

Keyboard Songs I

I wrote and arranged 8 of the 12 songs on the Keyboard Songs I album in the early 1970's on an old upright piano, which despite its somewhat honky-tonk tone, I was fortunate enough to have obtained for a song (pun intended). I won it at a sealed bid auction being run by the music department at the local college. I was informed of the event by a friend with an in at the music department, who even advised me how to bid (I believe my winning bid was \$10.11, and someone bid \$10, and someone else bid \$10.10). I appreciated the help, as I was a poor itinerant musician, and would never have had a piano otherwise. I had taken a few months of piano lessons as a teenager, but when I got into playing piano in the early 70's it was all strictly by ear, and I wasn't too concerned about proper classical technique either. Anyway, having written and arranged these 8 songs all those years ago, and despite having played them only very infrequently since the early 1980's, I finally got around to recording them in 2014.

The four songs that do not date as far back as the early 1970's include "Better Than Before", which was written around 1980 on a spinet piano that I had for only a brief period of time (I relocated several states away and had to leave it behind). "Glimmer and Circumstance" and "I Love You As My Own" were both written in the early 1980's on a fairly primitive keyboard instrument that I had purchased around 1980 for about \$200. I used that same keyboard in 1989 when I recorded 3 of the 15 albums in the D.L. Stieg Catalog, and it served me well for many years despite its limitations. By comparison, the keyboard that I purchased for \$20 in 2013, which I used for the recordings of the 2014 Catalog, is far superior in terms of the range of sounds it can produce, although curiously (and regretfully) it is quite incapable of reproducing the sound of a grand piano. In any event, the only other song on

this album that does not date back to the early 1970's is Billy Joel's "Lullabye," which was released in 1993. I was raising my own little ones at the time, and I loved the song, so I learned to play it, mostly from the sheet music, but also by listening to the recording. It was rather a slow and painstaking progress, because while I can read staff notation for piano, I can only do so in extreme slow motion, which is obviously of very little use in the matter of playing the music at the proper tempo.

I decided early on in recording this album that I would add a fingerstyle guitar track to each song. This posed something of a problem, however, since 8 of the 12 keyboard arrangements are played in nearly impossibly difficult keys for the guitar (3 keys based on an F# keynote, 3 based on D#, 1 based on G#, and 1 based on C#). I'm not sure why I gravitated toward the black keys so much in composing songs and fashioning arrangements for keyboard, since it would seem that the natural note keys (which are also the most favored keys on the guitar) would be somewhat easier to play in, though I am not a competent enough keyboardist to be able to say for sure one way or the other. In any case, I solved the problem with fashioning duet guitar arrangements by tuning the guitar to Eb standard tuning (each string tuned one half-step lower than usual). Then, by fashioning a guitar arrangement based on the keynote one half-step higher than the keynote of the keyboard arrangement, I was able to transpose the guitar music to the much friendlier keys of play based on the keynotes G, E, A, and D respectively.