



MARSYAS TRIO



IN THE THEATRE OF AIR

THEA MUSGRAVE · JUDITH WEIR
GEORGIA RODGERS · HILARY TANN
LAURA BOWLER · AMY BEACH



In the Theatre of Air



Marsyas Trio

Zubin Kanga *piano*
Helen Vidovich *flute, alto flute, piccolo*
Valerie Welbanks *cello*

photo © Marshall Light Studio

1	Thea Musgrave <i>Canta, Canta!</i> (1997) for alto flute, cello and piano (orig. cl/vc/pn)	3'44
Judith Weir <i>Several Concertos</i> (1980)		
2	Concerto for Violoncello	5'36
3	Concerto for Pianoforte	5'56
4	Concerto for Piccolo	3'19
5	Georgia Rodgers <i>York Minster</i> (2018)	5'25
Hilary Tann <i>In the Theater of Air</i> (2017)		
6	Hérons	1'29
7	Goldfinches	1'41
8	Thrushes	1'41
9	Wild Geese	2'14
10	Hawk	2'25
11	White Owl	1'31
12	Starlings	4'50
Laura Bowler <i>Salutem</i> (2014)		
13	Stone Age	3'23
14	Bronze Age	3'06
15	The Middle Ages	2'56
16	Industrial Revolution	3'07
17	Modern Age	4'03
Amy Beach <i>Two Pieces for Flute, Cello and Piano, Op. 90</i> (1921)		
18	Pastorale	3'31
19	Caprice, 'Water Sprites'	0'58
Total timing		60'54

Notes by Heather Roche

The year 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of (some) women getting the vote in the UK, and is celebrated with this release by the Marsyas Trio, featuring works by five living British composers and one notable American.

1918 marked a milestone in the feminist movement, and such milestones have been since framed in terms of ‘waves’. The first wave was primarily concerned with the vote. Three have followed, and we are now arguably in the middle of the fourth, which is concerned chiefly not with the individual but with structural deficiencies within society, and with the need to speak out following the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential election and what has been seen as a gradual retrenchment on women’s rights.

We have, however, come a long way. It is extraordinary to compare the life of Amy Beach, the earliest composer to be featured on this release, and presented on this album as an American ‘bonus

track’ accompanying the otherwise British lineup, with her modern-day equivalents. She was, early in life, recognised as one of the finest pianists in the United States, and performed as a soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at a time when she could neither vote, nor attend Harvard. However, following her marriage in 1885 she was restricted to two performances a year, an order she obeyed until the death of her husband in 1910, when she resumed touring. She was, however, encouraged by her husband to continue composing during their marriage, and in general he encouraged her towards larger form works and away from the songs that had mostly comprised her portfolio hitherto. She could not, as her male counterparts did, travel to Europe for formal instruction; instead, she studied, copying and memorizing, the scores of orchestral pieces she heard performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

As women composers and performers in the West, we no longer have to fight to be able to do the things we want to do in the ways that Beach did. But we still fight for those things to be recognised on equal terms: we want to be paid equally, we want to be able to choose to have families without sacrificing our creativity and careers, and we want to see the work of women appear on every concert programme. Women composers are still underrepresented, largely ignored by orchestral programming, often discouraged from engaging with technology, and regularly reminded that their ambition is seen as ugly and ‘unfeminine’.

The Marsyas Trio celebrate the important anniversary of women’s suffrage by presenting works by women composers of multiple generations while acknowledging that we are still not done. ‘Deeds not Words’ ran the motto of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), and here is an album as deed: while sometimes we may feel within the realm

of contemporary classical music that we lack political agency, the Marsyas Trio make full use of theirs.

Thea Musgrave’s *Canta, Canta!* appears here as an arrangement of an arrangement: the trio, *Canta, Canta!*, was originally for clarinet, cello and piano, and Marsyas flautist Helen Vidovich worked together with Musgrave to create this version, with alto flute replacing the clarinet. The trio itself is an arrangement made by the composer in 1997 of a song from her own *A Cantata for a Summer’s Day*, written in 1954 for chorus and chamber orchestra, commissioned by BBC Scotland and dedicated to the memory of Lili Boulanger. The song arranged in *Canta, Canta!* is a setting of a poem by Maurice Lindsay (a friend of the composer and her regular collaborator until his death in 2009), describing the orange tiger lily burning bright in the hot summer sun. This arrangement retains the vocal colour of the original, the drama and lyricism being passed between alto flute and cello lines.

Judith Weir's *Several Concertos* was commissioned by the ensemble Lontano in 1980. There are a few 'firsts' for women associated with the work. Most recently, Weir has become the first woman to be made Master of the Queen's Music. In addition, Odaline de la Martinez, the first woman to conduct at the Proms, was the pianist in Lontano when the work was commissioned. Weir herself describes the piece as an 'early curiosity', a 'sort of *jeu d'esprit* about late 1970s complexity crashing into the concerto manners of the traditional concert hall'. Each of the three movements features one of the instrumentalists as soloist, first a concerto for Violoncello, then for Pianoforte and finally for Piccolo. While each movement features a soloist — the violoncello solo full of dramatic portamenti, the pianoforte solo rampant with intricate passage work, low rumblings and violent clusters, and the piccolo solo one of lyrical gymnastics between registers — the work remains virtuosic for all players throughout.

Georgia Rodgers' *York Minster*, commissioned by the Marsyas Trio, is part of a series of pieces, called *Real Spaces*, that explores the harmonic frequencies of resonant spaces. She refers to these frequencies as the space's 'acoustic fingerprint' and, in addition to York Minster, has also made pieces based on St. Andrew's Church at Lyddington in Rutland, and Maeshowe, a Neolithic tomb in the Orkney Islands. The pitch material for the piece is derived from the acoustic fingerprint of York Minster: a kind of modal scale is extracted by analysis of the impulse response of the space, with pitches at 71, 177, 335, 401, 284, 354, 670 and 802 Hertz. These pitches are converted into their nearest equally tempered notes with cent deviation and used extensively (but not exclusively) in the composition of the work. Structurally, the piece resembles Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room*, in which the text is recorded and played multiple times on the course of the piece, resulting in gradual unintelligibility of the text. In the Rodgers, the same music is repeated

seven times, with one note removed from the material on each repeat.

Welsh composer **Hilary Tann** mixes the musical and the visual in her piece, ***In the Theater of Air***, commissioned by the Marsyas Trio. It is not birdsong that is the inspiration here, but the poetic description of seven different kinds of birds in movement. In order of their appearance in the piece, the birds are Herons ('in the black, polished water'), Goldfinches ('they swing on the thistles'), Thrushes ('upward like rain, rising'), Wild Geese ('high in the clean blue air'), Hawk ('eyes fastened harder than love'), White Owl ('a buddha with wings'), and Starlings ('like one stippled star'). The text accompanying each bird comes from the American poet Mary Oliver (hence the American spelling of the title) and her collection *Wild Geese*. Once described as the 'indefatigable guide to the natural world', Oliver's poems relate the human condition to nature; we are human, but also animal. As she writes, 'You only have to let the soft animal of your body/love what it loves'.

Tann uses a mix of playing techniques to express the movement of the birds, and structurally the piece resembles a wave, starting with the stillness of the herons, moving towards tension and activity with the thrushes, wild geese and hawk, and finally the wave breaks with the white owl and starlings.

Laura Bowler's *Salutem* was commissioned by the Marsyas Trio as a partner piece to George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae*, which lies at the core of the Marsyas Trio's existing repertoire. Five movements of the Crumb are named after geologic time periods: Archeozoic, Proterozoic, Paleozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic. Bowler extends these through the ages of humankind in five movements: Stone Age, Bronze Age, The Middle Ages, Industrial Revolution and Modern Age. Bowler makes extensive use of extended playing techniques, the voices (and screams!) of the instrumentalists, amplification, auxiliary instruments (a mortar and pestle in the Stone Age, crotales in the Bronze age, and wood and metal in the Industrial

Revolution) improvisation, and sampled music. The piece is also theatrical: players are instructed to play each other's instruments, take selfies and shout. The piece reflects destruction wrought by human intervention in the world: the banging grunts of the Stone Age, primitive building rhythms of the Bronze Age, the furor of war in the Middle Ages, the mechanisation and dehumanisation that begins with the Industrial Revolution, and the gradual immersion into technology in the Modern Age.

It was following the death of her husband that **Amy Beach** became a repeat resident of the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH, and was instrumental in starting the artists residency programme there. Indeed, it was on her first visit there that she composed the two pieces presented on this album, her ***Pastorale*** and ***Caprice 'Water Sprites'***, coincidentally written the year after American women across the nation got the vote. The *Pastorale*, sweet and lyrical in temperament, highlights the singing capabilities of both the flute and cello,

and hints at the strength of Beach's powers of orchestration. The *Caprice 'Water Sprites'*, not even a minute long, passes swift running lines between the three instruments, as though the sprites Beach imagines follow the current of a fast running river in their play.

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Rich and powerful musical language and a strong sense of drama have made Scottish-American composer **Thea Musgrave** (b. 1928) one of the most respected and exciting contemporary composers in the Western world. Her works are performed in major concert halls, festivals, and radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Known for the clarity of her invention, the skill of her orchestrations, and the power of her musical communication, Musgrave has consistently explored new means of projecting essentially dramatic situations in her music, frequently altering and extending the conventional boundaries of instrumental performance by physicalising their musical and dramatic impact.

Musgrave has been the recipient of many notable awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Ivors Classical Music Award 2018, and The Queen's Medal for Music. She was awarded a CBE on the Queen's New Year's Honour List in 2002.

www.theamusgrave.com

Judith Weir (b. 1954 to Scottish parents in Cambridge, England) studied composition with John Tavener, Robin Holloway and Gunther Schuller. On leaving Cambridge University in 1976 she taught in England and Scotland, and in the mid-1990s became Associate Composer with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and Artistic Director of Spitalfields Festival. She was a Visiting Professor at Princeton (2001), Harvard (2004), and Cardiff (2006-13), and in 2014 was appointed Master of the Queen's Music. In 2015 she became Associate Composer to the BBC Singers.

She is the composer of several operas (written for Kent Opera, Scottish Opera, ENO and Bregenz) which have been widely performed. She has written orchestral music for the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony and Minnesota Orchestras. Much of her music has been recorded, and is available on the NMC, Delphian and Signum labels. She blogs about her cultural experiences at www.judithweir.com.

Georgia Rodgers (b. 1985) is a composer of instrumental and electronic music whose work focuses on textural and spatial aspects of sound and the experience of listening. In 2016 she was selected as one of Sound and Music's *New Voices*.

Georgia studied Physics and Music at the University of Edinburgh followed by a Masters degree in computer music taught by Michael Edwards. She is now pursuing a PhD in composition at City University, London, with a particular focus on the perception of sound, space and the human experience of listening. Her supervisor is Newton Armstrong.

Georgia also works part-time as an acoustician for a firm of consulting engineers, specialising in architectural acoustics. She lives and works (and was born) in north London.

Welsh-born composer, **Hilary Tann** (b. 1947), lives in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in Upstate New York where she chairs the Music

Department and is the John Howard Payne Professor at Union College, Schenectady.

Praised for its lyricism ('beautiful, lyrical work' *Classical Music Web*) and formal balance ('In the formal balance of this music, there is great beauty ...' *Welsh Music*), her music is influenced by a strong identification with the natural world. These two interests combine in her enjoyment of haiku (she is a published haiku poet) and in text selections from Welsh poets. A deep interest in the traditional music of Japan has led to private study of the *shakuhachi* and guest visits to Japan, Korea, and China.

Her compositions have been widely performed and recorded by ensembles such as the European Women's Orchestra, Tenebrae, Lontano, Marsyas Trio, Thai Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and KBS Philharmonic in Seoul, Korea. www.hilarytann.com

Laura Bowler (b. 1986) is a composer, vocalist and Artistic Director specialising in theatre, multi-disciplinary work and opera. A professor of composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and at the Royal Northern College of Music, she is also the Founder and Artistic Director of Size Zero Opera, a company specialising in the creation and performance of contemporary opera. She has been commissioned by HCMF, BBC Radio 3, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Quatuor Bozzini (Canada), Song Circus (Norway) and Ensemble Phace (Austria) among many other groups both in the UK and abroad. She is also the vocalist for Aarhus based, Ensemble Lydenskab.

Known as the first female composer to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra (her *Gaelic Symphony*, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896), **Amy Beach** (née Amy Marcy Cheney, 1867-1944) was also one of the first US composers to have her music be recognized in Europe, and the first classical US composer to

achieve success without the benefit of European study – she was self-taught in composition using treatises and studying scores.

A remarkable child prodigy, she made her public debut as a pianist in 1883, also the year of her first published compositions. In 1885 she performed with the Boston Symphony, but upon her marriage to the distinguished surgeon, Dr. H.H.A. Beach, she curtailed her performing in accordance with his wishes, and focused on composition. She made one performance per year, with the proceeds donated to charity, and one of these performances was of her own piano concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1900. Following the death of her husband in 1910, she resumed performing, and toured Europe to great acclaim, performing her own music, until the onset of WWI. After the war, she continued performing, both in the U.S. and Europe, and she composed more than 300 published works during her lifetime. More works have been and continue to be published since then.

Marsyas Trio performing Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* at the Société de Musique Contemporaine Lausanne, photo © Patrick Dawkins



The London-based **Marsyas Trio**, formed in 2009 by graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, is dedicated to music for flute, cello and piano from the Classical era onwards. Aiming to inspire a generation of new works for this genre, they are uncovering lesser-known repertoire and are proactive in commissioning new music.

The Trio has toured abroad in Europe and China, has performed at festivals throughout the UK including the Vale of Glamorgan and Three Choirs Festivals, at the Holywell Music Room (Oxford Chamber Music Society), in London for Spitalfields Music, St John's Smith Square and Conway Hall, and in Switzerland at the Société de Musique Contemporaine Lausanne. This concert was broadcast on the Swiss Radio station RTS Espace 2. The Trio has also appeared live on BBC Radio 3 'In Tune', Classic FM Bulgaria, and Bulgarian National Television. Their CD, *A Triple Portrait* (Meridian Records 2015) received airtime on European radio and reviews internationally, including

Cambridge Music Journal Tempo, *The Strad*, and Australia's *Limelight Magazine*. The ensemble was joined by pianist Zubin Kanga in January 2017. The Marsyas Trio performs in rural Wales as part of the Arts Council of Wales' Night Out scheme and has received generous funding from the RVW Trust, PRS Foundation, Hinrichsen Foundation, Ambache Charitable Trust, Fidelio Charitable Trust, Britten-Pears Foundation and Arts Council England.

Marsyas Trio takes its name from Greek mythology – inspired by the bold, spirited passion of Marsyas, the celebrated pipe-playing satyr who dared challenge Apollo in a musical contest.

www.marsyastrio.com

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NMC Recordings Ltd
St Margaret's House
21 Old Ford Road
Bethnal Green, London, E2 9PL
Tel. +44 (0)20 3022 5836/88
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