



Uncovered Ground

Felicity Wilcox
Collected Chamber Works

- 1 *People of this Place* 6'23"
- 2 *Uncovered Ground* 11'50"
- 3 *Tambourin* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*) 3'31"
- 4 *Le Tourbillon (electronic interlude)* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*) 1'39"
- 5 *Le Tourbillon* 2'30"
- 6 *Vivre Sa Vie, Composer's Cut* 15'32"
- 7 *La Reveuse - Coda* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*) 4'15"
- 8 *SON* (from *SON-ombra*, String Quartet no. 1) 5'55"
- 9 *Fragments I-IV* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*) 8'01"
- 10 *Falling* (from *Snow*, Movement 2) 4'45"

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This piece is both an acknowledgement of First Nations Australians as traditional custodians of the lands I live and make music on, and a loving expression of my sense of shared place, reflecting the echoes of nature and the blend of lives lived for millennia in

mid-career was to open up space to cultivate and express music that was truly mine after 20 years composing under externally imposed constraints; my curiosity simply got the better of me. After 10 years working consistently at this endeavour, I hope I have by now learned to follow the beat, not just of my heart, but also of my inner ear - and the diverse languages you will hear across this record reflect that impulse. Here are ostensibly tonal pieces, that suddenly push into dissonance and experimentation; others still that seek to frame an idea in sonic terms; electronic music maintains a shadowy presence also, reflecting a lifetime of playing within diverse realms of sound-making. Visuals underpin much of

the Sydney region – a beautiful place of birds, bush, grasses, sandstone and sea. I chose the bass clarinet for its enormous range and ability to evoke different sound worlds on one instrument, working closely with Jason Noble to develop new approaches to multiphonics and other extended performance techniques for the instrument. It was described by celebrated British clarinetist Roger Heaton as, ‘a richly expressive work’ (Tempo 2021), and Australian critic Peter McCallum wrote of it as, ‘a sepulchral low resonance, like a sound from the earth’ (Sydney Morning Herald 2020).

People of This Place has been performed widely in Australia, the UK and the USA, and selected for release on *Women of Note Vol. 3* (ABC 2021), *Songbirds* (Ensemble Offspring 2020), and *Chi’s Cakewalk* (Jason Noble 2017, listed by its Gadigal title, *Yurabirong*). Thank you to my First Nations advisors for conversations that shaped the work’s final form: D’harawal man and researcher, Gawain Bodkin-Andrews, who advised me on protocols for creation of work that considers Indigenous spaces and perspectives; and Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi man and artist, Jonathan Jones, who advised me on the use of First Nations language and cultural property – conversations that resolved my decision to exclusively use the work’s English title from 2019. In presenting it, I pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the land that inspired it, to their elders, past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal people. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

2 *Uncovered Ground*

This octet was commissioned jointly by Ironwood and Ensemble Offspring for their ‘Broken Consorts’ program in 2015 to draw together the strengths and sensibilities of these separate specialist groups in early and new music. Acknowledging its success in doing so, Paul Nolan wrote, “*This engaging commission work comprehensively answers the brief of exploiting this collaboration’s combined ingredients and backgrounds...and blends early and new music styles effortlessly and seamlessly.*” (Sydney Arts Guide 2015)

In meeting the brief I had several clear intentions: I chose a richly ornamental musical language that alternates between fanfare and stillness in the vein of Baroque repertoire, and cast my material in exploratory ways, in the vein of new music; I contrasted the character of old and new instruments, beginning with a duet between modern and Baroque violins, followed by dialogues between viola and alto flute, bass clarinet and cello, and continuing with contrasting the grand piano’s colours through juxtaposition of conventional and prepared playing techniques (thanks to Zubin Kanga for his input here). I also wanted to make reference to how both the systems underpinning intonation and our perception of tonality has shifted in the centuries that separate the sound worlds of the early Baroque and 21st century through exploring microtonality – clearest in the free-time passages, whose tonal ambiguity is aided by the entry of the wooden 8-keyed simple-system Classical flute (thanks to Lamorna Nightingale

for introducing me to this lovely creature), which is tuned to A=430. This overarching aesthetic of contrast is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the closing statement of the ground bass played in all its diatonic purity after so much recurrent dissonance. A self-contained miniature performed on Ironwood’s Baroque string instruments (tuned to A=440 to work with Ensemble Offspring’s modern instruments), the ground was the first music I composed, to reference the traditional music for consorts that was played so often during the early Baroque period. I then transformed its bass pattern into a 10-note tone row for the dissonant free-time passages; its melody was recycled and manipulated for each of the three duets, and its harmonies constitute the material for the opening and closing fanfares.

In composing *Uncovered Ground* I had a very clear image in mind: of a wall, rendered over with cement – matte, modern, bold – that was slowly being chipped away, to reveal a beautiful underside: some long-forgotten, delicate mural, rich in detail. The hammers and chisels are heard as the percussive sounds that cut across the block chords of the fanfare, opening the way to gradually reveal, bit by bit, the fragile beauty of the design abiding underneath.

Gouttes d’un sang étranger

This 75-minute work was originally composed for saxophone, viola da gamba and spoken word with electronic sound, and images. It was selected for Vivid Festival 2014, and was developed with performers Anthea Cottee

and Nathan Henshaw, whose generous input and mesmerising world premiere performance brought so much to this work. The original instrumental pairing cements the work's French associations: the viola da gamba is associated with the French Renaissance and early Baroque, and the saxophone has a strong presence in the French classical repertoire from the 20th century. (I have since re-versioned it for clarinet and cello, and for clarinet and viola da gamba - combinations heard in the movements contained on this album). This work reflects my affinity with the French people, and love of their language and culture. It draws inspiration from the story of my great-great-grandfather Pierre Claude Louat, and muses on my strong relationship with the country he left in the 1860s – a century before I was born. Although the subject material is personal, the work explores broader ideas around the migrant experience including issues of displacement and fragmentation of family and identity.

The title *Gouttes d'un sang étranger* (*Drops of Foreign Blood*) is a play on the title of a French Suite, *Suite d'un goût étranger* (*Suite with a foreign flavour*), by French composer and viol virtuoso Marin Marais, from his fourth book of pieces for solo bass viol, published in 1717. This word play reflects a broader preoccupation with quotation and musical borrowing here; selected melodies and bass lines from the Marais source work are quoted and mutated, and certain gestures are extracted and intensified. This was done through techniques such as transposition, rhythmic alteration and exaggeration,

retrogrades and inversions, intervallic alteration and exaggeration, melodic fragmentation and exchange, acoustic loop generation, and chromatic and microtonal ornamentation. Extended techniques are incorporated to heighten gesture and to contrast the new material with the old. It is my great honour to share authorship of the piece with Marais.

3 *Tambourin*: In the original Marais suite, *Tambourin* is an adjunct to the first movement, *Feste Champêtre*, and is performed on bass viol and continuo at a loud dynamic and rapid tempo with percussive articulations to emulate a drumming passage ('tambour'). I slowed it down, and have introduced a rhythmic elasticity to the melody through alternation of triplet and dotted rhythms that elongate and elaborate the original melodic phrases. I also set Marais' beautiful suspensions to full effect, to offer a more modern emphasis on their inherently sensual dissonances and tension.

4 *Le Tourbillon*: Translating to 'tornado' in French, the Marais piece's furious scalar passages evoke their subject well. I used extended techniques to add to the illustration of a furiously blowing wind, including *embouchure portamento*, multiphonics and flutter-tongues in the saxophone/clarinet part. I have intensified the original Marais four-note, turn pattern, contracting it rhythmically from semiquavers into sextuplets, into demisemiquavers. With this rhythmic contraction there is also intervallic contraction: whole-step and half-step turns become microtonal, further contracting into

trills and tremolos. The electronic music that weaves through *Gouttes d'un sang étranger* has been conceived as a metaphor for the fluidity of time, to speak to the temporal and spatial dislocation common to all migrant families. Here, a recording of the original viola da gamba and saxophone duo playing *Le Tourbillon* is reversed, with signal processing applied in layers. This digital manipulation of the recorded material reveals time as mutable; it repeats itself; exists in parallel layers; travels in reverse; and the echoes of an event are heard before it happens.

7 *La Reveuse (Coda)*: Here, Nathan Henshaw's saxophone performance of my Coda to *La Reveuse* is played back in reverse with effects, followed by Jason Noble's bass clarinet performance of the Coda heard forwards and without digital treatment. The musical material is derived from the melody of *Tambourin*, which I have broken slightly, to convey the physical and emotional toll of a violent assault on my great-great grandfather that occurred in his later years and from which he never recovered.

9 *Fragments I-IV*: In composing *Gouttes*, a work about 'depaysement' (displacement), it felt fitting to explore the concept of fragmentation. These pieces are separate miniatures that thread throughout the larger work, containing disparate chunks of material from the Marais; some audibly related to the source work and some not in my rendering. There is a florid aesthetic to the *Fragments* that is particularly evident in

the final piece, *Fragment 4*, whose intricate lines are embellishments of the underlying B drone that both instruments return to between episodes. I was striving to introduce an improvisatory quality into the work here, leaving expression, timing, and articulations up to the performers. I notated these movements in small repeated chunks that generate a kind of slowly evolving loop, where the doubling of the two instruments becomes imperfect due to the fact that repeats might occur mid-measure, and phrases are interrupted randomly. The *Fragments*' febrile and intricate lines, quiet dynamic, incompleteness, and repetitive, yet mutating cycles focus the listener on ideas of transience, mutability and space, to reflect the underlying preoccupations of the larger work.

6 *Vivre Sa Vie, Composer's Cut*

When Paul Stanhope commissioned me in 2017 to write a piece for The Australia Ensemble to a film of my choosing for their 'Sound of Pictures' program, I had to go through a rather long series of channels to request permission not only to rescore Godard's 1962 film *Vivre Sa Vie* (originally scored by French composer Michel Legrand), but also to cut it down to a shorter version that suited the specific purposes of this commission. After sending several emails in English via his distributor, I wrote a direct email to Godard in French, and was amazed when his personal assistant promptly replied, giving me the great director's blessing to proceed.

My version reduces an 85-minute film to around 15 minutes; I tried to remain true

to the narrative thread. When writing film music, a composer's concerns become focused on narrative themes – how to support and communicate them; one of the first that emerged here was the hymn-like chorale under the film-within-a-film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. It symbolizes the purity of St Joan, of the main character Nana, and the tragedy of their entwined fates. This theme works its way throughout the fabric of the whole film; its derivations are heard in the vibraphone, flute and clarinet parts accompanying the low-register piano riff that recurs under each Boulevard scene; it becomes the basis for the elegant and seductive alto flute solo that accompanies Nana when she goes to work; and it provides material for the clarinet's lyrical countermelodies. In what I hope is an authentic leitmotif, I have manipulated and layered the chorale melody with other musical ideas to entwine characters, shift mood, and express different aspects of the narrative, in a way that allows the film to resonate with Nana's presence.

Godard includes a quote by Montaigne at the beginning of the film: 'Il faut se donner a soi-meme et se preter aux autres' (which translates loosely to: 'Give yourself to you and lend yourself to others'), that sparked some compositional ideas. If Nana's wholeness is expressed in the simple chorale melody, the idea of her lending herself to others might be expressed in the fragmenting and scattering of the chorale melody. This occurs first in the title scene, to accompany the Montaigne quote and establish something of the film's key themes (both narrative and musical). The same

idea returns when Nana first hooks up with a stranger in the street, it returns briefly in the vibraphone part towards the end of the scene where she is working the hotels, and in the final scene where both plot and music spiral out of control.

There is a kind of meta-dialogue occurring in my rescoring of the three dialogue scenes. In each of these scenes Nana speaks with a man: her husband; a police officer; her pimp. Nana's voice is 'spoken' by the alto flute and the male voice by the bass clarinet. In composing these parts I laboriously transcribed the speech rhythms and pitch inflections of the original French dialogue into musical notation. In these scenes, the piano and vibraphone provide underscore and sound effects to accompany the woodwind dialogue in a further play between levels of the diegesis.

Finally, the structure of the film lends itself perfectly to a live performance of the score, as Godard edited the film into 12 short vignettes, separated by inter-titles. When contemplating projecting a film without dialogue, I made the decision to retain this structural element, and to use these inter-titles to convey important narrative clues to my audience. I used these spaces between scenes to insert two-bar clicks which give the ensemble the tempo of the upcoming section and cue them into alignment with the picture at regular intervals. This allows the tightly scored musical elements to underpin the precise moments in the drama for which they were composed. Harriet Cunningham wrote: *'It's playful, it's dramatic, and it nudges the boundaries between live and recorded, screen and stage, concert and*

film with a delicious sense of exploration.' (A Cunning Blog 2017)

8 *SON-ombra (String Quartet no. 1): Movement 1, SON*

Sean Botha commissioned my first string quartet for his doctoral research project *Secrets Through the Soundglass* in 2018, asking me to respond to electroacoustic composer Denis Smalley's concept of 'spectromorphology' (Smalley 1997) in composing a new work for acoustic instruments. I was taken with Smalley's notion of sonic traces, or the ways in which sound can leave a residue in its wake. This became the driving concept behind my work, reflected in its title, *SON-ombra*, which means SOUND-shadow.

My quartet is in two movements of indeterminate order: *SON* explores opaque, strong, bulky sounds occupying the sonic foreground, and dramatic, goal-oriented gestures. These words by Smalley seemed to convey what I was seeking to do here: 'The notion of gesture as a forming principle is concerned with propelling time forwards, with moving away from one goal towards the next goal in the structure ... governed by a sense of forward motion, of linearity, of narrativity' (Smalley 1997); *ombra* is more transparent, and focused on internal activity and texture, and the spaces between. The Sydney Art Quartet provided generous input during rehearsals through owning and refining my extended techniques, and providing an excellent interpretation of both movements – only one of which has been included here due to

background interference on the live recording of *ombra*. Huge thanks must go to Sean Botha, for his guidance during the process, his interest in my work and for commissioning this piece.

10 *Falling (Movement 2: Snow)*

This is the second movement in my trio *Snow*, for clarinet, piano and cello. It was composed in 2016 on the occasion of the launch of 100clicksWest, my new music venture. During the winter that year I experienced an afternoon of snowfall, observing the snow falling silently, flakes gently tumbling in slow motion – and it is this that the work's slow movement attempts to convey. I used image as a prompt while composing *Falling*; the piece's gentle pace, textural sparseness, and U-shaped registral trajectory (a slow descent from a white sky down to silhouetted, dark, mountainous shapes and back up again to the sky), are very much aligned with the slow-motion video I filmed that afternoon. Across the three movements, visual patterns and light play are reflected in the musical techniques, patterns and gestures I have chosen, and in this movement, I have tried to convey the reverent quality of calm experienced when standing as an observer to the magical workings of nature.

Liner notes by Felicity Wilcox



Felicity Wilcox is an ARIA and AACTA-nominated composer whose output encompasses concert music, film music, song writing and improvisation, music for theatre, installation, dance and radio. She has received commissions for many leading ensembles and her compositions are regularly performed and broadcast in Australia and internationally. As Felicity Fox, she worked commercially as a composer and music director from 1986 to 2016, with a highlight being her role as Assistant Music Director and Composer for

the Paralympic Games opening Ceremony in Sydney 2000. She was the first woman to be nominated for an AACTA (AFI) Award for film composition in Australia (*Redheads*, 1992), and has composed the soundtracks to over 60 screen productions, for which she has received national and international recognition through awards, nominations and film festival screenings.

Felicity was awarded her PhD in composition in 2013 at Sydney Conservatorium of Music under the supervision of Damien Ricketson, and is currently Senior Lecturer in Music and Sound Design at the University of Technology Sydney. Her scholarly publications are in the area of music for multimedia; and she is the editor of *Women's Music for the Screen-Diverse Narratives in Sound*, for Routledge. Felicity advocates for gender equity and diversity in music in various roles at the international and national level. She lives on Darug Country in the Blue Mountains, NSW, with her dog and two young adults, when they're home. www.felicitywilcox.com

Thank you:

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1. *People of this Place*

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2016)

Performed by Jason Noble: Bass Clarinet

2. *Uncovered Ground*

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2015)

Performed by Ironwood: Matthew Greco: Baroque Violin; Nicole Forsyth: Baroque Viola; Daniel Yeadon: Baroque Cello; and Ensemble Offspring: Lamorna Nightingale: Flutes; Liisa Pallandi: Violin; Jason Noble: Bass Clarinet; Claire Edwardes: Percussion; Ben Kopp: Piano

3. *Tambourin* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2014)

and Marin Marais (1717)

Performed by Jason Noble: Clarinet; and Daniel Yeadon: Baroque cello

4. *Le Tourbillon (electronic interlude)* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2014)

and Marin Marais (1717)

Performed by Anthea Cottee: Viola da Gamba; Nathan Henshaw: Tenor Saxophone

Recorded at Sydney Conservatorium of Music by Adrian Barr.

Electronic treatments and mix by Felicity Wilcox at Siren Studios

5. *Le Tourbillon* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2014)

and Marin Marais (1717)

Performed by Jason Noble: Clarinet; and Daniel Yeadon: Baroque cello

6. *Vivre Sa Vie, Composer's Cut*

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2017)

Performed by Ensemble Offspring: Lamorna Nightingale: Flutes; Jason Noble: Bass Clarinet; Claire Edwardes: Percussion; Ben Kopp: Piano

7. *La Reveuse - Coda* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2014)

and Marin Marais (1717)

Performed by Anthea Cottee: Viola da Gamba; Nathan Henshaw: Tenor Saxophone; Jason Noble: Bass Clarinet. Electronic section recorded at

Sydney Conservatorium of Music by Adrian Barr. Electronic treatments and mix by Felicity Wilcox at Siren Studios

8. *SON* (from *SON-ombra*, String Quartet no. 1)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2018)

Performed by Sydney Art Quartet: Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba: Violin 1; Anna Albert: Violin 2; Andrew Jezek: Viola; James Beck: Cello
World premiere performance at Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre 24 February 2018, recorded and mixed by Ian Stevenson

9. *Fragments I-IV* (from *Gouttes d'un Sang Etranger*)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2014)

and Marin Marais (1717)

Performed by Jason Noble: Clarinet; and Daniel Yeadon: Viola da gamba

Electronic section performed by: Anthea Cottee: Viola da Gamba; Nathan Henshaw: Soprano Saxophone

Recorded at Sydney Conservatorium of Music by Adrian Barr.

Electronic treatments and mix by Felicity Wilcox at Siren Studios

10. *Falling* (from *Snow*, Movement 2)

Composed by Felicity Wilcox (2016)

Performed by: Jason Noble: Clarinet; Freya Schack Arnott: Cello; Felicity Wilcox: Piano

Tracks 1&10: Recorded and mixed at Free Energy Device Studios by Richard Belkner.

Tracks 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 & 9: Recorded and mixed at Trackdown Studios by Rose Mackenzie-Peterson

Produced by Felicity Wilcox

Mastered by Martin Wright

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