

Tom Armitage

Dear Cynus,

*2019*

*For Solo Piano*

# Dear Cyrnus,

*by Tom Armitage*

*Duration c. 6-7'*

Cyrnus was the erômenos of Theognis of Megara, an influential Greek lyric poet in the sixth century BC. We know very little of Cyrnus, sometimes referred to as Kyrnos or Kurnos, other than he was the son of Polypas. What we know comes from Theognis' writings of their pederastic relationship.

The elegies of Theognis present him as a complex character, an exponent of traditional Greek morality and a tormented man who found much joy and despair in his love for Cyrnus. He was described by Isocrates as among "the best advisers for human life" and his work, although sometimes considered self-contradictory, was the fruit of a lifetime of experience and wisdom. The Theognid collection is so vast that it is suspected that Theognis as an individual may not have existed at all, and in fact the collection was a collaborative composition by many writers over an extensive period of time. The attribution of their feelings towards Cyrnus could in fact be an expression of love towards any hypothetical young male.

This is what attracted me most to the elegiac verses of Theognis addressed to Cyrnus. The mystery of its authorship and the accessibility of self-identification that we may all experience as Theognis or Cyrnus. I remember as an eighteen-year-old thinking that I could not be attracted to anyone over the age of twenty-five, but now I am writing this as a twenty-six-year-old and I start to wonder if I am also now beyond that age of desire. Additional shame is burdened upon this thought because I know that I have many much older male friends that still refer to me as "young man", and sadly many of them are alone and quite lonely.

Not all of Theognis' writings to Cyrnus are amatory, but of those that are, his writings display his anxiety, his cynicism, his self-awareness of his mortality, his suspicions regarding Cyrnus' promiscuity - especially with men that Theognis considers to be less worthy, but most of all, his endless and unshakeable devotion to the young man. I have taken three elegies as inspiration for *Dear Cyrnus*,

*Boy, since the goddess Cypris gave you a lusty  
Grace, and your beauty's every boy's concern,  
Listen to these words and for my sake take them to heart  
Knowing how hard it is for a man to bear desire.*

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*My heart's in pain because of my love of you,  
For I can't either hate or love,  
Knowing it's hard when a man's your friend  
To hate him, and hard to love him if he doesn't want.*

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*Knowing in your heart that the flower of lovely youth  
Is briefer than a footrace, loosen my chain.  
For even you, mightiest of boys, may some day be compelled  
And meet the hard work of the Love Goddess,  
Even as I do now with you. Beware!  
A boy's wickedness may one day conquer you.*

*(Translated by Peter Bing & Rip Cohen, Games of Venus, pp. 94-109. © 1991 by Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.)*

The verses express much admiration for Cyrnus' beauty, paired with Theognis' regret that age has withered his own attractive appearance. The demonstrable strength of his affection towards Cyrnus results in him stifling his desire to love him and his incapability to hate him for not returning his love. And in the final verse, whilst pleading with Cyrnus for pity and possibly gratification, he scorns him and reminds him that one day he will also grow old and will not be as attractive as other boys anymore. He chastises him for either being so beautiful or for using his beauty to inflict emotional torture.

The following music is at times fragmentary, as is the texts of which it was inspired. I present Cyrnus youthful beauty in the opening bars of this piece. A 6/8 metre providing a playful, boyish lilt; mid to high register chords hinting at his adolescence; a bright major tonality and arching melodies expressing the beauty of clear lines in Greek art; additional harmony notes to add colour and to suggest charming imperfections, such as a freckles or perhaps a beauty spot; and a series of unrelated block chords and cubic structures suggesting an angled bone structure, such as high cheekbones or a strong jawline.

# Dear Cyrnus,

## I.

Tom Armitage  
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**Bright and Graceful** (♩=80)

Measures 1-6 of the piece. The music is in 6/8 time and begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The instruction *con ped.* is written below the first measure.

Measures 7-11. The music continues with dynamic markings of *mp* and *p*. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, and the left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

**Un poco meno mosso**

Measures 12-15. The tempo is marked *Un poco meno mosso*. The music is in 6/8 time. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, and the left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *ff*, and *p*. A second ending bracket is shown over measures 14 and 15.

**Heavy; Regretful**

(♩=♩)

Measures 16-19. The music is in 4/4 time and begins with a pianissimo (*pppp*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, and the left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

## II.

1 **Red and Misty** (♩=180)

*pp cresc.*

Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 1 through 3 of the piece 'Red and Misty'. The music is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 180. It features a piano (pp) dynamic with a crescendo. The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a similar pattern with some chromaticism. A pedal line is indicated below the staff.

4 **Explosive!** **Restless...**

*fff* *p cresc.*

*con ped. normale*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4 through 6. Measure 4 continues the previous texture. Measure 5 is marked 'Explosive!' and features a fortissimo (fff) dynamic with a triplet of chords. Measure 6 is marked 'Restless...' and features a piano (p) dynamic with a crescendo. The piece concludes with a normal pedal effect ('con ped. normale').

7

*f*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 7 through 9. The right hand plays a continuous eighth-note pattern. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords. The dynamic is marked forte (f). The piece ends with a fermata on the final chord.

10 **Affectionate** (♩=60)

**Pulsing accel.** **A tempo** **Suddenly despondent**

*pp* *ppp* *mp* *pp*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 through 14 of the piece 'Affectionate'. The tempo is quarter note = 60. Measure 10 is marked 'Affectionate' and piano (pp). Measure 11 is marked 'Pulsing accel.' and pianissimo (ppp), featuring a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 12 is marked 'A tempo' and mezzo-piano (mp). Measure 13 is marked 'Suddenly despondent' and piano (pp). Measure 14 continues the despondent mood. The piece concludes with a fermata.

**Bright and teasing**

17 *cantabile*

**Muffled**

21 *ppp*

**Expressive!**

26 *ff*

**Pulsing**

**accel.**

**A tempo**

32 *pp* *ppp* *mp* *p*

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### III.

**Bright and Graceful**

1 **Loaded** (♩=80) **Loaded**

*pp* *sim.* *mp* (*sempre pp*)

**Bright and Graceful**

7 **Affectionate**

*pp*

14 **Charged, Energetic** (♩=70) *cantabile*

*mp*

17



18

*mf*

19

20

**molto accel.**

21

(♩=60)

**fff** *lunga* **pp**

**Sinking with Desperation** (♩=80)

25

Musical score for measures 25-27. The piece is in 6/8 time. Measure 25 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass clef has a key signature of one flat (Bb). The time signature changes to 4/4 in measure 26. The music features a melodic line in the treble and a supporting bass line. Measure 27 returns to 6/8 time with a key signature change to one flat (Bb).

*keep tempo and dynamic constant throughout*

28

Musical score for measures 28-32. The score is written for piano with a grand staff. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat (Bb). The bass clef has a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands, including a prominent bass line in the lower register. Measure 32 ends with a fermata.

33

Musical score for measures 33-36. The score is written for piano with a grand staff. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat (Bb). The bass clef has a key signature of one flat (Bb). The music features a melodic line in the treble and a supporting bass line. Measure 33 starts with a dynamic marking of *pp*. Measure 34 has a dynamic marking of *ppp*. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 36.