

Sonic Cradle

with Alex South (clarinets, interactive electronics)
and Katherine Wren (viola)

The Lemon Tree

Thursday 21st October, 1pm

Programme

Alex South and Katherine Wren	<i>In the black holes of the ocean</i>
Oliver Searle	<i>From the Coast</i> (world premiere)
Karen Power	<i>Sonic Cradle</i>
Alex South and Katherine Wren	<i>CETACEA</i>

* *From the Coast* by Oliver Searle was commissioned by **sound**
and supported by the Hope Scott Trust

Programme notes

Alex South and Katherine Wren *In the black holes of the ocean*

If, as biologist Roger Payne writes, whales “give the ocean its voice” then poet Lesley Harrison is among those who are helping to reimagine that voice in the dry zone above the waves. In her poem ‘Whale Song’ (from the collection ‘Beyond the Map’) Lesley evokes not just the cetacean singer but also its surrounding world, given to it primarily through the senses of sound and touch rather than sight. Her singer is neither alien intelligence nor talking whale, but operates on an exquisitely sensuous and expressive level, which, crucially, we humans can share and comprehend through our feeling bodies. In this piece viola, clarinets and pre-recorded percussion evoke the oceanic environment, utilize interactive electronics to echo Lesley’s speech rhythms in ways which echo the original cetacean heterophony, perform their own non-verbal and unscripted roles, dissolve into the swell of the tides.

Oliver Searle *From the Coast for bass clarinet and fixed media*

We are now on a path towards a very different future, where young people's experiences of the natural world will be vastly different from mine. Even if we make drastic alterations to our way of living, and reduce our impact on the planet immediately, we will not see any positive changes for a very long time. The fixed media track in this work rolls onwards, and although the player has some control over certain musical decisions, the destination is set. This piece attempts to capture recollections of past engagement with the sea/coast; each of the sections are a frozen moment in time, never to be re-visited. All sounds on the backing track were recorded by Alex South, in a sea cave, just below The Scores, in St Andrews.

In The Surf - getting out of my depth in the water and panicking, while playing in large waves after a storm.

Foghorn Dreams - falling asleep to the sound of the foghorn on the island of Fidra (in the Firth of Forth).

The Dead Whale - memories of finding a dead Minke Whale, while playing on a beach on a grey day in North Berwick.

Rowing in the Mist - getting lost in the mist at sea in a rowing boat, while on a fishing trip.

Karen Power *Sonic Cradle for amplified viola, arctic ice (fixed media) and photographs*

The composed part of sonic cradle is based entirely on field recordings captured during a residency in The Arctic. I spent 3 weeks recording above, inside and deep below the Arctic ice. The aural score/ stereo playback part is composed entirely of these field recordings and attempts to merge this extraordinary places' quiet, vast and isolated exterior with its explosive and sonically rich underworld. The materials and structural layout focus on the huge sonic spectrum of ice/water and its ever-evolving shapes, contours and layers. Water in all its forms, its hypnotic flow and instantaneous speed changes and jolts, are interpreted here. The pacing and flow of this work is informed by my memory of a brief but intense time spent in this place. My memory of the way things moved, the rapid changes, the light, the 'loaded' silence and the endlessness. The performer is asked to prepare for this work by; reading some text, watching a reflective documentary made by the composer, looking at photographs (which the audience will see) and of course listening to the aural score and directed notes. All preparation aims to 'set-the-scene' so that when the sound enters it is already loaded with context.

Alex South and Katherine Wren *CETACEA*

Throughout the first Coronavirus lockdown, musicians Katherine Wren (viola) and Alex South (clarinets, electronics) worked together remotely with poet Lesley Harrison, exploring the intersection of their interests in animal song and the music and cultures of the North Atlantic. To tell the story of the creation of *CETACEA* is to trace a line outwards from Lesley's poem (itself inspired by an exhibition by artist Marina Rees centred on the bones of a pilot whale). Following that line from Lesley's text we reach an improvised in-person musical encounter and then move to the film (edited and cut by Alex from existing footage to accompany that music). Only then can we retrace that line to the music improvised in this performance, owing as much to the memories of those initial musical impulses as it does to Lesley's words, and now newly responsive to the powerful balletic movements of the pilot whales whose bodily presence takes centre stage.

We are extremely grateful to Lesley Harrison for her poem, to marine biologist Michael Scheer for permitting us to use his audio recordings of pilot whales, and to filmmakers Alexander and Nicole Gratovsky for sharing their film *My Pilot, Whale* (2014) under a Creative Commons license. Above all we salute the magnificent and still-mysterious beings that are at the focus of this work.

Biographies

Katherine Wren

Katherine Wren has been a full-time member of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra since 1998. In 2016 Katherine founded Nordic Viola, a flexible ensemble specialising in contemporary and traditional music from the North Atlantic. She has worked with many musicians around the North Atlantic and memorable performances include an improvised concert in Reykjavik's premier new music venue, *Mengi*, with East Iceland viola player and composer Charles Ross. Katherine has also commissioned new works by emerging composers inspired by landscapes, history and the culture of the Far North. She was shortlisted in 2019 and 2020 for the Scottish Awards for New Music "Making It Happen" category. In 2020 she received a special commendation in the Salomon Prize, awarded by the RPS and ABO to orchestral musicians who have not only shone musically but made a remarkable contribution to the life of their orchestra, its audience and community.

Alex South

Glasgow-based clarinetist and improviser Alex South is currently carrying out doctoral research into the relationship between humpback whale song and

human music at the University of St Andrews and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Recent solo and ensemble performances have included notated and improvised music for clarinets and electronics inspired by whale and birdsong, as well as humpback whale recordings played in multi-channel immersive sound. Alex's piece *Air Out Of The Night* was performed by Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra for GIOFest XII (2019). Alongside his PhD work, Alex plays with the Scottish Clarinet Quartet, The One Ensemble, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, Collective Endeavours and Ensemble Thing, with pre-pandemic performances at Celtic Connections, Counterflows, Cultural Olympiad (Rio), Dance International Glasgow, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Glasgow International Jazz Festival, Hidden Door, Plug, Sound, and Tectonics. His collaboration 'Rough Breathing' with Nichola Scrutton was shortlisted in the 2020 Scottish Awards for New Music.

Oliver Searle

Oliver Searle is a Glasgow-based composer and educator, who has written music for a wide variety of professional, amateur and youth organisations. His music has been performed and broadcast around the world, and he is currently Interim Head of Composition at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He is interested in inclusivity in new music, and capturing personal reflections on past events from life experience, as well as exploring the ways in which he can musically communicate this to others.

Karen Power

Everyday environments and how we hear everyday sounds lies at the core of Karen Power's practice with a continued interest in blurring the distinction between what most of us call 'music' and all other sound. She has found inspiration in the natural world and how we respond to spaces we occupy. She continually utilises our inherent familiarity with such sounds and spaces as a means of engaging with audiences. Resulting works challenge the listeners memory of hearing while simultaneously shifting focus and presenting new contexts for such sounds.

In 2009 Karen completed a PhD in acoustic and electroacoustic composition at SARC (Sonic Arts Research Centre), Belfast, with Prof. Michael Alcorn. Her practice has included field recording elements since 2012. Karen values development time and has been in receipt of global residencies such as; The Arctic Circle, The Banff Centre + Array Music, Canada, The Guesthouse, Ireland, UC Davis, California and in 2015 she received a DAAD Award enabling residence in Berlin for 1 year. She has also been composer-in-Residence with Galway Music Residency, The Model Art Gallery + Music Generation. Karen's work has been commissioned by RTÉ, Bozzini Quartet, SCAW, Carin Levine, Sonar Quartet, Ensemble Mosaik, ConTempo, Ultraschall Festival, MikroMusik,

Music Current, NMD Festival, Retro Disco, Isabelle O' Connell and others. Other musical performances include: RTÉ Symphony Orchestra, Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Modern, the Ulster Orchestra, Argento, Ensemble Mise En, Cathy Milliken, Kate Ellis, Mmm Trio and Quiet Music Ensemble. She has been awarded national and international awards and honorary mentions for her work and has represented Ireland internationally on a number of occasions, most recently with her string quartet @ ISCM, Beijing.

In 2017, Karen became chair of Sounding the Feminists, a collective seeking equality in music across Ireland.

Whale Song

as tides shift

as particles of light descend

in drifts and shelves

at the edges of continents

in the black holes

of the ocean

I sing for you.

I open my mouth for you.

I turn my belly over

and slowly flower

in plankton cloud

in velvet bloom

I arc and moan

like the earth rolling over,

collapsing

to hollow dive

to lung and heave

inside my head

recede/dissolve

a tremor, an aftersound

in tepid layers

in my private deep

moon dark, hanging

curved like an ear

Lesley Harrison

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