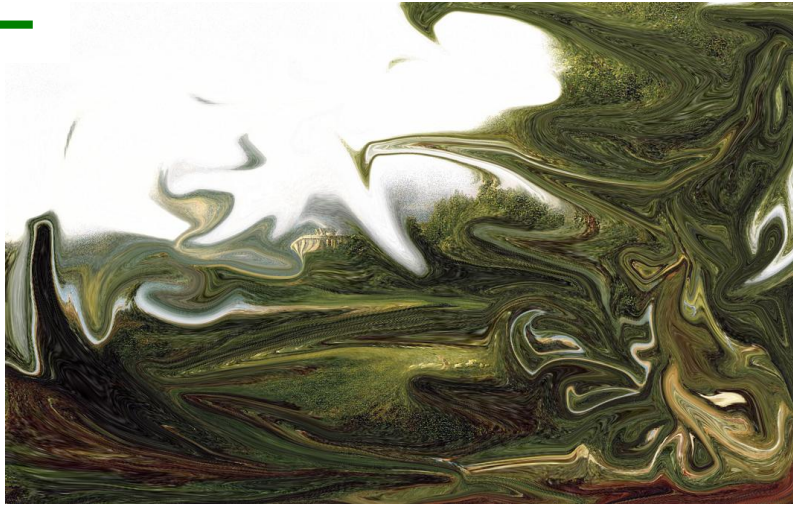


THE



MYTH

OF



ARCADIA

Images by Sergio Biseo

Personal background

In June 2014 I finished the long task of realising and putting out all my earlier music, which had lain unheard for decades. So it was perhaps not strange – especially already having had more than “three score years and ten” - that I should have been uncertain whether I had anything more to say in music. I certainly wondered if it was perhaps time to end that long creative journey.

Such thoughts were particularly pressing because I have always been interested in following the edge of the wave, and because I have long felt that the work of any artist, to be of quality, must change in response to the inevitable inner changes which living brings. I am not the same person I was when I set out in my teens, in Nottingham, on my musical journey. Indeed, I have changed so much in some of my attitudes, that those who knew me then, and indeed later, in Oxford and Cambridge, would be very unhappy to see where I now stand.

But my fears were groundless. Though the world must judge whether this new music has any quality, it is undoubtedly a new phase for me. I came to realise that when I created the *Bonny Street* CD all those years ago, I had been asking myself some fundamental questions about what music was, at least for me – its aims, its techniques and forms. So I thought and wrote about this – the results can be seen in the Blog (<http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./blog/>).

All this led me to revisit music which I had brushed up against in the past, and to come to know what was for me new music. In particular I was drawn to electronic composers, notably Luciano Berio, Paul Lansky and Vladimir Ussachevsky.

At the same time I found myself greatly responsive to modern Dance music, which manages to combine the most basic rhythmic impulses with highly imaginative and subtly finished sorties into the world of sound.

From the recording techniques used in this field, greatly aided and inspired by various excellent articles in *Computer Music*, I found new sound colours, new definitions of what can constitute rhythm and new possibilities for creating aural spaces and for generating power.

It became clear that I was extending and redefining what the sources and output of music could be for me. Paul Lansky says: *Speech and song are commonly thought of as different and distinct – as oranges and apples. It is my feeling, however, that they are more usefully thought of as occupying opposite ends of a wide spectrum of musical potential* (jacket notes for *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion*, New York: CRI Records (SD456)). I have long thought this was an inspiring view of the voice. And more generally, it seems to me that any sound source is potentially a source of music.

Yet I have also recognised that my interest is not only in music as an abstract form. For me music must, at least at times, express ideas which are capable of articulation. In particular, I wish and need it to express my current view of the world, which is a mixture of alarm and pessimism. So in this music, what I hope are beautiful moments are constantly offset by ugly or destructive forces.

The CD

The album has three sections.

SECTION 1- DREAMS, MEMORIES, REALITIES AND VISIONS.

Each piece is predominantly one of these.

Byzantium

This was written about ten years ago as a piece for two guitars. The title nods slightly towards the poem of Yeats, but only really in the sense of a place which is remote, unreal, has a certain sort of beauty, but with a disturbing undertone. It has the fragile logic of a dream. I then set the piece in a framework of abstract sounds to give the sliding in and out of focus which we can encounter in dreams, with additionally a touch of nightmare.

Love Dreams of Africa.

This was originally created in the 80s for a duo with Felix Cross, under the title of *The Bay of Cadiz*. On my visits to Spain, and more especially Portugal, I have always had a sense of beauty and historical resonance. I came to realise that these impressions were to some extent a creation of a world which never really existed.

I am not a poet, but occasionally I find myself generating words which are imaginative in nature. This happened on with this piece. Both words and music then lay in a file – on a typescript and a 3^{3/4} inch reel-to-reel tape, until I came to create the present CD.

Coming back to the words, I realised that this could be a first vehicle for my continuing wish, among other things, to explore the frontiers between the spoken word and the world of sound, which had so successfully happened in *Gargoyle*. I did not wish to press the boundaries as far as Paul Lansky has done, but like him (with Hannah Mackay) I wished to start with a single reading/interpretation. This was done by Frances Lee (my wife and colleague in Sounds Like).

The words show my intention to create a memory told to us by the speaker, though there is also a suggestion that it was possibly a vision of what might have been. In addition I wished to contrast the beautiful experience of the lovers with the return to the reality of mundane everyday life.

*“I can’t hear the cicadas any more”
you said, suddenly, as we left the Bay of Cadiz,
swinging westwards, like Phoenician merchants fearing
storms, monsters, and the terrifying height of the waves.*

*Starboard was Sagres, where once Henry, a Prince
of Portugal, studied navigation, and despatched
captains led on by stories of black slaves
and multi-coloured birds and Benin gold*

*to track the coast in stinking caravelles
southwards till the Pole Star met the sea.*

*Africa to port the ports of Africa...
where we landed to stare at the worshippers dancing
in serpentine procession, singing and drumming
for Damballa made Christ.*

*But that was after we came together
casually meeting faintly attracted
came together
slowly perceiving how silences
came together
exploring bodies
came together
strangely
came together
almost casually*

*“The cicadas never stop, they’re only drowned –“
By truckers’ exhausts lumbering up the motorway
As we head towards the mountains of the north.*

Canção

Reality is the theme of this piece. It was originally written for string bass and bass guitar, to be played with Sergio Biseo. It reflects my longstanding interest in Brazilian music. The piece takes us back through the lush sounds of bossa nova/ samba styles to the music of the indigenous inhabitants. The latter section is not meant to be an authentic recreation, but an impression of the austere mood which in some respects the music of traditional peoples can give us. At the same time there is another strand - the pessimistic view that both cultures are being destroyed by the pressures of industrialisation and commerce. So the piece ends with the destruction of the rain forest and all its supports.

Two Hours before the End of the World

This is the vision – though a bleak one.

This was written in my Bonny Street days and was given a first public realisation on the *Bonny Street* CD. But that version was first made in response to a painting by Moira Jarvis, which now appears on the Sound Paintings section of my website. Though it was entitled *Early Spring*, I felt that the painting had a brooding and disturbing quality.

The piece was inspired by procedures used in Renaissance music. However, the idiom is very much modern, and uses electronic devices freely. In formal terms the piece is a passacaglia, using a repeating bass and sequence of chords. Two guitars, using a call and response technique, present a varying theme. Working against them, another pair of guitars (one using delay, the other distortion) present much more dissonant ideas. The “counterthemes” are not so much complementary as antagonistic.

As with *Love Dreams of Africa*, the piece triggered the production of words, which are again read by Frances.

*Two hours before the end of the world
The last starving wolf stalks a hare
as the thawing islets of snow begin to freeze again*

*A blackbird calls for its lost mate
while starlings swoop and swirl under the vanishing sun*

*Maggots swarm, devouring a dog's carcass as though there is to tomorrow
(which is as it will be)*

*Air thins, light fades
as the cherry blossom unsuspecting prepares for the millionth time to open its buds*

*A galley drives hard to the harbour it will never reach
While demons hurtle through space to reclaim their realm
as the world begins its final unending night*

SECTION 2 - THE MYTH OF ARCADIA

In 2012 Moira Jarvis created a series of monoprints for an exhibition at the Dulwich Festival. She called the series *The Myth of Arcadia*. In conversations, she has said that, apart from the technical and conceptual tasks she was addressing at the time, she was interested more generally in what for her was a pun. Arcadia was both a myth in the sense of one of the stories of the Ancient Greeks and also in the common modern sense of a fiction or illusion.

Arcadia is a real region of Greece which became idealised by poets, as a place of beauty inhabited by beautiful young shepherds. I have always been attracted by such visions, as can be seen in various of my *Camshafts* and *Bonny Street* pieces. But Moira was inspired to create the series of monoprints by the two famous Poussin paintings on this theme, known as "Et in Arcadia ego" (I too am in Arcadia). "I" refers to death, and in the middle of their joy, young people are shown discovering a tomb. I found common ground here, as the theme of the shock of realising the fact of mortality, while you are still young and optimistic, (as seen, for example, in *Love's Labour's Lost*) is another theme which has always interested me. I was therefore prompted to create three Sound Paintings for my website, with videos created by Nigel Homer using the picture as the source material, while I created the music.

During the preparation for these pieces, I went back to or read for the first time various of the literature which has embodied the Arcadian vision since Greek times. I alert those who know the area well to the fact that it was soon clear that the tradition is rich in subtle variants. Consequently, a great deal of selectivity and shaping was needed on my part. Such listeners should remember that these are imaginative creations, expressing the ideas mentioned above, and not scholarly articles.

As with *Love Dreams of Africa* and *Two Hours before the End of the World* I asked Frances to create readings of the texts, which I then treated.

Dawn



Dawn is traditionally thought of as beautiful but fleeting. Moira writes: “the actual process of printing can be speedy, intense and hugely enjoyable. ..In this print I have tried to capture that exquisite moment when night changes into day. It is a fleeting moment so using this way of printing seems appropriate”. The music therefore aims to create some of this beauty. But at the same time Moira’s the picture has a considerable dark element, which I see as both as the emergence from night, and a foreshadowing of death. As we know, night will return...

*Bergers, vous dont ici la chèvre vagabonde,
La brebis se traînant sous sa laine féconde,
Au front de la colline accompagnent les pas,
A la jeune Mnâïs rendez, rendez, hélas !
Par Cybèle et Cérès et sa fille adorée,
Une grâce légère, une grâce sacrée.
Naguère auprès de vous elle avait son berceau,
Et sa vingtième année a trouvé le tombeau.
Que vos agneaux au moins viennent près de ma cendre
Me bêler les accents de leur voix douce et tendre. (André Chénier Mnâïs)*

*Soon as the flocks shook off the nightly dews,
Two swains, whom Love kept wakeful, and the Muse,
Pour'd o'er the whitening vale their fleecy car...
Fresh as the morn, and as the season fair:
The dawn now blushing on the mountain's side...(Alexander Pope Pastorals: Spring)*

*Cur non, Mopse, boni quoniam convenimus ambo,
tu calamos inflare levis, ego dicere versus,
hic corylis mixtas inter consedimus ulmos?*

*Why, Mopsus, being both together met,
you skilled to breathe upon the slender reeds,
I to sing ditties, do we not sit down
here where the elm-trees and the hazels blend? (Virgil Eclogues V)*

*Sing then, and Damon shall attend the strain,
While yon slow oxen turn the furrow'd plain...*

*O'er golden sands let rich Pactolus flow,
And trees weep amber on the banks of Po;
Blest Thames's shores the brightest beauties yield,
Feed here, my lambs, I'll seek no distant field. (Alexander Pope Pastorals: Spring)*

*Je plante en ta faveur cet arbre e Cybèle,
Ce pin, où tes honneurs se liront tous les jours :
J'ai gravé sur le tronc nos noms et nos amours,
Qui croîtront à l'envi de l'écorce nouvelle.*

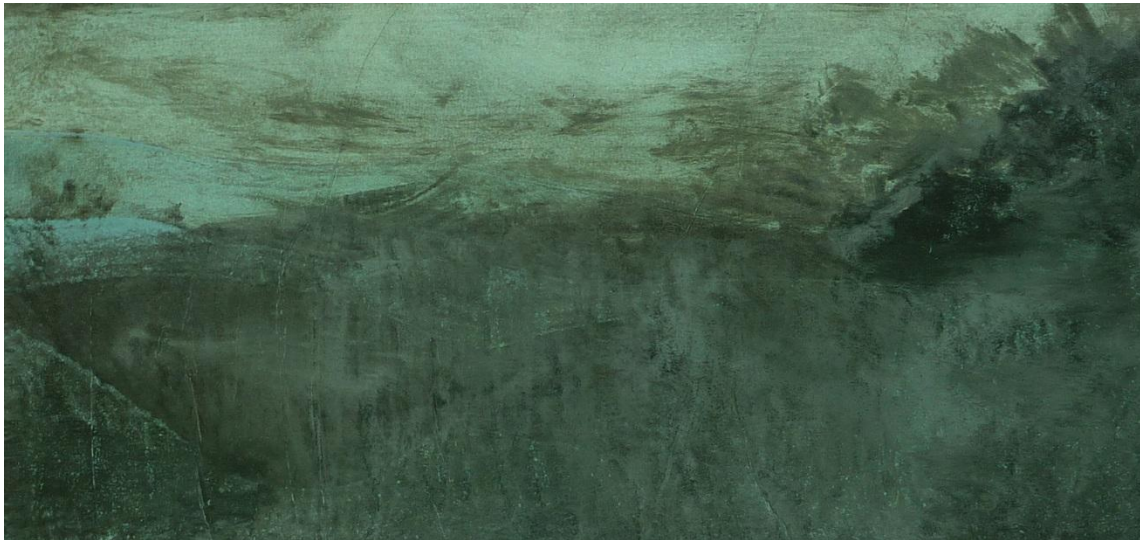
*Faunes qui habitez ma terre paternelle,
Qui menez sur le Loir vos danses et vos tours,
Favorisez la plante et lui donnez secours,
Que l'Été ne la brûle, et l'Hiver ne la gèle.*

*Pasteur, qui conduiras en ce lieu ton troupeau,
Flageolant une Eglogue en ton tuyau d'aveine,
Attache tous les ans à cet arbre un tableau,*

*Qui témoigne aux passants mes amours et ma peine ;
Puis l'arrosant de lait et du sang d'un agneau,
Dis : " Ce pin est sacré, c'est la plante d'Hélène"*

(Pierre de Ronsard Je plante en ta faveur cet arbre de Cybèle)

Afternoon



I found this painting the most challenging to set. There is a richness of colour, but it does not have the brightness which we customarily associate with paintings of summery scenes. To me there is again a brooding quality, more like the heaviness of a hot, late August afternoon.

*Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.* (Matthew Arnold *Thyrsis*)

*But see, the shepherds shun the noontday heat,
The lowing herds to murmuring brooks retreat,
To closer shades the panting flocks remove.* (Alexander Pope *Pastorals: Summer*)

*Where the rude Ax with heaved stroke,
Was never heard the Nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallow'd haunt.
There in close covert by som Brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eie,
...And the Waters murmuring,
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
...And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath...*

(John Milton: *Il Penseroso*)

*Fille de Pandion, ô jeune Athénienne,
La cigale est ta proie, hirondelle inhumaine,
Et nourrit tes petits qui, débiles encor,
Nus, tremblants, dans les airs n'osent prendre l'essor.
Tu voles ; comme toi la cigale a des ailes.
Tu chantes ; elle chante. A vos chansons fidèles
Le moissonneur s'égaye, et l'automne orageux
En des climats lointains vous chasse toutes deux.
Oses-tu donc porter, dans ta cruelle joie,
A ton nid sans pitié cette innocente proie ?
Et faut-il voir périr un chanteur sans appui
Sous la morsure, hélas ! d'un chanteur comme lui ! (André Chénier L'Hirondelle)*

*Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,
Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass?--
They all are gone, and thou art gone as well! (Matthew Arnold Thyrsis)*

Night



By contrast, the impact and interpretation of this monprint was immediately obvious. Interestingly, though I had primarily drawn on electronic resources in the other two pieces, the centre of this was the use of electric guitars.

*Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about (Matthew Arnold Thyrsis)*

*As I my little flocke on Ister banke
Did piping leade, the Sunne already sanke
Beyond our worlde, and ere I got my boothe.
Each thing with mantle black the night doth scathe;* (Philip Sidney *The Countess of
Pembroke's Arcadia*)

*Extinctum nymphae crudeli funere Daphnim
flebant;*

*For Daphnis cruelly slain wept all the Nymphs—
when she, his mother, clasping in her arms
[the hapless body of the son she bare,]
to gods and stars unpitying, poured her plaint.
cum complexa sui corpus miserabile nati,
atque deos atque astra vocat crudelia mater
and rear a tomb, and write thereon this verse: (Virgil *Eclogues V*)*

*But see, Orion sheds unwholsome dews;
Arise, the pines a noxious shade diffuse;
Sharp Boreas blows, and Nature feels decay,
Time conquers all, and we must Time obey.* (Alexander Pope *Pastorals: Winter or Daphne
To the memory of Mrs Tempest*)