

**Dissertation in Music Performance**

**by**

**Richard M. Narroway**

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**Dissertation Committee:**

**Professor Richard Aaron, Chair  
Associate Professor Danielle Belen  
Professor Aaron Berofsky  
Professor Andrew Jennings  
Professor Robert Savit**

Richard M. Narroway

[rnarrow@umich.edu](mailto:rnarrow@umich.edu)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
<b>RECITAL 1: CELLO CONCERTO WITH PERCUSSION</b>	1
Program	1
Program Notes	2
<b>RECITAL 2: THREE CELLO SUITES BY BENJAMIN BRITTEN</b>	5
Program	5
Program Notes	6
<b>RECITAL 3: SOUNDS OF AUSTRALIA</b>	13
Program	14
Program Notes	14
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	26

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation encompasses three unique programs for cello, each governed by distinct musical styles. Despite the different aesthetic approaches and cultural backgrounds of the composers, it is interesting to consider the fact that much of this music was written around the same time, specifically the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As such, these programs open up a fascinating dialogue of aesthetics, whereby one is able to compare the styles and techniques used by contemporary composers—of both Western and non-Western roots—and their individual approaches to writing for the cello as a solo instrument.

The first program features Tan Dun's *Elegy: Snow in June*, a concerto for cello and four percussionists composed in 1991. The unconventional instrumentation allows for a true array of timbres and effects, immersing the listener in an exciting, albeit at times harrowing, journey. Based on the 13th-century Chinese drama by Kuan Han-Ching, in which a young woman is executed for crimes she did not commit, Tan Dun's *Elegy* functions as a kind of lament, singing of light in the face of darkness, and hope in the face of tragedy.

Benjamin Britten's *Three Cello Suites* are the focus of the second program. These works, undoubtedly influenced by Bach's monumental cello suites from the early eighteenth century, were the product of a fruitful friendship between Britten and the Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich. Throughout the suites, Britten makes use of several traditional forms, yet superimposes onto them his own distinctly modern perspective. Particularly notable is his

extensive use of war motives, which occur throughout all three suites, a reflection of his pacifist views and strong condemnation of war.

The third program, *Sounds of Australia*, includes a collection of unaccompanied cello works, which draw inspiration from the rich cultural history and unique natural environments of Australia. While the compositional treatment changes rather significantly from piece to piece, all the works on the program are steeped in the same kind of distinct Australian style, characterized by evocative timbres, indigenous contours and rhythms, and a general sense of openness and breadth. With the exception of a few key moments in the program, the underlying mood is calm and meditative, which is one of the most powerful qualities of this music.

**RECITAL 1: CELLO CONCERTO WITH PERCUSSION**

*Monday, August 7, 2017*  
*Harris Concert Hall, Aspen, Colorado*  
*6:00pm*

**Elegy: Snow in June** (1991)  
Jonathan Haas, *conductor*  
Aspen Percussion Ensemble

Tan Dun  
(b. 1957)

## PROGRAM NOTES

Tan Dun (b. Simao, Hunan Province, 1957), rose to prominence in the 1980s as the leading composer of the Chinese “New Wave,” a generation of artists who flourished by embracing diverse cultures and traditions in their music.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, his music is characterized by a trans-cultural language, often blending together elements of contemporary Western styles and traditional Chinese music. This integration of different influences has given his music universal appeal, earning him the Grawemeyer Award in 1998, and perhaps most notably, an Academy Award for best music score to the film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1991 *Elegy: Snow in June* for cello and percussion, Tan avoids the traditional dramatic structures of Western music, instead relying on contrasting tempo relationships and an endless variety of instrumental timbres to convey the powerful thirteenth-century story of a young woman who was executed for crimes she did not commit. In Tan’s words, “even nature cries out for her innocence: her blood does not fall to earth, but flies upward; a heavy snow falls in June; and a drought descends for three years.”<sup>3</sup> Although the instrumentation is unconventional as far as concertos are concerned, the four-percussionist ensemble works in favor

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<sup>1</sup>Joanna C. Lee, “Tan Dun,” in *Grove Music Online*, accessed April 7, 2018  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000042657>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Tan Dun, “Elegy: Snow in June,” Tan Dun Official Website, accessed April 7, 2018  
<http://tandun.com/composition/elegy-snow-in-june/>

of the underlying narrative, producing a remarkable variety of sounds—at some points even tearing paper or hitting stones together—to capture the atmosphere of the story.

Written as a single-movement concerto, Tan continuously alternates slow and fast sections, so that the music at times sounds reflective and peaceful, and at other times, much more urgent and forward-moving. The work unfolds in the manner of a set of free variations, though the listener only twice hears the full-fledged “theme.”

It opens with a distant, fragmented cello solo based around the note G, occasionally ornamented by gentle Chinese bells, bowed cymbals and a clattering of stones. The Chinese influence is discernible from the very outset, with small glissandi and exaggerated vibrato oscillations that resemble an erhu. After a short but passionate cadenza, the fragmented cello lines return an octave higher, building in intensity until the ensemble erupts with a vigorous, rhythmic section full of running sixteenth notes. The cello enters urgently, with quick, syncopated material emphasized by jagged contours and abrupt pizzicato gestures. As the music calms, one hears a return of Chinese-influenced sound textures including left hand pizzicato grace-notes and ricochet strokes. This dovetails to a reprise of the earlier cadenza, before moving toward a complete thematic statement, marked *Amorevole* (loving; affectionate), where the cello finally has the chance to sing through a full enunciation of the theme, unhindered by percussive outbursts in the ensemble. This section seems to form the emotional heart of the work, offering a moment of warmth before dispersing once again into more agitated music. The remainder of the work continues this juxtaposition of fast and slow music, bringing together multiple kinds of notable influences. At one point, the cello even seems to take on the role of a rock guitar, hammering out a series of double-stop fifths, resembling power chords. The work gradually



builds in intensity until the final *Adagio*, where the cello presents a sweet, melancholic version of the theme, with simmering Marimba tremolos in the background.

While the continuous alternation of fast and slow music could potentially run the risk of losing momentum, the endless variety of instrumental textures ensures that the listener is always fully immersed in the musical narrative, eagerly anticipating what is about to follow. This is further aided by the many different kinds of stylistic influences that appear throughout the piece — from Chinese folk sounds to Western Rock music—which allow the music to speak to a wide audience, expressing deeply the entire emotional spectrum of the story. Ultimately, of course, this bringing together of different cultures is a hallmark of Tan’s compositional style, and one of the central reasons his music has become so popular in recent decades.

## RECITAL 2: THREE CELLO SUITES BY BENJAMIN BRITTEN

*Saturday, December 9, 2017*  
*Walgreen Drama Center, Stamps Auditorium*  
*7:30pm*

### **Suite no. 3, Op. 87 (1971)**

Introduzione: *Lento*  
Marcia: *Allegro*  
Canto: *Con moto*  
Barcarola: *Lento*  
Dialogo: *Allegretto*  
Fuga: *Andante espressivo*  
Recitativo: *Fantastico*  
Moto perpetuo: *Presto*  
Passacaglia: *Lento solenne*

### **Suite no. 2, op. 80 (1967)**

Declamato: *Largo*  
Fuga: *Andante*  
Scherzo: *Allegro molto*  
*Andante lento*  
Ciaccona: *Allegro*

### **Suite no. 1, op. 72 (1964)**

Canto primo: *sostenuto e largamente*  
Fuga: *Andante moderato*  
Lamento: *Lento rubato*  
Canto secondo: *sostenuto*  
Serenata: *Allegretto (pizzicato)*  
Marcia: *Alla marcia moderato*  
Canto terzo: *sostenuto*  
Bordone: *Moderato quasi recitativo*  
Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto: *Presto*

## PROGRAM NOTES

In September 1960, English composer Benjamin Britten attended the London premiere of Dmitri Shostakovich's Cello Concerto no. 1, performed by the work's dedicatee, Mstislav Rostropovich.<sup>4</sup> A close friendship soon developed between Britten and the Russian cellist—one of the most fruitful composer-performer partnerships of the twentieth century—leading to the composition of five works for Rostropovich: a Cello Sonata, a Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, and Three Suites for Unaccompanied Cello.<sup>5</sup>

The pair ended up collaborating on several occasions throughout the 1960s, including the premiere performances of both the Cello Sonata and Cello Symphony (in 1961 and 1964 respectively), with Britten as pianist and conductor. Britten began working on the Cello Suites in 1964 and completed them over a period of seven years, with Rostropovich giving the premiere of each suite at Britten's own Aldeburgh Festival in Suffolk.<sup>6</sup>

The Bach influence (unavoidable in this medium) is evident in Britten's use of traditional Baroque forms, among them the *fuga*, *ciaccona*, and *passacaglia*, and the array of Bachian devices he incorporates within them (discussed below). Unlike the Bach Suites, however, these movements appear more in the guise of character pieces than dances, perhaps a reflection of the more flexible function of the twentieth century suite as opposed to the eighteenth century suite.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Banks, Philip Brett, Jennifer Doctor, Judith LeGrove, and Heather Wiebe, "Benjamin Britten," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed December 8 2017.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000046435>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

To be sure, in the Baroque period the term, suite, was used quite specifically to denote a collection of dance movements in the same key; nowadays, however, it can be applied rather freely to describe any ordered set of pieces designed to be performed in one sitting.<sup>7</sup> In Britten's Suites, the music—with its fluid key center, ambiguous metrical relationships, sudden tempo fluctuations, and constantly evolving mood—rather quickly distances itself from the precedent of Bach's Suites. The result is an imaginative collection of character pieces full of colors and theatrical effects, that draw the listener into a vivid and profound journey.

It is worth noting that when Britten began composing the Suites, he was still primarily known as a composer of vocal works, particularly opera and large-scale choral pieces. In fact, his instrumental contributions were fairly limited between 1945-1960, with the exception of a few pieces for the Aldeburgh recorder group, a 1953 *Variations on Sellenger's Round*, and a 1959 *Fanfare for the Cathedral of Bury St Edmunds*.<sup>8</sup> Despite the instrumental conception of these suites, however, the vocal affinity of Britten's compositional style is still fairly prevalent throughout. This can be seen in the several *Canto* movements that frame the first suite, and the long, singing lines of the *Introduzione* and *Fuga* in the third Suite. The rhetoric vitality of the opening *Declamato* in the second suite also seems eerily reminiscent of the Wilfred Owen text setting in his 1961 *War Requiem*. In fact one could argue that much of the music presented in these suites is steeped in a vocal style, lending it not only a heightened sense of communicative power, but also an endless sense of lyricism and *line*, whereby Britten is able to develop and elaborate his melodic ideas in an inexhaustible number of ways.

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<sup>7</sup> David Fuller, "Suite," In *Grove Music Online*, accessed December 8, 2017.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000027091?rskey=LxC0Vf&result=1>

<sup>8</sup> Paul Banks et al., "Benjamin Britten," In *Grove Music Online*.

This sense of vocality and communicative power is further enhanced by Britten's predilection for war motives. For the majority of his life, Britten was an outspoken pacifist who condemned violence and war, often using his music to express these political views.<sup>9</sup> As such, war motives—bugle calls, marches, battle sequences—can often be heard in his music. The Three Suites are no exception: each suite includes rather unsettling scenes that echo his anti-violent sentiments. This can be heard particularly in the *Marcia* of Suite 1, the *Declamato* of Suite 2 and the *Marcia* of Suite 3. In each of these cases, as in much of his other music, the “war” scenes tend to be framed by contrasting material of a more elegiac, mournful character. The effect is comparable to that of his War Requiem, in which he intersperses traditional movements of the Latin Mass for the Dead with nine poems by Wilfred Owen, a war poet who died in WWI. The Owen settings serve to disrupt the progression of the Latin mass, contradicting the liturgical calmness of the text with violent battle scenes that force the listeners to confront the horrors of war. The same approach is used in his cello suites, though on a smaller scale, allowing the more combative movements to come across with even more force and impact.

#### SUITE 1 (1964)

In the first suite, Britten adapts the six movement structure of Bach's cello suites, though more so in the manner of character pieces than dances, and superimposes onto it his own distinctly modern perspective. Britten uses the *Canto* movement to frame and separate the other six movements, modifying it for each of its four returns throughout the suite (comparable to the Promenade in Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition*). Particularly notable is the opening

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

chord of the *Canto*, which could be considered an amalgam of the tonic and dominant sonorities of Bach's Prelude from Suite no. 1. Some may argue that this is merely a coincidence, but I believe that it was almost certainly a conscious decision on Britten's part, especially considering the fact that Britten was inspired to compose these pieces after hearing Rostropovich perform the Bach Suites. It is almost like a subtle nod to Bach's influence, acknowledging that these Suites—though they certainly diverge from Bach's precedent—are part of the same line of succession that Bach established centuries ago.

The “character” movements seem to draw upon—or at least allude to—aspects of the *Canto*, particularly its intervallic shapes and irregular phrase structures. The first character movement is a *Fuga*, in which he incorporates an array of Bachian compositional devices, including inversion (stating the subject upside down), bariolage (an alternation of notes on neighboring strings) and augmentation (a lengthening of the note values of the subject), constantly creating a sense of variety in his treatment of multiple interweaving voices. This is followed by a *Lament*, a condensed yet emotionally rich movement, characterized by the sombre quality of a falling minor triad. The hushed, transposed *Canto Secondo* introduces the *Serenata*, an entirely plucked movement with guitar-like chords and an exotic character. This is followed by a *Marcia*, evocative of a battle-scene led by a drum corps, as illustrated by the bugle-like harmonics and the *col legno* (with the wood of the bow) drum rhythms. The *Canto Terzo*, the darkest and most harmonically ambiguous enunciation of the *Canto* theme, dovetails into an eerie *Bordone*, which is built upon a drone on the open D string, with chromatic figurative material and left-hand pizzicato played both above and below the drone. The final movement, a volatile, buzzing *Moto Perpetuo* full of running sixteenth notes, builds to a glorious and climactic return of the opening *Canto* theme that drives the work to its dramatic conclusion.

## SUITE 2 (1967)

Suite 2 consists of five individual and self-contained movements, none of which connect to each other thematically (unlike the two other suites). That being said, thematic development plays a key role in each of the five movements. The opening *Declamato* sets up the dark character of the Suite, with its fanfare-like theme, full of rhetoric power. Yet it is not an entirely confident declamation; on the other hand, there seems to be a quiet sense of inner turmoil, as can be heard through the dynamic fluctuations and expressive treatment of half-steps. The *Fuga* is unusual for the sparseness of its thematic subject, and unfolds in a very hushed dynamic throughout. Again, Britten makes extensive use of traditional fugal devices such as inversion, stretto, and registral expansion, creating the illusion of there being multiple voices even while the cello only plays a single line (something Bach did so masterfully in his cello suites). The movement proceeds in the manner of clockwork: with absolute and quiet precision. The diabolical *Scherzo*, marked “ruvido” (to be played in a rough manner), forms a drastic contrast to the preceding movement, full of jagged accents and volatile dynamics. This is followed by an eerie *Andante Lento*, marked “non espressivo” (not expressive), which features a menacing left-hand pizzicato drone-like gesture. The monotony of its thematic content lends this movement a transitional quality, not in the sense that it is any less important than the other movements, but more in the way that it adds a dimension of expressive breadth to the larger journey of the suite as a whole. In other words it serves to create momentum leading up to the final *Ciaccona*, a monumental edifice full of ingenious thematic development. Particularly noteworthy is the “tranquillo” section in which the theme is inverted. The movement ends with a rather frivolous

gesture of dismissal, with an interesting marking, “presto!” (note the exclamation mark), ending the suite on a more positive note.

### SUITE 3 (1971)

The third suite functions almost like a theme-and-variations, but backwards. It is only after experiencing the nine diverse character movements of the work that the thematic source is finally revealed: three Russian tunes from Tchaikovsky’s volumes of folk-song arrangements, and the “Kontakion” (Hymn for the Departed), which Britten took from the *English Hymnal*. The reverse-variation technique is comparable to Britten’s *Lachrymae* (1950) for viola and piano, and the *Nocturnal* (1963) for guitar, both based on songs by John Dowland.

In a way, this suite forms the most touching and personal tribute to the great Russian cellist. The vocal quality is unmistakable, ranging from the “parlando” utterances in the *Introduzione* to the long, expansive lines of the *Fuga*. Again, Britten highlights extremes of mood. Compare, for instance, the frenzied *Marcia* to the heartfelt *Canto*, or the tranquil *barcarola* to the dark and frightening *dialogo*. Structurally speaking, the piece is rather freely written, almost like a set of improvisations around the four themes. When the Russian tunes are finally revealed at the work’s conclusion, they bear a childlike simplicity, all of a sudden transporting the listener into a pure and youthful sound world. Interestingly, he juxtaposes these youthful folksongs, light and naive in character, with a traditional Hymn for the Departed, which is much more solemn and grandiose. In doing so, he paints a rather grave picture for listeners, acknowledging at the same time the dream-like transience of our youth and the inevitability of our mortality. In a way, this final suite is Britten’s own meditation on death.



Note on the program order:

In tonight's program I have chosen to perform the Suites backwards, in the order 3-2-1. The primary reason for this decision is the prevailing mood of each suite. The third ends in such a dark manner, while the first is much more glorious in this regard. Since the program is already so inherently dark, I think it makes sense to end on a more optimistic and uplifting note.

### RECITAL 3: SOUNDS OF AUSTRALIA

*Thursday, March 8, 2018*

*Walgreen Drama Center, Stamps Auditorium*

*5:00pm*

**Prelude and Laughing Rock** (1993-2003) Ross Edwards  
Prelude: Mesto (b. 1943)  
Laughing Rock: Vivace

**Into the Dreaming** (1993) Peter Sculthorpe  
(1929-2014)

**Threnody** (1991-1992) Peter Sculthorpe

**Dawn Lament** (1999) Paul Stanhope  
(b. 1969)

**Water Spirit Song** (2003) Ross Edwards

**Requiem for Cello Alone** (1979) Peter Sculthorpe  
Introit: Calmo  
Kyrie: Con larghezza  
Qui Mariam: Come una preghiera  
Lacrimosa: Calmo  
Libera Me: Con fuoco  
Lux Aeterna: Molto calmo

*Intermission*

**Sonata for Cello Alone** (1959, rev. 2001) Peter Sculthorpe

**Bourrée Echo** (2015) Huw Belling  
(b. 1986)

**Variations on Waltzing Matilda** (2017) Traditional  
*arr. Richard Narroway*

## PROGRAM NOTES

### *About the Composers*

#### **Peter Sculthorpe** (b. Launceston, 1929; d. Sydney, 2014)

Sculthorpe is widely considered to be Australia's most celebrated and influential composer. As a result of his compositional efforts, Sculthorpe successfully established a distinct Australian style that is now universally recognizable and has influenced generations of composers after him.<sup>10</sup> Inspired by the vastness and flatness of Australia's natural landscapes, as well as its indigenous history, Sculthorpe's music has very discernible characteristics: his melodies are long and expansive, and generally rather horizontal in their contours; his rhythms are often rooted in indigenous chants; he likes to incorporate sounds that allude to traditional instruments like the didgeridoo and clap sticks; and many of his works contain sounds of nature. Particularly notable is his masterful grasp of tempo relationships, which he uses to great effect in his music. Generally speaking, his slow music tends to be introspective in character, featuring sustained melodies and harmonies that simmer with emotional intensity, while his fast music evokes moods of ritualistic celebration through the use of percussive, articulated melodies, static harmonies, and a sense of release. Perhaps above all aspects, his music is renowned for its unmistakable national-oriented style; no other composer has so successfully been able to conjure

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Covell, "Peter Sculthorpe," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 7, 2018.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000025275?rskkey=fHL8di&result=1>

up the sounds and images of the Australian outback—motivated by such a deep personal interest in the country’s indigenous history—through their music.

Considering the many works he wrote for the cello, one could assume that Scuthorpe had a special connection with the instrument. These pieces, with their melodic warmth, vivid timbres and wide range of expression, offer a perfect entrée into the sound world of Australia.

**Ross Edwards** (b. Sydney, 1943)

Ross Edwards is one of Australia’s most distinguished and celebrated composers, known for his unique compositional sound world which draws upon traditional aspects of ritual and dance, and on the beauty and diversity of Australia’s natural environment. Much of his work is inspired by his interest in deep ecology and his belief in the need to reconnect music with elemental forces.<sup>11</sup> His music, like Sculthorpe, has a very national-oriented character, yet with more of a focus on florid, decorative melodies and rhythmic dance elements than on sustained, expansive lines. As such, his melodic material tends to outline larger intervals and more angular contours than Sculthorpe’s melodies, which are usually more horizontal. That being said, he has a similar approach to tempo relationships in the way that he likes to juxtapose slower music that evokes a calming, meditative quality with faster music that is more dance-like and exhilarating.

**Paul Stanhope** (b. Wollongong, 1969)

Paul Stanhope is a Sydney-based composer, currently on faculty at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He also serves as the Artistic Chair of the Australia Ensemble based at

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<sup>11</sup> Ross Edwards, “Bio,” Ross Edwards Official Website, accessed March 7, 2018.  
<http://www.rossedwards.com>

the University of New South Wales. A former student of Peter Sculthorpe, many of Stanhope's works contain comparable nationalistic influences. For example, his instrumental works, *Morning Star* (1992-3) and *Mularra* (1998-9), among others, draw upon aspects of Indigenous chants and dance rituals, exploring an extensive range of innovative techniques and timbral possibilities that lend them a distinct Australian character. That being said, his music is by no means confined to a singular style. In fact, his compositional output is rather eclectic, signaling a whole variety of different stylistic influences, from the Second Viennese School to English pastoralism.

**Huw Belling** (b. Sydney, 1986)

Huw Belling is a composer and conductor, and the Principal Artistic Associate of Sydney Chamber Opera. He completed a Doctor of Philosophy in Composition at St. Catherine's College, Oxford, and a Masters of Music at the Royal College of Music, London. Huw and I met in 2006 when I was attending St. Andrew's Cathedral School in Sydney. As the music department teaching assistant and composer-in-residence, he took on various conducting duties, and frequently wrote music for our orchestra and choir rehearsals. I have always been intrigued by his cerebral approach to composition, particularly his attention to structural coherence and motivic development. A competent violinist himself, he has a great understanding of extended instrumental techniques, many of which appear throughout his *Bourrée Echo*.

## *About the Pieces*

### **Prelude and Laughing Rock (1993/2003)**

*Laughing Rock* was written in 1993, as part of the Uluru Project of Tall Poppies Records, which brought together cello pieces by twelve different composers to celebrate the returning of Uluru to its traditional Aboriginal owners. In writing the piece, Ross Edwards was inspired by the unusual fact that some Aboriginal languages use the same word for music and laughter. For Edwards, “*Laughing Rock*...is a joyful utterance in the spirit of healing and reconciliation.” This sense of joy is captured by the upbeat, insistent rhythms, and the virtuosic, leaping quality of the melodic material.

Edwards added the *Prelude* in 2003, which is more reflective and calm in character. Particularly striking is the way he is able to outline a quasi-polyphonic sound world—comparable to Bach in his Cello Suites—by traversing the full range of the cello and highlighting voices in different registers.

### **Into the Dreaming (1993)**

*Into the Dreaming* is a short, tender piece dedicated to the memory of Lilian Peart, who was one of Sculthorpe’s close friends. The work was written as part of the same Uluru Project as Edwards’ *Laughing Rock*. It carries the program note:

The basic material of *Into the Dreaming* was inspired by a quiet, solitary walk in the Valley of the Winds at Kata Tjuta, in the Uluru National Park. I began writing the music on the day of the tragic death of a very dear friend, Lillian Peart. The music, then, sings for her.

It is comprised mainly of longer note values, with many notes tied over the bar line, blurring the sense of meter and giving the music a floating quality. The long, expansive lines, and introspective emotional intensity are characteristic of Sculthorpe's compositional style.

### **Threnody (1991/92)**

Threnody is a one-movement work comprised of four contrasting sections: *Cantando* (singing); *con malinconia* (with melancholy); *Risoluto* (resolute); *con rassagnazione* (with resignation). The main thematic material is based upon an adaptation of the Djilile chant, an Aboriginal lament that Sculthorpe also uses in his large-scale orchestral piece, *Kakadu*.

Sculthorpe dedicated the work to the memory of conductor Stuart Challender, who died of AIDS in December 1991.

The *Cantando* section introduces the monophonic chant, centered around the note, G. The melody has a mourning quality—characterized by gentle rhythmic syncopations and chromatic inflections—with Sculthorpe using the contrasting timbres of the D string and A string to highlight shifts in emotional intensity. Particularly notable is the melody's repetitive, almost monotonous nature, which lends it a sense of inner-tension that yearns to be released. The chant gradually builds in intensity, almost despair, landing on a series of declamatory double-stops that signal the transition into the *con malinconia* section. Similar to *Into the Dreaming*, this middle

section—comprised of sustained, expansive double stops—has a wonderfully spacious and evocative atmosphere that seems to conjure up images of the vast Australian outback. The main theme returns in the *Risoluto* section, though this time in the guise of a didgeridoo-like timbre, with sixteenth-note triplet values and an open G string drone. Once again building in intensity, the theme accelerates in tempo before erupting into a series of emphatic, descending eighth-notes, which mark the work’s climax. The slower music returns at the *con rassagnazione*, this time with a feeling of acceptance and peace, culminating on a C-major double-stop harmony produced by the open C string and an upper harmonic.

It is fascinating to observe Sculthorpe’s handling of tempo relationships in this work. He creates a striking duality between the faster and slower sections of the piece, embedding the faster music with more rhythmic activity (owing to its indigenous roots), and the slower music with a broader, sustained quality (evocative of Australia’s landscapes). This dualistic approach is a true hallmark of his compositional style and occurs throughout many of his other works.

### **Dawn Lament (1999)**

Stanhope wrote this short work as a response to Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s, “Dawn Wail for the Dead,” a poem about the indigenous ritual of greeting each new day by paying respects to those who have passed away. Marked *con dolore* (with sadness), the work’s melodic material is primarily based around a falling half-step motive, which appears in almost every phrase of the piece. The continuous recurrence of this “sighing” figure, oftentimes marked *glissando*, instills the music with a vocal quality that heightens its sense of mourning and grief. The dynamics



remain rather subdued for the most part until the climax of the piece, which features a surge in volume, as well as a quickening of tempo and rhythmic activity, culminating on a devastating high E flat. The final measures of the piece are once again more introspective and somber, marked to be played with a mute.

### **Water Spirit Song (2003)**

*Water Spirit Song* is part of a suite extracted from Ross Edwards' work, *Koto Dreaming*, a piece of music theatre featuring the Butoh Dancer Yumi Umiuare. *Koto Dreaming* was written especially for the 2003 Asian Music and Dance Festival held at the Sydney Opera House, featuring an ensemble of Asian and European instruments including the koto, shakuhachi, cor anglais, and cello. In the original work, *Water Spirit Song*—played by the cello and accompanied by the sound of a waterfall—introduces the work. This version for solo cello, however, excludes the waterfall soundtrack.

The piece is calm and meditative in character, featuring decorative melodies that rise and fall with fluidity and a sense of serene naturalness. Generally speaking, the thematic material is more florid and ethereal than Sculthorpe's, with shorter, more irregular phrase lengths and more exotic-sounding harmonies. It follows a basic ternary structure, with the opening material returning, almost identically, after the contrasting middle section.

## Requiem for Cello Alone (1979)

Perhaps the most moving and profound of Sculthorpe's cello works, the Requiem for Cello Alone is in six sections: *Introit*; *Kyrie*; *Qui Mariam*; *Lacrimosa*; *Libera Me*; *Lux Aeterna*.

The work carries the program note:

For the most part, the music reflects the words of the chosen parts of the Latin text, so that where the text is in the third person, singular or plural, I have used plainchant, and where it is in the first person I have used a more personal music. The work, therefore, alternates between the coolness and objectivity of plainchant, and the warmth, even passion at times, of my own kind of music, which here is concerned with imploring, with the wanting of forgiveness, and the wanting of eternal life.

Sculthorpe takes full advantage of the timbral and expressive possibilities of the cello, even asking that the C string be tuned down to a B flat for an added depth and richness of sonority.

While studying this piece, I could not help but notice subtle similarities to Britten's Third Suite for Solo Cello (1971), and even the legendary War Requiem (1962), both of which were written shortly before this work. (It is interesting to note that, for some time, Britten and Sculthorpe were the only two composers contracted by the publishing company Faber Music Ltd. By 1979—the year Sculthorpe wrote this Requiem—Britten's Three Cello Suites had already been published by Faber. I am almost certain, then, that Sculthorpe would have studied these works closely prior to completing his Requiem). First of all, the mood and melodic shape of the *Introit* sounds eerily similar to the "Mournful song" that appears at the very end of Britten's third suite. They even seem to share the same harmonic framework. In addition, the immediacy and energy of the *Libera Me* movement, marked *con fuoco*, seems to contain parallels to the volatile

*Fantastico* movement in Britten's Suite. Even more interesting, however, is the six-movement framework, which happens to be the same number of movements Britten used in his *War Requiem*. While Britten alternates traditional movements from the Latin Mass with more jarring, war-themed Wilfred Owen text settings, Sculthorpe alternates movements of simple plainchant with more passionate, national-oriented music. Of course, this could all just be a coincidence. At the end of the day these ideas are nothing more than speculation, and there is no way we could know for sure if Sculthorpe was in fact influenced by Britten's works. At the very least, however, they are worthy of some consideration; they have certainly helped shape my interpretative decisions. (To be sure, it is likely that Britten and Sculthorpe are not the only composers who have taken a dualistic traditional-contemporary approach in their Requiem settings. Vaughan Williams, for instance, seems to have envisioned his *Dona Nobis Pacem* of 1936 in a similar fashion, interspersing Walt Whitman poems throughout the Mass. It is possible that Britten could have been influenced by Vaughan Williams, and Sculthorpe by Britten, in which case we would have a fascinating compositional lineage before us! Again, however, we are dealing here with nothing more than speculation and probability. So, at the risk of traveling far beyond the scope of these program notes, I shall end my digression here).

In Sculthorpe's Requiem, the *Introit* establishes two important thematic ideas: the ethereal plainchant music, calm in character, and the sustained, expressive music built on a low B flat drone. These two themes return at various points throughout the work, their melodic and rhythmic content being varied depending on the character and style of the particular movement. The *Kyrie*, *Qui Mariam*, and *Libera Me* movements are steeped in a distinct, personal compositional style, featuring glissandi, left hand pizzicato and unconventional rhythms. The

*Introit, Lacrimosa, and Lux Aeterna* movements, on the other hand, feature calm, meditative music, comprised of single-voiced plainchant, and low B-flat drones.

### **Sonata for Cello Alone (1959/2000)**

Sculthorpe's *Sonata for Cello Alone* was originally written in Oxford in 1959, following a request from an Australian cellist then living in London. The cellist, however, insisted that the work was unplayable. Many years later, Sculthorpe revisited the work, realizing, rather ironically, that it was actually playable (moral of this story: don't trust cellists).

In Sculthorpe's words:

It consists of a somewhat free set of variations upon three ideas: the first is a quasi-Mahlerian melody accompanied by plucked open strings, the second is a rapidly-repeated rhythmic figure, and the third a martial-like motive punctuated by percussive sounds.

In one movement, the work unfolds rhapsodically, dovetailing from one idea to another rather seamlessly. It is much more animated and extroverted in character than the preceding Requiem, and in a general sense more forward-moving.

### **Bourrée Echo (2015)**

In 2015 I commissioned a few young Australian composers to write shorter works that drew upon or "echoed" fragments of a Bach Suite of their choosing. Huw's piece turned out to be

one of my favorites, based upon the Bourrées of Bach's Cello Suite no. 3 in C major. Of this work, Huw wrote:

Meditating on the acoustic possibilities of certain gestures, *Bourrée echo* draws a large orbit around Bach's third cello suite Bourrées: Bach's material is present, but only in the distance, like a star viewed from its last planet.

Although Huw never suggested that the work was inspired by any aspect of Australian culture, or that it was in any way an overt attempt to present something "Australian," he most certainly incorporates distinctly Australian sounds in his compositional palette. Particularly notable is his use of harmonic trills, which are evocative of the kaleidoscopic timbral capabilities of the didgeridoo.

The piece begins with an emphatic C-D-Eb gesture, alluding to the opening of the second bourrée of Bach's third suite, which uses the very same notes. The whole-step-half-step intervallic relationship of these three notes appears in multiple guises throughout the piece, varied by means of contrasting timbres and dynamics. In addition, Huw effectively capitalizes upon the resonant capabilities of the cello, using many open strings and harmonics to create a sense of open space and breadth.

### **Variations on Waltzing Matilda (2016)**

I wrote this set of variations on Australia's beloved *Waltzing Matilda* tune when I was back home in Sydney for Christmas Break in December 2016. I am not sure if it was the fresh Summer weather, or just the simple fact that I was home again, but this particular visit seemed to

stir up feelings of reminiscence and nostalgia for the days of my youth. Composing an arrangement of this song, which I grew up listening to, seemed a perfect outlet for these feelings.

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