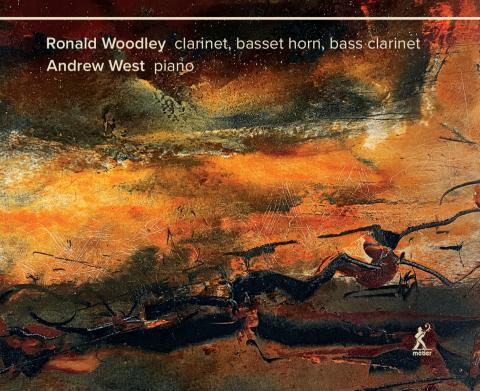
LUMINOS



LUMINOS

Contemporary Music for Clarinets

Ronald Woodley (clarinet, basset horn, bass clarinet)

Andrew West (piano)

1.	Elisabeth Lutyens This Green Tide, Op. 103 for basset horn and piano	10:15
2.	Angela Elizabeth Slater Around the Darkening Sun for bass clarinet and piano (premiere recording)	5:25
3.	Morris Pert Luminos, Op. 16a for basset horn and piano	16:22
4.	Christopher Fox This has happened before for four multitracked bass clarinets (premiere recording)	10:54

Elisabeth Lutyens Five Little Pieces, Op. 14 No. 1 for clarinet and piano (premiere recordina) 5 I Lirico 1.21 6 II Drammatico 0.47 7. III. Doloroso 1:41 8. IV. Pastorale 0.46 9. V. Declamatorio 0:35 Liz Dilnot Johnson The Space Between Heaven and Earth for basset horn and piano (premiere recording) 10. I. Winter 4:19 1:08 11. II. Spring 12. III. Summer 1:24 13. IV. Autumn 1:08 **Edward Cowie** Heather Jean Nocturnes for bass clarinet and piano (premiere recording) 14. I. The Singing Stream - Evening 4:08 15. II. Sun and Moon Dancing 4.11 16. III. Okavango Dream Streams 4:00 17 IV Take Facham Blue 3:31 18. V. Farth Nocturnal 3:58

Total playing time 76:40

THE MUSIC

This disc of new and recent British music for various sizes of clarinet encompasses four new works that I am privileged to have had written for me since the 2020 pandemic lockdown, along with some other fascinating pieces from the twentieth century that have been unaccountably neglected by recent generations of clarinet players.

The project began in a sense with the basset horn and Elisabeth Lutyens. Over the past few years, wearing one of my other hats as a chamber pianist, I have released several CD recordings with my long-standing duo partner, the tenor James Geer, exploring various facets of twentieth-century British song. Most recently, James and I have worked on a pair of discs for the Resonus label, rediscovering the unpublished songs of Elizabeth Maconchy, alongside her erstwhile teacher Vaughan Williams. The research for these recordings led me to a deeper interest in the remarkably diverse world of British musical modernism, its tensions with the establishment and its institutions, and the problematics of gender in the compositional culture of the mid-to-late twentieth century.

Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–83) is a key figure here, a composer whose star, after so many years of appalling neglect, ought surely to be in the ascendant in these difficult and anxious global times. Lutyens was drawn to writing for the basset horn by the playing of the clarinettist Georgina Dobrée (1930–2008), who did so much to bring the instrument into the realm of contemporary music. Previously the basset horn, with its characteristically woody, veiled tone, was known largely from its historical use by Mozart (especially in the Requiem and Serenade in B flat, K. 361) a sonata by Danzi,

the two *Konzertstücke* by Mendelssohn for clarinet and basset horn with piano or orchestra, and in the operas and instrumental works of Richard Strauss.

With Dobrée's unflagging advocacy for the instrument, however, from the 1950s onwards (matched only by that of Suzanne Stephens more recently, especially in the context of Stockhausen's circle), many new solo works were commissioned, most of which have regrettably failed to take hold in later players' repertoires. (It is worth emphasising that the basset horn has come a long way since the days of George Bernard Shaw: despite choosing 'Corno di bassetto' as his music critic nom de plume, he loathed the 'wretched' instrument as it was practised in his day, although he did acknowledge its 'peculiar watery melancholy'.)

As Lutyens tells us in her absorbing 1972 autobiography *A Goldfish Bowl*, she had become good friends with the highly distinguished Dobrée family, and Georgina's first commission from her, *Valediction* for clarinet and piano, resulted immediately from what Lutyens describes as the 'terrible news' of the death of Dylan Thomas in 1953. It was another twenty years, though, before a different kind of inspiration or 'donnée' led to her writing for the basset horn.

Georgina's mother Valentine Dobrée (1894–1974) was a well-regarded and exhibited artist, specialising in cubist collage, and renowned for her colourful relationships with the Bloomsbury Group in the 1920s and 30s. Later in life she published a dense, complex collection of poetry in 1965 under the title *This Green Tide*. The phrase is itself borrowed from one of John Ruskin's series of pamphlets from the 1870s and 80s, *Fors Clavigera*, setting out the author's social and moral vision of the workforce in Britain. By turns polemical, apocalyptic, confessional, Ruskin, looking out at the canal from the window of his hotel in Venice, writes (whether literally or metaphorically) of how 'this green tide that eddies by my threshold is full of floating corpses, and I must leave my

dinner to bury them, since I cannot save.' As the Ruskin scholar Paul L. Sawyer has written, 'Comparing the "green tide" with the "black and sulphurous tides" of English rivers and with "Death, and Hell also, more cruel than cliff or sea", he presents a world on the brink of that Moment when "the Sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and Death, and Hell, give up the dead which are in them" (XXVIII, 757–758). In passages like this Fors truly becomes Ruskin's Apocalypse.' (Ruskin's Poetic Argument: The Design of the Major Works, 1995).

Valentine Dobrée was, of course, herself writing in the wake of the global geo-political precipice of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Moreover, as it turned out, the composition of Lutyens's *This Green Tide* in 1975 for Georgina was begun in the immediate aftermath of the deaths of both Valentine Dobrée in May 1974, and of Georgina's father Bonamy – himself a distinguished literary scholar and professor at the University of Leeds – only a few months later. (Many of Valentine's art works are now also housed in the archives of the same University.) Lutyens dedicated the work 'to the near and the far, V.D. B.D.'

It has become something of a cliché in histories of British music to read of contemporary criticisms of Lutyens's works as 'difficult' or 'rebarbative' – often, one suspects, a proxy for criticism of the woman herself, whose life and treatment by others certainly gave her good reason to be so. But closer acquaintance with *This Green Tide*, for all the rigour of its underlying, closely planned pitch structures, reveals above all a profoundly vocal utterance – occasionally at temporary peace with itself, but more often plangent, torn, defiant, yet at the same time beautifully capturing the vulnerability of the basset horn's tonal qualities when taken to these extremes of expression.

There is a certain (though fortuitous) continuity of thought between *This Green Tide* and the first of the newly commissioned works on this disc to be presented here, *Around the Darkening Sun*, for bass clarinet and piano by **Angela Elizabeth Slater** (b. 1989).

A rising star of her generation, Angela has recently enjoyed significant achievements as Tanglewood Composition Fellow 2020–22, selected for the Royal Philharmonic Society Composer programme for 2021–22, and previously a Britten-Pears Young Artist in 2017–18. Her work has featured to high acclaim at festivals internationally in Europe, the US and the Far East. When I asked Angela to write a short work of around five minutes for bass clarinet and piano (thus enlarging the remarkably small repertory of worthwhile music for this combination), I gave her entirely free rein to write what she wished. She says of the work:

Around the Darkening Sun is a new work for bass clarinet and piano, written especially for Ron Woodley and Andrew West who commissioned the work in 2020.

The piece was written in a particularly dark period in the world, October 2020, where different lockdown restrictions were still isolating our lives. I felt a sense of relentless timelessness and disconnection, with an overriding sense of foreboding about what was to come, almost as though world events were spinning out of control. At this time, I came across an article by NASA which reported that the sun is getting dimmer year on year, inspiring the title *Around the Darkening Sun*.

This piece uses this idea to explore the connections and disconnections between two instruments. It begins in the depths of each instrument, gradually unfurling into disjunct melodic phrases that have fragmentary interconnections. As it progresses, the music cycles and spins through material becoming more and more tightly wound before this tension is released in a slow suspended and fragile section. The piece ends with one final burst of energy spinning the last remaining notes out into the universe.

Morris Pert (1947–2010) is a name now more or less forgotten in most classical musical circles. In the 1970s and 80s, though, as a classically trained and prize-winning composer and percussionist at the Royal Academy of Music, he received a number of high-profile commissions, including from the BBC, for large-scale orchestral and choral works. Pert later shifted the emphasis of his career somewhat sideways, forming his own experimental music group Suntreader, as well as becoming a top-ranking session rock and jazz drummer, playing alongside figures such as Brian Ferry, Kate Bush, Elvis Costello, Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins and many others. Pert was drawn in all his compositional work especially to cosmology, astronomy, oriental culture, mythology, and, as a proud Scot, ancient Scottish civilisations. His *Luminos*, for basset horn and piano, was written in 1972 for Georgina Dobrée, with whom he recorded it for Dobrée's own Chantry Records label (along with Lutyens's *This Green Tide*) in the mid-1970s.

This remarkable work brings together many of Pert's musical preoccupations: even though he did not openly explain its origins, it is not difficult to draw cosmological or astronomical inferences from the radiance and vibrancy of the title. Musically, it embraces and moves between various heterogeneous stylistic influences, while keeping a strong grip on the long-term arcs of structure. Within the characteristic late twentieth-century modernist frame, the lines are at times questing and lyrical, at other times rising to a relentless energy; Messiaen-like block chordal movement sits alongside jazz-inflected points of relaxation and rather trippy, semi-improvised wanderings. Pert adds, in the liner notes to his 1975 recording with Dobrée:

Luminos sets the basset horn against a variety of piano colourations, with the inside of the piano being used to produce many of the spacious and atmospheric textures – finger and mallet tremolo on the strings; pizzicato; crossbar playing; harmonics produced by moving a rubber mallet along the strings; and various string glissandi. All these effects, however, are used functionally as part of the music's melodic and harmonic development.

When I was planning the repertory for the present disc, I first suggested to **Christopher Fox** (b. 1955) that I record his ...or just after from 1984, which I had played with some success in the 1990s in a version for bass clarinet and digital delay. As a rather meditative piece, it seemed to provide a certain 'oasis of calm' in the middle of an otherwise largely grittier, more modernist collection of works. Christopher spontaneously offered to write a new piece for me instead, and *This has happened before* is the result, another product of the pandemic lockdown. Christopher writes:

This has happened before may be played live by four clarinettists or by one multitracked performer. The four musicians enter one by one, each of them playing the same melodic sequence, but each slightly faster, so that all four performances of the melodic sequence finish at roughly the same time. The music is always moving upwards and is based on the acoustic structure of the clarinet: if the first note is its fundamental, then the final note is the fifth harmonic, two octaves and a third higher, with the third harmonic, an octave and a fifth higher, the point around which, three-fifths of the way through the music, the melodic sequence pivots. Each phrase in the latter part of the piece is based on a phrase that we have already heard, but the music is now compressed in space and time, as the four parts strain towards a final coming together. The sonic result is a sort of an unmeasured canonic counterpoint that, to my ears at least, is reminiscent of the ecstatic singing of many religious communities.

This has happened before was written in July and August 2020 for Ronald Woodley, to whom it is dedicated.

I have followed Christopher's music for many years now, since commissioning and premièring his *clarinet quintet* in 1992. One of the things that has long fascinated me about his work is the way that he explores, both musically and intellectually, the relationship between the simple and the complex – a relationship that is itself, well, very complex. The results are winningly unpredictable, and it is safe to say that, although the score of *This has happened before* looks astonishingly spare on paper, it is one of the most mentally challenging works I have performed – here in a version for four multitracked bass clarinets.

The second, third, and fourth clarinet voices, entering in canonic sequence with the same set of brief melodic gestures as the first player, but each at a fractionally faster speed, must be paced carefully over a span of around ten minutes to complete the material at more or less the same time. Performance cannot be, and yet simultaneously must be, intuited, and great moment-by-moment attention paid to the detail of how the parts sound with and against one another in real time, always bearing in mind the long-term goal of final synchrony. Yet ultimately it is in the serendipity of the harmonic, contrapuntal, and acoustic interactions of the four voices on their symbiotic journey that the pleasure of the work resides, for both performer and listener.

The only work for 'normal' clarinet included on this disc is Lutyens's *Five Little Pieces*, Op. 14 No. 1 for clarinet and piano, seemingly a first commercial recording. Dating from 1945, the work was written for Frederick (Jack) Thurston, one of the leading clarinettists in the country at the time. Lutyens also knew him as one of the founder members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, formed in 1930 with the close involvement of her husband Edward Clark. The five movements offer intriguingly fleeting utterances, some less than a minute in duration, with the mood of each characterised with great concision by its Italianate title. Every bar is constructed with the utmost tautness and precision,

employing Lutyens' personal take on twelve-note serial technique while maintaining to the listener's ear a remarkably free, lyrical and dramatic distillation of expression.

In 2017 I had the privilege and pleasure of recording with the Fitzwilliam Quartet, for Métier, the clarinet quintet *Sea-change* that I had commissioned from **Liz Dilnot Johnson**. This work, inspired by and imbued with the evocative poem *Crag Inspector* by David Hart, calls for the use of five different clarinets, from piccolo E flat down to contrabass, along with the string quartet. The basset horn, however, does not feature here, largely because I did not possess one at the time! It seemed to me later, though, that the characteristics of the basset horn might well find real resonance with some aspects of Liz's wide-ranging musical personality, often closely entwined with the natural world and the place of humanity within it. The resulting work, *The Space Between Heaven and Earth*, is a glowing, positive statement of hopefulness, embracing Greek mythology, medieval song, and a very modern response to human healing from trauma. Liz introduces the work here:

When Ron and I first discussed my composing a new work for basset horn, the unique 'woody' and gentle quality of the instrument led me to thinking about the myth of Daphne. The young nymph in desperation asks Zeus to turn her into a tree so she can escape the unwanted advances of Apollo. This piece explores my own retelling of the story. I imagine a new ending, where within the protection of the form of the tree, Daphne is able to heal, to transform and to re-emerge as fully human once more.

The first part *Winter* is slow and lyrical with three musical ideas presented. The lyrical twelfth-century melody *O Frondens* by Hildegard of Bingen represents Daphne as the tree, while the more chromatic music laments the loss of Daphne's human body. The descending sequence of falling thirds

represents the space between heaven and earth that both the human and the tree inhabit.

After the brief trilling and budding of a more hopeful *Spring*, in *Summer* Daphne kicks her heels in an earthy dance where Hildegard's melody starts to transform. In the final section *Autumn* the healing role of the deep-rooted tree is complete – and Daphne is able to skip away.

It is nearly forty years since I first encountered the music of **Edward Cowie** (b. 1943), when I performed his solo clarinet piece *Kelly–Nolan–Kelly* as part of the week-long celebrations dedicated to him at the Fourth Contemporary Composer Seminar of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society in 1984. For the past few years Edward and his artist wife Heather, after their wide and extraordinarily creative peregrinations in Australia and Europe, have been living very close to me, in South Cumbria. By the time the present recording is released, they will have returned to Australia, so it was an act of enormous generosity that, after the bulk of this disc was already recorded, Edward composed, at white-hot speed, his *Heather Jean Nocturnes* in April 2023, in response to five of Heather's artworks, just in time for us to include them here. Such is the dizzyingly multi-faceted nature of Edward's creative thinking, it is only right he should be allowed to speak of the piece in his own words:

The Australian visual artist Heather Cowie and I (also Australian by adoption) were married in 1995. In the succeeding decades, I have watched an astonishing but steady unfolding and flowering of works in the form(s) of paintings, mixed-media assemblages, bas-reliefs, and sculptures. Like me, her main inspirational resources (and sources) are the dynamics of the natural world. Over the years, she and I have collaborated on several projects where

she has either made artwork in response to my music, or I have responded to her visual experiments and realisations.

The five movements (all 'nocturnes') are (in)formed by Heather's – 'HJ' as I affectionately tease her sometimes! – responses to both places and the sense of places. Locations – or I should say habitats – are the result of visits to locations in Australia (fourth movement: Lake Eacham Blue); Africa (third movement: Okavango Dream Streams); England (first and fifth movements: The Singing Stream – Evening, and Earth Nocturnal); and the 'spacial' second movement Sun and Moon Dancing. Heather was trained and worked as a field geologist in some of the most remote regions of Western Australia, South Africa and the sub-Antarctic. Such locations have no doubt instigated and initiated a very intense interest in the four elements.

Indeed, all five works in my *Nocturnes* have direct (and sometimes cryptically allusive) connections with earth, air, fire, and water. However, four of the five movements are certainly impregnated (or *saturated*) by and with water (movements 1, 3 and 4 especially). Thus, one of the integrating and binding forms and treatments of the pieces is the use of *flow-phrases – wave-forms and visual* (*but also sonic*) *arabesques*. There is always a sense of each piece (and each HJ work) being a kind of continuum in the form of both forward-moving ideas and ideas based on a kind of accretional *memory*. This is not 'programme music'. Rather, it is something that represents my absolute basic belief in the connectivity of the senses. Whenever Heather and I talk about our respective work(s), we naturally find powerful fusions between seeing and hearing when we use expressions like linear forms, time, colour, rhythm, shape, symmetry, and articulations.

One final (and deliberate) half-hidden inspirational resource (something even the brilliant performers haven't mentioned yet!) is the Nocturnes of Chopin. Even the harmony — as well as the notions of musical phrases being more liquid than stone — is sometimes 'ghosted' by associations with several Chopin nocturnal masterpieces. Heather herself once made a series of mixed-media pieces on the night displays and calls of *Tyto Alba* — the Barn Owl — which were definitely integrated with her responses to Chopin. The work is lovingly dedicated to 'HJ' as a small appreciation of the sense of wonder (and sensual wandering) that her often transcendental works evoke.

I need hardly add (but wish to all the same) my absolute sense of gratitude and awe in such a magnificent realisation by two fabulous musicians of (to me) a beautiful and strange marriage between the bass clarinet and piano!

Edward's wife Heather also provides her own perspective:

My first encounter with Edward's musical realisation of my five paintings was during the recording sessions with the amazing Ron Woodley and Andrew West (as I don't read music). They are each fairly short pieces so I was able to hear them played fully before the inevitable 're-takes'. What moved me profoundly was the fact that the sense of mood and colour, as well as their formal integrity, was so beautifully articulated by the sonic (inter)relationships of the bass clarinet and piano. But then Edward is a sublimely thought-full and sensitive composer, and he knows my art intimately. It is a joy and an honour to have my visualisations on this disc through Edward's imagination coupled with mine.



Heather Cowie - The Singing Stream



Heather Cowie - Sun and Moon Dancing



Heather Cowie - Okavango Streaming



Heather Cowie - Lake Eacham Blue Dusk

BIOGRAPHIES

Ronald Woodley enjoys a wide-ranging career as clarinettist, chamber pianist and musicologist, bringing the research experience of a distinguished academic portfolio to his varied performance projects. Appointed Professor of Music at the (now Royal) Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) in 2004, he was Director of Research there from 2010 to 2015 and previously held academic positions at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), the Universities of Lancaster, Newcastle, Liverpool, and Christ Church, Oxford. He is now Emeritus Professor of Music at the RBC, having retired in 2018 to concentrate on recording and research projects.

As a performer Ron trained as clarinettist at the RNCM, before completing a doctorate in musicology at Keble College, Oxford. He is the dedicatee of many new works by Edward Cowie, Christopher Fox, Steve Ingham, Roger Marsh, Liz Dilnot Johnson, Stephen Pratt, Angela Elizabeth Slater, and James Wishart, including an exciting series of bass clarinet duos in the 1990s in partnership with Roger Heaton. He has recorded works for bass clarinet by York Bowen and Josef Holbrooke with the Primrose Quartet (Meridian Records, 2016) and in 2017 premièred and recorded the newly commissioned Sea-change by Liz Dilnot Johnson, for multiple clarinets and string quartet, with the Fitzwilliam Quartet (Métier).

As a musicologist he has an international reputation as a specialist in late medieval music theory, in particular the fifteenth-century musician Johannes Tinctoris. Other projects in nineteenth- and twentieth-century musicology have included work on Ravel, Prokofiev, Steve Reich, George Antheil, and, most recently, early recordings of Lieder and pianists in the circles of Brahms and Clara Schumann, especially Ilona Eibenschütz.

As chamber pianist, Ron enjoys a long-standing partnership with the tenor James Geer, with whom he has recorded five CDs of twentieth-century British song for the Resonus, SOMM, and EM Records labels, including many unpublished works of Elizabeth Maconchy. As both clarinettist and pianist he has worked for many years with the pianist Andrew West, with whom he has recorded Constant Lambert's four-hand version of Walton's *Façade* Suites, with Lambert's *Trois pièces nègres pour les touches blanches*, for SOMM. In 2024 Ron will be recording chamber music by Brahms and Felix Weingartner for Resonus, as well as more British song repertory with James Geer, and solo piano music by Sibelius.

Andrew West has had a connection with the world of contemporary music since his solo recital for the Park Lane Group early on in his career. With tenor Mark Padmore he gave the world premiere of Birtwistle's *Songs from the Same Earth* at the Aldeburgh Festival, and performed Henze's *Six Songs from the Arabian* in the South Bank's Henze Festival; world premieres with baritone Roderick Williams have included works by Alexander Goehr and Ryan Wigglesworth.

Andrew has a long-established partnership with flautist Emily Beynon. They are at present engaged on a five-CD project recording the wealth of repertoire for flute and piano dating from the time of the Second World War, on the Dutch label Zefir Records.

Further CD recordings include Strauss Lieder with soprano Emma Bell; music by Les Six with Emily Beynon for Hyperion; and Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* with Robert Murray, for Stone Records. He is also the pianist for the three-CD set of Parry's *English Lyrics* for SOMM Records, and has recently recorded songs by Stanford with Roderick Williams for the same label.

Andrew is Chairman and Artistic Director of the Kirckman Concert Society, which for 60 years has auditioned exceptional young musicians and offered them debut recitals

at major London venues. He read English at Clare College, Cambridge, before studying under Christopher Elton and John Streets at the Royal Academy of Music. He was Pianist-in-Residence at Lancaster University from 1993 to 1999, where he first collaborated with Ronald Woodley in both piano duo and many clarinet and piano recitals across the UK. Andrew is currently professor of chamber music and accompaniment at both the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music, where he was recently made a Fellow.



Ronald Woodley

© Alex Woodley

Andrew West

© Angela Cushway



Angela Elizabeth Slater

© Adam Whittaker



Christopher Fox

© Jobina Tinnemans



Liz Dilnot Johnson

© Peter Searle



Ronald Woodley and Edward Cowie, discussing Heather Jean Nocturnes, Ayriel Studios, July 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ronald Woodley (clarinet, basset horn, bass clarinet)

Andrew West (piano)

Recorded at Ayriel Studios, North Yorkshire, 3–5 April and 24 July 2023

Recording Engineer and Editor: Paul Baily

Producers: Chris Marshall (tracks 1–13); Edward Cowie (tracks 14–18)

Artwork by James Cardell-Oliver, Divine Art

Cover painting "Earth Nocturnal" by Heather Cowie

Music copyrights:

Track 1: University of York Music Press

Tracks 2, 10-13: Composers Edition

Track 3: Josef Weinberger Ltd

Track 4: The Fox Edition

Tracks 5-9: Schott Tracks 14-18: UMP

All images, texts and graphic devices are copyright. All rights reserved.

© & P 2024 Divine Art Ltd

We gratefully acknowledge funding support for this recording from the Vaughan Williams Foundation



DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP











Over 650 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD. 24-bit HD. FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

Divine Art Ltd. email: sales@divineartrecords.com

www.divineartrecords.com find us on facebook, voutube, twitter & instagram

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.

