

Canzonetta

Iris de Cairos-Rego

Cairos-Rego

Iris de Cairos-Rego was a 20th-century Australian composer, pianist and teacher. She was born in 1894. Her father, George, a composer and music critic who was a driving force behind the establishment of the Sydney Conservatorium, was her first teacher. She undertook further studies in Berlin and London from 1907 to 1910. Returning to Australia, Cairos-Rego taught piano at the newly established Conservatorium in Sydney, and at Frensham School in Mittagong. She frequently performed as a piano soloist and chamber musician, including concerto performances with the Conservatorium Orchestra, ABC radio broadcasts, and as an associate artist with her brother, Rex, who was a singer. She died in 1987.¹

Cairos-Rego's compositions

Cairos-Rego's compositions were mostly for piano; they include:

- *Arabesque in A minor*.
- *Canzonetta*.
- *English June*.
- *Firelight*.
- *A frolic*.
- *Graneen Vale*.
- *Four sketches: Waltz in A, Song of the trees, Little dog and Country dance*.
- *Tarrel* (a highland song).
- *Toccata (The train)*.
- *Waltz caprice*.
- *White cloud*.
- *Bushland Sketches* for piano duet.

Cairos-Rego's contemporaries

- Roy Agnew (Australian, 1891-1944).
- Mirrie Hill (Australian, 1892-1986).
- Frank Hutchens (Australian, 1892-1965).
- Arthur Benjamin (Australian, 1893-1960).
- Lili Boulanger (French, 1893-1918).
- Lindley Evans (Australian, 1895-1982).
- Margaret Sutherland (Australian, 1897-1984).
- Linda Phillips (Australian, 1899-2002).
- Esther Rofe (Australian, 1904–2000).
- Dulcie Holland (Australian, 1913-2000).
- Miriam Hyde (Australian, 1913-2005).

¹ For further information about the composer, see www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/de_cairos-rego_iris or www.musicaustralia.org.

Title

A *canzonetta* is a short song, or a song-like piece, where the melody is always in the upper voice. Liszt wrote a *Canzonetta del Salvatore Rosa* for piano, and Tchaikovsky used the term for the second movement of his violin concerto. Cairns-Rego's *Canzonetta* was first published in 1924.¹

Analysis

Canzonetta is in the form of a modified strophic (verse repeating) song. There are two verses, each in binary (AB) form. The second verse is a slightly altered repeat of the first verse, with the melody an octave higher and using fuller textures. The key is E major. Section A ends on the dominant 7th chord, and Section B ends on the tonic chord. There is no modulation.

- A** b.1-4 A lyrical melody in the right hand with a simple arpeggiated accompaniment in the left. The harmony contains only chords I, ii⁷ and V⁷ of E major, beginning and ending on the tonic chord.
- 5-9 Continuing in E major, with the right hand part becoming more chordal in texture. An augmented chord (C#-E#-A, b.6) and a secondary dominant (C#-E#-G#, V of ii, b.7) bring passing suggestions of F# minor, but there is no modulation. The key of E major is confirmed by a ii⁷-V⁷ cadence in b.8-9.
- Suspensions (notes that are tied or repeated while the harmony changes, before resolving by step to a chord note) are used in b.7-9, creating tension and release. This phrase is 5-bars long, answering the opening 4-bar phrase while avoiding an overly symmetrical or "square" phrase structure.
- B** 10-13 The motif from b.5-6 is used as a sequence. There is some chromatic movement in the inner voices in b.10-14 (E-E#-F#-F*-G# and G#-A-A#-B), but still no modulation.
- 14-19 Building to a climax in pitch and volume in b.15. The climactic note is harmonised with a half-diminished 7th chord (A#-C#-E-G#), which momentarily interrupts the momentum, before leading to a subdued V⁷-I cadence in b.17-18. The dominant 7th chord is again decorated with a suspension (the repeated G# in b.17), and the tonic chord is prolonged in b.18-19.
- A** 20-28 Verse 2, similar to b.1-9, with the melody an octave higher and using fuller textures.
- 29-38 Verse 2 continues, similar to b.10-19.
- 39-42 Coda, reiterating the V⁷-I cadence in b.39-40, then prolonging the tonic chord.

Style

Although written in the third decade of the 20th Century, this piece is in a Romantic style more often associated with the 19th Century. Romantic characteristics of this piece include:

- lyrical melodies, in long, flowing phrases, sometimes irregular in length, to be played in a *cantabile* manner.
- rich (though fairly conservative) harmonies, using occasional chromaticism.
- expressive dissonance (e.g. suspensions).
- widely-spaced chordal textures, requiring extensive use of the sustaining pedal.
- expressive variations of tempo, sometimes notated by the composer, but also including *tempo rubato* at the performer's discretion.
- simple strophic formal structure.

¹ <http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an7646418-s2>

Signs and terms (Italian)

Allegretto means moderately fast.

cantabile means in a singing style.

♩ = 112 indicates a suggested speed of 112 crotchet beats per minute.

ad lib[erum] means at the performer's discretion.

rinforzando means strengthening the tone.

grandioso means grandly, or with grandiloquence.

poco rallentando means gradually becoming a little slower.

a tempo means return to the former speed.

accelerando means gradually becoming faster.

ritenuto means hold back the speed (i.e. immediately slower).

molto crescendo means gradually becoming much louder.

> indicates an *accent*; ^ indicates a strong accent.

tranquillo means calmly.

espressivo means expressively.

più accelerando e smorzando means more quickly and fading away.

8^{va} (*ottava*) means play an octave higher than written.

ppp (sometimes called *pianississimo*) means extremely soft.

A *pause* or *fermata* (◡) means hold for longer than the written value.