



Bjørn Arntsen

Bàrru

Ākarana Piano Quartet
Andrew Beer, violin
Robert Ashworth, viola
Chen Cao, cello
Sarah Watkins, piano

01. Pinch Points

NZTrio He Taonga Wairere
Amalia Hall, violin
Ashley Brown, cello
Somi Kim, piano

02. Pacific Notion

Tōwhā
Yanghe Yu, violin 1
James Jin, violin 2
Andrew Beer, viola
Matthias Balzat, cello

String Quartet
03. Guovssu (Daybreak)
04. Àigi (Time)
05. Fàpmu (Power)

Indiana Williamson, solo violin
with fixed electronics

06. Bàrru (Waves)

Pinch Points - Ākarana Piano Quartet

Imagining having a small fragment of music stuck in your head for 20 years...

After buying Hilary Hahn's recording of the Samuel Barber violin concerto, some twenty years ago, a five-note pattern began repeating itself in my ear and thus becoming an earworm. Emerging as if from out of nowhere, it kept sticking around year in, year out. It was as if the only way to get rid of the pattern was to exorcise it through this composition, but before doing so, I had to revisit the Barber concerto – I needed to know how the pattern came to be, what section, which bar number etc. After fastidiously searching the recording and the score, the pattern was nowhere to be found... Could I have imagined the whole thing? In my mind, I could hear Hilary's phrasing, timbre and velocity. I listened to Bo Linde's concerto, another favourite of mine, thinking it may have been a different and Hilary-less performance after all, but no pattern was found. Eventually after five months of digging through every Hilary Hahn album, I found it in Bar 92 of the first movement of Edgar Meyer's concerto – also on the Barber CD.

This piece takes its time to reveal the earworm in full, favouring variation over explicit revelation. In the first part there is an obsession over essentially one shape that is expanding and compressing in length, often played simultaneously at different speeds, provoking gestural figures from spirals, springs, coils, maelstroms and loop-de-loops. The second is a cycle of chords, moving from light to dark, often with cicada-like interruptions.

Pacific Notion - NZTrio He Taonga Wairere

This piano trio emerges as a stream of consciousness that flows, is felt, often punctuated, interrupted, shaped, and later crafted into repetitive earworms. It does not emerge from a verbal place, but from an idea of a certain time and place, namely the urban music of Aotearoa in the early part of this century, especially the sounds heard on "trips" to the clubs and arenas around the country, from electronica, dance, drum & bass to hip hop and trance. These are not styles normally associated with the concert hall nor the piano trio repertoire, but in Pacific Notion, they are weaved together, often blending the three instruments of the trio into sounding like one. This joyous music, often playful and reflective, is constructed around repetition as a main design feature, repetition in atmosphere — going through motions, the same motions, but never quite the same; with every repeating breath there is a new feeling, new vision, new life, new being, same life, but always different.

String Quartet – Tōwhā

Composing a string quartet has always given me great anxiety, as they are often seen as giant expressions of a composer's inner life.

Although, I have written for the ensemble before, this is my only String Quartet, in title. This work is a sonic reflection of Alta, an isolated place in the north of Scandinavia, and specifically the controversy surrounding the construction of a hydroelectric power plant, damming the Alta River in Finnmark, Northern Norway, 1979-1987.

The inspiration behind this music is not programmatically described through the work - to me, the qualities of the music are foremost musical. I found the Alta controversy, to be a reflection of memory, childhood and particularly my own Sámi identity, musically interesting. These reflections are often structural, like proportion and flow, but also the balance within the larger structure, the changing perspective between the two — the smaller details and the unity of the whole. Music, at its best, is a great surging river, that floods and fills its peoples and creates new pathways.

Bàrru - Indiana Williamson

Bàrru is a berceuse, a nocturne, a lullaby.

It is also the divide between a culture's unquestioned assumption of the righteousness and necessity of assimilation of the indigenous other and at least a partial recognition of the Sámi people's sovereign existence.

It blends recorded sounds, a cello choir, a viola and a prepared piano with a solo violin that sits on top of the shifting sand. I am continuously inspired by the beautiful syntaxes of Te Reo Māori and the language of my own people, the Sámi. Specifically, the juxtaposition of the fluid and legato-like use of vowels in Te Reo Māori with the jagged and angular combination of consonants found in the northern Sámi language.



First and foremost, gittos (thanks) to Wayne Laird for shepherding this project from start to finish; the amazing muscians that lent their talent: Amalia Hall, Andrew Beer, Ashley Brown, Chen Cao, Indiana Williamson, James Jin, Matthias Balzat, Robert Ashworth, Sarah Watkins, Somi Kim and Yanghe Yu.

My friends and colleagues at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Oliver Stewart, Sofia Hassounia, Stuart Challis, Michael Williams, Rachael Griffiths-Hughes and Lara Hall.

John Kim at The University of Auckland

Paddy Hill at Roundhead Studios, Auckland.

Jessica Duirs, Sally Casswell, Martin Lodge and Gail Pittaway.

Last, but not least my incredibly kind and patient family, Bertie, Max, Ruby and Winnie.



Producer: Wayne Laird

Engineers:
Matthew Gunn
Patrick Hill
Bjørn Arntsen

Piano Preparation: Glenn Easley

Album photo: Marc Antoine