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AUDIO CD & DOWNLOAD PRESS RELEASE



Composer: Sophie Harris

Title: I feel the silence

Artists: Sophie Harris (cello)

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Recording & CD Information

The story of this CD is born out of Sophie's friendship with violinist Rick Koster. For twelve years Rick and Sophie have worked together as members of the Duke Quartet. Whilst on tour they shared our mutual interests in philosophy and poetry in the coffee houses of Europe. A couple of years ago Rick invited Sophie to his home and studio for tea and chat which developed into improvising and recording and finally this CD.

This CD is completely improvised in a tiny room, a sort of "one take roulette" to the point where Sophie could almost not bear to alter anything however imperfect it was – London traffic, creaky chairs to name but two, this is not an airbrushed CD. For her the authentic journey is always paramount – to return to the tradition of a universal language of story telling.

At the heart of this aural journey is Sophie's story. A love of the cello and music from the first string quartet concert she attended aged 3. The gift of being taught and guided from age 10 by her cello teacher, metaphysical magician William Pleeth - whom Sophie's father had spent years listening to and painting as a boy attending concerts at Conway Hall in London. A terrible near death infant illness which left Sophie with a personal imprint of synaesthesia - as a child she saw colours around people, which spoke more to her of their feelings than words alone. And now in her poetry and music making, the sense of unity and somatic completeness in the sensory integration - almost like they are a broken mosaic of their nascent selves - and one which for her was triggered by early clinical death.

Perhaps this also accounts for Sophie's particular love of cultural Europe of the Second Viennese School. Freud, Schoenberg, Berg, Stefan Zweig - the marrying of intellect and heart and the simultaneous hurtling towards the abyss, the prophetic sense that this was untenable, as later born out by Fascism. And an almost atavistic responsibility for her Semitic heritage and for the extraordinary power that music has to acknowledge human suffering and communality.

The poem **Mother** was commissioned by composer Julian Marshall for his Song Cycle reflecting on different embodiments of love. During that first meeting, a wonderful stream of consciousness and connection occurred between the two of them. It was like watching the narrative that is the backdrop to the Mona Lisa portrait come alive. Sophie has now collaborated with Julian on his two extraordinary works **Out of the Darkness** and **Angel in the Forest** and looks forward to their continuing journey.

Tracklisting

Music: Song of the birds; Wash Me; Purcell; Kafka; Icebergs; Josquin; Muddy; Rainforest; Africa
Poems: Mother; Wash Me; Kafka; Gratitude

The CD opens with Sophie's version of the Catalan folk song "*Song of the Birds*" popularised by the great Spanish cellist Pablo Casals, through whom it came to represent dissent from Franco's

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regime in Spain. So saddened was Casals by the lack of action against Franco after the 2nd World War that he refused to perform any more, saying: "The life of a single child is worth more to me than all my music".

Wash Me was written when someone close to Sophie was very ill. The music invokes the poem as water, bird and a transformative vehicle for suffering.

In Purcell's "O Lord Hear My Prayer", Sophie was struck by the use of plaintive C as the "enlightened" key. Emptied of colouration or ornament, C is the white spectrum for religious contemplation. It is the synaesthete's purity. She feels that the dissent from the C is Purcell's prayer, the struggle and suffering on the journey to purification. And it is the language of that journey which she wanted to explore in *Purcell*, by extrapolating the C and allowing an ensuing jumble of harmonic colour – as if throwing light onto the different vibrations of flowers - then finding a path back to the beginning.

The poem *Kafka* came to Sophie as a series of vivid images whilst driving to Rick's house one day. On arrival she wrote it down and then went inside to create its musical counterpart. The Kafka story it references is called "The Penal Colony": a devastating depiction of split-off cruelty in which a machine murders its victims by imprinting their crime onto their body via huge needles. In her poetic journey a white calico covered with myriad silken threads uprooted and jumbled, mirrors Kafka's punctured human body. And it is the unravelling of this yarn or narrative thread which makes visible the unspeakable. Just as every Kilim and artisan cloth holds a story passed down.

Icebergs is a visceral image of our melting world: the feel and sound of the far North. As the composer inhabited that space, she had a strange shamanistic experience of being taken over by an ancient Inuit woman. In a rocking trance, a sung lament for the melting world came out of her which she then translated into cello dialogue and forms the apex of this piece.

Over the years Sophie has had the great pleasure of working with the Hilliard Ensemble. Her improvisation entitled *Josquin*, over this original work by Josquin des Pres is homage to Jan Garbarek and his work with the Hilliard - juxtaposing ancient and modern.

Muddy is the affectionate name which Rick gave to this piece when he first heard it. He said that it reminded him of Muddy Waters. As a classical musician, trained from infancy to appreciate the wonders of the Golden Section in Mozart and celebrate the great and diverse traditions of European Intellectual Life, for her to take off that glorious cloak and leap headlong into the unknown of beyond was thrilling.

Rainforest is a short aural ode to our beautiful world. Sunrise in Brazil calling us into being. Sometimes stepping into Rick's upstairs room is like the back of the wardrobe to Namia or the changing room in the shop which Mr Benn frequents. On this occasion Sophie closed my eyes to be greeted by a world emphatically non human, the calling of animals and birds unknown to her in shape or voice was a delight to experience.

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After mining the vaults of Freud and Gizek one day, Sophie started a piece which initially was called *Africa*, as it did begin as an enquiry into our origins and impulses. But then like all free thought it went on its own journey and quickly took on a different character resulting in a piece which is a personal embracing of the proximity of spirituality and psychosis. A challenging space to step into but one she felt she needed to take. The traces of Africa are barely discernable beneath the layers of philosophical modernity – a palimpsest of sound reflecting the discussion which prompted it into being.

Performer Information

A student of William Pleeth, Sophie Harris graduated from Chethams School of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music, where she won numerous prizes. Moving to London, she spent five years with the award-winning Smith Quartet, following her passion for contemporary music.

Since then her work has diversified both as a soloist and with ensembles, performing, recording, and commissioning new cello works with a range of composers and musicians including Steve Reich, Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman, Kevin Volans, Django Bates, Graham Fitkin, Rolf Hind, Isidora Zebeljan, Egberto Gismonte, Melody Gardot, Julian Marshall and jazz luminary Sam Rivers.

She has collaborated extensively with composer Jocelyn Pook on soundtracks for film, most notably Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, and with Gavin Bryars on a specially commissioned score for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

Sophie plays a wide repertoire in her extensive performances, CD recordings and radio broadcasts with many of Britain's leading chamber ensembles- including the Brodsky Quartet, Hilliard Ensemble, Ensemble Moderne and Lontano. She is married to Ian Belton of The Brodsky Quartet.

Sophie is the cellist in the Duke Quartet. Her cello is a Daniel Parker 1730.

Marketing/Press Activity

The CD will receive a full service to press and initial marketing will probably include Gramophone and BBC Music.

For review copies and any further information, please contact John Cronin at Music & Media/MMC Recordings, which is a division of Music and Media Consulting Limited.