

phoenix songs



genevieve lacey

move

This project began with the idea that, as a young musician soon to go overseas, I needed to find and to take with me something of my own country's recorder repertoire.

The majority of the composers whose works are presented on this recording are also recorder players, so these pieces are written with an intimate knowledge of the instrument, and real respect for it. They draw on all the subtleties of recorder-specific effects, playing with (and often denying) the expectations we have of recorder sounds, in order to demonstrate the instrument's extraordinary versatility and chameleon-like qualities. It is used in its traditional role as a pure and innocent pastoral voice, sounds which evoke unearthly qualities and convey the instrument's strong historical associations with death. It is paired with its well-loved early music companion, the harpsichord, to radically rewrite a traditional concept. However, the apparently docile instrument can also become assaulting: harsh articulations produce violent sounds and wild multiphonics. In a more obviously contemporary mode, the beautiful resonances and rich overtones of the bass recorder become subject to electronic manipulation. The



recorder's remarkable flexibility and immediacy of sound are crucial – its relatively 'primitive' design means there is very little mediation between player and sound produced. The instrument can be 'detuned' through strange fingerings and effects to produce bizarre microtones.

This programme was first presented as a series of live performances which strove to break with certain concert conventions in

order to create a new environment for both performer and listener. An environment of real intimacy and honesty in order that there might be a truly meaningful exchange between all the protagonists, and that the music might emerge clearly. Such an environment is so much harder to create through a recording. It is all too easy to become obsessed with inhuman notions of perfection, to become inhibited by the strange contradiction of making a lasting document of what in performance is an intangible (and hence all the more powerful) act of communication. So much is changed with the removal of the physical presence of players and audience. We hope that the performances we have decided to fix here (from an infinite number of possible and equally valid ones) can convey something of our conviction and the strength of this remarkable music.

We begin with the fierce conflict within Brenton Broadstock's **Aureole 3**. Aureole is defined as a border of light or radiance enveloping the head or sometimes the whole of a figure represented as holy. Broadstock writes that the piece is concerned with the dichotomy that exists between holy and unholy, good and evil, consonance and dissonance. Throughout the work these opposite elements struggle violently, and the

two instruments continually exchange roles. In some sections, the sparkling but uncompromising attack of the harpsichord is juxtaposed with the recorder's soft lyricism, whilst in others the recorder assumes the guise of the unholy, and spits and shrieks. The two are often given very similar thematic material, but because of their radically different characters, these similar figures are given startlingly different emphases. The piece builds to a frenzied outburst of almost complete chaos which subsides miraculously to allow sweet consonances to emerge victoriously.

Neil Currie's piece for solo tenor recorder uses Robert Frost's ***Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*** as its starting point, and the music leads both listener and player to different conclusions. We move from evocations of the snowy woods into a more psychological exploration of the mood of the traveller who pauses mid-journey to find herself drawn into the woods "lovely, dark, and deep." My traveller feels little of the peace of these woods, but is haunted instead by being alone in the darkness of such a place. These woods contain the unknowable and unpredictable – a step into the unconscious. Thoughts and motives are fragmented, and there is an overriding sense that the journey is far from finished.

The eerie, mysteriously veiled sounds of a prepared alto recorder break the silence after the darkness of the woods. The extraordinary pitch and rhythmic subtleties of ***Lingua Silens Florum*** seem other-worldly, and their effects are heightened when placed in this context. Shanahan gives us this quote from Doczi as a way into his piece: "It is said that the Buddha once gave a sermon without saying a word; he merely held up a flower to his listeners. This was the famous 'Flower Sermon', a sermon in the language of patterns, the *silent language of flowers*."

Out of this silence emerges Benjamin Thorn's ***Pipistrelli gialli (Yellow bats)***. These bats (bass recorder and live electronics) are completely unpredictable and quite mad! The first movement plays on repeated melodic fragments and uses electronic delays intermittently to add increasingly wild flurries and layers of sound. The second movement uses electronic technology to create a sonic space – an empty cathedral in which the beautiful sonorities of the bass recorder can resonate. In the final movement the sound of the recorder becomes completely distorted in a frenetic climax. The true recorder sound is totally submerged by electronic manipulation.

The pitch, 'clean' sound and sunny cheerfulness of Ian Shanahan's

Cathy's Song come as something of a relief after the zany bats! This and the ***Helical Ribbon*** which follows are brilliantly constructed miniatures with a disarming sense of humour.

The recorder has enjoyed a twentieth century renaissance which, for me, conjures images of the phoenix rising from the ashes, of rebirth and resurrection. The rebirth of this particular phoenix (***Phoenix Songs***) does not occur without considerable conflict and pain. Indeed, the concept of struggle between the recorders and piano is central to the work. In this work it is possible to balance a tiny recorder with the formidable piano; the two meet without any compromise of the piano sound. Five recorders are used so ingeniously that distinctions between them are blurred; the result gives the effect of one recorder with an extended range and varied timbre.

In the opening *Prelude*, both instruments are locked around the note F#. What could be an eternal struggle is broken first by the piano asserting itself alone before the recorder escapes into increasingly hysterical flights. The two engage in more rhythmic duels with occasional moments of repose – a beautifully lyrical recorder line sweetly accompanied by chiming chords in the piano. The movement comes full circle without any hint of resolution between the two.

In the *Arabesque*, the two instruments create a mercurial texture by minute changes to motivic figures which defy rhythmic or pitch certainty. Specific microtonal fingerings give the illusion that the recorder plays 'between the cracks' of the piano. Towards the end of the movement ostinato figures are used to create a sense of timelessness.

Rhapsody is the longest and most overtly dramatic of the three movements. Here, the five recorders swap continually to combat the unbridled intensity of the piano. So, for example, the opening piano gesture (beginning on the very lowest note) is answered by a soprano recorder, a sound which has the ability to survive the thickest piano texture. The constant tremolo effects in the piano, which range from an ethereal shimmer to thundering outbursts, are matched by violently articulated fragments from the recorder. For much of this movement, the emphasis (for the recorder particularly) is not on creating beautiful sounds, but instead, on pushing the instruments to limits, and sometimes beyond them, so that notes scream and break. Rhythmically complex piano interludes mark new sections, and as the movement progresses, the frenzy subsides, and a sense of stasis returns. The recorder holds eternally long notes,

and the piano quietly sifts through permutations of its own harmonies. It is as though the two players are spent, and the final note is held as long as the two can manage, with the recorder having resolutely sustained its presence until the finish. A new awareness of the potential of piano and recorder, separately, and finally together, emerges gracefully from what seemed initially to have been an unresolvable dichotomy. The recorder speaks gently amidst the hugeness of the piano – rising from the ashes.

It seems only fitting, then, that our final piece be titled *Flight*. The instrument soars effortlessly, and the sounds are freed from the strictures of notation to create a deceptively simple fantasy. Birds hover and swoop, are caught and sustained by air currents. The instrument flies free of stereotypes; the compulsory instrument of school children, the 'authentic' esoteric period instrument... etc., to be redefined as a valid contemporary instrument with a growing repertoire. I fly from my beloved Australia into a new world, deeply grateful to be taking these gifts with me...

Genevieve Lacey, April, 1995

The performers and composers write:

Amanda Baker

I was born in 1962. I grew up in the

Long Forest near Bacchus Marsh (Victoria). I played the piano and recorder as a child, and went on with both at University (recorder with Ruth Wilkinson) as well as taking up composition. I developed a strong interest in electronic music as an alternative to what I then felt to be the unsatisfactory idioms offered by conventional media. After finishing my studies I abandoned music completely for a time, becoming very interested in tai chi, pottery and gardening. The need to be doing something musical eventually reasserted itself, and I began working on *Phoenix Songs*. Among my other pieces are a string quartet, *Five Bagatelles* for piano, several pieces for choir and ensemble, electronic pieces and *A Whitsun Cantata*, a semi-dramatic piece for a troupe of twelve amateur singer / players, narrator and tape. I am currently finishing a concerto for recorder and chamber orchestra for Genevieve.

Ros Bandt plays renaissance and baroque recorders, renaissance flute, psaltery and percussion. She is also renowned in the area of new music as a composer, performer and sound sculptor. Ros has toured in Europe and America, performing her own original music, and has a PhD in contemporary music. She has won numerous national

and international awards including the prestigious Don Banks Award in 1991 for distinguished Australian composers. Her improvised music is available on Move Records.

Brenton Broadstock was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1952. He began his studies in History, Politics and Music at Monash University. In 1979 he went to the Memphis State University USA, where he studied composition and theory with Donald Freund. He continued his studies with Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney. His compositions have won numerous prizes, have been performed at international festivals, and played by all the major Australian orchestras. His music is broadcast regularly both here and overseas. Since 1982 he has been employed in the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne where he is currently an Associate Professor and Deputy Dean.

Robert Chamberlain studied in Melbourne with Max Cooke, in Vienna with David Lutz and Igo Koch, and at the Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada, where he coached with distinguished artists including John Perry, Peter Donohoe, Janos Starker and Lorand Fenyves. A partner in the Melbourne-based Team of Pianists his performing schedule includes

radio broadcasts, studio and compact disc recordings and concerts, often with instrumentalists and singers. He has recently recorded repertoire ranging from Haydn and Liszt to contemporary Australian works for the Team of Pianists' CDs, and is the pianist in works by Greig, Neilson, Kreisler and Heim on the recently released CD *Marina Marsden Violin Recital*. In June 1995 he will record with Marina Marsden and colleague Darryl Coote for the Team of Pianists' sixth CD *Homage to Brahms*. 1995 concert engagements include chamber music recitals in Melbourne and Sydney, duo piano recitals with Darryl Coote, and recitals and masterclasses with the Team of Pianists in Victorian country areas. Robert Chamberlain is an active teacher, both privately and as a Gardiner Teaching Fellow at the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music, and in the Department of Music at Monash University.

David Corbet

this is stuff about me that might be relevant:

like music lots,
like lots of different music
play some, write some, sing some,
hear some, see some, hate some
like computers too,
like bikes, don't like cars
like books, don't like fascists

like challenges, like to challenge
like live theatre and movies too
really don't like musicals much
like independence,
don't like the system
like people and honesty and love
like learning and unicycling
like to thank gen,
maybe I'll have my own CD too

Neil Currie was born in Moose Jaw, Canada, in 1955, emigrating to Australia in 1982. A protege of Peter Sculthorpe, his best-known compositions are programmatic in character. For example, he uses Filipino folk music in *Ortigas Avenue* to capture the spirit of the peaceful revolution of 1986. Other works comprise a more abstract and personal interpretation of a source, as in his arithmetical manipulation of the pitches and rhythms of Aboriginal song in *Windmill*. More recently, his trombone concerto *Tumbling Strain* has depicted the soloist as a didgeridoo player, surrounded by a corroboree group of supporting players.

Genevieve Lacey

I am a recorder player, lover of books and poetry, gardens and bushwalking. I have lead a charmed life – surrounded by an incredible family, by musicians and teachers (especially Ruth, Linda, Helen) who have inspired

and challenged, and by friends who sustain and define me. I have had a wonderful education, beginning in Papua New Guinea, continuing in Ballarat and most recently at Melbourne University. In all these places I have been encouraged to question, to think, to dream and to play. In July of this year, I will take my dreaming and my playing to Denmark. There I hope to discover new poets and thinkers, and musicians who voice their thoughts differently.

I intend then to return to this place which is my home with new gifts of my own to offer as a tiny thanks for all that has been.

Ann Murphy, originally a student of Max Cooke at the University of Melbourne, undertook further studies in Amsterdam with Glen Wilson, Ton Koopman and Gustav Leonhardt. She has given numerous recitals in Australia, and has recorded for the ABC. She has been a regular performer in MIFOH and other similar festivals. She has given solo recitals at several universities in Victoria, and has also worked with the German ensemble Camerata H6, and visiting European artists including Eva Legene, Walter van Hauwe, Robert Ehrlich and Evelyn Nallen. Ann teaches harpsichord and thorough bass at the University of Melbourne.

Ian Shanahan (born 13.6.1962 in Sydney, Australia) enrolled, in 1980, for the Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Sydney, where he worked towards a double major in Music and pure Mathematics. He graduated in 1985 with first-class honours and the University Medal. Shanahan's compositions teachers were Eric Gross, Peter Sculthorpe and Ian Fredericks. He is currently enrolled in a PhD degree in composition at the same institution, where he is a part-time lecturer. His compositions, many of which have been released commercially on compact disc, have received several awards and numerous performances both locally and internationally. In addition to his compositional activities, Shanahan has also been quite active as a (self-taught) recorder player and promoter of new music for his instrument. He has commissioned many composers to write for him, and has given numerous performances of their works – as well as lecturing, broadcasting and writing widely about the possibilities of the instrument. Outside of music, Shanahan has a passion for chess problems.

Benjamin Thorn is a Sydney-based composer, recorder player and semiotician. His compositional output includes a range of instrumental, vocal,

choral and theatrical works. He has gained wide acclaim for his works for recorder. He is the editor of *Recorders at Large*, a two volume collection of mostly Australian recorder music published by Currency Press. After the first performance of *The voice of the crocodile...* (published by Moek Verlag) a critic wrote "I don't know whether he should be encouraged or locked up".

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The CD cover shows the work of Phil, a dear friend and artist.

Cover painting: Philip Wischer, *Kakadu*
Oil on canvas stretched over natural timber
2m x1.5m 1990 (private collection)
Layout: Victoria Watts
Produced and engineered by Martin Wright and
Vaughan McAlley
Piano technicians: Brent Ottley and
Warwick Dalton

Many thanks to the composers for permission to play and record such outstanding works. Special thanks to Amanda Baker, Ros Bandt, Robert Chamberlain, David Corbet, David Collins, David Durance, Steve Ingham, Linda Kent, Chris Mark, Fred Morgan, Ann Murphy, Hartley Newnham, Ian Shanahan, Francine Tanner, Victoria Watts, Ruth Wilkinson, Philip Wischer, Martin Wright, Faculty of Music, Melbourne University, my wondrous family and countless other supportive friends.

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- 1** Aureole 3 *Brenton Broadstock* 1984 11'15"
2 Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening *Neil Currie* 1985 5'34"
3 Lingua Silens Florum *Ian Shanahan* 1991 1'31"
4-6 Pipistrelli gialli (Yellow bats): I, II, III *Benjamin Thorn* 1985 8'17"
7 Cathy's Song *Ian Shanahan* 1988 1'13"

p h o e n i x

Genevieve Lacey recorders

Robert Chamberlain piano

Ann Murphy harpsichord

David Corbet live electronics

Hartley Newnham voice

s o n g s

- 8** Helical Ribbon *Ian Shanahan* 1990 0'44"
9-11 Phoenix Songs: Prelude, Arabesque, Rhapsody *Amanda Baker* 1992 18'17"
12 Flight *Ros Bandt* 1978 1'40"

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