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AUSTRALIAN  
COMPOSER SERIES

NIGEL WESTLAKE



*out of  
the blue*



AUSTRALIAN  
COMPOSER SERIES



TASMANIAN  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

**Nigel Westlake** b. 1958

**Invocations**

Concerto for bass clarinet and chamber orchestra

[20:35]

- |          |     |      |
|----------|-----|------|
| <b>1</b> | I   | 3:49 |
| <b>2</b> | II  | 2:23 |
| <b>3</b> | III | 7:58 |
| <b>4</b> | IV  | 6:25 |

Nigel Westlake *bass clarinet*

Alison Lazaroff-Somssich *obligato violin*

**Antarctica**

Suite for guitar and orchestra

[22:01]

- |          |                                 |      |
|----------|---------------------------------|------|
| <b>5</b> | The Last Place on Earth         | 6:36 |
| <b>6</b> | Wooden Ships                    | 4:16 |
| <b>7</b> | Penguin Ballet                  | 3:10 |
| <b>8</b> | The Ice Core – cadenza – Finale | 7:59 |

Timothy Kain *guitar*

Alison Lazaroff-Somssich *obligato violin*

Vanessa Souter *obligato harp*

- |          |                            |         |
|----------|----------------------------|---------|
| <b>9</b> | <b>out of the blue ...</b> | [10:23] |
|          | for string orchestra       |         |

Total playing time

52:59

**Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra**  
**David Porcelijn conductor**

One of my earliest encounters – so I thought – with the music of Nigel Westlake was at a music camp, when four camp percussionists entertained us at lunch with a performance of *Omphalo Centric Lecture*. The music was as compelling as its title – the performers were clearly having tremendous fun and so were we, the listeners. They had to play it at least once more, for dessert.

What I didn't realise at the time was that I had already been hearing Nigel Westlake's music in the various signature themes on SBS-TV and ABC Radio and Television. Most of the latter were written in 1987 when Westlake was composer-in-residence for ABC Radio, and he was subsequently to win the gold medal for Best Original Music at the New York International Radio Festival Awards.

Nigel Westlake is one Australian composer whose presence extends well beyond the concert hall. He has composed incidental music for the Bell Shakespeare Company, television documentaries, the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, for four Imax films devised for super screens and 3D technology and for the film *Babe* and *Babe II: Pig in the City*. When, in 1982, Westlake studied film music at what was then the Australian Film and Television School, it represented his first formal musical education after leaving the New South Wales Conservatorium High School at the age of sixteen to work as a freelance musician.

**Antarctica**, the earliest of the three works on this disc, began life in the cinema, as the score for John Weiley's film *Antarctica*. Filmed in Imax, it

was shot over a three-year period. The team travelled 20,000 kilometres in and around the southern polar ice cap to look beyond the known, 'past the edge of everything', and capture visually the spirit of exploration and inquiry that has always been associated with Antarctica. In 1991 the brief was passed to Westlake: 'to compose music that captured the awe-inspiring grandeur, beauty, desolation and harshness of the images.'

Westlake's original sketches were scored for solo guitar and orchestra, and John Williams became involved early on, viewing the rushes of the picture and agreeing that it would make a marvellous vehicle for solo guitar. As it turned out, practical constraints meant that Westlake had to abandon this plan for the score, at least temporarily. But the following year the Australian Broadcasting Corporation suggested that he write a guitar concerto for Williams and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra as part of the ABC's sixtieth birthday celebrations, providing the opportunity to revisit his original ideas and resume the collaboration as originally planned. (Around the same time Westlake joined Williams' group Attacca as a performer and composer for tours of the UK and Australia.)

The resulting concert suite is far more than an arrangement of selected movements from the original film score. Rather it is a reworking of the music, incorporating material that was not included in the film. Dissociated from the imposing images on the Imax screen, Westlake's music has been able to take on a life of its own

without losing the qualities that made it, in John Weiley's words, 'wild, funny, dangerous, exhilarating and deeply moving.'

The four movements of *Antarctica* are drawn from the primary themes of the film: the desolate grandeur of the pole, the life it sustains and human presence in the region, both historically and today.

In its original guise 'The Last Place on Earth' was accompanied by an aerial of the ice cap, shot in the full daylight of the midnight sun. In a luminous opening the guitar freely plays a simple motive above a repeated harp pattern and the unearthly effect of strings playing without vibrato. The sparseness of the textures suggests the isolation of the ice cap; the building of orchestral sound to crashing chords and anxious tremolos, its savage power. In close up, we hear fragments of melody and small musical motives combined, tossed about by harsh rhythms; a brief cadenza for the guitar; and a brazen pounding theme that emerges from the opening idea. The music then 'pans' away, ending in the transparency with which it began.

'Wooden Ships' is a tribute to those first explorers who bravely risked their lives in vessels that would splinter under the pressure of the frozen ice. Harp and pizzicato strings as well as guitar create a delicate effect in a movement that is lyrical, even nostalgic. In the central section the comfortable harp accompaniment and wind counter-melodies are disturbed by the guitar introducing 'foreign'

elements – an unexpected harmony, a strange colour – which are then assimilated in the return of the opening theme.

One of the wittiest moments in Westlake's original film score is the 'Penguin Circus', guaranteed to provoke a smile if not a giggle. 'Penguin Ballet' shows another, less comical side of these curious birds – so clumsy on land, so graceful in the water. John Weiley's film captures a normally unseen aspect of penguin behaviour, what can only be described as a kind of underwater ballet below the ice cap. But leopard seals are well familiar with this display, and the emperor penguins must leave the water at fantastic speeds, escaping through a hole in the ice to avoid being eaten.

Westlake mirrors the mercurial fluidity of the penguin ballet with a rippling 'pas de deux' for solo guitar and harp, playing in the highest part of its range. The full strings are entrusted with a swaying ritornello, and ominous rumblings from the lower strings warn of the presence of the leopard seals.

The final movement comprises two sections, 'Ice Core' and 'Finale', linked by a formal cadenza for the guitar. An ice core extracted by Antarctic scientists can reveal changes in the earth's atmosphere and phenomena such as the hole in the ozone layer. For this section of the music Westlake creates ethereal effects with pitch bending from the guitar and hypnotic repeated patterns in the harp. The cadenza gradually builds momentum, anticipating the main melodic idea of

the 'Finale'. This final section of *Antarctica* is lively and rhythmic, its uplifting mood reflecting the optimism that surrounded the signing of the Antarctic Treaty just as the film was being completed.

John Weiley describes *Antarctica* as a noisy place – citing the sounds of human presence: generators, motors, shrieking stoves. He might also have mentioned the natural sounds of wind and cracking ice. But, he says, 'when it stops there is a kind of epiphany. You are here. That's when the music starts.'

For Nigel Westlake music started with the clarinet, under the inspiring tutelage of his father Don Westlake. As a clarinetist he worked with numerous orchestras, chamber groups and session bands. But it was the bass clarinet in particular that captured his imagination, and in 1983 he travelled to Amsterdam to study with Harry Spaarnay, that instrument's greatest advocate. In exploiting the bass clarinet's six-octave range and its impressive palette of tone colours, Spaarnay had rescued the bass clarinet from a mundane role as an 'adjunct' to the symphony orchestra and given it credibility as a solo instrument.

Years later Richard Mills invited Westlake to write a concerto incorporating the entire clarinet family. Westlake found, however, that once he began to explore ideas for the piece his fascination with the bass clarinet and the enthusiasm Spaarnay had imparted took over. The concerto for the whole family became

**Invocations**, a concerto for bass clarinet and chamber orchestra.

*Invocations* is in four movements, following an overall pattern of slow, fast, slow, fast. Westlake describes it as deliberately sparse, emphasising instrumental colour and 'intimate interplay' between the soloist and orchestra. This gives the work chamber-like qualities and a delicately poised sound world, even when the music is at its most energetic.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the first movement. It begins with cunning unisons – the piano doubling the solo bass clarinet, joined by marimba, solo violin and harp, then by the lower strings. Their colours exposed by the absence of a traditional bass line or accompanying chords, these instruments stake out the striding opening theme. Later, sinuous string melodies, hovering around just a few notes, provide contrast.

The agitated second movement develops more complex textures as the bass clarinet and solo violin engage in a dialogue. And there is a spirit of adventure in the bass clarinet's special technical effects as the soloist plays with harmonics, multiphonics, flutter-tonguing and swooping glissandi above a relentless accompaniment from the strings and snare drum.

The third movement begins with the bass clarinet alone – here cast in a meditative and introspective role. Important harp and piano parts provide a bell-like accompaniment, over

which we hear the moodily expressive melodies of the solo part. Effective use is made, too, of sustained string chords played without vibrato.

From its initial flourish the final movement is a whirlwind of changing metres and displaced accents. Without being disoriented we are led on a sprightly and rhythmic dance where certain beats just happen to go missing occasionally! This movement brings together elements from the preceding movements: the unison colours of the first movement; the meditative qualities of a lyrical theme suspended above sustained chords; and the extended techniques of the bass clarinet, including an impressive harmonic glissando that leads to the final climax and a magnificent close.

As a composer Nigel Westlake is largely self-taught and works such as *Invocations* highlight the way in which he has developed his craft in the context of performance. As a young adult he formed an eight-piece fusion band, 'Magic Puddin', which fostered his interest in composition, performance, collaboration and improvisation, and he spent more than six years as a core member of the Australia Ensemble. His intuitive gifts were enhanced and refined by the opportunity to study orchestration with Richard Meale in 1993, and *Invocations* and *out of the blue...* were completed in the following two years.

**out of the blue ...** explains Westlake, 'was composed when I was emerging from a "blue" period in my life brought on by a car accident. Whole days spent composing left me with nothing

but blank pages. It took months for the stream of ideas to re-establish their flow. *out of the blue...* was the result.'

This single-movement work draws on the rhythmic unity of a tightly knit small ensemble: a standard string orchestra featuring, from time to time, a solo violin and solo viola. In contrast to the other works on this disc, instrumental colour takes a back seat to rhythmic and textural effects emphasised by the homogeneity of the ensemble. *out of the blue ...*, like the 'Finale' in *Antarctica*, is primarily optimistic. It gains its energy from displaced accents and a distinctive piling up of parallel or near-parallel melodic parts to create a sense of propulsion.

The central section, by contrast, is fragmented and sparsely textured. Lapsing into 'introspection and reflection', it is as if the players are pondering over the musical material. Motives are slowed down, spread out, and shared between parts. There is a feeling of freedom and experimentation, room for creativity and a judicious use of silence. Dreamy tremolos and floating chords punctuated by plucked bass pave the way for a return to the opening ideas by way of a limping 'waltz'. The concluding section once more features the riffs (melodic fragments) and rhythmic patterns derived from blues music – its cumulative textures and syncopated rhythms guaranteed to drive out the blues.

**Yvonne Frindle**

## **Nigel Westlake**

Nigel Westlake commenced his career in music in 1975 at the age of 17 as a freelance clarinettist, performing with orchestras and chamber ensembles.

In 1983 he studied contemporary music in Amsterdam, specialising in the bass clarinet with Harry Sparnaay.

From 1985 to 1992 he was a member of the Australia Ensemble and toured extensively with them throughout Australia and the world. In 1992 he was invited to join guitarist John William's group *Attacca* as a writer and performer for tours of Australia and the United Kingdom.

As a composer he is largely self-taught, having commenced writing for rock bands while still a teenager. He has been commissioned by many of Australia's leading orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists and has successfully combined writing for the concert hall with his passion for film and theatre, having composed numerous TV and feature film scores, including the No. 1 box office hits around the world, *Babe* and *Babe II: Pig in the City* and the Imax film *Antarctica*.

He has won many awards for his compositions and in 2004 was awarded the HC Combs Creative Arts Fellowship from the Australian National University.

## Timothy Kain

Initially inspired by popular music and flamenco to start playing the guitar, Timothy Kain had his first classical guitar lessons with Sadie Bishop at the Canberra School of Music. After graduating, he lived in Spain and England, studying with José Tomas and Gordon Crosskey, winning first prize in the Third International Guitar Competition in Alicante, Spain, and the Royal Northern College of Music Bach Prize.

His performing and teaching activities have taken Timothy Kain all over the world, building an international reputation as an outstanding soloist and chamber musician. In 1992 he was invited to join John Williams' ensemble, Attacca. The performances proved so successful that John Williams and Timothy Kain began touring extensively together in the UK and Australia. In 1996 they released internationally their award-winning CD *The Mantis and the Moon* on Sony Classical.

A major focal point of Timothy Kain's musical activities has been his guitar quartet, Guitar Trek. The pioneering work of this group has seen the development of a specially made family of guitars of different sizes and an exciting new repertoire for the medium. Guitar Trek's strong popular appeal has led to immense success, with two best-selling CDs available on ABC Classics and regular touring overseas and in

Australia for Musica Viva. A third Guitar Trek CD has been recently recorded by the ABC for future release.

Timothy Kain has also had great success from his collaborations with other instrumentalists, most notably flautist Virginia Taylor, with whom he has a popular Tall Poppies release and *Music of the Americas*, for ABC Classics. As the Austral Trio, they are joined by cellist David Pereira. Timothy Kain's recent collaboration with oboist David Nuttall has been something of a runaway success, with their CD *Romancing the Oboe* enjoying regular airplay and popular interest.

A long-standing interest in Australian music has seen many fruitful collaborations with some of Australia's leading composers and the commissioning of a large number of solo, chamber and concerto works for the guitar, some of which he has recorded as part of the Canberra School of Music Bicentennial Anthology of Australian Music disc. Timothy Kain is also highly regarded as a teacher and is currently Head of the Guitar Department at the Canberra School of Music, Australian National University.

## Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra is acclaimed as one of the world's finest small orchestras. German-born Sebastian Lang-Lessing is the orchestra's Chief Conductor and Artistic Director.

The TSO presents an exciting and diverse annual concert series in Hobart and Launceston as well as concerts in regional centres. With a full-time playing strength of 47 musicians, its core repertoire is that of the Classical and early Romantic periods. It is, however, a versatile orchestra, performing repertoire from Baroque to jazz, popular music, opera and ballet, and is recognised for championing contemporary music.

The TSO records regularly for radio broadcasts, compact discs and soundtracks for television and film. It was the first Australian orchestra to record the complete Beethoven symphonies, and its recent recordings on international and Australian labels have been received with critical acclaim. In 2003, the orchestra launched its Australian Music Program and this year releases the first recordings of orchestral music as part of the TSO Australian Composer Series.

Encouragement of young talent is of paramount importance to the TSO. It provides an education program and collaborates extensively on a range of programs with Symphony Australia, the Australian Youth Orchestra and the Australian Music Centre.

The TSO has performed in most of the major Australian festivals and regularly travels to mainland Australia, touring both capital cities and regional centres. It has performed in Greece, Israel, Indonesia, South Korea, China, Argentina, Canada and the USA.



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## David Porcelijn

David Porcelijn is one of the most outstanding Dutch musicians of his generation. After several years conducting mainly outside Europe he has now returned to regularly work with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, South West German Radio Symphony Orchestra Baden Baden and Freiburg, Orquesta Filharmónica de Gran Canaria, North German Radio Philharmonic Hannover, the BBC Orchestras of London, Wales and Scotland, the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, amongst many others. Beyond his excellent work in the core repertoire, an abiding interest in new music has also seen him conducting KammerensembleN in Sweden and the Nieuw Ensemble of his native Amsterdam. A most highly regarded orchestral trainer, he has held the positions of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Music Director and Conductor of the Netherlands Dance Theatre and been a regular guest conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In recent seasons he has toured China as well as North and South America with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

He has a broad operatic repertoire, making his Opera Australia debut in 1991 and conducting opera in Britain for the first time in 1994 at Opera North. In 1992 he was awarded the prize

as Best Opera Conductor at the Munich Biennial for a production with Netherlands Opera.

David Porcelijn's many recordings have been principally made for ABC Classics in Australia. The most recent of these is his complete cycle of Beethoven Symphonies with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, which was released in 2002. Amongst others are Messiaen's *Eclairs sur l'Au-delà* with the Sydney Symphony (which won the 1994 award for ABC Classic FM Australian Recording of the Year) whilst his records with the Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras have included CDs of music by the Australian composers Richard Meale, Peter Sculthorpe (whose *Sun Music I-IV* won the 1997 ARIA award for Best Australian Classical Recording), Nigel Westlake and Matthew Hindson. Other recordings for ABC Classics include Schubert Lieder (orchestrated by Brahms, Reger, Offenbach and Liszt), Overtures by Auber, the first in a series of Showpieces for Piano and Orchestra with Ian Munro as soloist and Harp Concertos played by Alice Giles. For EMERGO he has recorded music by the Dutch composers Tristan Keuris (with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus) and Hans Kox and he is currently recording symphonies by Christian Sinding with the North German Radio Philharmonic Hannover for the German company cpo. This project has been so successful that cpo has asked him to record on a regular basis.

**Executive Producers** Robert Patterson, Lyle Chan

**Recording Producers** Stephen Snelleman, Nigel Westlake

**Recording Engineers** Andrew Dixon, Peter Cox

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**Mixing** Christo Curtis (*Invocations*), Neale Sandbach (*Antarctica*)

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**For Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra**

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**Australian Music Program Director** Richard Mills

**www.tso.com.au**

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