



West Australian Landscapes

The Perth Guitar Quartet



THREE MOODS

Robert Davidson

(b. 1965)

- 1** i. *Sunlight on the Swan River*
- 2** ii. *Sunrise*
- 3** iii. *Cottesloe*

THE TOWN OF WIND

Lydia Gardiner

(b. 1999)

- 4** i. *wind, leaves*
- 5** ii. *branches, roots*
- 6** iii. *earth, sky*

7 ENSEMBLE FOR SIX GUITARS

Nicholas Bannan

(b. 1955)

with guest artists Emily Hobday and Julius Yu

STONE, SHELL, BONE AND FEATHER

Duncan Gardiner

(1983-2022)

- 8** i. *When our heads are bowed with woe*
- 9** ii. *In Paradisum*
- 10** iii. *Your harps, ye trembling saints*
- 11** iv. *Vital spark of heavenly flame*
- 12** v. *Hymn of the dead*
- 13** vi. *There is a land of pure delight*
- 14** vii. *Feathers at sunset*
- 15** viii. *Midar*

A deep reverence for the natural world - a connection to country, a sense of place - permeates much of our rich and varied Australian guitar repertoire. Most of the inspiration for that repertoire, however, comes from locations in the eastern states of the country. This album is the culmination of a commissioning project which seeks to shift that balance, presenting the world premiere recording of four new works each inspired by some aspect of the West Australian landscape.

Each of the composers were given complete artistic freedom, which is reflected in the diversity of approaches and styles in the finished works. Lydia and Duncan each found inspiration in a specific location (the rural town of Greenough, and the East Perth Cemeteries); Nicholas found his impetus in native bird life, and Robert in the nostalgia of exploring the Swan River as a teenager. The program notes on the following pages are in the composers' own words, and provide a more detailed insight into their process. We are tremendously grateful to the composers for trusting us with their work.

We are also deeply indebted to the Noongar people, who have been custodians of this land for tens of thousands of years. It is a privilege to perform on Whadjuk country.

This album is dedicated in loving memory to our dear friend and colleague Duncan Gardiner, and was produced with support from the WA Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.



The Perth Guitar Quartet (from L to R):
Jonathan Fitzgerald, Jameson Feakes, Melissa Fitzgerald, Don Candy

THREE MOODS (2022)

Robert Davidson

Three Moods opens with a movement inspired by my first visit to Western Australia at age 14. My strongest impression was of the beauty of the Swan River, which I was fortunate enough to explore by boat. Sunlight reflected on the water, along with nostalgic memories of adolescence, were very much in mind as I created melodies and accompaniments.

The second movement starts quite sparsely, with resonating long notes in counterpoint. I imagined the sun rising, with more detail coming into focus as the light brightens; the counterpoint becomes busier and more ornate. In the final section, three guitarists are all playing tremolo to create sustained melodic lines.

The third movement returns to my 14-year-old memories of Perth, this time recalling swimming at Cottesloe Beach, with musical figures cascading over each other like waves, and the nostalgic memories evoking the joy and poignancy of that time of life.

-Robert Davidson

THE TOWN OF WIND (2022)

Lydia Gardiner

Wirnda Ngadra is the Wajarri name for the Leaning Trees that grow in Greenough, a small historical settlement located approximately 400km north of the city Perth, Western Australia. These trees bow down to the Earth due to the burning winds that blow from the ocean to the flat plains on which Greenough is located, causing the trees to grow horizontal to the ground. I have had a fascination with these trees since I first saw them in 2011 while driving to Geraldton for a sailing competition. I love the way they have adapted to their windswept life, with the branches forming their own root system in addition to their life-giving leaves. The title of my piece is inspired by *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* by Randolph Stow, who describes Greenough with these words. I really connected to the imagery here, as everything living and built in this area of WA is shaped by the wind, and my first reason for visiting was also inspired by the wind-filled waves of the Indian Ocean.

Throughout the piece two guitars are tuned down by 40 cents, giving the sound a shimmering quality throughout. The purpose of this is twofold: practically, it gives more timbral variation to a work for four of the same instrument, but also represents the almost magical quality these trees possess. They are somewhat bizarre to look at the first time – you can't quite comprehend what you are seeing.



Leaning tree in Greenough, Western Australia. Photo credit: Don Candy

The work is in three movements, each organically structured and taking inspiration from the literal form of the tree and the flat plains in which it grows. The first movement (*wind, leaves*) utilises natural harmonics as the only pitch material, starting at the top of the guitar's register before descending to the lowest harmonics. Each guitarist is given rhythmic fragments roughly every 15 seconds and is then left to improvise on this material; the ensuing rhythm is thus dense and free. The parts move quite independently from one another for most of the piece which creates gradual harmonic change while maintaining the serene atmosphere before fading away.

The opening material of movement two (*branches, roots*) overlaps with the closing of the first movement as the piece descends further down the tree to the woody branches. The guitarists sweep their hands up and down the fretboard, imitating the way branches rub against one another in the wind. Then, pitched material is introduced and is created by swiping the finger down the strings, producing an unusual timbre that suggests the feeling of touching a tree's limbs. This then solidifies into notes played in the usual fashion suggesting the firm wood of the trunk, while introducing a rhythmic motif that twirls around the existing material. All parts then move to two canons displaced by a semiquaver that is reminiscent of twisting roots underground, weaving through the earth in an unusual pattern; they ascend upwards in pitch. The Greenough leaning trees are distinctive as the roots and branches mingle together - because the tree is so bent, the branches appear to become roots and the roots become branches.

Earth, skies moves beyond the living tree, and towards the landscape in which it exists. This is the longest movement by far, representing the wide expanse of the environment that produces the unique features of the tree. Two guitars portray the flat earth from which the trees grow, creating an endless sound through the overlapping re-striking of the same chord, which gradually shifts over time. The other two guitars interject over the top with unrelated chords (using timbral modifiers such as harmonics, *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*) to represent the small blips on the otherwise flat horizon. Halfway through the movement all guitars move to block chords sounded by rubbing the hand over the strings. This moment of relative stillness presents the expansive sky that hangs above the trees, seemingly ever-still while simultaneously being ever-changing. Our eyes drop back down to the earth, where the Sun is beating down in waves onto the flat earth and the trees bend under its weight. Slides between dyads represent the trees bowing down to the relentless environment around them, with relief provided by bursts of wind (portrayed by *rasgueado* harmonics).

Finally, the picture could not be complete without the ever-present motorists speeding between Perth and Geraldton. Flourishes of harmonics cascade down the guitars, reminiscent of the doppler effect, as the machines whizz past the trees and their flat home, forever rooted to the spot as travellers flash past them in space and time.

-Lydia Gardiner

ENSEMBLE (2020)

Nicholas Bannan

Ensemble is the most recent of a series of chamber works that explore the interactive nature of acoustic communication that has been the preoccupation of my research into the evolutionary role of music. What stimulates group synchronicity, as opposed to turn-taking or solitary self-expression; and what might represent the potential transitions between these contrasting modes of acoustic production?

Ensemble reflects the West Australian context in which it was composed: the initial unison theme is broken down into individual lines in a manner that captures the controlled chaos observable in the flocking of birds. When the flock departs, we are left with the silence of the landscape, but able to recapture sonic memories that we can simultaneously experience. The single-movement form of *Ensemble* revolves around such evoked memories, and the anticipation of their reappearance.

-Nicholas Bannan

STONE, SHELL, BONE AND FEATHER (2016)

Duncan Gardiner

I received an invitation from the National Trust of Australia (WA) to compose a piece of music inspired by the East Perth Cemeteries. From outside the gates, the cemeteries look overgrown and unkempt. When I enter the gates my heart tends to flutter. Everywhere the eye can see oozes with story and history. It paints a picture of life stretching back as far as 1830.

Stone. Yes, of course stone. Grave stones are all around. Many of them are a type of slate that appears to be at the mercy of eons and the elements. Intricately carved stone and remnants of such patterns are worn smooth by wind and rain. Names and stories etched into these stones reveal much, still.

I noticed shells. Lots of them. It made me think of a graveyard for oysters. *Fossils...* Did the river used to run this high? I later discovered that the paths were lined with the crushed shells extracted from the Swan River.

Many of the old grave markers were made of wood and time has seen them perish. Almost all of the unmarked expanses of earth beyond the paths are the resting grounds for unknown souls. Up to ten thousand people were buried there. Only around 800 gravesites have been identified since. Bones are frequently dug up by Main Roads when they excavate parts of East Parade.

On my first visit to the cemeteries I noticed a beautiful black feather near a grave. I knew it would play a part in my piece. Every time I return I find more feathers to add to my collection.

It was my intention to interweave the old and the new. Old music, being music that was heard at the funerals of those who were buried in the East Perth Cemeteries. The new being my contemporary response to old music. The first seven movements begin with an exact reproduction of funeral music transcribed for guitar quartet. Following that is my contemporary response to the music. I wanted to create something that was true to my aesthetic as a composer and something that seemed restful, and befitting of the soothing, melancholy nature of a music that was intended to bring comfort in times of grief.

I. When our heads are bowed with woe

Open, luscious harmonies convey the essence of a new day, of rays of light illuminating dark spaces and shining upon the inscriptions on grave markers. The hymn melody is present throughout the movement, supported by shimmering harmonics, piquant cluster chords and an updated harmonic progression which harks back to a Baroque aesthetic.

II. In Paradisum

In Paradisum was a single line of music which may have been notated as early as the 14th century. Many persons buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery are of Irish descent, so I wanted to pay homage to the musical heritage of Ireland by shaping the original Gregorian chant into a lilting ballad, or a slow jig, by changing the 'rhythms' of the original tune and harmonising it.



Grave marker in the East Perth Cemeteries.
Supplied by the National Trust of Western Australia



Grave marker in the East Perth Cemeteries. Photo credit: Eva Fernandez, supplied by the National Trust of Western Australia

III. Your harps, ye trembling saints

I sought to cultivate the qualities of a harp in my writing for guitars. A guitar might be described as a type of harp, with its resonant string sound and chordal capabilities. I was drawn to this open sound and have set the hymn tune against the monotonous sounds of open strings. The work has a slightly Renaissance feel due to my use of modal harmonies.

IV. Vital spark of heavenly flame

In this movement my focus was on the bass line of Edward Harwood's hymn. In it I delve directly into the concept of minimalism, where musical ideas are characterised by the repetition of very short phrases which change gradually, producing a hypnotic effect.

V. Hymn of the dead

Music was rarely heard at Jewish funerals, however it would have been performed at times of mourning after the death of a loved one. I was struck by the unique sound of the descending scale heard in the closing lines of this hymn, which has a modal nature. The Jewish cemetery was the fifth to be opened, so as a symbolic nod I decided to write the work in 5/8 meter, giving the work a throbbing irregularity and a touch of exoticism.

VI. There is a land of pure delight

I was so taken by the title, which I assume refers to heaven. It's a modern take on what the hymn might sound like today. The melody is presented twice; firstly set to a sparkling accompaniment of shimmering harmonics and slightly dissonant shards or clusters of notes, before being shared with the bass guitar. After this melodic exchange the piece develops



*The mortuary chapel at the East Perth Cemeteries.
Photo credit: Eva Fernandez, supplied by the National Trust of Western Australia*



Grave marker in the East Perth Cemeteries. Photo credit: Melissa Fitzgerald

into a series of divisions upon a ground, where one can relish in the joys of harmony for harmony's sake. Delightful. Delightful to my ears, anyway!

VII. Feathers at sunset

On my first visit to the cemeteries it was late afternoon. The wind was strong. I stood for a moment and the breeze caught the strings of my guitar, setting off a series of otherworldly harmonics. The strings were vibrating in the wind and it was something very special. I decided to set harmonics and open strings as an accompaniment to a traditional Chinese mourning song. The melody is a traditional tune which I had to write out by ear.

VIII. Midar

Midar is an extra movement I wanted to add in the spirit of acknowledgement to the local Indigenous people of the South West region of Western Australia. The piece is a reflection of the beauty of the Derbarl Yerrigan (the Swan River). It tells the story of the sheoak trees that line the shores of the river. It recalls imagined ancient songs and dances. Might the early colonists have heard singing and dancing in the night? Certainly!

And we hear it, still.

-Duncan Gardiner



Recorded in Callaway Auditorium at the Conservatorium of Music,
University of Western Australia on 9 April, 7 May, 11 & 23 June 2023

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