



Devils of the Night

Ron Nagorcka
Robert Williams

Devils of the Night

Ron Nagorcka

“... wondrous ... the most Tasmanian [non-indigenous] music I have ever heard.”

Peter Sculthorpe (Tasmanian-born composer)

“... a unique, innovative and distinctive voice.”

Larry Polansky (New Hampshire)

“... wonderful in the balancing of ecological sources and musical structures. Nagorcka has a very sensitive ear for nature ...”

Pauline Oliveros (New York)

Composer, performer, and naturalist **Ron Nagorcka** (born 1948) spent his childhood exploring music and the natural world on a sheep farm in Western Victoria. He went on to study at the University of Melbourne with Keith Humble and Ian Bonighton, and at the University of California San Diego.

During the 1970s he was active as a composer in Melbourne, with a prominent role in avant-garde musical activities, and taught at the Melbourne State College. He has toured Europe, the USA and Japan on various occasions.

In 1988 he moved to a remote forest in northern Tasmania, where he has built his own house and solar-powered studio. He has a long-held interest in the sounds of the Australian bush (in particular its birds), the use of electronics in music and the system of tuning known as just intonation. His recordings of nature in Tasmania and in the arid zones of mainland Australia provide the basis for many of his compositions. He also makes and plays his own didgeridus – an instrument which has influenced his approach to composition from the beginning of his career.

From 1990-6 Nagorcka's music was performed mostly by the ensemble “Nyet” – a group of artists particularly interested in their relationship to the Tasmanian environment.

In October 1997, he was joined by Robert Williams and Larry Polansky in a concert as part of the “Sounding Sphere” festival in Harima, Japan – and the music prepared for that concert forms the basis of this CD.

In October 1998, his **Tasmanian Toccata** (track 13) for didgeridu, sampler and pipe organ was the main feature of three concerts to open the new organ in the chapel of Trinity College in Melbourne.

In 1999 he was awarded a commendation by the University of Melbourne in the Albert H. Maggs Composition Award. In August – September 1999, he undertook a “Wilderness Residency” at Eddystone Pt. where he wrote **This Beauteous Wicked Place** – premiered in Ballarat in January 2000, and presented in the Great Hall of the Old Bailey by Nagorcka and Elizabeth Anderson as part of the 2001 London Festival.



Robert Williams

Most of the music on this CD involves Robert Williams – a Melbourne-based pianist who has collaborated with Nagorcka since the early 1980s. His contribution to the development of this music during the 90s is considerable; encouraging a more disciplined approach with shorter, more fully notated pieces, and bringing professionalism to its performance. The interpretations of many pieces show his influence – such as **8 Bunbundalui**, **18 Tarranyennah**, **1 Devils of the Night** and in particular **6 Noyenna** (written by Williams on a Nagorcka theme) and **4 Cockatoo** where he wrote the piano part. **Cockatoo** is a unique achievement as it successfully juxtaposes an equal-tempered piano against Nagorcka's just intonation part. After graduating from the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and the Faculty of Education, Williams has worked in a wide range of musical activities earning him respect as a performer, composer and music educationalist. For many years he held the positions of Lecturer in Music and Music

Therapy at Melbourne State College. Williams has a long standing involvement with the performance and promotion of contemporary Australian music. His busy artistic life includes the co-ordination and direction of music festivals such as the "Great Southern Sounds Festival" held at the National Gallery of Victoria (1995 / 6), working as a music journalist and critic, and restoring and rebuilding pianos.



About the music

Sampling

With the invention of the tape recorder, the sonic possibilities for the composer changed forever, and since the functions of the tape recorder have been overtaken by digital technology, the processes of sound-manipulation have become fast and accessible, and this is changing the musical world radically. However this is not always very evident to the listener, as the emphasis in much music has shifted from the experimental to the popular, purchased or pre-loved. The means may have changed, but most of the music sounds like "old wine in a new bottle".

On the other hand, this CD presents music where the processes provided by digital technology are crucial to its construction, and are used to explore a particular world-view. Nagorcka continues to use the techniques of "musique concrète" – feeding the sounds he records in Australian forests, plains and arid areas into a "sampler" and manipulating them electronically to produce unique new timbres derived from the environments he has explored.

Just Intonation

“The relation of small numbers to musical consonances was from all time looked upon as a wonderful mystery of deep significance.”

Hermann Helmholtz **On the Sensations of Tone** (1862)

Many of the pieces on this CD also use an ancient system of tuning known as “just intonation”. The story goes that Pythagoras was passing a blacksmith shop when he noticed that the various hammers being used were making sounds which in combination were particularly pleasant to the human ear. Being the sort of person to think laterally, he decided to weigh the hammers to see if he could determine a mathematical relationship to explain the harmony thus perceived.

What Pythagoras actually weighed and found out remains mythological, but let's say he weighed 6 hammers to find that their weights were 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 greek kilos. He would have discovered, (if he named them the way we do) that sounding the 2 kilo and 4 kilo hammers together gave an octave, as did the 6 and 3. Sounding 2 and 3 together gave a “perfect fifth”, as did 4 and 6. Sounding 4 and 3 together gave a “perfect 4th”. 5 and 4 gave a “major 3rd”, 6 and 5 gave a “minor 3rd”. 7 and 4, 7 and 5, 7 and 6 sounded good together too, but we have no names in modern music for these intervals as they cannot be imitated by equal temperament. (In just intonation they are known as “septimal” intervals.) Pythagoras

concluded that musical consonance resulted from simple mathematical relationships.

It has been conventional for thousands of years to express these comparative weights (or lengths of string etc.) as ratios with the largest number first (e.g. 2:1, 6:5, 3:2, 11:8 etc.). The principle of just intonation is simply that the smaller the numbers are in a ratio, the more consonant is the interval involved. Conversely, bigger numbers represent more dissonant intervals.

1 Devils of the Night (Nagorcka / Williams 1992 / 97)

Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu and sampler**
Robert Williams **sampler**

Much of the material in this piece was originally written in 1992 as **Rondos alla Devil** and performed by the group “Nyet” along with readings from a poem of the same name by Tasmanian poet Bruce Roberts. It was rewritten and extended incorporating many suggestions by Robert Williams in preparation for a concert in Japan in 1997. It uses a specially invented 24 tone/octave just intonation scale and incorporates the sounds of a large and rather upset male Tasmanian Devil (trapped for research purposes at Cradle Mountain), as well as the sounds of Tasmanian owls and frogs.

2 Zygodactyl Dance (Nagorcka 1999)

Elizabeth Anderson **harpsichord**

Birds – such as parrots – which have two toes facing forward and two back, are called “zygodactylous”.

3 Mood from Lake Mungo (Nagorcka 1997)

Ron Nagorcka **sampler**
Larry Polansky **electric guitar**

Written in a microtonal scale involving guitar retuning for performance with Larry Polansky. The sounds of the sampler are all derived from the call of the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.

4 Cockatoo (Nagorcka 1994, Williams 1997)

Robert Williams **piano**
Ron Nagorcka **sampler**

Commissioned by the ABC and originally written for soprano saxophone and sampler. The saxophone part was limited to a set of pitches closely in tune with the just intonation scale to which the sampler is tuned. Williams has extended this line into a piano part in equal temperament bringing a fascinating new harmonic dimension to the music.

5 About 3 (Nagorcka 1998)

David Hamnes **organ**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu**

This piece has nothing in particular to do with nature and is written in equal temperament. Nagorcka studied pipe organ as a student and wrote **Sanctus** – recently re-released by Move on MD 3008 – for didjeridu, organ, electronics and voices in 1975. **About 3** is largely a study in rhythm – with a structure based on three minims followed by three crotchets, then 3+3 quavers. It was first performed in Norway by David Hamnes and Norwegian didjeridu player Audun Riser.

6 Noyenna (Williams 1997, based on a theme by Nagorcka)

Robert Williams **sampler**
Ron Nagorcka **sampler**

Noyenna is a Tasmanian aboriginal word for the shy and beautifully patterned Bassian Thrush. An early experiment in just intonation based on its call by Nagorcka is developed by Williams into a graceful dance.

7 Crow Chorale (Nagorcka 1995)

Ron Nagorcka **sampler**
Robert Williams **sampler**

This is part of the **Secret Places** suite – written for an exhibition after collaboration with Sieglinde Karl, Kate Hamilton and Hazel Smith.

The Forest Raven (often called a crow in Tasmania) is an amazing microtonal singer, and here its song is extended in a two-part chorale in true baroque style using a 24 tone per octave just intonation scale. The harmonies are both unfamiliar yet strangely satisfying: a truly haunting piece reflecting not only Nagorcka's love of the bush, but also his Lutheran upbringing.

8 Bunbundalui (Nagorcka / Williams 1992)

Robert Williams **piano**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu and sampler**

Written for Rob Williams, this virtuosic piece of complex rhythmic patterns is based on the call of the Crested Bellbird – an arid zone species with a fascinating soft ventriloquial call. The piano and didjeridu imitate the widely-spaced repeated pitches used by the bird, and the sampler uses timbres generated by sampling the sounds of its call.

9 Dancing with the Organ-bird (Nagorcka 1993)

Robert Williams **sampler**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu and sampler**

Based on the sounds of a Pied Butcherbird recorded at Atijere (Hart's Range) in the Northern Territory. It was written for the original Ensoniq EPS Sampler and is one of Nagorcka's first attempts to grapple with the harmonic logic of just intonation.

10 Calamanthus (Nagorcka 1995)

Geoffrey d'Ombra **flute**
Ron Nagorcka **sampler**

This small Striated Fieldwren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*) with its high trilling song was recorded near Macquarie harbour in Tasmania's south-west. The music begins by slowing down the recording to reveal an intricate and complex song – inspiring a two-part invention combining just intonation on the sampler with selected pitches on an equal-tempered flute.

11 This Beauteous Wicked Place
(Nagorcka 1999)

Elizabeth Anderson **harpsichord**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu and sampler**

The title is a description of Australia by John Grant – “gentleman convict” and the first person to bring a harpsichord into Australia. The piece was commissioned by Elizabeth Anderson (with support from the Australia Council) for the Ballarat “Organs of the Goldfields Festival” and was also performed by Anderson and Nagorcka at the 2001 City of London Festival. It features the sounds of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Australian Magpie, Tasmanian Devil, Pied Butcherbird and Masked

Lapwing and uses 24 tone per octave just intonation based on a just 12 tone scale devised by the 17th Century theorist Joseph Kirnberger.

12 The Frolicking Quoll (Nagorcka 1997)

Karlin Love **clarinet**

This little piece was written as a present for Nagorcka's daughter Erica who was learning the clarinet. Quolls (often called native cats) are increasingly rare marsupial carnivores.

13 Tasmanian Toccata (Nagorcka 1991)

Rhys Boak **organ**
Robert Williams **sampler**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu**

In equal temperament, this work is structured around themes and rhythms derived from analysis of Tasmanian birdcalls. The organ-like timbres played on the sampler are all derived by sampling techniques from the same bird calls. The didjeridu provides the driving rhythms which give the piece its excitement.

14 Prelude (Nagorcka 1985 / 95)
Robert Williams **piano**

Dedicated to the memory of Claudia Nelson – for whom it was completed in 1995. A simple repeating figure is matched by a beautiful 12-tone melody. In 1997 Larry Polansky arranged this piece for mandolin and this is presented on the next track.

15 Prelude (Nagorcka 1985/95 arr. Polansky 1997)

Larry Polansky **mandolin**

16 Galah (Nagorcka 1997)

Robert Williams **sampler**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu**

The galah is one of those unique members of the cockatoo family with which most Australians will be familiar, and very few would consider “musical”. However as this piece demonstrates there are some wonderful sounds within all that raucousness. All of the sampler sounds in this piece are derived from recordings of galahs. It was written for performance with Rob Williams and again uses a specially designed scale in just intonation.

About the other performers

Larry Polansky

Larry Polansky is a composer, theorist, performer, software designer, teacher, writer, editor and publisher from New Hampshire, USA. He holds the Joseph Strauß 1922 Chair of Music at Dartmouth College, chairs the Department and is co-director of the Bregman Electro-Acoustic Music Studio. He is the founder and co-director of Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective).

Elizabeth Anderson

Elizabeth Anderson has completed fifteen international concert tours, and has appeared as a soloist in all Australian capitals. She has performed concertos with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Sydney Opera and Ballet Orchestra, the State Orchestra of Victoria and the Queensland Philharmonic, and played continuo with the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Her CDs have been awarded prizes by **Gramophone**, **Soundscapes** and **The Age**.

Karlin Love

Karlin Love, performer and composer, lives and works in Launceston, Tasmania. She was born in the USA, studied in Seattle, and came to teach in Australia in 1989. Jazz, 'new' and

improvised music are her strongest interests. Ever fascinated by audience-space-performer relationships, she has been known to perform in art galleries, seedy pubs, woolsheds, wooded ravines, aircraft hangars and on barges.

Rhys Boak

Rhys Boak is one of Melbourne's busiest organists. He studied organ with John Mallinson and Douglas Lawrence at the University of Melbourne, and harpsichord with Ann Murphy. Rhys is currently the organist at Ormond College within the University of Melbourne and is also organist of the Malvern Presbyterian Church and Assistant Director of Music at the Toorak Uniting Church.

David Scott Hamnes

David Scott Hamnes studied organ in Tasmania and Melbourne. In July 1994 he moved to Namsos, Norway, the home town of his father. He now works as Kantor /Organist for Kolstadkirke in Trondheim, and as a part-

17 E-gypt (Nagorcka 1993)

Karlin Love **soprano saxophone**
Ron Nagorcka **didjeridu and sampler**

The Crescent Honeyeater – a bird with its stronghold in Tasmania – can be particularly raucous and part of its call is often described as “ee-gypt”. The timbres seem particularly suited to soprano saxophone. This is another piece in just intonation, with the saxophone playing various “bent” notes when necessary.

18 Tarranyennah (Nagorcka / Williams 1994)

Robert Williams **sampler**
Ron Nagorcka **sampler**

Tarranyennah is a Tasmanian aboriginal word for the Masked Lapwing (or Spur-winged Plover) whose evocative cry is well known in SE Australia – in the cities as well as the bush. Two samplers are tuned in an unusual 12 tone / octave just intonation scale for this dramatic piece in 9/16 time.

time organist for Nidaros Cathedral. He has composed works for organ and is currently working on a PhD degree on Australian organ music.

Geoffrey d'Ombrain

After a busy life in music education, the highlight of which was the founding of the music course at the former Melbourne State College, D'Ombrain now pursues his real musical passions: improvisation, composition and performing. Flute playing is a central part of all this, as is the attraction of music derived from bird calls.

Recording and production credits

Tracks **1**, **2**, **4**, **6-11**, **14**, **16**, **18**

Martin Wright, Move Records studio, Eaglemont

Track **13** Martin Wright, Scots' Church, Melbourne

Track **3** and **18**

Nobuhisa Shimoda and Koji Mii, Xebec, Japan

Tracks **5** and **17**

Nicholas Cummings, Launceston

Track **12**

Nicholas Cummings, St. Johns Church, Launceston

Track **15**

Terry Pender and douglas repetto, Columbia University Computer Music Center digital recording studio

Mastering Martin Wright

Booklet design Alessandro Servadei

Original artwork Detail from Philip Wolfhagen's **Darkness at 41 S 147 E** (1995), oil and beeswax on linen. Used with permission.

Photographs Nick Sheehy

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Devils of the Night

move

Ron Nagorcka and Robert Williams

- 1** Devils of the Night 6'24"
- 2** Zygodactyl Dance 3'15"
- 3** Mood from Lake Mungo 4'00"
- 4** Cockatoo 4'11"
- 5** About 3 3'28"
- 6** Noyenna 3'38"
- 7** Crow Chorale 3'43"
- 8** Bunbundalui 3'13"
- 9** Dancing with the Organ-bird 3'31"
- 10** Calamanthus 2'43"
- 11** This Beauteous Wicked Place 6'48"
- 12** The Frolicking Quoll 1'39"
- 13** Tasmanian Toccata 4'24"
- 14** Prelude 1'21"
original version
- 15** Prelude 1'10"
mandolin version (arr. Polansky)
- 16** Galah 5'30"
- 17** E-gypt 2'57"
- 18** Tarranyennah 3'03"

Ron Nagorcka

didjeridu & keyboard sampler

Robert Williams

keyboard sampler & piano

Elizabeth Anderson

harpsichord

Larry Polansky

electric guitar & mandolin

Karlin Love

soprano saxophone & clarinet

Rhys Boak

pipe organ

David Scott Hannes

pipe organ

Geoffrey d'Ombra

flute

All compositions Nagorcka

except **1 4 3 18**

Nagorcka / Williams

and **6** Williams

Artwork

detail from Philip Wolfhagen's
Darkness at 41 S 147 E (1995),
oil and beeswax on linen.
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