

Scenes from Brazil Programme Notes by Gary Ryan

Sugarloaf Mountain was influenced by the music of the 1960's jazz scene and in particular by the guitar style of Carlos Jobim, who played alongside Astrud Gilberto and Stan Getz on the famous 'Girl from Ipanema'. A samba-like rhythm underpins the whole of the movement and there are subtle harmonic references to the great Brazilian composer Heitor Villa Lobos.

Junglescape was first started in 2003 and gradually modified in 2004 following several performances which intentionally became part of the writing process, reflecting the evolution of the living things the music was trying to convey. Technically it is influenced by many of the major contemporary works for guitar I have performed (particularly those by Takemitsu and Ginastera). The guitar is an extraordinary sound world and contemporary techniques are often presented to the listener in what could be described as an atonal style, which can sometimes alienate an audience.

Junglescape is an attempt to convey a range of contemporary guitar techniques in a simple tonal world. The harmony is quite limited and static, drawing on the drone from folk music and incorporating modal elements. Technical complexity and harmonic simplicity combine to balance one another and an unconventional tuning takes the performer and listener into the relatively unfamiliar key centres of Eb and Bb.

The intention is to create many layers of sound in the listener's mind and to change our perceptions of what a sound is. In fact for the first minute or so of the piece a blind listener should not even be able to tell what instrument is playing.

The piece falls loosely into three sections. Silence is an extremely important element throughout and is just as essential and difficult to control as any sequence of notes. The first section represents a kind of imaginary dawn where fragile sounds start to emerge from the silence. This gradually builds into a full array of different sounds for the performer to juggle, with the full pitch range of the instrument reflecting the range of the forest canopy.

Then gradually the sounds subside into evening and give way to a more reflective second section, which is a memory of a lost rain forest. Then finally the music breaks into a dance-like section with a more optimistic celebration of life and nature, incorporating a slightly tribal musical feel.

Rio Bay (from the Corcovado) starts with a slow, melancholy and improvisatory musical feel influenced by Pat Metheny. This opening melodic material is then taken up tempo in a rhythmically vibrant bossa nova section, which is inspired by the guitar writing of Sergio Assad and Villa Lobos. The Corcovado mountain towers over Rio, with the statue of Christ the Redeemer at the summit looking out over what must be one of the greatest views in the world.