

Prevailing Winds

music for wind instruments by

Robin Stevens

Prevailing Winds

music by Robin Stevens (b. 1958)

CD1	1	Oceanic Lullaby (oboe, piano)	2:36
(41:58)	2	Concert Rondo (descant recorder, piano)	4:09
	3	Sicilienne for Gillian (clarinet, piano)	5:15
	4	O Brave New World (flute, cello)	6:26
		Three Epigrams (bassoon, piano)	
	5	I Foreboding	0:38
	6	II Gentle Lament	0:36
	7	III Clockwork Toy	1:15
	8	A Soldier's Prayer (horn, piano)	4:21
	9	Reflections on a Scottish Theme (solo oboe)	2:42
	10	Pandora's Box (recorders, bassoon, cello)	7:45
	11	Variations on a Twelve-Note Theme (clarinet, piano)	2:14
	12	Sound and Silence (solo flute/alto flute)	2:51
CD2	1	Suite Ecossaïse - Jig (descant recorder, guitar)	1:53
(46:34)	2	Waltz for Pierrot (solo bassoon)	2:19
	3	Grief's Portrait (horn, piano)	3:30
	4	At a Tangent (treble recorder, cello)	4:54
	5	Clarinetissimo! (solo clarinet)	3:20
	6	Suite Ecossaïse - Berceuse (flute, guitar)	2:10
	7	Concert Rondo (oboe, piano)	4:16
	8	Contemplation (bass recorder, cello)	4:38
	9	Coquette (solo flute)	1:43
	10	An Uneasy Dialogue (clarinet, piano)	5:46
	11	Conversations (solo oboe)	3:51
	12	An Interrupted Waltz (descant recorder, piano)	3:46
	13	Sweet Soufflé (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon)	3:02

The Music

Notes by the composer

For a composer, writing miniatures can be liberating. The brevity of the form encourages experimentation and risk-taking. If a miniature fails, it's a couple of weeks' endeavour come to nothing, whereas an unsuccessful large-scale composition can mean months or even years spent in vain. And when shorter pieces do work, the technical skills acquired in their writing can be a valuable resource enabling more substantial creative achievements in the future. More significantly, in music as in the wider world, there is great pleasure in succinct communication from a person who knows when to stop!

The pieces which comprise *Prevailing Winds* fall into one of three categories: lyrical songs without words (to steal Mendelssohn's phrase); character pieces; and more ambitious fledgling tone-poems. As one might expect, there is some overlap between these categories.

The songs without words are melodic and direct, exemplified by the opening track, ***Oceanic Lullaby*** (oboe and piano), which depicts a person peacefully floating on the water and being lulled to sleep by the rise and fall of the waves. The apparent simplicity of this piece belies the complex cross-rhythms beneath the surface, so to speak. ***Concert Rondo*** is a lively, overtly cheerful composition, but encompasses the occasional dissonant twist, keeping both performers and listeners on their toes. Originally written for descant recorder and piano (track 2), the composition also features in the arrangement for oboe and piano (track 19).

Sicilienne for Gillian (clarinet and piano) was written in 2000 for the 70th birthday of my mother, the pianist Gillian Butterworth. The gently lilting dotted rhythms of the sicilienne appeal greatly to me, and the predominantly lyrical character of this romantic composition is partially offset by the more dramatic music of its

central section (1'12"). In complete contrast, **O Brave New World** (flute and cello) contains the most experimental music on the disc, involving unusual timbres such as the veiled sound of the practice mute on the cello (1'08", 4'37"), playing on the cello bridge (2'32"), artificial cello harmonics (5'16"), and flutter-tonguing on the flute (0'29", 5'16"). This unpredictable, highly dramatic music also features 'catch-up counterpoint' (my own phrase), in which, from a unison starting-note, one instrument races ahead with a particular idea and then slows up, enabling the other instrument hurriedly to catch up with their version of the same idea (1'51", 3'10").

Three Epigrams (bassoon and piano) began life in 1994 as a composition for cello and piano, but the quirky ambiguity of these very short pieces is ideally suited to the bassoon. **A Soldier's Prayer** (French horn and piano) is more expansive, and constitutes my principal response, in 2014, to the centennial commemorations of World War I. This piece portrays a Flanders battlefield at dawn, and a single combatant's fearful anticipation of the brutality and desolation that will soon follow, expressed through the alternation of atmospheric lyricism and more martial, rhythmic music. In the most unusual passage in *A Soldier's Prayer*, a distant, muted horn makes a veiled appearance against a mysterious backdrop of complex chordal textures in the piano (2'14"-2'36").

The punning title **Reflections on a Scottish Theme** (solo oboe) describes both the introvert character of the music and the way that, in the first half of the piece, the end of each phrase is echoed (or reflected), and immediately re-echoed (with slight variations) – producing, in effect, an echo of an echo. The style is a pastiche of Scottish folk music, an idiom I find very congenial. **Pandora's Box** (recorders, cello and bassoon) also incorporates a degree of pastiche, principally in the refrain heard at the start, which harks back to the recurring 'burden' or refrain of the Medieval English carol. This burden appears four times in all, interspersed with duets and solo recitatives in a panoply of styles, culminating in a fast, playful coda with virtuosic writing for all three players. A novel feature of *Pandora's Box* is its use of six different types of recorder – in order of first

appearance, descant (with full trio, 0'01"), treble (with bassoon, 0'29"), tenor (with cello pizz, 2'07"), the tiny *garklein flötlein* (with bassoon, 4'48"), bass (with muted cello, 3'36"), and soprano (with full trio, 6'00"). At one point in the coda, the dauntless John Turner simultaneously plays on descant and soprano (6'55")!

Variations on a Twelve-Note Theme (clarinet and piano) has a teasingly misleading title: the theme which completely dominates this piece is indeed twelve notes long, but any expectation of post-Schoenbergian atonality is quickly thwarted by the overt E minor of the opening. **Sound and Silence** (unaccompanied flute and alto flute) is an atmospheric composition providing, as the title suggests, considerable pause for thought between its melodic arches. I struggled to decide whether a standard or an alto flute fitted this piece best: only in working with Sarah Miller on this recording did the obvious solution of alternating between the two instruments suggest itself.

Jig (descant recorder and guitar) is another piece in Scottish folk style, with its characteristic switches between 6/8 and 2/2 time, and colourful use of modal harmonies and flattened 7ths. In **Waltz for Pierrot** (solo bassoon) the search for a sustained melody acts as a metaphor for Pierrot's lonely longing for a suitable dance- (and life-) partner. At the end of the waltz a melody does indeed emerge, but has Pierrot really found the woman of his dreams?

Grief's Portrait (French horn and piano) is the second of my two World War I memorials. It depicts the dislocation, disorientation, and rapid mood-changes prevalent in intense grief. The piece begins in torpor and journeys through a funeral march (0'34", fragmented at 2'18") and plangent lyricism (piano solo, 1'30", transferred to the horn, 2'45") to the raw rage of the closing section (3'12"). **At a Tangent** (treble recorder and cello) is less direct: a questioning, probing composition exploiting the recorder's capacity for subtle suggestion, and implicit rather than overt emotion. An unusual feature of the opening is the use of double-glissandi, pizzicato, on the cello (0'01", restated, arco, 1'48", and again, pizzicato, at 4'01"). A mysterious passage of cello harmonics (1'17") recurs with

the instruments playing in rhythmic unison (2'45"), to eerie effect, and two sections based upon a folk-like melody (0'30", 3'23") provide forward momentum. In complete contrast, **Clarinetissimo!** (solo clarinet) is an 'in-your-face' Expressionistic tour-de-force, fully exploiting the technical and expressive exuberance latent in the instrument, with the occasional moment of tenderness along the way.

Berceuse (flute and guitar) again recalls Scottish folk music, its direct, heartfelt melody being centred in the haunting lower register of the flute. After the oboe version of *Concert Rondo*, **Contemplation** (bass recorder and cello) reverts to a more introverted expressive world. Though lacking penetration, the veiled tone of the bass recorder is arguably the recorder family's most beautiful contribution to the sonic landscape, and it is particularly effective when combined, as here, with a muted cello. *Contemplation* is clearly inspired by the lyricism of the English Pastoral Tradition, but contrasting episodes (1'02", 2'40") employ close canons and a combination of flutter-tonguing on the recorder and cello tremolos on the cello, to give an elusive, questing character to this unusual piece.

Coquette (solo flute) sees the fleet-footed flute in flighty mood, although the more thoughtful lyrical moments in the piece suggest a degree of emotional complexity beneath the outward bravado. **An Uneasy Dialogue** (clarinet and piano) is a much more expansive conception, in which the idea of a relationship under strain is central. At the start the two instruments enjoy a restless truce, politely if somewhat stiffly taking turns to cede the limelight to one another. Soon they embark in tandem on an angular, disjointed ritornello theme (0'43"), as if the puppeteer clarinetist were musically pulling the pianist's strings (or is it the other way round?): this theme is heard three more times during the composition, on the last occasion (4'25") in a loud, harsh, fragmented version, as if to destroy all semblance of cordiality. There is hope, however. Earlier, quieter dialogues in the piece see an unusual form of imitation: the consecutive pitches of melodic clarinet phrases (1'14", 4'44") are immediately transformed into strings of two-note piano chords on precisely the same notes. Elsewhere the

procedure is reversed, the clarinet making single melodic lines from strings of two-note piano chords (2'53"). At the end a measure of calm emerges, suggesting all is not lost for the feisty couple.

Conversations (solo oboe), like *Sound and Silence*, is an atmospheric soliloquy. Its structure is ternary, both slow outer sections being built upon a phrase-by-phrase alternation between the lower and upper regions of the oboe register: the closing section is actually an almost exact inversion of the entire opening section. In between comes quicker, dance-like music, of considerable rhythmic complexity, demonstrating the gazelle-like agility of the instrument. **An Interrupted Waltz** (descant recorder and piano) is also in ternary form, the probing harmonies and recitatives of the middle section acting as a foil for the tranquil lyricism of the outer sections. Finally, **Sweet Soufflé** (flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn and bassoon) brings together all the orchestral wind players on the disc in a light-heartedly tuneful celebration of their craft.

Robin Stevens



The Composer

Born in Wales in 1958, **Robin Stevens** studied at Dartington College (where he played the Elgar Cello Concerto with the College Orchestra), the Royal Northern College of Music (with cello as principal study, under Raphael Sommer and Moray Welsh), and Manchester and Birmingham Universities, before working for five years as Music Director and Pastoral Worker of St. Paul's Church, York. During his time in York, Robin wrote a considerable quantity of choral music, congregational hymns and solo songs, which became an integral part of worship at St. Paul's.

There followed three years as Head of Music in a West Yorkshire Comprehensive School, before a debilitating illness struck, keeping Robin out of full-time employment for the next seventeen years.

Returning to full health in 2007, Robin began a PhD in Composition at Manchester University, where his supervisors were Philip Grange and Kevin Malone. Robin's PhD centred on the creation of large-scale structures in a contemporary idiom, and unusually, all six compositions in his final portfolio were substantial works, constituting 'an outstanding submission', in the words of his external examiner, John Pickard.

Away from music, Robin has in recent years provided Maths support as a volunteer in a Manchester Primary School. He enjoys current affairs, holds loquacious dinner parties, thrives on stimulating conversation, is a keen cyclist, preaches occasionally, and is a regular at the Wythenshawe Park Run.

Robin came to serious composition relatively late, his formative years being dominated by mainstream Western Classical Music – singing in school and church choirs, playing cello in the county youth orchestra and in a string quartet - rather than much exposure to the Contemporary Music scene. Perhaps as a result, the traditional musical elements of melody, harmony and counterpoint still feature strongly in his music: he enjoys exploring aspects of texture and

timbre, but in contrast to some of his peers, these are almost always secondary elements in his music, rather than the heart of the matter.

Robin particularly relishes the challenge of writing for 'Cinderella' instruments and ensembles – those with a low profile that tend to have limited repertoire, such as tuba quartet, euphonium duet, bassoon trio, double bass, and guitar duet. Robin loves working personally with individual instrumentalists and singers, and the majority of the music on the *Prevailing Winds* album was premiered by local musicians at his annual charity concerts in Didsbury, South Manchester.

Robin's major works include two String Quartets and a String Quintet (soon to be released on the Divine Art label); *Fantasy Sonata* for violin and piano and *Sonata Romantica* for cello and piano; *Five Portraits* for bassoon trio; *Romantic Fantasy* for harp, flute, clarinet and string quartet; a Bassoon Concerto; *Brass Odyssey* for brass band and six percussionists; *Mourning into Dancing* for symphony orchestra; and a *Te Deum* for vocal soloists, choir, organ and orchestra. Robin has also recorded a couple of albums of his own songs (*Fire and Inspire* and *Whispers in the Wasteland*) and a disc of his compositions for solo cello, entitled *Reconciliation*. He is currently working on a Cello Concerto and a Clarinet Quintet, the latter for John Bradbury.

www.robinstevenscomposer.co.uk

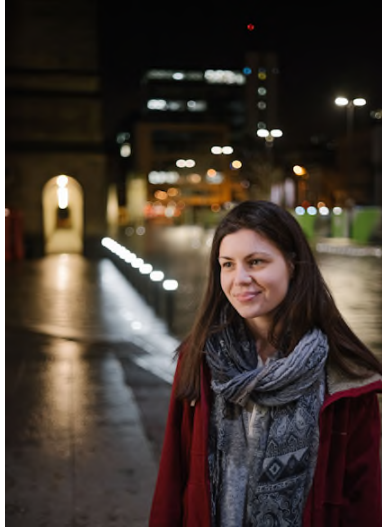
Richard Simpson



John Turner



Sarah Miller



Helen Peller





Lindsey Stoker



John Bradbury



Janet Simpson



David Jones

The Performers

John Bradbury (clarinet)

John studied Natural Sciences at St John's College, Cambridge. He was awarded a Travel Scholarship to study with Larry Combs of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, then went on to the Royal Academy of Music where he won the Hawkes Clarinet Prize and the Principal's Prize.

John held the sub-principal chairs in the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the London Symphony Orchestra, and in 1997 was invited to become Principal Clarinet with the BBC Philharmonic, performing throughout the North of England, at the BBC Proms and many international tours, not to mention enjoying unrivalled exposure on radio, TV, CD and online. He has played Guest Principal with all the major UK orchestras as well as with John Wilson's hand-picked orchestra at the Proms.

John has given many solo performances with the BBC Philharmonic, with highlights including the Mozart, Nielsen and Stanford Concertos. His recordings include the Busoni Concertino and the Arnold "Scherzetto" for Chandos, which was Editor's Choice in "The Gramophone". His celebrated Naxos disc "The English Clarinet" remains a best-seller ten years after its release.

John was awarded Fellowship of the Royal Academy of Music in 2018.

David Jones (piano)

David was born on the Wirral, north-west England. He graduated from the University of Wales, Bangor, with a First Class Honours Degree in Music, subsequently graduating from the Royal Northern College of Music with a Postgraduate Diploma in Piano Accompaniment and the degree of Master of Music in Performance, for which he also submitted a study of the songs of Albert Roussel.

After a year as Junior Fellow in Repetiteur Studies in the RNCM Opera Department, David lectured for three years at University College, Salford. He joined the staff of the School of Keyboard Studies at the RNCM as a staff pianist in 1996 and was appointed Accompaniment Co-ordinator (now Head of Accompaniment) in September 2001. He also holds the posts of Deputy Head and Accompanist for Junior RNCM, and is pianist for the Hallé Choir, and founder and Musical Director of Altèri, the Manchester-based chamber choir.

For many years he has been, with April Cantelo, Stuart Smith, Patricia MacMahon and Rosemary Walton, a tutor on the summer course *Art of Song*. As a member of the examiners' panel for the ABRSM, he has worked both in the UK and in the Far East.

David has given first performances of works by David Ellis, Robert Hanson, John Hawkins, Alan Lees, Peter Hope, Emily Howard, David Matthews, Mark Simpson, Robin Stevens and Philip Wilby. He completed his PhD at the University of Manchester in 2011, researching Jeffrey Lewis's music, and of his second CD of Lewis' music, the Gramophone said '*...a disc not to be missed by anyone who cares about communicative 20th-century music.*' A third disc in the series was released by Metier/Divine Art in spring 2009, on which he collaborates with soprano Caroline MacPhie and violinist Zheng Yu Wu.

Sarah Miller (flute and alto flute)

Having graduated from the RNCM, Sarah is currently studying in Cologne with Robert Winn and Aldo Baerten. She enjoys playing regularly with orchestras such as the Hallé, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Northern Sinfonia, and is currently trialling with the RTÉ National Orchestra. Sarah is a founding member of *Meridiem*, a dynamic flute and harp duo with the aim of taking music into more unusual settings (with the help of the *Live Music Now* scheme). In her spare time, Sarah reads, avoids cooking wherever possible, and loves to travel.

Helen Peller (bassoon)

Helen Peller enjoys a varied freelance career working as an orchestral and chamber musician, soloist and teacher. She has played with most symphony, opera and chamber orchestras in Britain and welcomes the opportunity to explore more intimate chamber works in smaller ensembles.

Helen's musical studies began in Bakewell and, whilst at school, she studied the bassoon with Charles Cracknell and Edward Warren. She was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain from 1980-83. Her studies continued at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama under the tutelage of Martin Gatt, Meyrick Alexander and John Orford. During this period she was principal bassoon in the Young Musicians Symphony Orchestra, won the Dr Dileas Short Prize in the Royal Overseas League music competition, won the 1986 Orchestral Wind Instrument Prize at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and was a member of the European Community Youth Orchestra. Scholarships enabled her to remain at the Guildhall for a year of postgraduate study.

Helen moved to Manchester in 1987 having been appointed Assistant Principal Bassoon with the Hallé Orchestra. She remained a member of the orchestra for 12 years and, during that time, travelled extensively worldwide, enjoying performing very varied symphonic repertoire.

Manchester has continued to be Helen's base for work within a variety of ensembles and educational establishments.

Richard Simpson (oboe)

After one year as sub-principal oboe in the BBC Symphony Orchestra with Pierre Boulez, Richard was invited to play principal oboe with the Hallé orchestra, a position he held for 17 years, in which time he appeared on numerous occasions as soloist. He was also a very active chamber musician in the North-West, performing many solo recitals and visiting festivals both in this country and abroad.

In 1991 he returned to the BBC Symphony Orchestra, this time as Principal Oboe. For the BBC he has recorded the Sinfonia Concertantes of both Haydn and Mozart and broadcast the Vaughan Williams Oboe Concerto. He is still involved in various chamber music activities connected with the orchestra, and with his wife, Janet, is a member of the Syrinx Trio, with Michael Cox, Principal Flute of the orchestra.

Richard has been a professor at both the Royal Northern College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama over many years.

Janet Simpson (piano)

After studying with the renowned teacher, Cyril Smith, and winning several prizes whilst at college, Janet joined the Hallé Orchestra as their Principal Keyboard player, a position she held for over 30 years. During that time, Janet toured extensively abroad and was involved in numerous recordings and broadcasts. She also appeared as soloist with the orchestra on many occasions.

On leaving the Hallé Orchestra, Janet continues to work in London, playing with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonia, this year performing a Trio for Harp, Cello and Celeste in the Royal Festival Hall with members of the Philharmonia. Chamber music and accompanying now form a large part of her musical life and she is a member of the Syrinx Trio.

Lindsey Stoker (French horn)

Lindsey Stoker was Assistant Principal Horn with the Hallé Orchestra from 1990-2000 and has subsequently pursued a freelance career working with many of the UK orchestras. Lindsey is the Senior Horn Tutor at the RNCM, where she has been teaching since 1990. She also teaches at Chetham's School of Music.

Lindsey was a guest tutor at the Prague Hornclass in 2011 along with Radek Baborak, and Thomas Hauschild, and in 2015 with Ricardo Matosinhos.

She has given Masterclasses and workshops with the British Horn Society and in Moscow, St Petersburg, Santiago, Oslo and Hong Kong, and has tutored horns at the European Youth Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra.

John Turner (recorders)

John Turner was Senior Scholar in Law at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge before pursuing a legal career, acting for many distinguished musicians and musical organisations, alongside his many musical activities. These included numerous appearances and recordings with David Munrow's Early Music Consort of London, the Academy of Ancient Music, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and the English Baroque Soloists. He now devotes his time to playing, writing, reviewing, publishing, composing and generally energising.

He has given the first performances of over 600 works for the recorder, including works by many non-British composers, such as Leonard Bernstein, Ned Rorem, Peter Sculthorpe, Douglas Lilburn, and Petr Eben. Many of the works he has premiered have now entered the standard repertoire, and these and his own recorder compositions are regularly set for festivals and examinations worldwide. He has rediscovered several works for his instrument, including the Rawsthorne Recorder Suite, Antony Hopkins' Pastiche Suite, Herbert Murrill's Sarabande, and Handel's F Major Trio Sonata.

John was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal Northern College of Music for his services to British music, and is a Visiting Distinguished Scholar of Manchester University.



Recorded at St. Thomas's Church, Stockport, England,
on 27th and 28th February, 2019
Recording engineer: Richard Scott (RIP)
Editing and mastering: Phil Hardman
Executive Producer: Robin Stevens
Booklet and packaging design: Stephen Sutton (Divine Art)
Photos of Robin Stevens by Iain Andrews
Photo of John Turner: Teresa Dietrich
Photo of Sarah Miller by Jon Harvey
Photo of Lindsey Stoker by Smith Imaging, Manchester
Other artist photos used by kind permission of the subjects
All texts images and graphic devices herein are copyright. All rights reserved.
Music Copyright:
Suite Ecossaise and *An Interrupted Waltz* are published by Peacock Press.
All other works are Copyright Control
©© 2020 Divine Art Limited (Diversions LLC in USA/Canada)

DEDICATION

*This recording is dedicated to the memory of
Colette Wilmot, a dear friend and a faithful supporter
of my music*

Robin Stevens

Coming soon!

Robin Stevens – String Quartets and Quintet

Divine Art DDA 25203

Due for release summer 2020



DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP

INNOVATIVE | ECLECTIC | FASCINATING | INSPIRATIONAL

Over 550 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. All our recordings are available at any good record store or download provider or direct from our secure online shopping website:

www.divineartrecords.com

(CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3)

Diversions LLC (Divine Art USA) email: sales@divineartrecords.com

Divine Art Ltd. (UK) email: uksales@divineartrecords.com

Printed catalogue sent on request

Also available in digital download through Primephonic, Qobuz, iTunes, Amazon, Spotify and many other platforms

follow us on facebook, youtube and twitter



WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG.

Robin Stevens

