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QUARTET

THESE VISIONS LUNAR SAXOPHONE QUARTET

- 1 John Metcalf: *On Song* – 8.33
 - 2 Peter Reynolds: *The Head of Brass* – 11.46
(text by Simon Rees)
 - 3 Chris Pietrie: *Canevon Gymru* – 11.02
 - 4 Hilary Tann: *Some of the Silence* – 10.07
 - 5–9 Christopher Painter: *Lunar Seas*
 - 5 *Lacus Gaudii (Lake of Joy)* – 1.50
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 - 11–13 Ashley-John Long: *Hevelspending*
 - 11 *Quaver* = 200 – 2.47
 - 12 *Crotchet* = 60 – 6.05
 - 13 *Crotchet* = 100 – 3.59
- Total: 72.25

THESE VISIONS

Gwyneth Lewis's words that emblazon the façade of the Wales Millennium Centre express not only a confidence for the future of the arts in Wales, but also a quiet optimism for their present good health. Certainly for composers working in Wales there are now a multitude of possibilities, collaborations and different media in which they can work: possibilities undreamt of thirty years ago.

One such development are young professional groups of musicians such as Lunar Saxophone Quartet, three of whose members trained in Cardiff (at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama)

and now lead busy careers both in Wales (under the auspices of the Live Music Now, Cymru / Wales scheme) and London. Working with a line-up of four saxophones means that commissioning new scores and good arrangements of pre-existing material represents the life-blood of the group's repertoire. There is no fallback position into the repertoire of the past.

Taking as their motto the words of Shakespeare which stand at the top of Mark David Boden's piece on this disc, the Lsq have worked for several years to bring to fruition a project

that combines the music of some of Wales's youngest and most gifted composers with that of more established figures such as John Metcalf, Hilary Tann and Christopher Painter. With the exception of Mark David Boden's piece (which was still composed for Lsq), all the works on this disc were written both for a Welsh tour in the autumn of 2010 and for inclusion on the present disc. Working and collaborating with all the composers on this disc is integral to the scheme. Indeed, Hilary Tann has written elsewhere that, "it's so important for composers to work with performers –

especially with performers as outgoing and receptive as the members of the Lsq. It's also a reason why composers should plan to come to "early" rehearsals. These are more important than last rehearsals and concerts. It's when the music gets done!"



John Metcalf (b.1946)

On Song

On Song was written in April and May 2010 in response to a commission from Live Music Now Cymru / Wales for the Lunar Saxophone Quartet. The commission – part of the *Mapping Wales* project celebrating twenty years of Live Music Now in Wales – was made possible with funds from the Performing Rights Society Foundation (PRS).

As the title suggests the colloquial term 'on song' is the starting point for a series of explorations of fragments of song. These fragments are explored in a simple

melody and accompaniment style using a predominantly syncopated accompaniment.

The reference points are many and varied – from operatic singing to plainsong, jazz to folk music.

The piece is in a single movement and is built on a consistent pedal note – G. As the sections of the piece unfold, different modes are used above the pedal note which also becomes increasingly prominent in the texture. Eventually it is refined down to a single unaccompanied note G passed between the instruments.

This signals the beginning of a final section which, after

starting quietly, builds up to a powerful conclusion.

Composer's note

On Song was first heard at a concert given at the Riverfront, Newport, on 29 October 2010.

About the Composer

Swansea-born John Metcalf has been central to the Welsh musical landscape since the 1970s and is one of its most individual composers. In the early 1990s he developed a personal voice in which an often beautiful, melodic surface is controlled by underlying structures of considerable technical rigour. He has written six

operas, including two for Welsh National Opera, and many large-scale orchestral and chamber works. His seventh opera, based on Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, is an international co-commission from the Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea and Companion Star, New York.

While John Metcalf's cultural roots are in the heart of Wales, his work has a broad international following and is represented in a growing catalogue of recordings. As well as his work as a composer, he is also Artistic Director of the Vale of Glamorgan Festival (Wales's only festival

devoted entirely to the work of living composers). In 2009 he received one of four inaugural Creative Wales Ambassador Awards from the Arts Council of Wales. The awards recognise artists' achievements, their standing in the arts in Wales and their capacity to push the boundaries of their art inherently as form and as a point of contact with contemporary Wales.

www.johmetcalf.co.uk

Peter Reynolds (b.1958)

(Text by Simon Rees)

The Head of Brass

The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay is an Elizabethan era stage play, a comedy written by Robert Greene, around 1588–92 and is recognised as groundbreaking in terms of its multiple-plot structure. *The Head of Brass* takes one aspect of the play in which Friar Bacon labours to create an artificial head made of brass, animated by demonic influence, that can surround England with a protective wall of the same metal. Bacon's inability

to remain awake and the incompetence of his servant Miles, spoil the opportunity.

The *Head of Brass* is written for narrator and saxophone quartet. When Simon Rees chose this episode from Greene's play to accompany Peter Reynold's piece, he took as a starting point the four "heads of brass" that are an integral visual element of the saxophone quartet. In musical terms, Greene's dotty friars and their anarchic servant, Miles, have been treated on a variety of stylistic levels: ranging from mock-gothic horror, with its roots in Weber's *Wolf's Glen* and the absurd world of H K

Gruber's *Frankenstein*, through to stylistic elements more akin to the 1950s B-movie. It aims to entertain and should not be taken too seriously.

The Lunar Saxophone Quartet commissioned The *Head of Brass* with funds provided by the Arts Council of Wales in association with the PAS Foundation. The Lunar Saxophone Quartet (to whom it is dedicated) gave its first performance at Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, on 5 November 2010.

About the Composer

Stillness, simplicity, an occasional playfulness and a tendency to set unusual and

quiotic texts can be found in the music of Cardiff-born Peter Reynolds. Like the music of Morton Feldman, with whom he studied briefly, his music avoids large-scale rhetorical forms and is often fashioned on a small-scale and revised over many years before reaching its final shape. He studied in Cardiff where he now lives and works. He teaches composition at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff and is currently Composer-in-Residence with Young Composer of Dyfed.

Simon Rees studied English at Trinity College, Cambridge, and taught English in Italy

and at Kyoto University. He has published three novels, *The Devil's Looking-Glass* (Methuen, 1985), *Making a Snowman* (1990), and *Nathaniel and Mrs Palmer* (1991, both Penguin), as well as poems (most recently in *Poetry Wales*), and librettos (*Hodion* at Antinopolis in *The Poet's Voice*). He has been Welsh National Opera's dramaturge since 1989 and lives in Cardiff.

Chris Petrie (b.1987) Caneuon Cymru

Identity forms both the background and formal shape of this work for saxophone quartet, *Caneuon Cymru* (Songs of Wales). Its basic thematic material is taken from a generic collection of the same title. Falling into a tripartite structure, the work's underlying material is gradually revealed in the final section. The work calls for both the soprano and alto saxophones to double on alto and tenor saxophones respectively (there is also a second version that requires

all four player to double on other saxophones). The composer has spoken of the music as "exploring" his Welshness and the underlying contradictions that such a label currently suggests for him. Born in Essex, but spending his childhood and teenage years in the Welsh border town, Monmouth, before undertaking formal music studies in the Principality's capital, Petrie now lives and works in London. Without the outward archetypal "trappings" of Welshness, where does he now stand in relation to such questions of national identity and, indeed, is it even

relevant? What is the nature of his (and others) inclusion in a disc of “Welsh music”? *Caneuon Cymru* does not seek to answer such questions and, still less, to present its underlying thematic material in a self-consciously Welsh guise, and therein lies the basic question that the music poses.

Caneuon Cymru was commissioned by the LSO for the present CD and was first heard at a concert given at Lampeter University on 9 November 2010.

About the Composer

One of the more striking younger composers to emerge from Wales in the last year or so has been Chris Petrie. At the age of twenty-three his own personal voice still continues to grow with each subsequent work, but even at this stage his music is marked by a darkness of expression, often drawing on urban images and sounds. His chamber opera (*Perception*) (2009) is concerned with the question of identity, tracing the last journey of a young woman, intent on suicide in the lonely surroundings of the London Underground. More recently,

music such as the orchestral work *Percolation* (2009; abc National Orchestra of Wales) reveals a preoccupation with multi-layered strata-like textures. Petrie moved to Monmouth, South Wales, as a child and studied composition at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama before undertaking post-graduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music, London.

www.chrispetrie.co.uk

Hilary Tann (b.1947) Some of the Silence

a deep gorge ...
some of the silence
is me

Alongside her work as a composer, Hilary Tann is also a published haiku poet. The music of *Some of the Silence* has evolved from the above haiku by John Stevenson, one of the pre-eminent haiku poets in the United States and a member, with Hilary Tann, of the Upstate Dim Sum haiku group. Stevenson's haiku governs the overall shape of the piece and the composer has written:

“Haiku come alive in their after-resonances – their ‘aha’ moments. Similarly, Japanese music works with the concept of a *jo-ha-kyu* curve – much like the shape of a wave which crests and then falls. So this piece falls into three sections. Each approaches ‘the gorge’ – which is, after all, a sudden ‘falling off’ in one’s perceptions. At first the reaction is stunned: ‘what’s that?’ Next the genesis of the gorge is outlined (fluid passages) and the reaction is more scattered (‘so many facets’). Last, we return to the original image (coloured by the water-movement) and the reaction is softer, almost lyrical

as the experience as a whole is synthesized. As a composer, my concern has been with ‘the far side of the curve’ – not the climax, but the ‘result of/ reaction to’ the climax – the downward curve of the falling wave (the *kyu* part of the *jo-ha-kyu* curve).”

About the Composer

From her childhood in the coal-mining valleys of South Wales, Hilary Tann developed the love of nature which has inspired all her music, whether written for performance in the United States or for her first home in Wales. The influence of the Welsh landscape is evident

in many chamber works and in text selections from Welsh poets R S Thomas and Menna Elfyn. She now lives in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in Upstate New York where she is the John Howard Payne Professor of Music at Union College, Schenectady. Hilary Tann is also deeply interested in the traditional music of Japan, has privately studied the shokuhachi and made guest visits as a composer to Japan, Korea, and China.

Hilary Tann holds degrees in composition from the University of Wales at Cardiff and from Princeton University. From 1982 to 1995, she was

active in the International League of Women Composers and served in a number of Executive Committee positions. Many works are available on cd from North/South Recordings, Channel Classics, Deux Elles, and others.
www.hilarytann.com

Christopher Painter (b.1962) **Lunar Seas**

The surface of the Moon is covered with large dark basaltic plains originally formed by ancient volcanic eruptions. Early astronomers mistook these for actual seas, dubbing them by the Latin term, *Maria*, and ascribing names and characters to the many such plains that cover the Moon's surface. Christopher Painter's short suite of pieces for saxophone quartet take names given to these imaginary seas and lakes, extending the original concept and bringing to them the drama and associations

of the Earth's seascapes. The pun contained within the title pays affectionate tribute to the group who commissioned the work: the Lunar Saxophone Quartet.

The work is cast in five movements. In the first *Locus Gaudii* (Lake of Joy), shifting metrical changes reflects the saxophone's jazz-like associations. The second, *Mare Vaporum* (Sea of Vapours) conjures the mysterious vapours that appear to rise from this "sea". In it, indefinite pitches are suggested as the players breathe through their instruments, with more focused melodic lines emerging periodically. The

melodic contours of the third movement, *Mare Anguis* (Serpent Sea), suggest the fanciful shapes of sea serpents that early astronomers perceived in this sea, situated on the near side of the Moon and some 150 miles in diameter. *Locus Doloris* (Lake of Sorrows) forms a dark undulating slow movement whilst the finale, *Mare Procellarum* (Ocean of Storms) brings the work to a lively and brilliant conclusion.

Lunar Seas was commissioned by the Lsq for the present cd and was first heard at a concert given at Lampeter University on 9 November 2010.

About the Composer

Christopher Painter's work is notable for his persuasive handling of traditional large-scale forms and forces, including a substantial number of orchestral and chamber works. Much of his music takes nature in its many guises as a starting point, often using it as a metaphor for the human condition. His most recent work, his Third Symphony, *Fire in Snow*, premiered in Mexico in June 2010 by the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM, under Alan Francis, deals frankly and powerfully with the emotional trajectory experienced by the composer

following the death of his mentor and friend, the composer Alun Hoddinott in 2008. Christopher Painter was born in Port Talbot, South Wales, and studied with Hoddinott at Cardiff University. Alongside a busy schedule of commissions, he heads up Oriana music publishing and is on the teaching staff of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. Recent works include *Furnace of Colours*, a song cycle to poems by Vernon Watkins, to be premiered by the soprano Claire Booth and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

www.christopherpainter.co.uk

Mark David Boden (b.1986) **these visions did appear...**

these visions *did appear...* takes inspiration from the Shakespearian character Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The work opens with gentle, mysterious chords, representing a dark woodland scene, with the gentle rustling of wind creating apprehensive energy.

Nervous fragments of melody, which echo around the haunted environment, are interchanged between the instruments, leading to a powerful climax as Puck awakes and plots his mischief amongst evil spirits. Lively

and energetic rhythms engulf the central section of the work, during which melodic fragments combine to form a quirky, rogish dance. As the nymph-like creature causes havoc and mayhem, energy levels increase, leading to frenetic homophonic rhythmic writing; the height of Puck's impishness. Dawn approaches, and envy energy is replaced by a nostalgic sense of reality; the end of playful dreaming. The music returns to a mystical sense of the unexpected: a nocturnal setting of relative calm.

these visions *did appear...* was first performed by the Lunar Saxophone Quartet at

The Warehouse, Waterloo, London on 22 November 2008. The work was awarded First Prize in the Lsq New Music Competition 2008. Published by Staunch Music

Composer's note

About the Composer

The music of Mark David Boden combines both refinement and elegance with a dark, yet understated, vein of passion. His scores often take extra-musical sources rather than traditional classical forms as a starting point. Their concerns include a subtle preoccupation with the patterns of the natural world and, in his most recent

orchestral work, *Six Degrees*, with the threat of ecological disaster. The music often has a compelling stillness, articulated through a delicate instrumental and harmonic palate though it is not without its own underlying drama. He studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, during which time he was the recipient of several awards. In 2009 he took up post-graduate studies at the Royal College of Music with the support of the *rwv* Trust.

www.markboden.co.uk

Ashley-John Long (b.1986) **Hevelspending**

The noun "Hevelspending" originated in the Urgic dialect of an old Lappish community during the Fourth century. These days it is defined as "the gasp made by one who, walking in the morning, smells spring in the air for the first time after a long winter". Like many happy accidents, the composer only happened upon the word when the present work was some three-quarters complete, but once encountered it seemed to resonate perfectly with the music already composed. The music falls into three sections:

the first is characterised by vigorous rhythmic invention whose energy is constantly renewed by the regular rhythmic displacement. The second movement by comparison is all stillness, its harmonic patterns shifting almost imperceptibly. The third movement follows without a break returning to a renewed sense of vigour driven forward by closely interwoven melodic phrases. This movement in particular, in the composer's words, owes something to "my burgeoning interest in Appalachian folk music and the quartet as such, has a folk-like quality to the counterpoint."

Hevelspending was written for and dedicated to the Lunar Saxophone Quartet and was first heard on 9 November 2010 at Lampeter University.

About the Composer

Ashley-John Long has carved a niche as a composer of innovative scores for improvisers that balance fine detail with freedom and flexibility. He is also rapidly emerging as one of the most virtuosic double bassists in the U.K, specialising in contemporary repertoire, creating innovative performance techniques and performing as a soloist throughout Europe. He

was born in South Wales, and studied double bass at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff. As a composer, his recent commissions include works for the Lunar Saxophone Quartet, percussion soloist Dave Danford as well as a big band work for Welsh harpist Catrin Finch. Leading jazz orchestras the world over have performed his jazz works and they have also received broadcasts on radio and television.

www.myspace.com/ashleyjohnlong

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www.laranjo.org

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Joel Garthwaite

Soprano Saxophone

Hannah Riches

Alto Saxophone

Lewis Evans

Tenor Saxophone

Lauren Hamer

Baritone Saxophone

At the centre of the Lunar Saxophone Quartet's philosophy is the relationship between performer and composer: it's an interaction that feeds and nourishes a healthy and vibrant musical culture. Already, since their formation in 2002, some of the UK's most prominent composers including Gabriel Jackson, John Metcalf and Hilary Tann have written dozens of new works for the group. Performances have spanned a wide range of occasions, from Bryn Terfel's *Faenol Festival* and the *Welsh Proms* to live broadcasts on BBC TV and Radio. Other recordings include their

critically acclaimed album *Catching Sunlight* (Edition Records 2008) and *Flux* (Signum Records 2011).

For further information please visit www.lunarsax.co.uk

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These Visions – Lunar Saxophone Quartet

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