

intangible classics

CONCEPTUS
SEA SONG


| divine art



SEA SONG

PLAYING TIME 10:05

MUSIC BY TIMOTHY COLLINS

WORDS BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD (1888-1923)

PERFORMED BY CONCEPTUS

In “Sea Song,” New Zealand poet Katherine Mansfield weaves a poignant tapestry of longing and introspection. Through vivid imagery and haunting metaphors, the poem captures the main character’s deep connection to the sea and their profound disconnection from their distant home.

The verses portray a wistful farewell to the sea’s captivating allure, symbolised by its “big green waves” and “brown rock caves.” The speaker declares their intention to banish thoughts of the sea, seeking solace in the shores of their memories. They distance themselves from the sea’s enchanting embrace, emphasizing that it holds no relevance in their current existence, perhaps protecting themselves from a loss unknown to us.

Mansfield introduces an ambiguous character, portrayed as an elderly figure burdened by a weighty pack and exhausted tears. She is personified as frail and feeble, evoking a sense of detachment and resignation. Equally she could be something beautiful, confusing the speaker who peripherally observes her search for something meaningful along the shore, her withered hands rummaging through shells and seaweed, only to be silenced by the encroaching darkness of night.

The ethereal presence of the sea echoes in the background, manifested as whispering waves that trail alongside the mysterious unknown character. They lead her to the rocky caves, intensifying the emotional atmosphere of the poem. The haunting refrain of loss and fear resounds through the verses as the speaker’s voice merges with her desperate cries.

Ultimately, Mansfield’s “Sea Song” delves into the depths of human yearning and the ephemeral nature of memory. It explores themes of loss, aging, and the unyielding power of the sea. Through her evocative language and evocative imagery, Mansfield invites listeners to contemplate the profound emotional landscapes evoked by the sea and the relentless pull of memories from afar.

Tim Collins’ setting perfectly weaves the story, matching the skill of the Mansfield, offering justice to her work. His composition is paced to set the scene, bringing the listener instantly into the disposition of the main character. Following the speaker’s wanderings, Collins takes us on an introspective, melancholic journey along the shore with a mighty canorous peak, all in a mere 10 minutes of musical euphoria.

Of course, one would be remiss to ignore the performance by Scott Robert Shaw and Conceptus, whose debut recording offers us a glimpse of great things to come. If Mansfield, Collins and Conceptus had created this work together, in person, it would be hard to imagine a more artistically rewarding outcome.

Sea Song

Katherine Mansfield

I will think no more of the sea !
Of the big green waves
And the hollowed shore,
Of the brown rock caves
No more, no more
Of the swell and the weed
And the bubbling foam.

Memory dwells in my far away home,
She has nothing to do with me.

She is old and bent
With a pack
On her back.
Her tears all spent,
Her voice, just a crack.
With an old thorn stick
She hobbles along,
And a crazy song
Now slow, now quick
Wheeks in her throat.

And every day
While there's light on the shore
She searches for something,
Her withered claw
Tumbles the seaweed;

She pokes in each shell
Groping and mumbling
Until the night
Deepens and darkens,
And covers her quite,
And bids her be silent,
And bids her be still.

The ghostly feet
Of the whispery waves
Tiptoe beside her.
They follow, follow
To the rocky caves
In the white beach hollow ...
She hugs her hands,
She sobs, she shrills,
And the echoes shriek
In the rocky hills.
She moans : "It is lost!
Let it be! Let it be !
I am old. I'm too cold.
I am frightened ... the sea
Is too loud ... it is lost,
It is gone ..." Memory
Wails in my far away home.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD (1888-1923)

Kathleen Mansfield Murry, known by her pen name Katherine Mansfield, was an esteemed New Zealand writer and critic who played a pivotal role in the modernist movement. Hailed as one of the most influential authors of her time, her literary contributions have garnered international acclaim and have been translated into 25 languages.

Born and raised in the vibrant Wellington suburb of Thorndon, Mansfield spent her formative years in a charming house on Tinakori Road. As the third child of the Beauchamp family, she embarked on her educational journey alongside her sisters, attending Karori School before transitioning to the prestigious Fitzherbert Terrace School. It was at this institution that Mansfield forged a deep friendship with Maata Mahupuku, who not only served as an early muse but also shared an intense and passionate relationship with her.

Under the name Katherine Mansfield, she crafted captivating short stories and poetry that delved into themes of anxiety, sexuality, existentialism, and the evolution of New Zealand's identity. At the age of 19, Mansfield bid farewell to her homeland and settled in England, where she cultivated friendships with prominent literary figures such as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and Lady Ottoline Morrell, all part of the renowned Bloomsbury Group. Tragically, Mansfield was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis in 1917, and at the young age of 34, she died in France, leaving behind a remarkable literary legacy.

This song is released on the centenary of her death.

CONCEPTUS

Conceptus is an international, multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary ensemble with a membership drawn from Germany, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland and Australia. Formed in 2021, the ensemble is dedicated to bringing new life to great works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and beyond, with a particular emphasis on Late Romantic British vocal music and song cycles. Their debut album, “Gods, Ghosts and Monsters” is set for release by Divine Art Records in early 2024 and will feature music by Butterworth, Warlock, Holst and Bridge, in addition to Timothy Collins’ Sea Song. Collins has composed and arranged extensively for the ensemble, including his “Rilke Lieder”, a cycle set to poetry by Austrian poet and writer Rainer Maria Rilke. Conceptus has also commissioned works by award-winning German composer, organist and conductor Christoph Ritter, whose Requiem is set for a world premiere and recording in 2024.

SCOTT ROBERT SHAW

The artistic director and founder of Conceptus, Scott was born and raised in Perth, Western Australia. The foundational steps of his musical education were in the British church music tradition, he began as a boy soprano in the St George’s Cathedral Choir in Perth and then the acclaimed St James King Street Choir in Sydney. A graduate of both the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and Royal Conservatory of The Hague, he studied both classical singing and Early Music, and also opera, theatre and stagecraft in the English National Opera’s Baylis programme in London. He has worked extensively as a soloist and choral singer in some of the most prestigious ensembles in Europe, and is in regular demand as an oratorio soloist, in particular in the Passions of J.S. Bach. In addition to his singing he is a classically trained actor, and excels as an interpreter of British Art Song, Lieder and chanson.

TIMOTHY COLLINS

Australian composer Tim Collins was born and raised in Brisbane, Queensland. A celebrated pianist, baritone, vocal coach, répétiteur and composer, he is a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, where he was awarded twelve scholarships and prizes, before joining the Young Artist Program at Opera Queensland. For much of his career he has been a concert singer and has performed, recorded and broadcast on radio throughout Australia in oratorio, recital, contemporary classical and chamber music. Since 2015 he has dedicated himself to classical composition to wide acclaim, and his works and arrangements have received numerous high profile premieres in both Australia and the USA, in particular the John F. Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., the Colorado Music Festival and Aspen Music Festival, where his song cycle “Love’s Crusade” was performed by triple Grammy award winning mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung in 2018. As “in house” composer and arranger for Conceptus, Tim has had a strong hand in the establishment and success of the ensemble.



Scott Robert Shaw



Timothy Collins

Sea Song by Timothy Collins

Words by Katherine Mansfield

Scott Robert Shaw, tenor

Eva de Vries, violin

Laura Roura i Foixà, cello

Luba Podgayskaya, piano

Recorded in Yoursonics Studio, Rijswijk NL, November 2021

Sound engineer: Jan Maarten van den Boom

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Cover still from Sea Song film

Conceptus photo by Aleksandra Renska

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Scott Robert Shaw, tenor

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