian era, the setting for this novel, were independent women of the new world actually more free, or were there simply different pressures put upon them? The film's central character Isabel is fiercely independent in her new world sensibilities, but also has a fascination with the old world, expressed by her naive fascination with Madame Merle's parlour performance of Schubert's **Impromptu Op. 90 No. 3**.

Jane Campion's choice of composer for her 1993 film *The Piano* was crucial to the film's success. Ada, a mute played by Holly Hunter, is sold by her father into a marriage with Alistair Stewart (Sam Neill) and forced to move to the other side of the world, from Scotland to New Zealand. After hauling Ada's piano up from the beach where it was almost left to rot, Alistair's friend Baines (Harvey Keitel) becomes attracted to her. He makes a deal with Ada, that she may buy back her piano one key at a time in return for favours of a sexual nature. Ada may be mute, but her voice is the music she plays on the piano, hence the importance of choosing the right composer. Enter Michael Nyman, whose evocative soundtrack is at once contemporary and reminiscent of the time in which it is set (i.e. early days of white settlement in New Zealand). One can hear traces of folk melody and even of the music of the Romantic composers, particularly Frédéric Chopin. ***Big My Secret*** is performed by actress Holly Hunter in the film, before one of Ada's aforementioned exchanges with Baines. Although this is all part of the 'arrangement' they made, you can hear through her impassioned performance that Ada has realised she has feelings for him.

Scene Two: BAD

There are many occasions in cinema and indeed in life when harsh judgements are placed upon individuals. Perhaps it's due to some kind of pack instinct that humans have? Or perhaps it's too much effort to research the details before you go accusing people of wrongdoing? Some creatures are labelled as bad, like vampires and werewolves, but they are also victims and hey, they need to eat too! Some we feel deserve this label, others not. It's what they choose to do with the label that is the most interesting part of an often complicated story.

Let's take the case of La Pieuvre (The Octopus) from *The City of Lost Children* (dir. Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1995). For a start, it has nothing to do with any deep sea creature. La Pieuvre is a woman, or rather, two women, siamese twins joined at the lower leg, who run an orphanage rather in the style of Charles Dickens' Fagin, i.e. the children are expected to pick pockets to fund The Octopus's lifestyle. To cut a long story short, they own a trained flea that performs only when it hears **L'Exécution,** a creepy clown-will-eat-me kind of piece performed by The Octopus on their barrel organ. Each performance triggers a response in the flea, to poison a person. The victim of said poisoning will then kill the first person they see. Confused? Whatever. Nobody can prove La Pieuvre are murderers and whilst theirs is an abominable action, you've got to admire that kind of ingenuity.

Speaking of admiration, let's talk about vampires. Not the most admirable of creatures, you might say? Perhaps not, but if there's one great thing you can say for a lot of vampires, it is that they are often very cultured people.

This is certainly the case with Miriam (Catherine Deneuve) in the 1983 lesbian vampire flick *The Hunger*. She lives in a magnificent mansion (tick!) full of painting and sculpture and antique furniture (tick! tick! tick!) with a cello-playing David Bowie (tick! tick!) and she plays piano herself (tick!). In fact she begins her seduction of Sarah whilst playing **The Flower Duet** from the opera *Lakmé* by Léo Delibes. That's my kind of woman, even if she *is* a bloodthirsty evil vampire!

Another pianist vampire, Lestat de Lioncourt from the 1993 film *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*, is fond of Classical period 'Sturm und Drang' works, but in a predictably Hollywood fashion prefers the Sturm-y sections of the works to any contrasting peacefulness in the music. The **Adagio e cantabile** from Haydn's Sonata in E-flat major is a case in point: during the film he uses the stormy central section purely to emphasise his point during arguments, playing and arguing simultaneously in a miracle of multitasking. How can so immoral a creature be so cultured? I almost forgive him!

When I first mentioned that I was to include Claude Debussy's **Clair de lune**, many wrote to me excited that I was including a tribute to the sappy teenage vampires and werewolves of the *Twilight* films. I apologise to those people, for this programming choice has nothing to do with them. It's a tribute to that wonderful Hollywood blockbuster *Ocean's Eleven* (2001). There's something quite seductive about this film, super smooth Danny Ocean (George Clooney) and his motley crew of clever crooks whom we are manipulated into liking. We know that stealing is wrong, but we know too that people who run casinos are crooks. Plus *our* thieving crook friends in this film are so human, so fragile, so damn likeable and have genuine affection for each other, whilst the casino bosses are just plain greedy. After the big heist, as our crooked heroes watch the Las Vegas fountain dancing under the flashing lights to the ecstatically beautiful music of Debussy, anyone would be forgiven for thinking they were kind-hearted modern day Robin Hoods (except for the fact that they keep all the money for themselves!).

It's all about the choices we make, isn't it? Someone who made consistently pretty bad choices would be Betty (Béatrice Dalle) of Jean-Jacques Beineix's 1986 film *Betty Blue*. I'm sure that many of us sometimes fantasise about overreacting to bad news. Just think how good it would feel to punch that boss you hate square in the face, abuse that unfaithful ex-boyfriend/girlfriend in front of their current flame, rip out the vocal folds of those hideous screaming kids next door. Of course you would never ever act upon these crazy fantasies, but this is where you differ from Betty. Suffering from an unspecified mental illness, she has no filtering mechanism between appropriate reactions and dangerously inappropriate

reactions. However, she also has moments of genuine fond connection with her long-suffering boyfriend Zorg; the piano duet they play, **C'est le vent, Betty**, is such a moment. Pity they had to have this moment in the piano shop in the middle of the night (another silly choice), disturbing the neighbours.

Disturbing neighbours is something from which director David Lynch has formed an entire career. There is very little that is as disturbing as pleasant-looking people in average suburban neighbourhoods being subjected to incredibly disturbing things behind closed doors. One of these pleasant neighbourhoods would be the small fictional Washington State town of *Twin Peaks*, where young, beautiful, popular Laura Palmer was slain by her own father Leland Palmer, possessed by the evil killer BOB. Lynch's typical juxtaposition of horrific occurrences in pleasant surrounds is for me the key to its success. Add onto this Angelo Badalamenti's misty floating score, including a version of the originally instrumental theme **Falling**, sung by the cute-as-pie Julee Cruise, and you've got yourself a beautiful sugary pink bubble just waiting to be burst by terrifying demonic tragedy.

Scene Three: **AWKWARD**

We have all felt out of place at one time or another. A fish out of water, a square peg in a round hole, sticking out like a sore thumb; clichés aplenty have been coined over the years to describe that awful feeling. Being an incredibly shy person, I've considerable personal experience of it, especially during my adolescent years. To be honest, I often still feel rather shy and socially awkward, but I am much more practised at concealing it!

When a classical musician steps outside of the 'ghetto' (for want of a more appropriate term) of other classical musicians or music lovers, or more broadly, practitioners of what is increasingly known as the 'heritage arts' (how I loathe that term), it can be a less-than-friendly world. I've often found myself defending the art form I choose to practise; 'elitist' and 'inaccessible' are the two derogatory descriptors most often employed. No wonder I have felt less than confident to speak of my chosen career to other normal people out there! This is why I identify so strongly with Salomo (Darron Flagg) from Percy Adlon's 1987 film *Bagdad Café*. Teenager Salomo lives with his mother in a roadside motel/diner/truckstop in the middle of the desert on Route 66 in Bagdad, California. He loves the music of J.S. Bach, incessantly practising it on his small square piano, and has constructed a shrine to the composer against the opposite wall. His mother Brenda (C.C.H. Pounder) doesn't appreciate his tastes and see him as a burden to her, not least because they are looking after his young son. With the very unexpected arrival of stranded Bavarian tourist Jasmin Münchgstettner (Marianne Sägebrecht), Salomo finds his very first understanding friend, someone to appreciate his moving performance of J.S. Bach's **Prelude BWV846** from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Similarly Julie, the central character of *Delicatessen* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, 1991) escapes from the post-apocalyptic world she inhabits by playing her cello. Whilst her murderous father cuts up human bodies to sell in his delicatessen, Julie (Marie-Laure Dougnac) practises in her apartment upstairs. Soon a friendly clown Louison (Dominique Pinon) moves into the building, and Julie finally finds someone who understands her. They are perfectly matched, two charming misfits brought together,

who triumph over evil with the help of some sewer-dwelling vegetarian rebels, Les Troglodistes. My arrangement of Carlos D'Alessio's **Delicatessen Titles Music** for Piano, Toy Piano and Melodica is at once a tribute to their charming courtship and to Louison's clownish antics.

Speaking of unlikely relationships, none could be more so than that of the title characters in *Mary and Max* (Adam Elliot, 2009). Bespectacled and friendless eight-year-old Mary Daisy Dinkle (Bethany Whitmore/Toni Collette) chooses her penfriend Max Jerry Horowitz (Philip Seymour Hoffman) by closing her eyes and pointing to a spot on a random page in the New York telephone directory at her local post office in Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia. Max is a middle-aged man suffering from Asperger's Syndrome, who lives alone in his Manhattan apartment. This exquisitely animated claymation film follows their friendship well into Mary's adult life, a kind of arrested coming-of-age story. Throughout the film Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin's bittersweet **Russian Rag** is used as a soundtrack for Max's rather disconnected life in the bustling metropolis of New York, NY.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the Atlantic, someone else is living an equally disconnected life. Amélie Poulain (Audrey Tautou), title character of *Amélie*, is a painfully shy young waitress at the Café Deux Moulins in Montmartre, Paris. Watching the television news the night that Princess Diana is killed in a car crash, Amélie is shocked and drops a bottle cap. It rolls across the floor and hits a tile in the bathroom wall, loosening it to reveal a tin box full of a little boy's toys – marbles and postcards and tin soldiers and the like. Amélie tracks down the owner of the box: now a middle aged man, he is moved to tears by the childhood memories that come flooding back, and decides to contact his family, estranged for many years. Amélie thus decides to devote her existence to helping others, employing ingenious methods of effecting change without ever being discovered. She is not as good at effecting change in her own life, but is eventually very happily united with the equally quirky Nino (Mathieu Kassovitz), fairground worker, porn shop sales assistant and collector of discarded photo booth pictures. It's a match made in heaven.

Much of Yann Tiersen's score for *Amélie* existed before the film was made. Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet reportedly first heard Tiersen's music when an assistant played a CD of it on a car journey, whereupon he was immediately struck with it and wanted it for his film. The very Parisian accordion and piano textures, coupled with toy instrument/found object sounds (toy piano, melodica, music box, typewriters, bicycle wheels) give Tiersen's music a very modern and simultaneously rather nostalgic palette. His **Six Pieces for Piano, Volume 2** are all solo piano works used in the film. The arrangements for toy piano, harpsichord, recorder and melodica that I have created for this album are a special tribute to Tiersen's colour palette.

Epilogue:
TH– TH– TH– THAT'S ALL FOLKS!!

As a writer of cabaret shows, I have often started with the title of a show, which fuels journeys down some slightly crazy tangents in my mind. My favourite of these thus far is a show I co-wrote with longtime friend, the sensationally talented Nadia Piave: *The Buggers' Opera* was a gay version of *The Beggars' Opera* and spawned a series of sequel titles, only one of which has yet been penned – *Copacabugger* (a gay adaptation of the story from Barry Manilow's iconic song). Titles yet to be fleshed out include *Madame Buggerfly: Memoir of a Gay-sha*, *The Same-Sex Marriage of Figaro*, *Seven Brides for Seven Buggers* and my personal favourite, *Cumalot*. These words alone immediately set my synapses firing. Thus it was with *The Good, the Bad and the Awkward*. It was something that immediately rolled off the tongue and opened up this gallery of characters I'd assembled into more than the sum of their parts.

I therefore thought it would be remiss not to include music with the title to end all titles, Ennio Morricone's iconic theme from the Sergio Leone film **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.** The Spaghetti Western was, I feel, a kind of coming-of-age for Westerns. Up until then, they had been a very black-and-white affair (in more ways than one) but in Leone's vision the characters took on a depth, a complex humanity that had not been seen in the genre previously. Director Leone and composer Morricone worked particularly closely together, creating a world all their own via their combined aesthetic. Leone reportedly would often shoot scenes with Morricone's music continually playing in the background. I think it's not often enough articulated that director/composer partnerships are responsible for a very strong sense of style in cinema, connecting bodies of work together in a somewhat intangible way: Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann, Peter Greenaway and Michael Nyman, Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass, Mike Leigh and Andrew Dickson. These partnerships have created such strong cinematic aesthetics!

I chose to arrange *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* for toy piano, harpsichord, recorder (plastic) and melodica as something of a tribute to Yann Tiersen and his unique instrumental aesthetic – a sound world which I thought would give a personal flavour to the music and also provide punctuation for the sections of the album, like an audio version of the title cards in a silent film.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is my riding into the sunset moment.

And we all lived happily ever after.

Sally Whitwell

SALLY WHITWELL

My name's Sally and I'm a musician.

I'm one of those people who need variety, and my working life reflects this need.

I play piano in all kinds of ensembles, with instrumentalists and choirs and classical singers (and the odd cabaret singer).

Of an afternoon or an evening, you'll often find me conducting choirs, filled with people of all ages and levels of experience.

I compose music for all kinds of musicians to perform, professional and amateur, young and old and in between. I also regularly help others to manifest their own imaginations in sound.

Sometimes I write cabaret shows, usually late at night over a glass or two of red with one of my favourite cabaret artistes in tow.

I play music to accompany dancers, to help them jump and twist and kick their legs in the air and balance on one foot. I was a dancer in a past life, you see.

I teach music to university students and high school kids and much littler people in a variety of contexts. It's so much fun!

I live behind a shopfront studio in Sydney's Inner West with my beautiful partner Glennda, a talented artist whose stunning paintings fill our studio. We are proud parents to four stunning felines, Gandalf, Aloysius, Tegan and Boudica. I like cooking and walking and cross-stitching pretty (and occasionally subversive) things.

If you require the official biography, that's what the interwebs are for, yeah? Google me.

Yes, I'm also on Facebook.

That is all.

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My family, Hoon Chee, Colin and James for always being there.

My dear friend of many years, Nadia Piave, for teaching me how to put a show, or indeed an album, together. Nadia, this album is dedicated to you, your vivid imagination and your no-holds-barred approach. You rock my world!

– Sally

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