

DELPHIAN

Sensations of Travel

Hebrides Ensemble

Chamber music by

NIGEL OSBORNE

Sensations of Travel

Chamber music by NIGEL OSBORNE (b. 1948)

Hebrides Ensemble

Zoë Beyers *violin* (tracks 1–12, 17, 19–20)

Catherine Marwood *viola* (tracks 12, 17, 19–20)

William Conway *cello* (tracks 1–8, 12, 17–20) / *director*

Rachael Clegg *oboe* (tracks 12, 17)

Maximiliano Martín *clarinet* (tracks 17, 19–20)

Philip Moore *piano* (tracks 1–8, 12–16, 19–20)

To Nigel, with respect and gratitude for many years of inspiring collaboration

This recording was made possible with generous support from Creative Scotland, Kimie Trust, McGlashan Charitable Trust and the Binks Trust.

Kimie Trust was established through a bequest by Kimie Okada (1929–2008), who loved music all her life, moved from Tokyo to Edinburgh in 1993 and was always keen to support music in the country that she had made her home. She regularly attended concerts by Hebrides Ensemble.



Recorded on 6-8 February & 7 May 2018
at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh
Producer/Engineer: Paul Baxter
24-bit digital editing: Matthew Swan
24-bit digital mastering: Paul Baxter
Piano: Steinway model D, 2016,
serial no 600443
Piano technician: Norman W. Motion

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The Piano Tuner

Three preludes and five fugues for piano trio – version with soundscapes

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Prelude I 'Tuning' | [2:43] |
| 2 | Fugue I 'Tetrachord, Hexachord' | [1:28] |
| 3 | Prelude II 'Sensations of Travel' | [1:31] |
| 4 | Fugue II 'Sea Bird' | [0:55] |
| 5 | Fugue III 'Dragonfly' | [1:05] |
| 6 | Fugue IV 'Tiger' | [2:02] |
| 7 | Prelude III 'Song of Loss' | [3:06] |
| 8 | Fugue V 'Fractal Counterpoint' | [3:17] |

Espionage: three miniature sonatas

Studies in Poussin and happenstance

- | | | |
|----|---|---------|
| 9 | Et in arcadia ego
<i>Broken memories / digital surveillance</i> | [4:05] |
| 10 | The triumph of the poet
<i>Shakespeare in the Kremlin</i> | [1:30] |
| 11 | A dance to the music of time
<i>The art historian and the spy / a sentimental tune</i> | [4:35] |
| 12 | Balkan Dances and Laments | [15:08] |

Ecological Studies

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 13 | White Bird | [1:07] |
| 14 | Kuda Kepang – Mudskipper Macaque | [1:13] |
| 15 | Osbornia – Makyung | [0:53] |
| 16 | Egret Kingfisher Sandpiper | [3:54] |
| 17 | Zone | [9:21] |
| 18 | My beloved, where are you going / Adagio for Vedran Smailović | [4:52] |

Preludio y canción

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------|---------|
| 19 | Preludio | [2:50] |
| 20 | Canción | [4:42] |
| Total playing time | | [70:28] |
| <i>premiere recordings</i> | | |

Notes on the music

fugue [from French *fugue*, an adaptation of the Italian *fuga*, literally 'flight'; from the Latin *fuga*, related to *fugure* 'to flee']

1. A polyphonic composition constructed on one or more short subjects or themes, which are harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint, and introduced from time to time with various contrapuntal devices.

2. *Psychiatry*: A flight from one's own identity ...

The quotation is from Daniel Mason's 2002 novel *The Piano Tuner*, which itself is quoting the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In 2004, Nigel Osborne completed an opera based on Mason's book, which also provided the basic material for his piano trio recorded here.

This chain of works on a common theme – itself in a sense a fugue – begins with Mason's story. Edgar Drake is the piano tuner, working in London in 1886. Out of nowhere, and in stark contrast to his regular round of gentleman's clubs and the homes of the city's upper classes, he receives a commission to tune a piano in Burma, recently annexed by the British Empire. The instrument belongs to the military doctor Anthony Carroll, eccentric but with an unmatched record of maintaining the peace, who first demanded that the army bring an Erard grand for him into the Burmese jungle. After some reservations, Drake accepts the commission and travels deep into colonial south-east Asia.

* * *

It is January 1993. Nigel Osborne is playing violin beside his friend Vedran Smailović, cellist of the Sarajevo Opera, in the Skenderija Stadium. This is the venue where, only nine years previously, Torvill and Dean stunned the world with their figure-skating performance to Ravel's *Bolero* at the 1984 Winter Olympics. But Sarajevo is a city at war now, and the stadium is a ruin. Osborne and Smailović's concert outfits of white tie and tails are set off by strong, practical boots, planted ankle-deep in the snow. Among the pieces they play – before they are spotted by snipers and have to cut short their impromptu concert – is Osborne's **Adagio**, written especially for Smailović, 'a cellist with frostbitten fingers'.

Smailović came to international fame as 'the cellist of Sarajevo' when he began in May 1992 to play Albinoni's *Adagio* in G minor in the ruins and graveyards of Sarajevo, as an act of resistance to the destruction and a memorial to those being killed around him. 'According to many,' Osborne has written, 'this marked the start of the civil resistance movement ... [He] became an icon for a city that chose to see itself as dignified, cultured and European.' The piece Osborne wrote for him mixes echoes of the Albinoni – it is written in an abstracted G minor, and features a central flurry of quasi-Baroque semiquaver figuration – with allusions to the descending melodies that signify lament in the traditional music of many Eastern European countries.

Like Drake, Osborne had made a journey predicated on music's ability to heal. Following experiences in cultural resistance activities in Poland in the early 1970s and Czechoslovakia in the early 1980s, in 1992 he began taking action against the war unfolding in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is how, first of all, he found himself playing in the Sarajevo snow. On subsequent visits to the city he began to develop a practice of music therapy for traumatised children, first in Sarajevo and then more extensively in Mostar. What he learnt there he has subsequently offered to other children in warzones in Israel/Palestine, Sierra Leone, Uganda and elsewhere.

Often working in opposition to violent and oppressive regimes, Osborne is therefore no stranger to the interaction of art and surveillance. It is a juxtaposition of themes that recurs in one of his current projects, a film-opera on the subject of the Cambridge spies, for which the violin solo **Espionage** serves as a preliminary sketch. Subtitled 'studies in Poussin and happenstance', its three short movements draw together many themes, yet connect them with a lightness and efficiency that is characteristic of all the works on this recording. Drawing on the fact that Anthony Blunt, one of the Cambridge Five, wrote extensively on Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), all three movements are named after paintings by him, two of them renowned masterpieces. The movements each take darkly suggestive subtitles of their own: 'Broken memories / digital surveillance', 'Shakespeare

in the Kremlin', 'The art historian and the spy / a sentimental tune'.

The complex balance of viewpoints, itself reminiscent of a Poussin painting, is captured in Osborne's 'Et in arcadia ego'. A three-note descending motif – a lament? – slowly emerges. It births other ideas: a harp-like plucking, a meandering ornament played on harmonics. Yet none take on a full form, and the music soon collapses entirely into a scratching, crackling sound (produced by moving the fingers hard against the violin's fingerboard). 'The triumph of the poet' – marked *con fuoco* throughout – sounds hardly triumphant at all, but possessed by a Faustian will to self-destruction that only abates at the last moment. Yet it recalls art's ability to soothe conflict, one of the recurring themes of Osborne's work. Its subtitle comes from the title of a play by Ivo Štivičić that Osborne helped stage on the Brionian Islands off the coast of Croatia, where his Cambridge spies film is set; the play tells the story of Stalin's dying encounter with an actor.

The last movement of the three, 'A dance to the music of time', may be closest to its visual inspiration. We can certainly hear elements of Time's lyre, depicted in the painting, in the open-string pizzicatos, and the circling of the dancers in the semiquaver passages with which they alternate. But for all the apparent lightness there is a melancholy tone, which solidifies briefly as a tune in its own right and casts a shadow across

the whole movement. The subtitle here is, of course, a reference to Blunt himself, acting at the intersection of aesthetics and realpolitik.

The combination of light and dark continues in **Balkan Dances and Laments**. It was composed in 2001, six years after the end of the Bosnian war yet with its devastation and trauma continuing to resound among its survivors and in their cities. If it is intended as a recollection of Osborne's travels to the region, the memories appear to be mostly painful ones. Although the dances lead the title it is the laments that predominate, drawing on the character of traditional Bosnian music – particularly in the way the oboe's melodies are repeated with an almost overwhelming encrustation of ornament. The dances, when they occur, are crisp and vigorous, yet seem always on the brink of dissolving into unbridled rage. Indeed, about two thirds of the way through the piece this is what appears to happen, as the interlocking cross-rhythms collapse into a single, impenetrable wall. From this there is only coming back, and it is the oboe, with one final lament, that restores a sense of balance if not resolution. Such is the bittersweet nature of returning home, knowing there is still more to be done.

Written in 1989, **Zone** is the only work on this album to pre-date Osborne's experiences in Bosnia, yet it nevertheless still relates to his activities in Eastern Europe. It is dedicated to the memory of the Soviet film-maker Andrei

Tarkovsky, who died in 1986. Osborne was a great admirer; the director's style influenced the opera he was writing at the time of Tarkovsky's death, *The Electrification of the Soviet Union*, and he knew Tarkovsky's composer, Eduard Artemyev, through the journal *Contemporary Music Review*, of which Osborne was a founding editor. *Zone* is named after a strange territory in Tarkovsky's 1979 sci-fi masterpiece *Stalker* that is sealed off from the outside world but where miraculous things are rumoured to be possible. Three men – a writer, a professor and their guide – enter the Zone, each with their own hopes for what they will find. Once inside, however, they realise the dangers posed by their unconscious desires and stop short of trying to fulfil their dreams.

Osborne's score – for oboe, clarinet and string trio – draws on Artemyev's music for the film, which itself absorbs influences from India, Azerbaijan and Western Europe. It is possible to hear Artemyev's synthesised tambura in Osborne's jittery drones (both composers focus on the same low D, too), while Osborne's sparse pizzicato strings resemble the slowed-down *tar* (an Azerbaijani lute) of the soundtrack. From this atmospheric beginning, however, Osborne probes further, finding long, elaborate melodies that eventually cohere into a unison statement by all five instruments: the cusp of a decision, perhaps, the brink of the unknown. Osborne himself refers to Tarkovsky's use of water to obscure familiar cultural artefacts from view,

one of those artefacts – in Osborne's piece – being the music of Bach, whose contrapuntal invention is submerged beneath a rapidly flowing surface.

* * *

As Drake travels, he is transformed. Encounters both natural and personal draw him further from his life in London. On the steamship through Suez he hears magical stories of nomadic cities in the desert. In Rangoon he is encouraged on a tiger hunt by some British soldiers, an excursion that ends with the accidental killing of a child. In Mandalay, en route to Carroll's station in the Burmese jungle, he is captivated by *pvè* street theatre, where he hears the *ngo-gyin*, a traditional song of mourning and loss that he carries with him to the story's end; its distinctive sound is suggested by the natural harmonics of the cello and violin in **The Piano Tuner's 'Prelude III'**.

The way Osborne's trio is structured around a series of 'Preludes' and 'Fugues' is another nod to Bach, whose spirit is present throughout Mason's novel. For the author, Bach's music is a vehicle for Western culture and civilisation; for the composer, the fugue's inherent qualities of layering and linking offer an opportunity to bridge the musical styles of two continents. Not a contrived integration, but a sensitive placement of things next to each other – rooted in the same gentle, generous curiosity that

makes Osborne's work in music therapy so successful. (Something similar may be heard in the **Ecological Studies'** snapshot juxtapositions of Asian and European dances, flora and fauna.)

The principle is developed throughout *The Piano Tuner*: the two styles are contrasted side by side in Fugues II and III, but in Fugue V (despite its abstract title) they are brought into direct dialogue, and a sort of togetherness. The feeling of travel is heightened by short inserts specially created for the present album release, recorded by Osborne in India and on the jungle border between Myanmar and Thailand, of cicadas, monkeys, hoopoes, nightjars, a tabla-player, a village at dawn, the ocean ... At the end of the piece the composer's own voice is heard, singing a fragment from Kipling as set in Osborne's operatic version of *The Piano Tuner*. In similar vein is the brief song that here precedes *Adagio for Vedran Smailović* – a setting of words by the Bosnian poet Goran Simić reflecting on the pain left by the Srebrenica genocide.

* * *

One last vision of travel. **Preludio y canción** – written especially for Hebrides Ensemble – relates to another opera-in-progress by Osborne, *Naciketa*. Naciketa is the boy hero of the Katha Upanishad, an important ancient Hindu scripture. A moral tale,

Notes on the music

the story concerns the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and well-being over material wealth, concluding with the realisation that the true Self is inseparable from Brahman, or the universe's vital force. Like the writer and the professor in *Stalker*, Naciketa arrives at his enlightened state with the help of a guide, in this case Death (Yama).

The opera is being created in collaboration with the American-Chilean author and activist Ariel Dorfman, and takes its protagonist to situations of child exploitation and trauma around the world. Towards the end of the story Naciketa arrives in South America, and it is from this episode that *Preludio y canción* is drawn. A *canción* is a form of South American song, popularised by the nineteenth-century *trovadores*. Lyrical rather than for dancing, it is unusual in not using percussion, instead highlighting intricate melody and enigmatic texts. Osborne's version is a tribute to the Nueva Canción Chilena style that emerged from the pro-Allende democratic movement to which Dorfman belonged in the 1970s. It is simple and melodic, joyful even. This final inward journey – one more sounding of a familiar theme – does, at last, offer a note of hope.

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Tim Rutherford-Johnson is the author of Music after the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture since 1989 (University of California Press, 2017).

Additional recorded material

Tracks 1 & 8: Norman Motion, piano tuner, recorded during sessions at Greyfriars Kirk; Nigel Osborne, Tibetan gong, recorded in the studio and mixed by Paul Baxter

Tracks 3–7: natural soundscapes and tabla recorded on location by Nigel Osborne (Sarwar Sabri, tabla)

End of track 8: Nigel Osborne, voice & piano

Opening of track 18: Nigel Osborne (vocals, keyboard & percussion), Ruairaidh Osborne (guitar), recorded by Davor Rocco; poem by Goran Simić, music by Nigel Osborne

Hebrides Ensemble

With programmes that are diverse, imaginative and inspiring, **Hebrides Ensemble** has established itself as one of the foremost chamber music collectives in the UK. Co-founded and led by its artistic director, the cellist and conductor William Conway, the Ensemble is renowned for its fresh and intelligent approach to programming, which places contemporary music at the heart of a diverse repertoire.

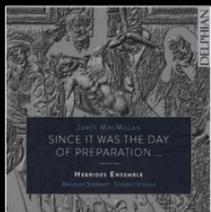
The Ensemble's flexibility is its strength; it draws its performers from a pool of the most outstanding musicians in the UK and beyond, ensuring the exceptional performance standards for which it has become renowned. This is an international ensemble with its roots in Scottish culture, a collective which performs regularly at venues and festivals throughout the UK and Europe and is regularly featured in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3.

In recent years, Hebrides Ensemble has given premieres at the Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam, King's Place and Wigmore Hall, London, at the Aldeburgh Festival

and at Edinburgh International Festival, while summer 2018 marked the Ensemble's debut appearance at the BBC Proms. Hebrides Academy supports the next generation of performers, composers, artistic directors and cultural leaders through its mentoring programme, and Hebrides Digital allows audiences around the world to be part of every performance the Ensemble gives, using live streaming, Twitter feeds and cutting-edge digital technology.

The present album is the third in a critically acclaimed series of composer portraits which Hebrides Ensemble has released in partnership with Delphian Records. The first – a recording of James MacMillan's *Since it was the day of Preparation ...* (DCD34168), commissioned by Hebrides Ensemble and dedicated to its director William Conway – went straight to No 1 in the Specialist Classical Chart upon release in July 2016, and was followed in August 2017 by *The Last Island: chamber music by Peter Maxwell Davies* (DCD34178), which won the EVM Award for New Music Recording of the Year at the 2018 Scottish Awards for New Music.

Also available on Delphian

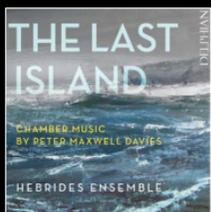


James MacMillan: *Since it was the day of Preparation ...*
Brindley Sherratt *bass*, Synergy Vocals, Hebrides Ensemble
DCD34168

The first disc in a new recording partnership between Hebrides Ensemble and Delphian Records presents Sir James MacMillan's extraordinary setting – by turns intimate and dramatic – of the Resurrection story as told in St John's Gospel. As at the work's premiere at the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival, the Ensemble and its director William Conway (the work's dedicatee) are joined by bass Brindley Sherratt in the role of Christ, and by a pristine quartet of singers from Synergy Vocals. A significant landmark in MacMillan's career, *Since it was the day of Preparation ...* now inaugurates a series of recordings set to document Hebrides Ensemble's outstanding contribution to Scottish cultural life.



'extraordinarily affecting ... It broaches enduring universal issues and, in this wonderfully committed recording, already feels like a modern masterpiece'
— BBC Music Magazine, July 2016



The Last Island: chamber music by Peter Maxwell Davies
Hebrides Ensemble
DCD34178

Peter Maxwell Davies's later music powerfully evokes the isolated majesty of his Orkney island home, yet it also bears witness to his talent for friendship – to his associations, both personal and musical, with friends and supporters in Scotland and further afield. Among the warmest was with William Conway, whom Davies first encountered as principal cellist of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and for whom he created the demanding solo part of his second *Strathclyde Concerto*. And it was for Hebrides Ensemble, co-founded by Conway in 1991, that Davies composed several of the most profound works to arise from his late engagement with chamber music – a genre in which he had previously worked rarely, here revealed as the 'last island' of this remarkable and prolific composer's output.

'Beguiling, even transfigured ... vivid performances'
— Sunday Times, August 2017



Lutosławski / Penderecki: Complete music for violin and piano
Foyle–Śtżura Duo
DCD34217

Repression and censorship; optimism and freedom; renewed constraints. If this sounds like a now all too familiar story of political progress achieved and then reversed, the Foyle–Śtżura Duo's stunning survey of chamber works by two of Poland's leading post-war composers attests that music was there to bear witness to each twist and turn of the tale. Soundtracking a drama which moves through the post-Stalin thaw of the 1950s and 1960s to the triumphant re-establishment of democracy near century's end and beyond, these vital utterances range from the exploded intensities of Penderecki's *Three Miniatures* to the lean, focused expressive charge of Lutosławski's *Partita* and the millennial anxieties of Penderecki's Violin Sonata No 2.

New in January 2019



Out of the Silence: orchestral music by John McLeod
Evelyn Glennie *percussion*, Royal Scottish National Orchestra
John McLeod, Holly Mathieson *conductors*
DCD34196

Energetic and active in his eighties, John McLeod continues to enjoy a resurgence heralded – among a flurry of commissions and premieres – by Delphian's 2015 album of his chamber music. Its distinctive colour and drama are equally evident in the orchestral works assembled here, three of them under the composer's own baton. *The Shostakovich Connection* (1974) and *Out of the Silence* (2014) pay homage respectively to the Russian master's Fifth Symphony and to the maverick yet impeccable craftsmanship of the Danish composer Carl Nielsen. The Percussion Concerto – a substantial display piece – makes full use of the extraordinary talents of Evelyn Glennie, for whom it was written thirty years ago, while the *Hebridean Dances*, in lighter vein yet no less vivid, bring proceedings to a rousing finish.

'Beginning in hushed tones, this develops into something magical ... [The Percussion Concerto] is particularly impactful, utilising the nuanced sounds of every instrument' — BBC Music Magazine, August 2018

