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GORDON KERRY

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For Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

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harvesting the solstice thunders

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TASMANIAN
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Gordon Kerry b. 1961

1	Nocturne for double chamber orchestra	11'11
2	Concerto for cello, strings and percussion Sue-Ellen Paulsen <i>cello</i>	14'31
3	Bright Meniscus	8'54
4	Heart's-Clarion for trumpet and strings Geoffrey Payne <i>trumpet</i>	13'21
5	harvesting the solstice thunders	12'35
	Total Playing Time	61'03

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra
David Porcelijn *conductor*

Composing is a very practical activity, and Gordon Kerry is nothing if not a professional at his craft. Each of the pieces on this CD shows varying aspects of a developed musical style. There are common features in the ways in which the musical materials, while shaping themselves into a memorable world in each composition, are articulated by devices which adapt themselves to each circumstance and idea and promote structural coherence. Like most artisans, Kerry works to commissions and with particular occasions for performance in mind. Each of these pieces was conceived with the knowledge of who would first play them – the **Nocturne**, for example, was commissioned by Youth Music Australia and written during Kerry's Peggy Glanville-Hicks Fellowship. It was composed specifically for the instrumental complement available at the 1995 Summer Academy, a group of Australia's finest advanced student instrumentalists conducted by Brett Dean. 'The forces available,' Kerry explains, 'practically amounted to an orchestra of Classical proportions and disposition, but considering that the focus of Summer Academy is chamber music, I chose to divide the ensemble into two. Each contains a wind quartet and a string octet, with the solo piano acting as a kind of bridge.' The context in which a composer hears his own music played can be suggestive: when Kerry was about to begin composing his Cello Concerto he heard the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra play his Nocturne in its New Music

Tasmania Festival. Alban Berg's Chamber Concerto for violin, piano, and 13 instruments was also on the program, and Kerry recalls a conversation with then-concertmaster Barbara Jane Gilby 'about how much she enjoyed playing a work where the virtuoso role was shared around, and there was so much interaction between soloists and individual members of the orchestra.'

The **Cello Concerto** Kerry wrote for Truls Mørk and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra thus became a virtuoso piece for the cello, but one where each member of the orchestra of strings and percussion is required to play in a solo capacity. Writing for the Norwegian cellist came about in a happy way when Truls Mørk, in a TSO concert where he was soloist, heard the 1994 premiere of Gordon Kerry's *harvesting the solstice thunders* (commissioned by the ABC), and at dinner afterwards expressed his interest in playing any work Kerry might write for him. Kerry wrote this concerto supported by the Music Fund of the Australia Council and it was premiered with Truls Mørk in Hobart in 1996. The composer is delighted that the TSO's wonderful Principal, Sue-Ellen Paulsen, agreed to make this recording. This concerto is strikingly successful in combining the demands of virtuosity (as in the three short cadenzas it contains, the first emerging from the solo cello's introduction on a richly resonant open C string, the third making a conclusion to the piece) with the sense of the soloist as first among equals. The orchestral

strings, often as soloists, enter into dialogue with the solo cello in often intricate polyphonic textures, and they too are called upon to push the boundaries of their instruments: unpitched writing, randomly repeated figures, high harmonics, *col legno* and quarter tones. The interventions of tuned percussion are all the more telling for being so brief. Tubular bells announce the first faster section. Then, at the end of the 'slow movement', the glint of high percussion announces a nodal point, described by the composer as 'high, seraphic D flat major chords, with the cello repeatedly trying to escape through upward-rising glissandos'.

Another virtuoso, trumpeter Geoffrey Payne, was to be featured in **Heart's-Clarion**, in which he would be joined by the strings of Brett Kelly's Academy of Melbourne (they premiered the piece, a Victoria Commission, in 1998). 'It was tempting at first to write a straightforwardly flashy piece of virtuosity...but the trumpet can also be a profoundly lyrical instrument; given that I was working with the comparatively restricted palette and mass of the string orchestra, I decided to explore that side of things as well.' A restriction can be a source of clarity and strength.

Schoenberg, who said there was plenty of good music still to be composed in C major, composed his first purely tonal work for 28 years, the Suite for string orchestra, for 'college' orchestras, of whose standards he had a high

opinion. Though his Nocturne's challenging idiom reflects a higher expectation of its first performers, Kerry could nevertheless have echoed Schoenberg's words 'here, a new spiritual and intellectual basis can be created for art; here, young people can be given the opportunity of learning about the new fields of expression and the means suitable for these.' Much the same could be said about audiences of listeners. Perhaps this was in Kerry's mind when he chose to make **Bright Meniscus** commissioned in 1997 by the Canberra Symphony Orchestra unashamedly use the common chords of the diatonic system – that, and the fact that the professional but part-time orchestra might find such an idiom rewarding to put across to its public.

Here, however, another practical dimension was decisive: the blank sheet of music paper as he began to compose the piece for Canberra set Gordon Kerry thinking of ways to relate it to the city. 'I remembered reading a poem entitled *Canberra in April ...* by J R Rowland, which begins with a beautiful evocation of the landscape in which Canberra sits:

...distances immense
And glowing at the rim, as if the land
Were floating, like the round leaf of a water-plant
In a bright meniscus.

The image is a powerful one, both in its sense of sweeping vistas that are so common in Canberra, and the luminosity of such

landscapes, but also because the term meniscus vividly evokes surface tension. Something that seems still and calm, like the surface of water, is in fact the product of a complex of energies.' Of all the pieces on this CD, *Bright Meniscus* is perhaps the one where Kerry's music most beautifully synthesises Romantic and impressionist elements such as the opening's 'luminous' octaves, reminiscent of Richard Strauss' *Aus Italien*. The fast wind writing with which this contrasts will be readily recognised as part of Kerry's distinctive sound world.

The titles of several of these pieces are invitations to enter into Gordon Kerry's world of reading, of experience, of imagination. His word-windows into that world are not manifestos, nor do they prescribe a way of listening, though they enrich and stimulate it. Nocturnes, for Kerry 'are traditionally restful or meditative pieces, but night is also the time of dreams (good and bad), passion, fear and various other emotions.' The intensity of Kerry's music is equally found in the restlessness of the more fitful melodies, as in the serenity of night thought, where longer melodies tend to prevail. The expanded chamber music dimension of the ensemble recalls Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony No.1, with its constantly changing textures and the emergence of smaller groups. Kerry's polyphony is sometimes antiphonal and sometimes horizontal, across the two groups. The varied interactions, playing as it were with stereo

effects, give Kerry an eagerly exploited range of additional combinations of sounds and ideas, and, by contrast with Schoenberg's relentlessly tense expressionism, Kerry's achievement is to pass rapidly from passion to meditation and back.

Geoffrey Payne and his instrument inevitably suggested the last trump, but in writing **Heart's-Clarion**, Kerry wanted 'to avoid the merely apocalyptic'. The title, from the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins' *That Nature is an Heraclitean Fire, and of the Comfort of the Resurrection*, does have apocalyptic connotations:

... the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping,
joyless days, dejection.

Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade,
and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire,
leave but ash:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is,
since he was what I am ...

'The image as used here,' writes Kerry 'is more generally one of hope. The piece is dedicated to my sister Dianne who at the time of its composition and premiere was bravely fighting a fatal disease.' The confirmation of hope comes in the coda, where a series of common chords supports the trumpet's heart-easing, but twelve-note, melody. Up to this affecting conclusion

with its final open strings, the clarion has been exploring, its lyricism sometimes halting, its scurrying spectral and frequently muted, reminders that the trumpet's call is often heard, in the words of another poet, 'on a darkling plain, Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight'. Glimpses of a sustained resolution are undercut by disquieting uncertainties – dissonance, and even hints of anger, in the way the strings and trumpet interrupt each other, the strings' potential for energetic rhythmic patterning never settling into predictability.

An affinity with Hopkins' wrestling with language and meaning to extrude intensely memorable but sometimes difficult images will be found in the textures, structures and emotional charts of more than one of Kerry's pieces on this CD. The music is that of a life deeply lived, and demands to be lived with.

The affinities between music and the other arts were explored by the symbolist poets and perhaps it's no accident that Gordon Kerry finds in the poems of Hart Crane 'a highly charged symbolist language, a meditation on life, death, love, time, art and such like'. No accident, either, that this poetry 'dominated by the image of the sea, by turns seductive and threatening but always changing' inspired **harvesting the solstice thunders** – music which, Kerry explains, is, 'like Debussy's sea-epic, something of a symphonic sketch'. Indeed the music's tribute to Debussy's *La Mer* even takes the form at one point of a subtle allusion.

The six *Voyages* poems from which the title is drawn were fashioned as a souvenir of Crane's brief relationship with a young sailor he met in the spring of 1924. *Voyages* defy selective quotation. Crane has been said masterfully to use variations in rhythm and syntax to establish a powerful, nearly invisible foundation. This provides dynamic forward movement to poetry with significance drawn from many conflicting and overlapping registers. Compare the composer on his *harvesting the solstice thunders*: 'While I hope the music is evocative and sensual, it does also concern itself with finding a satisfying abstract form.' He describes how 'three elements of the fast opening form a kind of ritornello: a dark turbulent texture given out by bassoons, bass clarinet, cor anglais against wide horn calls, a series of almost pure major chords on full brass and strings; a glittering rapid texture of woodwinds and tuned percussion...the harmonic idiom throughout the piece is derived from six-note chords, each of which has a distinctive character as a result of a limited number of intervals. The rhythmic aspect of the piece also makes much use of sudden changes of metre, which gives the music a little extra energy and avoids the sense of a constant pulse. The slow central section achieves its changes of tempo by rhythmic modulation, where a cross-rhythm in one tempo becomes the basic pulse for the next section.'

Kerry's orchestral piece, he tells us, is like a kind of voyage – its one movement structure in

clearly defined sections ends with an altered version of the music with which the piece begins, 'as after any time away, "home" looks slightly different.'

Each piece recorded here is a port-of-call in Kerry's musical voyage, but rather than finding in the chronology of composition stages of development, it may be better to recognise some of the common elements in a musical language which forms new amalgams in the crucible of each new creation. This is the language of an ear open to music of the composer's time and to the whole heritage, neither courting easy popularity, nor prisoner to any stylistic prescription or label. The unfolding 'story' of Kerry's music is to be sensed less in strongly drawn surface contrasts of sound and texture than in overlapping departures in new directions. Among the technical aspects of the music the composer hears and refines into utterance are formal designs which grow out of a sensitivity to the relative proportions of any piece's constituent sections. Within and across these sections, and without diffusing his musical personality, Kerry uses both strict and aleatoric counterpoint, simple diatonic harmony contrasted with the characteristic vocabulary of six-note chords. As he composes, Kerry senses and controls the elements of local and global meaning, the adaptability of his harmonic means working hand in hand with an analogous modulation of tempo, maintaining a musical

unity within which contrasts can play themselves out.

Gordon Kerry has also given some revealing keys to the life experience out of which this music grew, what was in his head and heart when he wrote it. The music can be heard as a celebration of human existence, of death, loss and fear as well as sensual or spiritual joy. How we listen is out of the composer's hands: as an artefact, this CD is a collection of pieces for various orchestral combinations, with or without soloist, composed by Gordon Kerry between 1993 and 1998, and purposefully recorded in authoritative performances by an orchestra and conductor much associated with Kerry's music. It asks to be listened to, for its musical values, and pleasures.

David Garrett

Gordon Kerry

Gordon Kerry lives in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range in northeastern Victoria, Australia. Since 1993 his orchestral music has been commissioned by the ABC, BBC, Symphony Australia, Australian Youth Orchestra and Ars Musica Australis. Symphonic works, several concertos and works for voice and orchestra have been premiered by conductors such as Mark Elder, Markus Stenz, Stephen Barlow, Mathias Bamert and David Porcellijn with soloists including Truls Mørk, Geoffrey Payne, Esther van Stralen, Merlyn Quaife and Francesco Celata. His works have been premiered in the major concert halls of Australia, the Ulster Hall and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and have been broadcast extensively.

He has written a large body of chamber works for ensembles in Australia, several to commission from Musica Viva Australia, and in the UK, Germany and Russia. He has composed many solo instrumental and a range of choral works as well as music specifically for educational purposes. Recently he has written a number of pieces for the regional community in which he lives.

His opera *Medea* has had seasons in Australia and the USA with Chamber Made Opera and in Germany with the Berliner Kammeroper.

A former student of Barry Conyngham at the University of Melbourne, Kerry has received

awards and fellowships from the Australian Music Centre, Australia Council, Peggy Glanville-Hicks Trust and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. In 2003 he was awarded the Centenary Medal for his service to Australian society through music.

Kerry is also a writer on music, contributing to books published in Australia and the UK, to specialist magazines and writing feature articles and reviews for a number of major newspapers and annotations for classical music presenters.

Sue-Ellen Paulsen

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra's Principal Cello Sue-Ellen Paulsen studied in Vienna with André Navarra after completing her studies at the Queensland Conservatorium with Richard Dedecius. She toured the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy as soloist with the Queensland Youth Orchestra in 1980 and in the same year won the ABC Concerto Competition. She was cellist with the New England String Quartet in Armidale for three years prior to her appointment with the TSO. Sue-Ellen Paulsen was one of two Australians invited to play in the World Philharmonic Orchestra in Montreal, Canada in 1988.

Sue-Ellen Paulsen has been Guest Principal with the Sydney Symphony, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Australian Chamber Orchestra. She was invited to join the Australian Chamber Orchestra for its 1995 American and 1996 European

tours and in April and May of 1997 she travelled throughout the Czech Republic giving recitals in castles in Bohemia and Moravia.

Sue-Ellen makes regular solo appearances with the TSO, performing concertos by Haydn, Milhaud, Lalo, Shostakovich, Ligeti and Sallinen, among others. In 1995 she gave the world premiere performance of Andrew Ford's cello concerto *The Great Memory*, which was composed especially for her. She has also featured as soloist with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra in CD recordings of compositions by Peter Sculthorpe and Richard Mills' Cello Concerto. With support from the Australia Council, she has commissioned works from Gordon Kerry and Antony Partos.

In 2002 Sue-Ellen Paulsen appeared in recital with pianist Caroline Almonte (broadcast live on ABC Classic FM) and performed Saint-Saëns' *La Muse et le poète* with Irish violinist Fionnuala Hunt and the TSO.

Geoffrey Payne

Born in 1957, Geoffrey Payne became interested in brass playing when he attended rehearsals and performances with his father who played tuba in a brass band. It was not long before he himself was playing cornet.

At the age of 12, Geoffrey swapped the cornet for the trumpet and was awarded a scholarship to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music where he gained his Performer's Diploma. In 1976, he

received a scholarship to join the ABC Training Orchestra and, in the same year, was appointed to the trumpet section of the Sydney Symphony. Three years later he joined the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra as Associate Principal; he was promoted to Principal Trumpet in 1986. That same year, Geoffrey was invited by the San Diego Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor, David Atherton, to appear as Guest Principal Trumpet. He was invited back to the United States the following year to perform with the International Trumpet Guild based in Michigan.

Geoffrey Payne has performed as a soloist with the Melbourne, Adelaide, West Australian and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras and the Sydney Symphony. In 1995, he made his debut with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and performed Richard Mills' Trumpet Concerto with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra under Hiroyuki Iwaki in Melbourne and under Sir William Southgate in Albury and Shepparton.

Geoffrey Payne is a regular artist with Hiroyuki Iwaki's Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa in Japan and in November last year was soloist for the Ensemble's European tour. He frequently performs in chamber groups and with contemporary music ensembles. He has recorded two CDs with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, *Trumpet Concertos* and *Bel Canto Trumpet*.

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra is acclaimed as one of the world's finest small orchestras. German-born Sebastian Lang-Lessing is the orchestra's Chief Conductor and Artistic Director.

The TSO presents an exciting and diverse annual concert series in Hobart and Launceston as well as concerts in regional centres. With a full-time playing strength of 47 musicians, its core repertoire is that of the Classical and early Romantic periods. It is, however, a versatile orchestra, performing repertoire from Baroque to jazz, popular music, opera and ballet, and is recognised for championing contemporary music.

The TSO records regularly for radio broadcasts, compact discs and soundtracks for television and film. It was the first Australian orchestra to record the complete Beethoven symphonies, and its recent recordings on international and Australian labels have been received with critical acclaim. In 2003, the orchestra launched its Australian Music Program and in 2004 releases the first recordings of orchestral music as part of the TSO Australian Composer Series.

Encouragement of young talent is of paramount importance to the TSO. It provides an education program and collaborates extensively on a range of programs with Symphony Australia, the Australian Youth Orchestra and the Australian Music Centre.

The TSO has performed in most of the major Australian festivals and regularly travels to mainland Australia, touring both capital cities and regional centres. It has performed in Greece, Israel, Indonesia, South Korea, China, Argentina, Canada and the USA.



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David Porcelijn

David Porcelijn is one of the most outstanding Dutch musicians of his generation. After several years conducting mainly outside Europe he has now returned to regularly work with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, South West German Radio Symphony Orchestra Baden Baden and Freiburg, Orquesta Filharmónica de Gran Canaria, North German Radio Philharmonic Hannover, the BBC Orchestras of London, Wales and Scotland, the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, amongst many others. Beyond his excellent work in the core repertoire, an abiding interest in new music has also seen him conducting KammerensembleN in Sweden and the Nieuw Ensemble of his native Amsterdam. A most highly regarded orchestral trainer, he has held the positions of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Music Director and Conductor of the Netherlands Dance Theatre and been a regular guest conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In recent seasons he has toured China as well as North and South America with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

He has a broad operatic repertoire, making his Opera Australia debut in 1991 and conducting opera in Britain for the first time in 1994 at Opera North. In 1992 he was awarded the prize

as Best Opera Conductor at the Munich Biennial for a production with Netherlands Opera.

David Porcelijn's many recordings have been principally made for ABC Classics in Australia. The most recent of these is his complete cycle of Beethoven Symphonies with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, which was released in 2002. Amongst others are Messiaen's *Eclairs sur l'Au-delà* with the Sydney Symphony (which won the 1994 award for ABC Classic FM Australian Recording of the Year) whilst his records with the Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras have included CDs of music by the Australian composers Richard Meale, Peter Sculthorpe (whose *Sun Music I-IV* won the 1997 ARIA award for Best Australian Classical Recording), Nigel Westlake and Matthew Hindson. Other recordings for ABC Classics include Schubert Lieder (orchestrated by Brahms, Reger, Offenbach and Liszt), Overtures by Auber, the first in a series of Showpieces for Piano and Orchestra with Ian Munro as soloist and Harp Concertos played by Alice Giles. For EMERGO he has recorded music by the Dutch composers Tristan Keuris (with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus) and Hans Kox and he is currently recording symphonies by Christian Sinding with the North German Radio Philharmonic Hannover for the German company cpo. This project has been so successful that cpo has asked him to record on a regular basis.