



## Ten Wee Drams

### **Sarah Watts** **bass & contrabass clarinet**

*Short works inspired by the isle of Raasay*

Saturday 24th October 2000

### **Programme**

Alasdair Nicholson	<i>Bring my pipes and I'll go home</i>
Jane Stanley	<i>The Faery Cup</i>
Iain Matheson	<i>While We Wait</i>
Sarah Watts	<i>The Sound of Temptation</i>
Stuart Macrae	<i>MOBOFCROWS</i>
Piers Hellowell	<i>Time, The Deer</i>
Oliver Searle	<i>The Illicit Still</i>
Pete Stollery	<i>...the vivid speechless air...</i>
Adam Lee	<i>Hallaig</i>
William Sweeney	<i>....ruadh, uaine, da fhilleadh</i>

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## Programme notes

### **Alasdair Nicolson *Bring my Pipes***

As a young child growing up on Skye I spent many days on Raasay with my father. But my abiding memory is of annual Sunday School picnics where we ranged around the island without a care. One of our favourite places was the eerie dilapidation of Raasay House which we wandered through freely and whose peeling walls and crumbling rooms we were convinced were filled with ghosts. In approaching writing this work it is with this ghostly memory that I remember a small piece of my own childhood with music that has a dark atmosphere with hints of melodies floating through like revenants. In this case the tune that sits at the heart of the music is Tog orm mo Phiob (Bring me my bagpipes), a lament for Ruraidh Macleod of the Skye Macleods rather than those of Raasay - my paternal grandmother was from the former clan. The song talks of a longing to be back home; one which I feel more and more as the years go by. In looking at the history of Ruraidh Macleod, I discovered that he died in the Chanonry of Fortrose in 1656 and this made for a more potent connection for me as, when my family left Skye in my teens, it was to Fortrose Academy that I went to school.

### **Jane Stanley *The Faery Cup***

Shadows, flickering lights, glimpses of an ornately decorated den.... this is the imagery that captured my attention when reading the folk-tale about fairies on Raasay (The Faery Cup of Raasay in Alasdair Alpin MacGregor's Peat Fire Flame). It tells the story of a character named Ewen who is invited into a "faery establishment" to join the faeries in their merriment. According to this source, faery homes are "lustrous and gorgeous" with their tables "adorned with vessels of silver and gold". Ewen successfully flees with the beautiful cup, despite the faeries' best efforts to chase him. It wasn't so much the narrative in this folktale that served as an impetus for my piece, but the atmosphere conveyed by it. The piece opens softly and atmospherically, evoking the idea of the faeries' dwelling slowly coming into view. Once inside, light bounces off the array of glistening surfaces, as evoked by sudden shifts in register and dynamics played by bass clarinet. In composing this piece, I was also conscious of the significance of Raasay to the history of pibroch tradition. This is reflected my choice of mode at the start of the piece as well as well as hints of pibroch-style ornamentation. As the piece unfolds, there is a shift towards abstraction, to suggest a gradual retreat from the scene.

## **Iain Matheson *While We Wait***

There is a mysterious waiting process when a new whisky is maturing and when a new piece of music is taking shape. In each case no-one is quite sure of the outcome or how things will change, gradually or suddenly, as the work proceeds. The only certainty is that the ingredients will take their own time, to find their proper place in the finished work.

## **Sarah Watts *The Sound of Temptation***

This work is about the view from the top of Temptation Hill, overlooking Raasay House and the sea to the Cuillin Mountains on Skye. Sarah has spent many hours on Temptation Hill - one of her favourite places on Raasay. The contrabass clarinet becomes an evocative soundscape of sea eagles, whale, wind and rain. It also makes reference to the poem on the memorial stone at the top of the Hill with free improvisational and reflective heartfelt melodic passages.

Sunrise over the hills of Skye  
Sunrise over the sea  
There's not a place in all the world  
In which I'd rather be -  
For I call it the earthly paradise  
Because it's like heaven to me  
Raasay

## **Stuart MacRae *MOBOFCROWS***

The last time my wife and I visited Raasay, in about 2008, we walked round the track to Hallaig from North Fearn, and then up the side of Dun Caan. We didn't see another soul all day, but from the high road, cliffs above and steep slopes below, we witnessed something that made a lasting impression. Two white-tailed eagles - I had only ever seen these before in glass cases - were circling frantically above us, mobbed by several crows, or possibly ravens. In the near total silence surrounding us we could hear the sudden cries of all the birds and the whirling thrum of the air beneath their wings as they swooped past us. We sat and watched, and listened, for several minutes. MOBOFCROWS reflects something of the stillness of the day, and just a hint of the underlying, everyday violent energy of this high-altitude mugging.

## **Piers Hellowell *Time, The Deer***

Raasay is justly celebrated not only for its natural beauty but for its bard, Somhairle MacGill-Eain. My piece is a small tribute to his celebrated elegy Hallaig, taking its opening as its title: 'Time, the deer, is in Hallaig wood'. The bard uses the deer to symbolize passing time; the piece juxtaposes two materials, taking its cue from the poem. Firstly, a leisurely slow air stands for the timeless dimension, while secondly energetic bursts from the low register of this magnificent instrument bring us to the present, among the streams, rustling bushes and bird calls of the village.

## **Oliver Searle *The Illicit Still***

The first legal distillery on the Isle of Raasay opened in September 2017. This short work aims to capture the sounds of the distilling process, aiming to emulate a rhythmic and mechanical environment, with each sound fragment chasing and moving around each other (and perhaps giving the impression of an attempt to evade any authorities who might like to thwart any illegal distillers...).

The four distinct sounds are hissing, dripping, humming and bubbling. Coincidentally, one of my favourite pubs in Aberdeen (where I wiled away many hours whilst a student in the 1990s, when I probably should have been doing something else), was called The Illicit Still. The four sounds created by the clarinet in this piece also act as four separate personalities, each interacting, and engaging each other in conversation in various combinations.

## **Pete Stollery *...the vivid speechless air...***

Much of my recent music and sound art has examined a relationship with place, usually places I have visited, or have grown to know well. I had never been to Raasay, but having been asked to compose a short piece which "takes its influence from Raasay" and which would be "accessible to the islanders", I decided to reflect on this place I had never visited, trying to imagine its sounds, smells and sights, whilst reading and listening to reflections of others who had been there. My imaginary version of Raasay is particularly influenced by Seamus Heaney's translation of Sorley Maclean's poem Hallaig, a haunting reflection on the clearances in the mid 1800s and it is from this poem that my title is taken. The census taken in 1841 stated that 129 people were resident in Upper and Lower Hallaig; the census taken in 1891 stated that the population

was 0. This short piece is 161 seconds in length, each second is dedicated to each individual currently registered as resident on Raasay (census date 2011).

### **Adam Lee *Hallaig***

This piece is inspired by *Hallaig* which was a small town on the Isle of Raasay and was the birthplace of the Scottish poet Sorley MacLean who wrote a poem of the same name. The poem reflects on the nature of time and the historical impact of the Highland Clearances, so in the piece I have tried to capture the devastation of the clearances, both when they happened in the mid-to-late 18th and mid-19th century and today, when all that is left is the mysterious and eerie ruins. This can be heard in the slow tune, marked *lamentoso*, which is based on a traditional Scottish air called MacPherson's Lament. Through this melody you can also hear a strong pibroch influence. Pibroch is a form of music for Scottish bagpipes which consists of a theme and variations and as Raasay has a strong piping tradition, I have tried to imitate this style of piping throughout. The Dancing section takes inspiration from the Scottish tradition of Ceilidh dancing and so is quite boisterous and fast-paced to capture the style of this event.

### **William Sweeny ....*ruadh, uaine, dà fhilleadh (...russet, green, two plaitings)***

The title comes from the last line of the first stanza of Sorley MacLean's great poem *Coilltean Ratharsair* (The Woods of Raasay). It can be pronounced (roughly) as "roo-ah, wy-ne, da eelug". I had written a setting of this poem for voices and orchestra in 1993, and this bass clarinet solo is based on the instrumental and vocal material of the first three stanzas. The beginning of the *tempo giusto* section represents the third verse:

Thug thu dhomh clogadan,	You gave me helmets,
clogadan buadhmhòr,	victorious helmets,
clogadan mireanach,	ecstatic helmets,
buidhe is uaine;	yellow and green;
clogadan glaganach,	bell-like helmets,
clogadan uallach,	proud helmets,
clogadan drithleannach,	sparkling helmets,
clogadan ruadha.	brown-red helmets.

Sorley himself said that the opening verses of the poem invoked *piobaireachd* and this seems to me like the *urlar*, or ground. Gaelic imagery can refer to items of clothing to indicate the moods, emotions or character of the person wearing them and here, the "helmets" might represent the poet's awakening

imagination as he wandered through the great woods which stretch up the western slopes of Dun Caan from Inverarish.

## **Biographies**

### **Sarah Watts**

Sarah Watts studied clarinet at the Royal Academy of Music with Angela Malsbury and Victoria Soames Samek (bass clarinet). Sarah then decided to specialise in the bass clarinet and continued her studies at the Rotterdam Conservatorium bass clarinet with Henri Bok, funded by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust and a Leverhulme Trust Studentship. Sarah was awarded the Exxon prize for the best classical music student in Rotterdam.

Successes include: Winner, UK Howarth Clarinet Competition 2000; Winner, Hawkes Clarinet Prize (RAM) 2001; Winner, Sir Arthur Bliss Chamber Music Prize (RAM) 2000; Winner of wind section and Faber Prize, UK Performing Australian Music competition, 2001 (her clarinet and bass clarinet recital was broadcast on ABC radio); Finalist, Wind section, Royal Overseas League Competition 2000.

Sarah specialises on the bass clarinet and has gained an international reputation as an artist, teacher and researcher on the instrument. She has performed solo repertoire across the UK, Ireland, Asia, Europe and the Americas and has attracted composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Piers Hellawell and William Sweeney to write works for her. In January 2003, Sarah performed a solo bass clarinet recital in London's Purcell Room as part of the Park Lane Group Young Artist Series.

Sarah teaches bass clarinet at the Royal Northern College of Music and is Director Performance at Sheffield University. Sarah hosts bass clarinet and clarinet courses on the Isle of Raasay in Scotland and runs and tutors on other wind chamber music courses in the UK and France. Sarah has given workshops on bass clarinet technique at many establishments around the world.

Sarah performs with Hard Rain Ensemble, rarescale and SCAW.

Sarah has completed a PhD in bass clarinet multiphonic analysis at Keele University and has published 'Spectral Immersions; A Comprehensive Guide to the Theory and Practice of Bass Clarinet Multiphonics' via Metropolis publishers.

Sarah is an Henri Selmer Paris artist, a Vandoren UK artist and a Silverstein Ligature artist.

In 2016, she was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM), London.

### **Alasdair Nicolson**

Alasdair Nicolson was born in Inverness in 1961 and brought up on the Isle of Skye and the Black Isle. His first musical experiences were in traditional music before going on to study at Edinburgh University. An award-winning composer, he is now regarded as one of Scotland's most important musical voices and a significant figure on the UK music scene both as composer, performer and programmer. He has written music for many of the leading orchestras, ensembles and soloists in the UK and abroad and his music has been performed and broadcast all over the world from New York to Rome, Tokyo to Sydney.

[www.alasdairnicolson.co.uk](http://www.alasdairnicolson.co.uk)

### **Jane Stanley**

Jane Stanley is a UK-based, Australian-born composer. Her music has been performed and broadcast throughout the world, having featured at festivals including Tanglewood, ISCM World Music Days, and Gaudeamus Music Week.

She is a Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Glasgow. Her music is published by Composers Edition and the Scottish Music Centre in the UK, and the Australian Music Centre.

[www.janestanley.com](http://www.janestanley.com)

### **Iain Matheson**

Iain Matheson was born in Plean and grew up in Glasgow, where he studied music at the university. He now lives in Edinburgh where he divides his time between teaching and composing. You can hear samples of his music on his website.

[www.iainmatheson.co.uk](http://www.iainmatheson.co.uk)

### **Sarah Watts**

Sarah Watts studied clarinet at the Royal Academy of Music and then bass clarinet at the Rotterdam Conservatorium funded by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust and a Leverhulme Trust Studentship. Sarah has gained an international reputation as an artist, teacher and researcher. She has performed across the UK, Ireland, Asia, Europe and the Americas, and has had many works composed for her. She has published an

internationally respected resource on the theory and practice of bass clarinet multiphonics. In 2016, Sarah was awarded the ARAM (Associate of the Royal Academy of Music). She is a Selmer Artist, a Vandoren Artist and a Silverstein Pro Artist.

[www.sarahkwatts.co.uk](http://www.sarahkwatts.co.uk)

### **Stuart MacRae**

Born in Inverness in 1976, Stuart MacRae's works include a Violin Concerto (2001), Hamartia for cello and ensemble (2004), Gaudete for soprano and orchestra (2008), and Courante for the Dunedin Ensemble (2019), all of which have been performed at the BBC Proms. In recent years Stuart has composed many works for the stage, for the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Scottish Opera and Music Theatre Wales, including the operas The Assassin Tree (2006), Ghost Patrol (2012) and the critically acclaimed The Devil Inside (2015). Anthropocene (2018) will receive a new production in Salzburg in 2020.

[www.stuartmacrae.com](http://www.stuartmacrae.com)

### **Piers Hellawell**

Piers Hellawell's work has been performed around the world by leading artists such as LSO, Håkan Hardenberger, Evelyn Glennie, Philharmonia Orchestra and the Hilliard Ensemble. The CD 'Airs, Waters' in May 2012 was hailed as "gorgeously impassioned work..... a rich kaleidoscope of inspired creativity". Syzygy was premiered in 2013 by Swedish Chamber Orchestra; 2016 (60th Birthday Year) saw Wild Flow at the BBC Proms, while the trio Up By The Roots - a collaboration with poet Sinéad Morrissey - is released in 2019 on a disc of that name, again on Delphian. Piers Hellawell is published by Peters Edition.

[www.piershellawell.com](http://www.piershellawell.com)

### **Oliver Searle**

Oliver Searle is a Glasgow-based composer and educator. He has written music for a wide range of professional, amateur and youth organisations, and has worked as a classroom music teacher, as well as in further and higher education institutions. He was nominated for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in 2013, won a British Composer Award in 2018, and has had works performed at festivals and venues around the world, with broadcasts in Europe and Asia. Oliver is frequently involved in the creation of music for theatre and has completed a number of inclusive music projects with young people.

[www.oliveriredalesearle.co.uk](http://www.oliveriredalesearle.co.uk)



### **Pete Stollery**

Pete Stollery is a composer and teacher based in the north-east of Scotland where he teaches at the University of Aberdeen. He writes mainly for electroacoustic forces using technology to realise his compositional ideas, although, occasionally, he works with human beings, which he finds very stimulating. He is chair of sound, a new music incubator in north-east Scotland and his work is published by empreintes DIGITALEs in Canada.

[www.petestollery.com](http://www.petestollery.com)

### **Adam Lee**

Adam Lee is a clarinettist studying at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where he also studies composition with Tom Wilson. Adam's piece for solo bass clarinet, Hallaig was selected as the winner of Sarah Watts' "Ten Wee Drams" Student Composition Competition. He is thankful for support from The Robertson Trust and Dewar Arts Awards, who support the brightest and best of Scotland's young artistic talent.

[www.adamleeclarinet.com](http://www.adamleeclarinet.com)

### **William Sweeney**

William Sweeney is a Scottish composer. He studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (1967–70), and at the Royal Academy of Music (1970–73) with Alan Hacker (clarinet) and Harrison Birtwistle (composition). He worked as a woodwind tutor for a number of years and later taught composition at the University of Glasgow.

[www.britishmusiccollection.org.uk/composer/william-sweeney](http://www.britishmusiccollection.org.uk/composer/william-sweeney)

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