**Notes from Shetland to Shanghai**

By Sophie Rocks

Notes from Shetland to Shanghai is a multi-disciplinary programme, combining music and poetry to explore the global topic of migration. From traditional music to classical and contemporary, this show incorporates music from all over the globe including countries such as Israel, Canada, Russia, Holland and of course, China.

Having grown up on the Shetland Islands, a small archipelago north of Scotland, I was part of a small, very close community. I was also fully aware of the extent to which migration played, and continues to play a part on the islands: at present, more people of Shetland heritage live in Canada, Australia and New Zealand than in Shetland.

In 1969, Shetland Fiddler Tom Anderson composed a slow air, Da Slockit Light, which was inspired by people migrating from Shetland. As I play this piece regularly in recitals, it in turn inspired me to consider migration across the globe, an ongoing global phenomenon of huge consequence.

With this in mind, I programmed a recital named ‘Notes from Shetland to Shanghai’ which I performed at the 2018 Edinburgh International Fringe festival. The programme consisted of solo harp works from all over the world, commencing in Shetland and ending with a traditional Chinese song. However, I wanted to explore ways in which to expand this, challenge myself and widen the audience for the Harp. Through this, I developed a programme combining solo Harp music from global locations with readings of poems connected to migration from all over the world.

Drawing on personal accounts, both of those who leave and those who stay, this show takes you on a journey, exploring the emotions connected with immigration - fear, anger, sorrow, resilience, freedom and hope. It has been an incredible journey to put this programme together. Setting music to the intimate thoughts and feelings of people with whom I have felt such a strong connection has been a more emotional experience that I expected and I feel fortunate to share this with you.

**Shetland**

Da Slockit Light - Tom Anderson (1969)

Moments of Separation - Christine de Luca

Speaker: Chris Stout

Beginning in the Shetland Islands, this first piece explores the feelings of those who stay and those who are sometimes left behind.

Tom Anderson’s Traditional tune, *Da Slockit light* was inspired by people migrating away from the islands in the 1960’s. ‘Slockit’ is part of Shetland dialect, meaning extinguished. Tom Anderson named the tune after watching all the lights go out in his home village of Eshaness, a symbol for all those leaving the islands.

Christine De Luca’s poem, *Moments of separation* is a poem of three parts, it is about moments of separation within a family when somebody is leaving and going away. This is set in 3 different times, in 2002 when a student is going to university, in 1965 when somebody else is doing the same thing, and then back in 1880 when a son of the household is emigrating.

*About 1880.*

*She keens he’ll settle in New Zealand*

*That she’ll no see him again*

*Never ken his bairns*

*She’ll sell gloves for stamps*

*At da byre, a Peerie greet as she milks*

*face farnenst the warm flank*’

**Israel**

Sonatine for Harp - Sergui Natra (1969)

Refugees - Brian Bilston

Speaker: Fenton Hutson

A Romanian born composer, Sergui Natra emigrated to Israel in 1961 where he had huge success in writing for the harp. This is the third movement of his sonatina and for me, its rhythm and melodies embody a character filled with anger, frustration and disharmony, which led me to pair it with the first setting of Brian Bilston’s *Refugees.*

Brian wrote this poem in order to show the polarising views that are attached to such a crisis. Some believe letting refugees onto your soil could put your citizens at risk. Others believe it is our human obligation to take care of one another unconditionally. Some fall in between. When you first read it, the poem seems to be making a certain kind of statement about refugees and how to handle them.

*It is not okay to say*

*These are people just like us*

*A place should only belong to those who are born there*

*Do not be so stupid to think that*

*The world can be looked at another way*

**Canada**

Exosphere, Suite Galactique - Caroline Lizotte (2001)

A small snippet from one of my favourite pieces, originally written about molecules and their transformations as they escape the core of the earth and reach space. For me, this piece depicts the great difficulties and disarray of making a transformative journey.

This is a transitional piece, bridging to the latter half of the programme.

**America**

In a Landscape – John Cage (1948)

First Neighbours – Margaret Atwood

Speaker: Danielle Gonzalez, Percussionist

Composed in 1948, John Cage’s minimalist solo work In A Landscape was composed with the idea that the purpose of the music was “to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences.” For me, In A Landscape, has a dreamlike feel and holds an air of mystery and uncertainty, all feelings that I associate with the idea of moving to a new country.

First Neighbours is just one of the many fantastic poems in Margaret Atwood’s collection, The Journals of Susanna Moodie. Published in 1970, Atwood adopts the voice of Susanna Moodie, a noted early Canadian writer, and attempts to imagine and convey Moodie's feelings about her migration from England to Canada in 1832.

First Neighbours describes the difficulties of being accepted by the locals and the discomfort she is forced to feel through her misunderstandings of the language and culture. I found this poem particularly poignant as though it describes the journey of a Western European finding her way in a new country and being judged by the natives. It is just as relevant today, most frequently with Western Europeans doing the judging.

*The People I live among*

*Unforgivingly previous to me*

*Grudging the way I breathe their property*

*The air, speaking a twisted dialect to my differently shaped ears*

*Though I try to Adapt*

**Russia**

A Separation, Nocturne in F Minor - Mikhail Glinka (1888)

Someone - Lily Brett

Life - Lily Brett

Speaker: Clare English

Glinka wrote this piece after having to leave Germany and his fiancé in order to return to care for his sick father in Russia - he was never to see his beloved again, which led him to write such a melancholic and heartbreaking piece.

Lily Brett also had ties with Germany, but in a very different way. Born in Feldafing displaced persons camp in Bavaria, Brett was born to parents who had reunited having been separated in Auschwitz. This experience led Brett to publish a book of poems named *the Auschwitz poems.*

Both *Someone* and *Life* examine the feelings of loneliness associated with being somewhere without a sense of belonging.

*Someone Life*

*If you had someone.... There was no sense*

*It could save you There was no life*

**Nigeria**

Awuya - Sally Beamish

Who Am I, without Exile? -Mahmoud Darwish

Speaker: Christopher Rocks

Awuya was commissioned by Glasgow University to celebrate the groundbreaking work of Professor Keith Vickerman in the field of African Sleeping Sickness. This poem is inspired by the changing forms of deadly trypanosomes, by Central African drums and harp, and by a lullaby from a tribe decimated by sleeping sickness in the 1940s. The original words of the lullaby, sung to a little girl called Awuya, are hauntingly reminiscent of the symptoms of the disease.

*Awuya, eh, your mother does nothing*

*She crushes no ground nuts and draws no water*

*Awuya, eh, your mother goes nowhere*

*Neither to catch fish nor to look for snails.*

Alongside this is Mahmoud Darwish’s poem, *Who am I, without exile*? This poem begins as a poem depicting the image of a single human being alone, without community and resolves, through the use of differing pronouns, with the poem ending in *we* as opposed to *I.* Beginning in a place of anguish, this poem settles in a place of bonding and hope.

*And nothing carries us: not the road and not the house.*

*Was this road always like this, from the start,*

*or did our dreams find a mare on the hill*

*among the Mongol horses and exchange us for it?*

*And what will we do?*

*What will we do without exile?*

**Holland**

Pour Le Tombeau D’Orphee - Marius Flothius

Everything Looked Normal - Lily Brett

Speaker: Huw Owen

Based on the tale of Orpheus’ death, this elegy depicts intense feelings of grief and mourning. Though titled after the tragic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, the work was composed in 1951 after a particularly dark period in Flothius’s life. Having been one of the few survivors to have returned to Holland from the concentration camp Sachsenhausen, Flothius arrived home separated from his wife and to find his mother had committed suicide. Having suffered such hardships, an elegy seemed an appropriate representation of Flothius’ feelings of the time.

This again aligns with Lily Brett’s *Auschwitz poems.* *Everything looked Normal* paints the picture of life after trauma - from the outside; life has moved on but fear and tragedy does not subside.

*We had a dog called Spot*

*And everything looked normal*

*Except for four locks*

*On the front door*

*Which didn't shut much out*

**Canada**

Haiku 1 & Ceremonial Music, From the Eastern Gate - Alexina Louie

My Accent - Anna Yin

Speaker: Anna Yin

These works are bound together in more ways than one. Both Alexina Louie and Anna Yin are Canadians of Chinese descent and use their art as a way to communicate their Eastern heritage in western culture. *From The Eastern Gate* is a primary example of how Louie blends her western influences with her Eastern heritage. Throughout this work, Louie uses extended techniques, such as pitch bends and tuning key glissandos, to imitate sounds associated with middle eastern instruments, the Guzheng in particular.

When talking about why she wrote *My Accent,* Anna explores self-acceptance in society and argues that accents should not prohibit people from believing in their dreams. Both of these works show a journey towards a blending of cultures, a sense of belonging in the society they live in, alongside pride in their cultural heritage.

*I have hesitated many times*

*before I speak;*

*now it develops teeth.*

*Even with gaps between,*

*I decide*

*…this is my voice*.

**China**

The Streaming Brook - Chinese trad.

A beautiful traditional chinese song and a gentle interlude. This piece tells the story of a woman singing in the moonlight awaiting her long lost love.

**Wales**

Welsh Dance No.2 - Dalwyn Henshall

Refugees - Brian Bilston

Speaker: Fenton Hutson

The penultimate piece in the programme accompanies the second half of Brian Bilston’s *refugees.* In contrast to the anger, frustration and disharmony I associate with Natra’s Sonatina, this dance is gentle, tender and heartwarming - the perfect accompaniment to this particular setting of this poem.

The second half of *Refugees* shows the perspective of those that welcome refugees, those that look at the world as one where we can belong anywhere unconditionally. *Refugees* has a very different meaning when read backwards:

*The world can be looked at another way*

*Do not be so stupid to think that*

*A place should only belong to those who are born there*

*These are people just like us*

**Scotland**

Time spinner – Esther Swift

Eira Lynn Jones commissioned Time Spinner as a tribute to Helen Macleod, her former student, friend and colleague. Helen died in a car accident on July 23rd, 2018 at the age of 37. The three sections represent her beautiful soul, her infectious smile and her zest for life. Her motto was ‘Choose to Shine,’ and the fact that she touched so many lives is testament to the fact that she did just that. This piece reflects on something of great sadness and yet finds a way for joy and hope to grow, showing that even in tragedy, there is renewal.

**Shetland**

The Swan LK243 - Catriona Mckay (1999)

The Morning After, Scotland - Christine De Luca

Speaker: Christine De Luca

A tune about travel to bring us home. Catriona McKay’s inspiration behind this tune was her participation in the Tall Ships’ Races - an annual series of races which take place over several hundred miles of European waters and are designed to encourage international friendship. While Catriona took part, she sailed on a historical boat from the Shetland Islands, named the Swan LK243.

Alongside this is a poem that reminds us of our openness. The Morning After, Scotland was written by Christine de Luca in the run up to the Scottish independence vote in 2014. It is a poem to remind us that regardless of our differing opinions, we are still a welcoming nation, known for our out-stretched hands and open hearts.

*We aim for more equality;*

*and for tomorrow to be more peaceful*

*than today; for fairness, opportunity,*

*the common weal; a hand stretched out*

*in ready hospitality.*