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# PETER SCULTHORPE

SONGS OF sea AND sky

earth cry ▶ mangrove ▶ kakadu ▶ from ubirr

william barton DIDJERIDU

the queensland orchestra ▶ michael christie



1	<b>Earth Cry</b>	11'06
2	<b>Mangrove</b>	15'05
	<b>Songs of Sea and Sky</b>	[16'04]
3	I Prelude	0'54
4	II Saibai solo violin: Alan Smith	3'47
5	III Interlude	1'46
6	IV Mission Hymn	3'38
7	V Dance Song	2'36
8	VI Lament	3'23
9	<b>Kakadu</b> solo cor anglais: Alexa Murray	16'14
10	<b>From Ubirr</b>	12'10
	Total Playing Time	70'40

William Barton *didjeridu*  
The Queensland Orchestra  
Michael Christie *conductor*

The first work of mine that includes a didjeridu is *The Fifth Continent*, for speaker and orchestra. Written in 1963, I did not know any didjeridu players at that time. I had to use pre-recorded tape, later abandoned. Following this, I used the didjeridu only in film scores and in some occasional works. My real commitment to the instrument began in 1994 with *From Ubirr*, for didjeridu and string quartet, which was written for the Kronos Quartet.

As a result of this work I realised that the didjeridu is implied in almost all my orchestral music. I did nothing about this, however, until several years ago, when I became friends with William Barton. Our friendship culminated in the making of the present recording. I have since included William in my choral *Requiem*, written for the 2004 Adelaide Festival of the Arts.

Peter Sculthorpe  
Composer Emeritus  
The Queensland Orchestra

The music of Peter Sculthorpe contains one of the most original and compelling cultural responses to the Australian landscape so far coined by any Australian artist. His appreciation of the continent's vastness, and respect for its native inhabitants, is clearly deeply personal, but not without irony. Sculthorpe is a 'European' Australian and lives and works in the modern nation's largest city; and so, in a sense, his exploration of the landscape and engagement with the native culture are largely symbolic. It is in his music, rather than his day-to-day existence, that he has taken the opportunity to come to terms with the both alienating and enriching experience of being a 'European' Australian in this strange and wonderful environment.

To do this, Sculthorpe has had to work to free himself from many European ways of thinking about music. The rapid changes and strong opposing forces underlying traditional 19th-century harmony seemed to him to be particularly out-of-place in any attempt to portray more static, less obviously contrasted surroundings. Highly directional melodies and rhythmic structures were similarly useless to him. However the result is more than just a negation of traditional 'values'. As James Murdoch concluded in his 1972 survey of *Australia's Contemporary Composers*, Sculthorpe's is 'an indigenous and tangible Australian idiom, and an unequivocal musical identity.'

Back in 1961, Sculthorpe pointed out: 'There is little development in the 19th century sense, but rather, growth by accretion, almost, it might be said, like the manipulation of building blocks made of sound.' This characteristic becomes even more evident in Sculthorpe's later works. **Mangrove**, written in 1979, is made up of a number of such highly contrasted blocks, such as the sparse, rhythmic opening music for brass and percussion, the brooding melody for low strings (later passed to the brass), and the central episode of birdsong.

*Mangrove* provides a particularly good example of how Sculthorpe continually seeks to avoid hackneyed, 'European' responses. He deliberately omitted the traditional 'water and rain' instruments, woodwinds and harps, from the orchestra on this occasion lest he were tempted to use them. This is partly because he had little interest in actually portraying a mangrove tree in music. The title excited other resonances:

... memories of a time spent among mangroves; thoughts of Sidney Nolan's rain-forest paintings, in which Eliza Frazer and the convict Bracefell become through love, birds and butterflies and aboriginal graffiti; even recollections of a beach, mangrove-free, at Ise, in Japan; and thoughts of a New Guinea tribe that believes man and woman to be descended from mangroves.

A most striking aspect of *Mangrove* is Sculthorpe's treatment of its main melody, which is based on a Japanese *saibara* court tune called *Isé-no-Umi*. It is given first to the cellos who present it in heterophony: that is, they are directed to play it *fuori di passo*, literally 'out-of-step' with each other. Some play either a little before or after the beat, while others play the melody in strict rhythm. *Mangrove* was written for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and first performed by that orchestra under Louis Fremaux.

After the success of *Mangrove*, which was performed widely in the years after it was written, Sculthorpe received frequent promptings to write a sequel. An ABC commission in 1986 seemed to prove the opportunity for what was to be, tentatively, *Mangrove II*. In coming to write the piece, however, Sculthorpe found that his thoughts had turned elsewhere:

'Whenever I have returned from abroad in recent years, this country has seemed to me to be one of the last places on earth where one could honestly write quick and joyous music. I decided therefore to write such a piece.'

Further reflection put Sculthorpe on a different course:

'It soon became clear that it would be dishonest of me to write music that is

altogether quick and joyous. The lack of a common cause and the self-interest of many have drained us [Australians] of much of our energy. A bogus national identity and its commercialisation have obscured the true breadth of our culture. Most of the jubilation, I came to feel, awaits us in the future. Perhaps we now need to attune ourselves to this continent, to listen to the cry of the earth, as the Aborigines have done for many thousands of years.'

**Earth Cry**, as the work became, stands as that rare thing in Sculthorpe – music that seems to pass beyond ritual mourning for the land and the plight of its native inhabitants, music that is genuinely angry. There is menace in it from the slow introduction onwards. For the central long section, Sculthorpe transforms an earlier work, *The Song of Tailitnama*, a setting of Arrernte (Aranda) poetry composed in 1974. The actual song, heard first from the violins, passes to the horns and trumpets as well, and, by presenting various versions of the melody simultaneously, Sculthorpe gradually builds to a shattering climax. A long version of the melody, high in the strings, marks the end of this angry ascent, and thereafter the texture thins and quietsens. A very slow, low scored coda brings back the opening melody again with the violas and trombones.

While the melodic idiom of *Earth Cry* is typical of Sculthorpe's previous music, this slow melody

which frames the work represents a departure in his treatment of the orchestra. Such a mixing of instrumental colour – of the string and brass sound, violas and trombones singing together – was hitherto unknown in Sculthorpe's music. As usual, there is a special reason: to summon up broader feelings of a broader landscape.

Despite the determination and anger so obvious in the music of *Earth Cry*, Sculthorpe described it as 'a straightforward and melodious work'.

**From Ubirr**, written in 1994 for the Kronos Quartet, is derived from *Earth Cry* and contains many similar elements. Like its progenitor, it asks us to attune ourselves to the planet, to listen like the Aborigines to the cry of the earth.

Ubirr is a large rocky outcrop in Kakadu National Park, in northern Australia. It houses some of the best and most varied Aboriginal rock painting in the country. Many of the paintings have been proven to be the earliest-known graphic expressions of the human race. They demonstrate a caring relationship with the environment, and the Aboriginal belief that the land owns the people, not the people the land.

Sculthorpe also describes *From Ubirr* as 'straightforward and melodious'. Its four parts are made up of quick, ritualistic music framed by slower music of a supplicatory nature, and an extended coda. The slow music is accompanied by a didjeridu pitched to a D-flat and the quick music by a second didjeridu pitched to A.

The instrument represents the sound of nature, of the earth itself. The arrangement on this recording was made especially for William Barton and The Queensland Orchestra, conducted by Michael Christie.

If *Earth Cry* and *From Ubirr* are 'straightforward and melodious', **Kakadu** seems to have these qualities in even greater abundance. This finally, perhaps, is the genuinely celebratory piece that was to have been *Earth Cry*. Unlike *Earth Cry*, which anchors a central fast section in a framework of slow music, *Kakadu* begins and ends with music that is 'quick and joyous'.

Though the word *Kakadu* already has a place in music, as the title of a set of variations by Beethoven (his 'kakadu' is German for cockatoo), Sculthorpe's *Kakadu* takes its name from the Kakadu National Park, an enormous wilderness area stretching from coastal tidal plains to inland mountain plateaux. Today, only a few of its native inhabitants still speak the *Kakadu*, or *Gagudju*, language from which the park takes its name. As Sculthorpe says, the work 'is concerned with my feelings about this place, its landscape, its change of seasons, its dry season and its wet, its cycle of life and death.'

The melodic character of the opening of *Kakadu*, like *Earth Cry*, finds Sculthorpe under the influence of the contours and rhythms of Aboriginal chant. This can be heard most clearly in the music for the upper strings, which passes

to the trumpets. The ecstatic horn melody, too, that follows, relies on the same melodic and rhythmic contours, but is interpreted in a much more 'Western' fashion.

The slow central section introduces an 'individual' to the musical landscape, in the guise of a long melody for solo cor anglais. Sculthorpe's score note tells us that this represents 'the voice of Emanuel Papper', the American music lover who commissioned the work as a birthday present for his wife Patricia. Dr Papper's meditation is rewarded with a 'vision' of birds, in a section very much like the birdsong episode in *Mangrove*. It provides both a spectacular interlude and the pretext for the musical development that follows. As if charmed by the birds, Dr Papper's cor anglais is gradually enmeshed into the sound world of the *Kakadu* music from the fast outer sections. Musically speaking, the result is one of the most effective pieces of genuine counterpoint to be found in Sculthorpe's music. *Kakadu* was first performed in the United States in July 1988 by the Aspen Festival Orchestra conducted by Jorge Mester.

**Songs of Sea and Sky** was originally a work for clarinet and piano, commissioned in 1987 by the School of Music, Yale University, to mark the retirement of the distinguished clarinet teacher, Keith Wilson. The arrangement on this recording was made especially for William Barton and The Queensland Orchestra. The work was inspired by

a traditional melody from Saibai, an island just south of Papua New Guinea, in Torres Strait. The melody was collected by Jeremy Beckett in May 1961.

Although some traditional Torres Strait music still survives in its original form, most of that heard today is strongly influenced by the religious music introduced by missionaries in the 19th century. Nevertheless, its themes are still predominantly of sea voyages, flights of birds and changes in sea and sky.

The work is in one continuous movement consisting of six parts: *Prelude*, for cellos and didjeridu; *Saibai*, a reworking of the traditional melody; *Interlude*, mostly for violas and didjeridu; *Mission Hymn*, a variation of *Saibai*; *Dance Song*, a rhythmic section based upon the material presented in the *Prelude* and *Interlude*; *Lament*, a second variation of *Saibai*, a brief coda. Following the climax, at the end of the *Dance Song*, the emotional content of the music culminates in the *Lament*. Here, the music years for the years before white settlement.

**Adapted and abridged from a note by Graeme Skinner with additional information by Peter Sculthorpe.**

### **William Barton**

William Barton is widely recognised as one of Australia's finest traditional didjeridu players, teachers and composers for the instrument. He was born in Mount Isa in North Western Queensland and was taught the instrument, from an early age, by the Elders of the Kalkadunga Tribe.

His performing experience is vast. He was invited to appear at the Edmonton Festival in 1996 and gave performances in Hawaii during that same year. In 1998 he appeared in Vienna and during 2000 he performed in Spain, in Japan at the Wasso World Music Festival and in the African Dance and Cultural Festival in Los Angeles.

His performances in Australia since 1998 have included appearances at the Melbourne International Festival, the Top Half Folk Festival, the Queensland Biennial Festival, the Brisbane Festival and Brisbane's River Festival, the Tyalgum Classical Music Festival and regular performances at the Woodford Folk Festival.

William Barton has appeared as soloist as part of Mount Isa's celebrations of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Torch Relay and again as part of Brisbane's celebrations, with Chamber Ensemble Brisbane, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, the Naroo Dance Company and in performances with the Kalguda Dancers and the Doonooch Dancers.

His recordings include featured soloist on the ABC's official Olympic Theme and a Sculthorpe recording with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

2002 included appearances with The Queensland Orchestra performing the newly included didjeridu solo part in Peter Sculthorpe's *Earth Cry*, and an invitation to appear with the same orchestra in its performances of the work in Tokyo.

During 2003 he produced a major composing and performing project for the 2003 Queensland Biennial. He was Artist-In-Residence with The Queensland Orchestra, as well as giving further performances of Sculthorpe's *Earth Cry* at the Colorado Music Festival in the USA and Sculthorpe's quartet version of *From Ubirr* with members of the Australian Chamber Orchestra at the Huntington Festival.

He has been soloist in the Australian premiere of Peter Sculthorpe's *Requiem* at the 2004 Adelaide Festival and forthcoming engagements include the UK premiere performance, with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, at the Lichfield Festival. William Barton has received invitations to appear at the Amelia Island and Madison festivals in Georgia, USA and the Estonian Music Festival in Estonia. In 2005 he will make his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

### **The Queensland Orchestra**

Our vision – through an ongoing commitment to the highest standards of excellence, The Queensland Orchestra will touch the hearts and minds of Queenslanders.

The Queensland Orchestra is founded on a dynamic modern concept of orchestral music making. In its largest form, it champions the cause of the great orchestral classics in performances featuring major international and Australian artists. It also presents beloved works of the classical and chamber repertoire – from baroque through to new commissions.

Each year, it plays for seasons presented by the Australian Ballet, Opera Queensland and Queensland Ballet. It is involved in prestigious festivals on a regular basis, such as Energex Brisbane Festival, Queensland Biennial Festival of Music and Brisbane's River Festival.

Vitaly engaged in the culture of its region, The Queensland Orchestra's flexible configuration, from specialist chamber ensembles through to large symphonic forces, is designed to ensure maximum coverage throughout the State.

Its extensive education program involves performances presented for pre-schoolers (Kiddies Cushion Concerts) through to open rehearsals for secondary school music extension students. In 2003, the Orchestra played to over 40,000 children.

## Michael Christie

Born in 1974, American conductor Michael Christie is much in demand from major orchestras in Europe and North America. In September 2001, he was appointed Chief Conductor of The Queensland Orchestra, the youngest person ever to hold a Chief Conductor post with a major Australian symphony orchestra. One year previously, in September 2000, he was appointed Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival.

Michael Christie has conducted many of the leading orchestras in Europe including the DSO Berlin, NDR Hannover, the Czech, Rotterdam and Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestras, the Swedish Radio Symphony, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic to name but a few. From 1996 to 1998, he was Associate Conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic and he has also worked with all the major Finnish orchestras.

In North America, Michael Christie has conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Atlanta Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony and the Cincinnati Symphony among others. Forthcoming engagements include anticipated returns to many of the above orchestras.

Michael Christie is also establishing an excellent reputation as an opera conductor and each season he conducts both operas and ballet performances at the Opernhaus, Zurich. He has

a very special relationship with the House in Zurich where, in the 1997/98 season, he was Assistant Conductor to Franz Welser-Möst (a position especially created for him). That season he made his highly successful debut conducting performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and a new production of *Hansel and Gretel*.

He has also worked with the Finnish National Opera, where he conducted *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1999/2000 and with the Queensland Opera where he made his debut conducting *Così fan tutte* the same season. In March 2004 he made his opera debut in The Netherlands conducting John Adams' *The Death of Klinghoffer* with the Rotterdam Philharmonic.

Michael Christie first came to international attention in 1995 when he was awarded a special prize for Outstanding Potential at the First International Sibelius Conductors' Competition in Helsinki. Following the competition, he was invited to become an apprentice conductor with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and subsequently worked with Daniel Barenboim, conducting both in Chicago and at the Berlin State Opera during the 1996/97 season.

Michael Christie graduated from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's degree in trumpet performance. His conducting teachers have included Robert Spano, Eiji Oue and Peter Jaffe.

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**Editorial and Production Manager** Hilary Shrubbs  
**Recording Producer** Stephen Snelleman  
**Associate Producer and Editor** Thomas Grubb  
**Recording Engineer** Gary Yule  
**Cover and Booklet Design** Imagecorp Pty Ltd  
**Cover Photograph** Sunset over the East Alligator River floodplain from Ubirr Lookout, Kakadu, Northern Territory.  
APL/JP & ES Baker

### For The Queensland Orchestra

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Recorded 18-20 September in Studio 420, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Ferry Road, Brisbane, in the presence of the composer.

ABC Classics would like to thank Julie Warn and Martin Buzacott for their assistance with this project.

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