

## Helen Fisher - Wings of the Wind

I am a British born resident. Studying this piece has prompted me to look at Maori chant and culture. It has been suggested that the Maori arts community, probably due to similar stylistic elements in the music, has embraced Helen Fishers work. This piece clearly pays homage to the Maori sound of the Nose Flute. Where Traditional Maori chant may limit itself to small intervals such as a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> Helen Extends this to greater intervals but still maintains the sense of the Oro by building the whole piece around a C#. The Shift from Note Bending to the use of harmonics represents a greeting to the Spirit world and that sound gives me a feeling of Spirituality/Earthiness. Helen talks about the piece representing a daily flight for flocks of starlings off Kapiti Island to find food and I feel that the music absolutely does justice to that concept. The birds flutter, souring, gliding and curious nature are all represented by the sound of the flute as well as their journey to and from the mainland with their change of direction being at bar 74. This music feels like it is improvised although the score clearly states that it is not, however, that improvised sense of the work represents nature in itself and to the bird, their journey (and life) are a piece of improvisation on a daily basis. Helen clearly worked with the performer (or one of a similar calibre) to be able to capture the nuances of the subject matter. With reference to the spiritual element, this piece refers to the cycle of life and death and carries a different message to its listener, one of birth to death, curiosity to weariness, a reflection of the human spirit and its capacity to survive everything that it is dealt.

## Kea Country - Ian McDonald

The Kea is a Parrott with attitude!! This piece was written with a deliberate attempt to capture the spirit of the Kea with particular reference to its strangely human characteristics. This piece suggests different ideas in its 5 short movements. The key element that I think Ian McDonald presents to us is not just the personality of the bird, but also our interaction with the bird and in turn its reaction to us. The first movement to me is the sound of both the bird (high pitched sound) and the trampers walking through its territory/homeland (low pitch noises) Near the end it almost sounds like human conversation heard by the kea from above. This is expanded upon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement where the sense of a tramp hut is captured, is this curious intelligent bird attracted to us because of how we behave in this environment? This is clearly a meeting place between man and bird. The rising and swooping tin whistle also represents the birds' flight and presence in the camp, possibly looking for food. The third movement continues in a similar manner, but this time using a circus theme and waltz to present us with the Kea's "cheeky monkey" attitude. Now we get serious in the 4<sup>th</sup> movement with the bird removed from human contact. It flies over the mountains on updrafts (represented by the electro-acoustic sounds) and its cry can be heard over the horizon. The final movement ends with poem and then actual birdcall to provide a feeling of closeness to the Kea, like the bird is talking to you, personified in a way, by the lyrics of the poem. Its funny how it is almost impossible to observe something without affecting the results by your presence! Is this what we have with the Kea?, are we becoming more like it or it like us, or maybe it's a bit of both! I think that Ian McDonald asks the same question in Kea Country; maybe it should be called Kea and Trampler Country?

## Don't Dream Its Over – Neil Finn

I Love this track! This is a very appealing piece of music for me on quite a few levels. Firstly I would like to talk about the backing. This is a modern piece and as a jazz and pop musician I would have to say that it just grooves! The guitar introduction is unhurried and provides a good rhythmic pulse and sets the key nicely. The bass enters a few bars later with a pentatonic riff then just supports the harmony with tonic notes, fill in walks on beat 4, and the occasional ragtime derived syncopation. There is an airy steel guitar sound that floats in and out of existence to create tension in the verse and the bongos are added give a sense of rhythmic interest and to change the feel from 8<sup>th</sup> note to 16<sup>th</sup> note rhythms. The organ break is very “whiter shade of pale” like with common use of faster Leslie speaker activation for effect and to support the guitar based counter phrase immediately after. The other interesting feature is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> chorus where the harmony changes in the “Hey now, Hey now” section, again another good song writing technique. With regards to the lyrics and melody, we have already discussed a “question” like phrase from the melodic line ending in mid air in the lyric “there is freedom within”. Your attention is grabbed by the feisty rhythmic pulse of the lyrics “Hey now, hey now”, as if the song is trying to brush away doubt which is immediately followed by the reassuring lyrics of “Don't dream its over”. There is religious reference made in the lyric “Try to catch the deluge in a paper cup”, this to me suggests the lost feeling in the 1<sup>st</sup> verse, as with “you'll never see the end of the world when you are travelling with me” which suggests the end of a relationship, am I holding you back somehow, stopping you from finding your goal? The subject turning over to the TV page instead of reading the news suggests to me that they are avoiding confrontation somehow and instead using television as an escape. The lyrics are very poignant and create very vivid imagery in my mind, a truly great piece of music.

## A Chaos of Delight – Eve De Castro Robinson

“So that partly sums up my approach to composing. There are emotional/philosophical leanings, and timbral pushings, and flickers of recognition of sound events or extra musical devices, but very rarely a story line. That's why I haven't done any opera. I don't do songs, or settings.” – Interview with Eve De Castro Robinson conducted by composer Thomas Goss.

This work is an acoustic rendition in celebration of the dawn chorus. It was written specifically for Andrew Uren (Bass Clarinetist) who requested a piece from Eve. According to Eve she chose that topic as the bird theme comes very naturally to her, and she started thinking about derived sonorities, the extremes of registers, certain calls, certain motifs, and the fact that the bass clarinet can surprisingly and ironically play high very well. She likes to push extremes of registers in instruments and also likes clicking sounds, which is a speciality of Andrews (tongue clicks and slaps). So Eve collaborated with Andrew, using recordings of bird noises to create sections of the work such as the “Hoom” of the Kakapo (the very low note). She also talks about Bethels beach being the source of inspiration for her Tui sound, where the tui makes a kind of perfect 5<sup>th</sup> or octave call and response figure.

I think that the emotional content is evident too, with the beginning of each day comes a feeling of excitement and flurry represented in passages of the work. The piece also has a natural balance to it with a definite feeling of beginning middle and end.

## Little Lamb – Jenny McLeod

This song based on Blake's poem "The Lamb". The piano accompaniment has been very cleverly composed and is significant in telling the full story of The Lamb. Only Stanza 1 has been set to music by Jenny McLeod, which holds the question "who made thee"; asked by the singer. Musically speaking the answer is at first hinted by the opening piano entry twice and then in the singers opening line. This is of course a reference to the presence of the spirit litany found in many Christian masses, which is repeated 3 times. The Melodic line over the word "who" is used to emphasise the question more and later on from bar 25 the accompaniment becomes more hymnal, suggesting the answer to be found in the church, and indeed god. I appreciate the fact that the vocal line is fairly conjunct in style without many large interval leaps where in the piano lines are more disjunct in style, representing the leaping and frolicking of the young animal. When the question is asked there is a sense of unbalance between vocals and piano, a contrast of styles if you like, later on when the answer is given there is a great sense of calm as the answer is made clear. The climax of the melody line appears to be at the word "rejoice", the music seems to peak at this point suggesting the finishing of the question. However there is also a peak to be found at bar 17, which supports the word "bright". I enjoyed the piano style from bars 9-20 which really does suggest a happy little lamb enjoying the stream and meadow, blissfully lacking in self recognition. Lucky Lamb!

## Private Universe – Neil Finn

We all live in a private universe don't we? Aren't we all driven entirely by our attitudes based on our OWN point of view? The atmosphere of this piece is a haunting one, and the subject is clearly not in a happy place, with talk of "labour" and "endure". The piece begins with sounds of the street, and ends with tribal drumming and drones. It reminds me of the kind of feeling you get when you arrive in a town/city/country on your own and its all unfamiliar. Jim Morrison lyrics read "people are strange, when you're a stranger" and this use of Polynesian drumming and general hubbub give you the feeling that you are a stranger here. This could all be an analogy for how the subject is feeling mind you and not a literal description mind you. The melody is restricted to provide the listener with an introverted feeling as if the subject is talking to oneself. It's a dark scene. The mood changes completely over the lyrics "and it's a pleasure etc". The key of the song changes from minor to major depicting a happier turn of events. This section is not only happier but also gives us a religious clue as it uses the same rhythmic pulse as and "3 times spoken" emphasis of Christian masses. The melodic line emphasises the last word of each phrase i.e. "Known" and "Gained". Is this Neil Finn interjecting here? Have things changed now after this section? I feel the determination of Neil in the last verse as if he has gained the ability to see light at the end of the tunnel at least. The imagery of the lyrics is still as strong but the delivery of the words has moved from victim to victor partially due to the melody being sung 1 octave higher. We can all get bogged down by things sometimes, and this song is merely a reflection of that, that's all, whether Neil is saying that we should turn to God is debatable but we should all at least realise that our own state of mind can be our best friend and worst enemy!

## Slice of Heaven – Dave Dobbyn

This is a great piece of song writing and sequencing combined. The bluesy riff sung by the vocal intro serves as a drive for the whole song, when the flutes are not playing it, it is still represented in the sequenced bass line in the verse. There is that lovely lilted feeling you get on the bridge section (“howdy angel etc...”) where the rhythm almost feels syncopated and the backbeat is almost lost due to the rhythmic feel of the strings. The verse then appears to go into a quasi pop-reggae feel with the bass playing arpeggios and the strings stabbing almost constantly on the “off beat”. The chorus then enters with choir like layering of vocals and the local sweet sound of the glockenspiel playing a beautiful counter melody. And this all happens in a 3-minute song? The arrangement is very rich indeed and very creative for the time it was written, using predominately a midi setup with only hardware synthesis instead of virtual instruments that we have now. In the notes it is suggested that the song is a prayer to the Virgin Mary. I think that the choir sound of the chorus backs up this idea with a very gospel like vocal layering, and your attention is certainly grabbed by the “Howdy Angel” section being so rhythmically different. Also the rising sound that swoops upwards from the ocarina flutes could represent the ascension to heaven. This is after relating the lyrics “Your bottom lip’s near draggin’ on the ground” to the crucifixion of Christ. At the very least it gives you a feeling of carrying the prayer upwards to reach its recipient! One more thing regarding to the production of this work, each electronic sound in the piece has its own space in the mix. This clever use of panning gives you that sense of the tune being alive and has a great deal to do with the effectiveness of each individual part and the song as a whole.

## Whaling – Dave Dobbin

This piece is a total contrast in style from slice of Heaven in many ways. This is a folk song basically enhanced by the use of a popular folk instrument, the fiddle; that comes in and out of play in between verses. This tune was recorded by musicians and not sequenced on a computer, and the backing is much more conventional with the simple use of a few diatonic chords supporting the melody, and with use of simple drum beats and bass lines. It reminds me of the folk style of Bob Dylan in the way that the feature is not on the music. It is the poetry and lyrics that take centre stage this time as Dave Dobbyn draws analogies about human behaviour through biblical reference and sexual innuendo. The first half of the song describes Jonah and his feelings as he fled from god. He is defiant, fuelled by his own strength and bravado, which is only skin deep in reality. Have you ever been angry at the sea when you have tried to swim through it? Even the smallest wave has a great deal of energy contained within it, enough to brush you aside with absolute ease. This is what Dave Dobbyn is referring to in the lyrics “and when tour ship can’t handle the heavier seas”, in that the problem was too great to be able to brush it aside with his own denial. The solution for Jonah was not to turn to god (“no down on bended knees”) as he was running away FROM god!

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the tune, the subject is looking for forgiveness and is in a fearful state as he needs “saving from himself”. He talks about the selfishness of human nature and the need to fulfil his own sexual desires, “the first to get trigger happy”. Is this track about fidelity? If it isn’t then it implies some other element in a relationship. He doesn’t mean to harm anyone, just like Jonah, maybe he feels that some demand lies too heavy on his back. Monogamy is sometimes a tough call for anyone and maybe this represents the struggle that society places on us which

sometimes conflicts with our natural instincts. And maybe he realises in the end verse that he should be with his “sweet baby”, as he makes references to the fact that he is not happy with anyone else, when he sings the line “not where I wanted to be”. I can relate this song as I have often found myself in situations that I’d rather not be in, but haven’t we all?