

Charlotte Bray

At the Speed of Stillness



Aldeburgh World Orchestra • Sir Mark Elder *conductor* • Lucy Schauer *mezzo-soprano*
Alexandra Wood *violin* • Birmingham Contemporary Music Group • Oliver Knussen *conductor*
Claire Booth *soprano* • Andrew Matthews-Owen *piano* • Huw Watkins *piano*

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At the Speed of Stillness

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

REPLAY/ FIRE BURNING IN SNOW

Melinda Maxwell *oboe / cor anglais*
 Katherine Lacy *clarinet / bass clarinet*
 Alexandra Wood *violin*
 Christopher Yates *viola*
 Ulrich Heinen *cello*

CAUGHT IN TREETOPS

Marie-Christine Zupancic *flute / alto flute / piccolo*
 Victoria Brawn *oboe / cor anglais*
 Mark O'Brien *clarinet / bass clarinet*
 Mark Phillips *horn*
 Jonathan Holland *trumpet*
 Edward Jones *trombone*
 Julian Warburton *percussion*
 Malcolm Wilson *piano*
 Robert Johnston *harp*
 Christopher Yates *viola*
 Ulrich Heinen *cello*

1	At the Speed of Stillness	11'14
	Aldeburgh World Orchestra Sir Mark Elder <i>conductor</i>	
	Fire Burning in Snow	10'45
2	Moonshot	5'26
3	Loose Ends	2'54
4	Occupations	2'25
	Lucy Schauer <i>mezzo-soprano</i> Birmingham Contemporary Music Group	
5	Oneiroi	9'33
	Huw Watkins <i>piano</i>	
6	Replay	10'29
	Huw Watkins <i>piano</i> Birmingham Contemporary Music Group	
	Songs from <i>Yellow Leaves</i>	11'33
7	Still Standing	2'00
8	Collusion	3'32
9	While the bell tolls...	2'26
10	Farewell	2'23
11	Old Tales	1'12
	Claire Booth <i>soprano</i> Andrew Matthews-Owen <i>piano</i>	
	Caught in Treetops	16'49
12	Part 1	10'46
13	Part 2	6'03
	Alexandra Wood <i>violin</i> Birmingham Contemporary Music Group Oliver Knussen <i>conductor</i>	
	Total timing	71'03

Charlotte Bray: Sound and Image

by Bayan Northcott

On hearing almost any score by Charlotte Bray, one is likely to be struck by three characteristics. The first is the clarity of her ear and of her textures – virtually every note *sounds*. This, in turn, seems to depend upon the second characteristic: an innate sense of how much material, how much elaboration – no more and no less – is needed to make a piece; a quality that the young Benjamin Britten referred to as structural 'efficiency'. And the third characteristic is the rather exceptional independence of her style for a still-young composer from any obvious influence. She speaks warmly of her teacher Mark-Anthony Turnage, and of the guidance she has received from Oliver Knussen, but her airy lines and figurations are quite distinct from the grainy harmonies and tight-locked rhythms of the one, or the densely iridescent fantasies of the other. Indeed, her idiom might be described as tending towards a certain austerity and abstraction, were it not so responsive to the many poetic and extra-musical shades of meaning and feeling she draws into her music.

These qualities are already exemplified in the earliest piece in this collection, her

concerto for violin and chamber ensemble *Caught in Treetops* (2010). Inspired by poems of D G Rossetti and Lorca and comprising a pair of nocturnes – the one turbulent the other melancholic – the score often sounds fuller, and sometimes fiercer in texture than it looks on the page, in the way the spaces between the notes seem to fill with resonances. *At the Speed of Stillness* (2012) was commissioned for the large forces of the Aldeburgh World Orchestra, and, in finding plenty for them all to do, she resorted, rather exceptionally, to the favourite Turnage procedure of varied *ostinati* in contrasting riffs. But no matter how hyperactive some of the textural layers, the contrasts in speed and character between them are always clear – as they are in the three successive patches of invention and their varied recapitulation comprising *Replay* (2011) for piano quartet. Her more linear, lyrical gifts are exemplified in the song-settings: the Shakespearian haiku-sequence of *Yellow Leaves* (2011), with its luminously imagistic piano accompaniments, and the sensitized word setting of *Fire Burning in Snow* (2013) in its tracery of chill, sometimes stinging instrumental sounds.

Notes by Charlotte Bray

At the Speed of Stillness (2012) for orchestra

This takes part of its inspiration from a surrealist poem by Dora Maar:

*I rested in the arms of my arms
I no longer slept
It was night in the summer,
winter in the day
An eternal shivering of thoughts
Fear love fear love
Close the window open the window
You'll see you'll see
The hummingbird motionless as a star.*

The energy, sense of endless movement and of exhaustion encapsulated in the poem permeates the music. Important also is the play with paradoxical ideas – the contrary notion that something moving quicker than the human eye is able to detect can appear to be motionless or still.

Harnessed to this 'energetic charge' in the work are expressions of ideas that resulted from contemplation of Sizewell Power Station and the power lines stemming from it, which I drew on as a source of inspiration, mesmerised by the relentlessness of the structures, the

restless shifts in perspective as one chases the power source across the countryside; the constant duality of the power lines, an underlying energy – hidden and intimate almost, yet zinging with immense power and force. *At the Speed of Stillness* was commissioned for the 2012 BBC Proms and premiered by the Aldeburgh World Orchestra under Sir Mark Elder, and is dedicated to Mark-Anthony Turnage.

Fire Burning in Snow (2013) for mezzo-soprano, oboe/ cor anglais, clarinet/ bass clarinet, violin and cello

A BCMG Sound Investment commission supported by individual donors in memory of Jack Phipps and dedicated to the poet Nicki Jackowska and to the memory of Jonathan Harvey, *Fire Burning in Snow* sets three poems by Jackowska – *Moonshot*, *Loose Ends*, and *Occupations*, a sequence portraying lost love and a search for a way forward from this 'place'.

Frozen, immersed in his absence, the female protagonist in *Moonshot* craves closeness, reaching out for her lost love. Peeling away the layers of personality that gave her form, defined her, she dances alone in a light that she hopes will summon him, singing for comfort. In her solitude, in the quiet of this haunting

lament – the darkest part of the collection – a deep emptiness is felt: disturbed, raw emotions that are never fully comprehended, mysteries that persist, provide openings for other journeys.

Delivered from a masculine perspective, *Loose Ends* is grounded and present. Emerging from an emotional landscape shaped by painful loss, newly found freedom, promise (a dream) of future happiness: the male character feels indestructible until he loses control, falls back to the dense earth with a thud and the realisation that his attempts to bury the memories of his lost love are superficial and futile.

A rich presence is felt throughout *Occupations*: a love dovetailed into the narrator's – internal, whilst still being free; constantly thrown back to recall what has been lost, until eventually, it escapes (once accepted, perhaps). Ultimately, some form of resolution is found.

Vivid diction threaded with sensory references allow one to see, hear, smell, and feel the poems – they are virtually tangible, leaping off the page with a clear and colourful voice.

In the finely controlled nine-minute span of *Oneiroi* (2013) for solo piano, she reverts to what is evidently an affinity for night imagery and dreams, attributing this partly to the influence of Henze, yet quite transcending his tendency to turbid cloudiness.

Although already a proficient cellist, Charlotte Bray was 21 when she took to composing in earnest. Yet in scarcely more than a decade, she has built up a substantial catalogue of works in almost all the standard genres; built up, too, a professional reputation of a composer who works hard and always delivers. Not least, she has refined a compositional style and practice for herself, neither explicitly tonal nor atonal, but always cogent in its harmonic unfolding – token of an independent spirit from which much may be expected.

Oneiroi (2013) for solo piano

In Greek mythology, dreams are personified by dark-winged spirits called Oneiroi. They emerge at night from their cavernous home in Erebus, the land of eternal darkness beyond the rising sun. According to Homer, the Oneiroi passed through one of two gates: the deceitful dreams through a polished ivory gate, while the prophetic, god-sent dreams issue from a transparent gate made of horn. Since dreams are essentially a private inner space, a hidden dialogue of thoughts and emotions, the parallel of the Oneiroi is fitting in viewing the piece as a spirit of dreams.

Works by Hans Werner Henze and Oliver Knussen inspired the piece. A dialogue of thoughts flow throughout – an incredibly private inner space, in which melodies frequently re-emerge, as if flashes of dream were recurring. Sometimes dark, isolated and pensive, and at other times delicate, lyrical and warmer in character, the music is in constant flux between a clear and a blurred state – one questions whether it is a dream or reality. *Oneiroi* was commissioned by the Festspiele Europäische Wochen Passau and is dedicated to Oliver Knussen.

Replay (2010) for piano quartet

As one of the winners of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 2010 Composition Prize, I was commissioned to write this work for the 2011 Cheltenham Music Festival with prize money from the Susan Bradshaw Composers' Fund.

As if engaged in an intimate conversation, agile cantabile lines are woven quietly together to form the opening of *Replay*. This is the first of three contrasting musical identities that the piece unfolds in succession before returning to a variation of each – the music flows constantly between these distinct identities. The structure was prompted by images of spherical trigonometry.

The second section is dark, rough and earthy. A low, rumbling piano line sits under the strings that, in rhythmic unison, build the tension with syncopated patterns. Repetitive staccato gestures in the piano cut through, joined shortly after by the cello playing pizzicato. While these elements continue underneath, a tender solo violin line takes centre stage, preceding an intense third section, extreme in terms of register and dynamic, made up of syncopated riff-based variations. Gradually falling back into the graceful weightless material of the opening; the replay begins,

with each section recognisable in character but distinctly different on its reappearance.

Songs from *Yellow Leaves* (2012) for soprano and piano

This song-sequence, commissioned by the Richard Thomas Foundation, draws its texts from a collection of 154 haikus by the poet Caroline Thomas based on Shakespeare's 154 Sonnets. I selected 33 of the haikus as the basis for nine themed songs, five of which are recorded here. The cycle travels through a range of emotions based on love, loss and deceit. The title, *Yellow Leaves* – a line appearing in the poetry – signifies the completion of the song cycle in Berlin in the autumn of 2012.

In *Still Standing*, a powerful and purely selfless love is presented, a total devotion and sense of constant renewal. Here, the poetic references to nature (waves, tides) strongly influenced the composition. The love has suddenly disappeared with *Collusion*, which is full of bitterness and deceit. Attempting to forget, one feels the heart break and grief in *While the bell tolls...*: the poet's use of colour and again, the references to nature, are incredibly evocative. In *Farewell*, we feel sadness and loss for what has passed. Sweet memories remain but something darker lies under

the surface. Coming full circle, the beauty of love is still blazing in *Old Tales*, ever renewed.

Caught in Treetops (2010) for solo violin and ensemble

This was commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, to whom it is dedicated, and by Sound and Music. The work is launched by an explosive cadenza: inspired by Sonny Rollins' *Autumn Nocturne*, I wanted to capture the same kind of relentless energy. The concerto is continuous but in two parts, responding to the poems that were a central source: *A Match with the Moon* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and *The Moon Sails Out* by Federico García Lorca. A sense of mystery pervades both poems; the figurative language of the first has a fun and playful nature, while Lorca encapsulates a subtle but profound sense of loss. Ideas for the concerto grew from a solo violin work I wrote shortly before for violinist Alexandra Wood. The original work included an improvised ensemble part for members of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group; the improvisatory nature of the solo piece remains in the larger work to an extent, although the concerto has ultimately taken on a life of its own.

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Fire Burning in Snow Poems by Nicki Jackowska

2 *Moonshot*

Reaching out to trespass on that ice-sheet
where you are not; only the moonlight
spreading fins across me, and where
should looking end if I go out
and tramp the lawn's mud down
at night, when you have peeled away
your selves and curled alone upstairs
or in the hollow of a northern hill.

3 *Loose Ends*

He covered her hair. It shone too bright and made his days dazzle.
He took her red shoes and locked them in a stout box.
He erased her name from their shared furnitures, and left
his own scent on the cushions and the light-switches.

Then he left the house. It was good that the road was wide
without neighbours. His travelling companions moved like shadows
beyond the shores of that smooth, enclosed ice-river. Surely
he could tread the stone of this fine free highway forever?

For the birds sang, and his legs swung one
after the other. He could have a fathomless lover
who would wait like a deep well he could sing into; she
would not squeeze him like a bellows, or borrow the back of him.

So the fields arched and promised. He came to a river; he came
to a house and his indestructible bone-self frayed at the edge.
In the café, a woman came to serve him, who wore red shoes,
who disturbed with her word the dense earth where he had
buried her.

© 2013 Nicki Jackowska

What then I sing alone will call
the moonlight in and rocking over all
the bed, heat it where you are not
and dance alone for all the world's light.
Bare feet on an untreated lawn, seeding
it late, the grass unruly, tufted.
I crouch and moan under these dead trees
and hope for lightning, roar from the sky.

4 *Occupations*

He's a presence among the leaves
of jasmine, of old oak

He's a footprint
dovetailed into mine
beneath the heel

He's a cloud of pollen
on the run
a hive of cotton-threads
weaving his cloth

Sun does not penetrate
his vein
nor drum his ear

I dream him lustily
my tide rears him and
throws him back

Somewhere between the wave's
crest and falling
this fish escapes

Songs from *Yellow Leaves* Poems by Caroline Thomas

7 *Still Standing*

Love – be like hunger –
Not sated: like tides, or seasons,
Sharply renewed

No curbs, no expectation:
'myself entrammelled'
So that you be free

Everyone I've loved
Converges in you
And all I am is yours

Waves, minutes, currents:
Time's incremental rise and
Wreck. Yet this stands still.

8 *Collusion*

So sublime a start –
so soon and suddenly spent.
And I acquiesce.

You chose to deceive,
so spare me the remorse. Oh,
real tears? Awed, I forgive.

Equivocation
is collusion. (I revel
in this guilty pain.)

© 2012 Caroline Thomas

9 *While the bell tolls...*

Grieve – while the bell tolls.
Less! – forget me, forget you
cared;
be spared their scorn.

I am: yellow leaves;
ruins; twilight; sunset; embers.
This frailty stirs you.

But be contented:
this – the best I have to leave –
is already yours.

10 *Farewell*

Farewell: the equity
you thought you had in me
was all illusion.

Your absence makes a
winter, dark and bare and mute,
of this lush summer.

And absence in spring:
all its delights like shadows
dreamt of in winter.

Violets, lilies,
marjoram, roses: their charms
(and taints) filched from you.

11 *Old Tales*

Your beauty blazes
in old tales, like prophecy.
Worth unknown; untold.

Nothing new; instead
recitals – reviving love's
instant first conceit.

It is not straying
when my soul's lodged with you,
my home, my rose, my all.

The full version of *Moonshot* was first published in *News from the Brighton Front* (Sinclair-Stevenson 1993). *Loose Ends* and the full version of *Occupations* are published in *Lighting a Slow Fuse – New and Selected Poems* (Enitharmon Press 1998).

Nicki Jackowska's poetry is published by Enitharmon Press. Her latest collection *Behold* has received considerable acclaim. She is the author of seven poetry collections, four novels and the ground-breaking book *Write for Life*.

Charlotte Bray

Charlotte Bray has been rapidly recognized as an outstanding talent of her generation. She was born in Britain in 1982, and studied at Birmingham Conservatoire under Joe Cutler, and subsequently at the Royal College of Music with Mark-Anthony Turnage. She participated in the Britten-Pears Contemporary Composition Course in 2007 with Oliver Knussen, Colin Matthews and Magnus Lindberg; and attended the Tanglewood Music Centre in 2008 with John Harbison, Michael Gandolfi, Shulamit Ran and Augusta Read-Thomas. She was awarded the prestigious MacDowell Colony Fellowship and was in residence at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire in the summer of 2013. She was then resident at the Liguria Study Centre, Italy, having been awarded a Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship. She is an Honorary Member of Birmingham Conservatoire and winner of the 2014 Lili Boulanger Prize.

As a result of winning the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, she was commissioned to write *Replay* for piano quartet for the 2010 Cheltenham Festival. She was appointed apprentice Composer-in-Residence with Birmingham Contemporary Music Group/ Sound and Music in 2009-2010, during which time

she wrote *Caught in Treetops*, premiered by Alexandra Wood and Oliver Knussen. As the inaugural Composer in Residence with Oxford Lieder Festival 2011 she composed a new baritone cycle for Roderick Williams. Her orchestral piece *At the Speed of Stillness* was commissioned for the BBC Proms in 2012 and premiered by the Aldeburgh World Orchestra conducted by Sir Mark Elder, receiving its US premiere in Tanglewood's 2014 Festival of Contemporary Music.

Other highlights from 2014 include: *Black Rainbow*, commissioned by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra for its youth orchestra; *Suya Dalmak* for solo cello and tape, commissioned by cellist Isang Enders and premiered at Festival 3B in Germany; string quintet *The Sun was Chasing Venus* for the Dover Quartet at Savannah Music Festival, Georgia; pieces for piano trio for the Albany Trio (London) and the Oberon Trio (Berlin); and *Circling Point* for alto saxophone and piano, commissioned with funds from the Swedish Arts Council for saxophonist Johannes Thorell who toured the work in Argentina in August 2014.

She has received commissions from of the most established performers and

ensembles, including London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Ensemble 360, Britten Sinfonia, Claire Booth, Lucy Schauer, Jennifer Pike, Lawrence Power, Julian Quentin and Mona Asuka Ott; and from the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Savannah, Aix-en-Provence, Festspiele Europäische Wochen Passau and Verbier festivals. Notable conductors who have performed her work include Oliver Knussen, Daniel Harding and Jac van Steen.

Charlotte is currently writing a new work for the youth company of the Royal Opera House for a Gala Concert in 2015, a choral work for the Chester Cathedral Choir, and a chamber opera commissioned by Nova Music Opera in collaborating with librettist Amy Rosenthal on the story of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in England.

The **Aldeburgh World Orchestra** was devised as a celebratory project for the 2012 London Olympics as part of Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme at Aldeburgh Music. The Programme was founded over 40 years ago by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears to bridge what they

perceived as a training gap between conservatoires and the music profession. It has rapidly established a reputation as one of the world's leading centres of learning for exceptional young professional musicians. Residential courses and masterclasses take place throughout the year in the beautiful surroundings of the Suffolk coast where Britten lived and worked and participants benefit from an exceptional campus of performance spaces and studios which has grown up around the world-famous Snape Maltings Concert Hall, home of the Aldeburgh Festival. The Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme is annually host to some of the world's finest performers and teachers who lead, and often participate in, intensive projects which mostly culminate in high-profile performances. It is exceptionally well-funded, thanks in part to Britten's legacy, with all successful participants receiving bursaries to cover course fees, accommodation and most of their travel costs.

Information about the artists on this disc can be found on our website:
www.nmcrec.co.uk

Cover artwork created by **Idil Atesli**, a student from the BA (Hons) Graphic Design course at Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design. Students were briefed to create cover artwork for the series and winning students selected to have their work used in NMC's Debut Discs series; the judging panel included NMC's Executive Producer Colin Matthews, designer Vaughan Oliver and journalist and broadcaster Tom Service.



About the artist:

Idil Atesli was born and raised in Istanbul. She moved to London to start her education in graphic design at Central Saint Martins College. Intrigued by the wide array of directions that the course offered, she identified her way of self-expression best through illustrating thoughts, embodying narratives and linking contexts to transfer messages visually. Nevertheless, her appreciation of order and pattern introduced her to information design and typography. Mainly interested in semantics and semiotic studies, typography and visual language, and any kind of printed material – especially books – she continues to observe, analyse, produce and accumulates the outcomes in an expanding body of her **digestive-tract.com**

About the design:

The distinctive tone and sound quality of this music allows the listener to detect it in its surroundings and distinguish it from a chaotic 'sea of sounds'. This image

is the visualization of how a clear and a limpid piece of music is pulled out from its blurred and fuzzy environment to meet its audience.

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The Leverhulme Trust

At the Speed of Stillness was recorded on 18 July 2012 at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Snape, Suffolk.
STEVE PORTNOI Recording Producer/Engineer

Caught in Treetops was recorded live on 26 June 2011 at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Snape, Suffolk for BBC Radio 3 and first broadcast by BBC Radio 3 in Hear & Now on 16 July 2011.

SAM PHILLIPS Recording Producer
TIM ARCHER Recording Engineer

Fire Burning in Snow, Yellow Leaves, Replay and Oneiroi were recorded on 21-28 February 2014 at St Silas Church, Kentish Town, London.

DAVID LEFEBER Recording Producer/Engineer
DAVID LEFEBER Digital Editing/Mastering

COLIN MATTHEWS Executive Producer for NMC

IDIL ATEŞLI Cover image
FRANCOIS HALL Graphic design

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