



IN TWO MINDS | DUO MENURIDA

LAURA CHISLETT, flute(s) EDWARD COWIE, piano

In Two Minds

Duo Menurida

1.	Pre Dawn and Dawn: Australian Bell Birds	7:28
2.	Guten Morgan, Herr Kandinsky! (Point and Line to Plane)	7:11
3.	Boom Time- Bitterns at Leighton Moss	9:11
4.	New York-New York Mark Rothko- Jackson Pollock	6:42
5.	Ornitharia (Flute Solo)	3:56
6.	Stonehenge Thunderstorm and Skylark (Solo Piano)	4:55
7.	Lake Eacham Blue	7:05
8.	Dusk/Night Lyrebirds	7:45
	Total playing time	54:51

Laura Chislett, flute(s)
Edward Cowie, piano

FOREWORD

by Edward Cowie

I met and performed with the distinguished and brilliant Australian flautist, Laura Chislett in 1989, when I was still working in Australia as Professor and Director of The Australian Arts Centre in Townsville, North Queensland. I already knew of her phenomenal technical skills through recordings of some of the most ferociously difficult flute music ever written, including works by her then husband, Chris Dench and works by Brian Fernyhough. I can't exactly remember why I invited her to fly to Townsville to do some improvisation concerts with me (at the piano), but be that as it may, she **did** fly up and from the very first moments that we played together, I knew there was a very special and even unique creative 'chemistry' between us and that our sensibilities of sound and its connection with the natural world were perfectly in accord.

Some 30 years later, and 28 years since I returned to the United Kingdom, I decided to make a CD with Laura and invited her to come to England to make it. The decision was made in December, 2022 and so I didn't realise at that time that I would decide to return to Australia to live full time. That decision was made by my Australian visual artist wife, Heather Cowie, and me in February, 2023. At this stage of my life (I was 80 this year!), I really felt I was more than ready for one big final adventure with that vast and fabulous land - I'd left it in 1995 feeling that there was a tremendous amount of 'unfinished business' between the country and my music.

It didn't take Laura and me very long to come up with some kind of 'catalogue' of scenarios for the improvisations. We knew a significant part would be dedicated to land, sea, and sky in general, and birds in particular. But since I am also a visual

artist and married to a very brilliant one, I also wanted to continue and contain the suggestions of both Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky that '*music and the fine arts are deeply connected on many levels*'. We therefore chose Kandinsky himself as an acoustic stimulus; the contrasted and powerfully dynamic paintings of Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, a particularly evocative mixed-media work by Heather Cowie called *Lake Eacham Blue*. In this way, the visual senses would be interwoven in between evocations and invocations of the life, songs and habitats of Australian and British birds.

So what **is** improvisation?

I guess the easiest way to describe it is- *music made and performed without preconditions and which is performed in the moment*. Its perhaps most familiar 'habitat' lies in the fields of some forms of jazz, though both baroque and the so-called 'classical' periods of music featured *improvisations* within a concerto in which at places called *cadenzas*, the soloist was expected to improvise virtuosic episodes derived from some of the themes and harmonies of the movement in which the cadenza appears. But I also suspect that improvisation may well have a history as ancient as that of music itself! I like to imagine, (having lived close to the caves of Lascaux in France for several years and visited them and other cave systems in south west France on a regular basis), that of an evening- after a day or period of hunting far afield, a great feast would be cooked and as a part of the celebration of a successful hunt, music would be made (with voice and perhaps primitive flutes or drumming sticks), that would be improvised in the form of *sonic story-telling*.

Perhaps the popularity of music, that accompanies film or TV dramas and documentaries, is a remnant of that primeval use of sonic-invention to embellish and even enhance some forms of narrative.

Certainly the preparation of this CD was one that relied a great deal on our actual experiences of the sources of inspiration. Both Laura and I have seen and heard

both bell and lyrebirds in the rich and atmospheric vastness of their natural forest and bush habitats. I took Laura to Leighton Moss (a wetland nature reserve in NW England), in order to help her to get a 'feel' for the scale and atmosphere of the place, even though the Bitterns' booms have long fallen silent after the spring and early summer cascades of their 'honks'. Laura's choice of birds for her solo improvisation- '*ornitharia*' – is closely fused with her field-experiences of some of the most delicious (even operatic!), bird songsters of the Australian Bush. We have, of course, both (but independently), experienced the song and dance of Australian Lyrebirds.

Our experiences of the visual artists treated on this CD are also deep and thorough. Both of us have witnessed these artists' works 'face-to-face'. The collected and collective experience of this duality between the sonic and the visual has taken months of thoughtful conversation and individual experimentation with our instruments. Meeting for the first time after over 30 years apart might have anticipated a sense of strangeness perhaps, but nothing of the sort happened! From the very first improvisations in my studio in south Cumbria, Laura proved that she and I have astonishingly aligned thought and sensing processes. We have always acknowledged and celebrated the fabulous palette of sonic colours (*timbre*), that we can create on our respective instruments. But, I'd forgotten however, how very rich the colours are on the bass flute but also what a capricious instrument it can be in yielding-up its colourful tones. Laura's piccolo playing has transformed into something much richer than I remember from the past. In fact, three decades of performance and invention by both of us, (from either side of the world), has clearly added more substance and creative possibilities when we put our two minds and our instruments onto a 'platform of invention'.

The results of this recent improvisation have been transformational and inspiring. Duo Menurida is very much alive and both of us keenly look forward to further developments in the art(s) of improvisation- albeit improvisations arising directly from our respective intersensual experiences in and from the natural world...

It is our hope that you, the listener, will join us in what is- after all- a type of **ritual**: a direct transmission of sensory experiences in the form of totally spontaneous outpourings of invention and fantasy. If you'd rather make your own 'pictures' of the sonic events in the 8 tracks recorded- feel free to ignore what follows. We'd just like to share with you the actual events and creative works that helped to shape the music we discovered *in the moments...*



Edward Cowie and Laura Chislett at Aryriel Studios, Whitby

NOTES

on the music

1. DAWN-BELLBIRDS

It is pre-dawn in an Australian forest. The darkness isn't absolute and there are already faint sounds of insects and creatures like frogs somewhere in the dark-webbed tree canopy. But as light slowly rises, colours emerge and change and a few honeyeaters begin to sing in the distance. At just the point when the sun is about to rise a first solitary bell bird intones its simple repeated (antique bell-like) calls. Bell birds are colonial so it's not long before other males join-in and begin to sing in a kind of avian counterpoint...

2. GUTEN MORGAN, HERR KANDINSKY! (Point and Line to Plane)

In his famous and influential lectures at the Bauhaus in the first decade of the 20th century, the Russian-born (and some say - the 'father of total abstraction') painter, Wassily Kandinsky shared his ideas on the fact that all nature consisted of **points-lines-planes**. The points of blotches on the side of leopards; the 'eyes' on butterfly wings; the 'points' of eyes and open mouths; the points of raindrops and the points of ocean-worn pebbles. The lines of side-striped zebra; the line of a snake in motion; the lines of tree-trunks and branches; the lines of exposed sedimentary rocks on cliff-faces and the lines of approaching and falling waves on beaches. Then he turned to the planes (textures) on the backs of crocodiles; the patterns made in tree canopies or of myriad stars in a night-sky; the complex lace-like patterns of water-falls and turbulent streams. All these (and infinitely more in nature) had their equivalents in music, architecture, the written word, dance and indeed all forms of human invention

and creative outcomes. This improvisation realises (in sound) a musical response to Kandinsky's special thoughts and ideas....

4. BOOM TIME- BITTERNS AT LEIGHTON MOSS

Leighton Moss is a wetland nature reserve in North Lancashire. One of it's avian celebrities is the presence of Bitterns. These somewhat heron-like (but largely brown and richly striated) are secretive by nature- spending most of their time hidden amongst the 'jungle' of three metre-high reeds (*phragmites*), where they build their nests and hunt for fish, eels, frogs and other wetland prey. In late winter something strange and wonderful happens to these otherwise mainly silent creatures. ON a misty and still icy-cold morning, with the meres shimmering yet still under the blue canopy of mist, strange coughing sounds emerge from somewhere quite close but invisible. This is a male bittern 'warming-up'. He takes two or three deep breaths to inflate a balloon-like sac in his oesophagus before firing a stream of air through his syrinx. This powerful sound- a 'boom' (some describe it as being like blowing across the top of a giant milk bottle)- is uttered several times after the intake of breath. It so happens that **all** bitterns seem to boom (for those musicians amongst you who might read music), on or around the 'f' below middle 'c' or various microtonal versions of it! This movement evokes such experiences as I have just described...

5. ORNITHARIA (solo flute)

Laura Chislett

Ornitharia is a celebration of some of the birdsong to be heard in my neighbourhood in Sydney which I have placed into an imaginary aural habitat. Over months I collected birdsong samples on my phone. Then I transcribed them, at first quite literally, but subsequently I decorated them and sought to show my perception of the bird's character. I've merged the birdsong segments with the background habitat sounds so that the birdsong blends in and out of the habitat forming a near continuum. The

sustain pedal of the Steinway piano was activated throughout, to extend the birdsong and the habitat sounds, and to blur the definition between the two, as if the listener were hearing some sounds up close and others from far away as in a real-world bush setting. I referenced the song of three different species of bird: the joyful Grey Butcher Bird, a reflective Magpie, and the soloistic Pied Butcher Bird.

6. STONEHENGE THUNDERSTORM AND SKYLARK (solo piano)

A visit to Stonehenge in the mid 1980s and I witnessed a distant thunderstorm flashing, and rumbling over the vastness of Salisbury Plains. Slowly the dark menace of thunder clouds dispersed so that shafts of colour-making light fell onto the fields. A solitary skylark- perhaps a signal of and ascent of life after the storm had passed- mounted slowly and in full song ever-higher into the cobalt sky above. Its continuously varying phrases and melodic decorations fascinated me so that I took the decision to begin the skylark in the middle-range of the piano and to let the spillage and cascading of song ascend to the very highest notes of the piano...the bird performs its own magnificent *perdendosi*...

7. LAKE EACHAM BLUE

Lake Eacham is a water-filled volcanic caldera in the northern part of Queensland, Australia. The lake is aquamarine on it's fringes, but in the middle an unearthly black and jade colour. In the centre, the water is more than 250 metres deep! It is undoubtedly an aboriginal sacred site for even to the uninitiated, it oozes an atmosphere of primal power- an almost magnetic feeling of life and history in wrapt and wrapped codependency. My wife, Heather Cowie, began our exploration of deep love and friendship there. She made several mixed-media assemblages inspired by this place- each associated with jazz in some form or another. In particular, she visually recalled early evening into darkness where the songs of jungle birds from the forest rim to the crater-lake, gave way to the ticking of insects and babble of frogs whilst at

the same time producing 'stars' of phosphorescence created by jungle fungi. This is a 'nocturne' with a hoped-for atmosphere of profound peace and calm....

8. DUSK/NIGHT- AUSTRALIAN LYREBIRDS

This final nocturnal piece speaks of the prodigious compositional skills of the Australian Lyrebird (Latin family name, *menurida*, after which our duo is named). Darkness falls in a rainforest where a chorus of avian 'goodnights' are uttered before a solitary lyrebird begins its bewitching and bewitched song. We chose to end the improvisations with this, the greatest of birdsong inventors. Its songs remind us of the richness and diversity of natural sounds, which in turn **must** be a reminder that our planet is a sounding one, and that we must protect and nourish that sonic diversity as a token of our absolute dependence on the health of a planet being destroyed by sense(less) humanity. None of the sounds on this CD would be possible if we lived in a soundless world. A silent planet would indicate the end of a sensate spirit, and this is something we must never allow to happen.....

IN TWO MINDS

Improvisation Collaboration with Edward Cowie

A personal note by Laura Chislett

I've been asked recently about my thought processes while improvising. It's a seemingly simple question, but of course it's a difficult one to answer.

University studies¹ into improvisational neuroscience show that a network of brain activity is involved. Scans have evidenced enhanced connectivity between the left and right brain, increased demand on attentional resources and increased activity in the regions which are associated with spontaneous thought processes. So 'mind wandering' is part of the improvisatory process. I can certainly vouch for that, perhaps for both the performers and for the audience participants. Mind wandering is liberating, freeing us from the perception of chronological time and even from the sense of personal identity. I seem to exist only inside the sound, "floating" freely somewhere amongst ideas, harmonics, textures, melody and the swirling of energy traveling through the air we breathe. But how do Edward and I mind wander collaboratively?

Edward and I both have an intense connection to the natural world and to art. I feel that this allows us to relate seamlessly to each other's musical ideas. We are simultaneously co-creating an imaginary landscape which has diversity and complexity, just as the natural world does. But how do we prepare for these collaborations?

I started preparing months ago, through collecting bird song samples and transcribing them, then working out how I could reference them on the flute, and then combining

them into a dialogue. I imagined landscapes and call/response ideas, though I don't think I actually used any of these. However, my "soundbites" were there like a memory bank to access and adapt if required. Did we rehearse the improvisations?

Yes, but not too much. We tried out ideas and structures. Nothing was fixed though, as without spontaneity the music could lack subtlety and flow. All performing musicians know that the depth of a performance is elevated through the experience of playing in public: the presence of listeners (or microphones) fires up one's thinking and sparks further creativity. Fortunately we had the opportunity to play for some very attentive audiences in the week prior to going into the studio.

I'm writing this reflection after having just listened to the CD in its first post-production phase, and I'm so grateful to all involved for their part in the recording and documentation process, and especially to Edward, whose ability to evoke the perfect gesture at any point in time is quite remarkable.

These recordings can be "about" many things. The track titles point to themes, but for me they are also about highlighting the interconnectedness of all living things, and about the fundamental need for everyone to have access to the natural world and to art.

¹ Beaty, R.E. (2015). *The neuroscience of musical improvisation*. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 51, 108-117. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2015.01.004

BIOGRAPHIES

Edward Cowie

‘Considered by many to be the greatest living composer directly inspired by the Natural World’

Edward Cowie’s first Prom commission was *Leviathan*; a large scale orchestral work premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1975. It marked the first major event in a career that was to gain him national and international recognition for a new kind of ‘voice’ in the music world. Its title, arising from a conjunction between the mighty whale and a book by Hobbes with the same name can be seen as a signal of a composer whose imagination is deeply embedded in and inspired by the forces of nature. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, a stream of works inspired by wild places on this planet flowed into being, works like his sumptuous *Gesangbuch* (1975/6), (just released on Signum Classics), the *American Symphony* (1984), *Mount Keira Duets* (1985), and his powerful *Choral Symphony*, ‘*Symphonies of Rain, Steam and Speed*’. This immersion in the study of nature was born of a childhood spent in rural Suffolk and the Cotswolds and continues to form the core of his fertile imagination today.

But two further strands underpin and inspire Cowie’s musical practice and ideas. His undergraduate studies in Physics and practical studies in Painting have been integrated into a kind of ‘fusion-world’ of ideas where science, the visual arts and music coalesce

in a kind of creative continuum. In recent years, he has increasingly worked towards his music by means of 'field studies', theoretical research and painting-drawing. Studies and collaborations with leading physicists, for example, have not only seen exhibitions of his pre-compositional drawings, but have added a body of new music that directly translates scientific theory and experiment into music. His monumental solo piano series Rutherford's Lights was inspired by a study of the relationships between theories of light and colour, and his more recent Particle Partita for two violins – with a sonic time-line of the history of particle physics.

These 'fusions' of disciplines, the bridges between study and practice are an essential part of the composer's quest for new ways of forming. Parallels can be found between the linear and pointillist textures, forms, and motifs in his music with the writings and paintings of Klee and Kandinsky. During his period as first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers (2002-5), Cowie produced a string of large and small-scale pieces that moved through landscapes and natural habitats all over the world. Gaia, INhabitAT, Lyre Bird Motet, Bell Bird Motet are classic examples of a music that engages with all of the senses in a profound respect for the power that nature has to move us.

Cowie was the first Granada Composer/Conductor with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra between 1982/4. This led to many conducting dates with other orchestras including the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra; the BBC Singers, ABC symphony orchestras of Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and Tasmania and the Seymour Group and the Australia Ensemble. He was the first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers between 2003/5 and first Artist in Residence with The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for the same period. His work for television has included a major film on Edward Lear for Granada TV and his acclaimed BBCTV2 film Leonardo of 1986. He has also written and presented major radio series

commissioned by ABC FM Australia as well as for BBC Radio 3 and 4.

Major public lectures include the Gertrude Langer Memorial Lectures in Australia, and the Kate Springett Memorial Lecture in London as well as a Ruskin Lecture at Oxford. He has been invited to give keynote lectures and recitals all over the world. As a visual artist he has had over 40 one-man shows in important galleries in the UK, Germany, USA, Australia and New Zealand and his paintings and drawings are in public and private collections in 19 countries.

Other musical honours have included a Gulbenkian Award to study at The Royal Ballet; The Radcliffe International Composer's Prize and a Chopin Fellowship to study with Lutoslawski in Poland. Cowie acknowledges Alexander Goehr as a major influence (as Cowie's professor and teacher) on his life and work- an acknowledgement that continues in a warm and ongoing friendship.

As an academic, Cowie has held major professorships in two Australian and one British University as well as Visiting Professorships in Germany and the USA. He has two doctorates- a PhD which includes studies in physics, mathematics, music and fine arts and was awarded the first Doctorate in Music (DMus) from the University of Southampton for his work as a composer. He was awarded a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for inspirational visits to Africa and California, both leading to major compositional outcomes concerned with bringing music to the world that 'warns of the dangers to the wild and living world through the continuing destruction of it at the hands of humanity'.

Cowie's reputation continues to grow world-wide, and new recordings emerge with high praise and appreciation. His collaborations with major soloists and chamber groups are also enlarging and deepening. He still regards the human voice and the chamber-music mediums as the 'the most fabulously rich and varied palette of

possibility in the expression of emotion and sensation’.

Cowie returned to Australia to live there permanently in November 2023. He and his visual artist wife, Heather Cowie, intend to continue their exploration of the natural world as vigorously and comprehensively as ever!



Edward Cowie © Chloe Rosser

Laura Chislett

Laura Chislett has developed a reputation as a dynamic interpreter of extraordinary music.

“For reasons and repertoire and performance there is nothing like this anywhere”
(Fanfare)

“Laura performed with such commitment and mastery that some of the audience could never be certain if it was the works themselves or her performance that left such a profound impression “ (Roger Woodward in ‘Beyond Black and White’)

“This is a fascinating release... the rewards are great indeed.” (Fanfare)

“bravura impressionante” (La Nazione)

Laura’s career has not followed the usual path. As a student she played for several years with the Australian Youth Orchestra but was then encouraged, under the guidance of renowned musicologist and mentor Richard Toop, to study in Europe rather than seeking an orchestral career at home in Sydney. This led to inspiring encounters with some of the foremost interpreters and composers of modern music in Europe at that time. She subsequently decided to pursue what has become known as a “portfolio” career, centered around the ideals of dedication to meaningful music performance, and to making music relevant to the wider community through connection and education.

A rich collection of Laura’s solo and ensemble recordings on ten different labels is widely available on CD, Spotify, YouTube, Amazon Music, etc. The repertoire spans across musical styles and genres, including (to name just a few) J. S. Bach, Lili Boulanger, Brian Ferneyhough, and improvisation.

Over many years she has explored and developed the wonderful sonorities that are possible on the flute, such as, simultaneous singing and playing techniques, vowel-inflected air sounds, and the “fine tuning” of expressive vibrato. She has sought to combine these and other techniques in ways that can suggest musical imagery, especially in relation to the natural world.

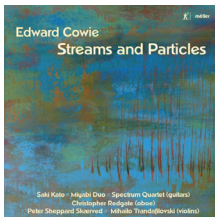
A strong connection to the natural world has been ever-present in her life. Her earliest memories of birdsong are of her parents identifying the individual birds and their song in their bush-like garden in Sydney’s northern suburbs. Since those days she has held a deep respect for the precious flora and fauna on this planet.

Composers with whom Laura has had a close working relationship, or who have written works dedicated to her, include Gerard Brophy, Sharon Calcraft, Edward Cowie, Chris Dench, James Erber, Andrew Ford, Christopher Fox, Richard Karpen, Elena Kats-Chernin, Rósa Lind, Jane O’Leary, Riccardo Piacentini, Horațiu Rădulescu, Michael Smetanin, Giorgio Colombo Taccani, Katia Tiutiunnik, Reza Vali, Maurice Weddington and Julian Yu.



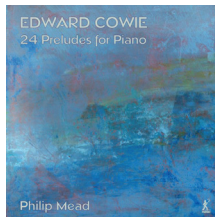
Laura Chislett

Further Recordings from Edward Cowie



Streams and Particles

MSV 28612



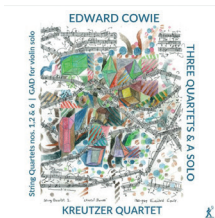
24 Preludes for Piano

MSV 28625



Orchestral Works

MSV 92108



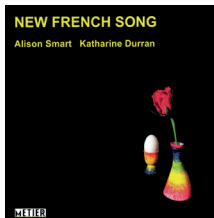
Three Quartets and a Solo

MSV 28603



New Music for Oboe Vol. 2

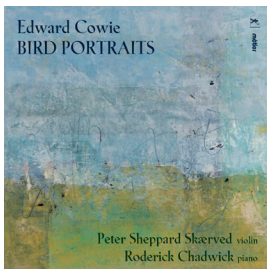
MSV 28531



New French Song

MSV 92100

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Bird Portraits

A cycle of 24 'sonic portraits' of different British birds from 4 distinctive habitats. After much study and extensive field-work, Cowie has drawn even closer to composing music that not so much imitates nature, but understands and portrays the birds, how they sing and their environment.

Peter Sheppard Skærved violin

Roderick Chadwick, piano

MSV 28619

"Cowie strives to depict the birdsongs as they really are, and they do often stand out with remarkable clarity"

– British Music Society

Where Song was Born – 24 Australian Bird Portraits

The second of the 'Bird Portraits' cycles featuring 24 of Australia's remarkable birds. Following British *Bird Portraits* (Métier MSV 28619), it contains new music with highly original treatments of the relationships between the bird singers and where and how they sing.

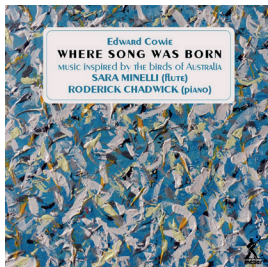
Sara Minelli, flute

Roderick Chadwick, piano

MSV 28620

"Cowie has created a stunning sonic tapestry"

– Fanfare



Where the Wood Thrush Forever Sings

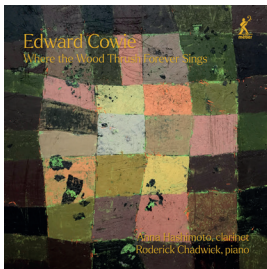
The third of the 'Bird Portraits' cycles. In this latest cycle, Cowie draws inspiration from the avian wonders of the Americas, presenting a symphonic ode to 24 distinct bird species.

Anna Hashimoto, clarinet

Roderick Chadwick, piano

MEX 77104

"Cowie is an endlessly inventive composer and this is a treat." – BBC Music Magazine



Edward Cowie, piano
Laura Chislett, flutes

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