

# The Sound of Prog Piano

BY RICCARDO SCIVALES

**A**fter *The Rain* is a ballad I originally wrote in 1983 for my "Quannah Parker" progressive rock quintet. This band was active from 1981 to 1985, then dissolved because compulsory military service caught us one by one. After so many years (and following the renewed interest in Prog music), I have now happily re-founded Quannah Parker in my home country of Italy, along with Giovanni Pirrotta (guitars), Andrea Cuzzolin (voice), Giorgio Salvadego (electric bass), and Paolo Ongaro (drums).

As noted in my previous article in these pages on Rick Wakeman and Yes's *South Side Of The Sky*, the Prog style draws creatively from many musical sources (classical, jazz, folk, avant-garde) besides rock. It also rejects the usual "three-minutes-per-song" format, favoring long compositions with extended instrumental sections and improvisations, mood and tempo changes, imaginative lyrics, and many odd and alternate meters. Some of these features are found in *After The Rain*, which I originally played on a Davoli electric piano—a wonderful vintage instrument similar to a Fender Rhodes electric piano, but with a beautiful distinctive tone color of its own.

The overall atmosphere of *After The Rain* is one of serenity, and it mirrors the original lyrics, which speak about rain, the smell of earth, dispersing clouds, a blue sky and a feeling of freedom. This song is sung in section A, played in a regular 4/4 meter with jazz-tinged harmonies. In order to get a special tone color, in the band version of this piece the vocal melody is doubled at the unison by the electric piano in the right hand part (as found here).

The rest of the piece is instrumental and shifts to 7/8 time, one of the most commonly used odd meters in



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Prog music. Odd meters are especially important in this style—in his great book *Rocking the Classics* (Oxford University Press), Edward Macan writes that "progressive rock has explored unusual meters more systematically than any other style of popular music." In this respect, Prog musicians were inspired by Bartók, the Russians composers and the Folk music of Eastern Europe, as well as by Dave Brubeck's famous pieces in odd meters.

A kind of "hypnotic" episode mirroring the conclusive words ("Feelin' really well") of the second stanza, section B of *After The Rain*, uses "slash chords," i.e. chords with nonharmonic tones in the bass. This device is frequently found in Prog music to give a sense of "spatiality" and/or "suspension" to the whole. The harmonies here could be seen as actually being Cm9 - Gm9 - Am9 - G6/B, but slash chords have a different and more "open" sound. In the original band version, there is no lead melody here, but an equal dialogue between different and echoing melodic lines (as another distinctive Prog feature, also note the melodic role of the electric bass). See example 1 on the next page.

Section C originally featured a theme played by the electric guitar over an electric piano arpeggiated figure similar to the one found in section B. See example 2 on the next page.

In order to save the original texture of this episode, in section C of our piano solo arrangement the right hand plays both the above-mentioned guitar theme and an arpeggiated figure. This well-known classical technique is much favored by Prog giant Rick Wakeman, who has masterly exploited it in many pieces like *Catherine Howard*, *Anne Boleyn*, *After The Ball*, and more.

Following a reprise of the previous sections, section D provides a right hand ostinato on repeated chord changes. This serves to launch and accompany the following section, which originally featured a long guitar improvisation. This has been replaced by section E in the piano solo arrangement presented here. If you like, you can expand this section by improvising ad lib on it, until you are thoroughly familiar with the magic of 7/8 time. ■

**See *After The Rain* on page 32.**

Riccardo Scivales's most recent book is the best-selling method *Jazz Piano: The Left Hand*, published by *Ekay Music* in its *The Steinway Library Of Piano Music* series. Among Riccardo's other books are *Harlem Stride Piano Solos*, *The Soul Of Blues*, *Stride & Swing Piano*, and *The Right Hand According To Tatum* (all published by *Ekay Music* and available through [www.music-booksnow.com](http://www.music-booksnow.com)). His other books include *Echoes Of Venice* and *Southern-Fried Blues* (San Diego, Neil A. Kjos Music Company) and *Dick Wellstood: The Art Of Jazz And Blues Piano*, Vol. 1 (London, England, Soliloquy Music).

# AFTER THE RAIN

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♩ = ca. 78

Em<sup>7</sup>

Am<sup>7</sup>

Am<sup>11</sup>

B/C<sup>#</sup>

F<sup>#</sup>m<sup>7</sup>

Musical score for the first system of "After the Rain". It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as ♩ = ca. 78. The first measure is marked with a box containing the letter 'A'. The first few notes of the treble staff are marked with a 'v' and 'mf'. The bass staff has a 'with pedal' instruction. Chord symbols above the staff include Em<sup>7</sup>, Am<sup>7</sup>, Am<sup>11</sup>, B/C<sup>#</sup>, and F<sup>#</sup>m<sup>7</sup>. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and fingerings.

Am<sup>7</sup>

D/G

Am<sup>9</sup>/D

Gmaj<sup>7</sup>

1. B<sup>b</sup>m/E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>maj<sup>7</sup>

Musical score for the second system of "After the Rain". It continues the grand staff from the first system. Chord symbols above the staff include Am<sup>7</sup>, D/G, Am<sup>9</sup>/D, Gmaj<sup>7</sup>, and a first ending marked with a box containing '1. B<sup>b</sup>m/E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>maj<sup>7</sup>'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and fingerings. A 'with pedal' instruction is present at the end of the system.

## Example 1

Musical score for "Example 1". It features three staves: Vibraphone (top), El. Guitar (middle), and El. Bass (bottom). The key signature is two flats (Bb, Eb) and the time signature is 7/8. The Vibraphone part has a melodic line with slurs. The El. Guitar part is labeled "Top voice" and has a similar melodic line. The El. Bass part provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and slurs.