

JEREMY DALE ROBERTS:

STRING QUINTET (2012)

Dedicated to Erika Fox and to the memory of my teacher Priaulx Rainier.

PART I: 'The Caller on the Shore' – 'Moments of Being' – 'Dance on the Shore'

PART II: 'The Meeting'

PREFACE

Dear Erika,

05/01/10

This is my New Year gift to you: the second part will follow as soon as I can get it down – probably just in one unbroken span: not long, some kind of fulfilment of the first part. I'm wondering whether I shouldn't provide some kind of explanation of the title, show my hand a little: but I can't aim for anything rational – there are so many layers and glancing references which have accumulated along the way. Something along the following lines...

It was originally to be called (and perhaps I shall retain that) '*Marina*' – *String Quintet for two violins, viola and two cellos*. It arose following my first encounter with Marina Tsvetaeva (in the Elaine Feinstein translations, which you introduced me to thirty years ago). I could never set her poetry to music, but her passionate, unquenchable voice seemed to want to be embodied musically, and for me inescapably, in the sound and ambivalent register of the viola. Also – as I think Rilke recognized in his letters to her – the sea and its tides needed to be present, embracing her as some kind of element, or origin. Already a Nordic theme presented itself: 'The Lady from the Sea', or the Caller from the Shore. Sketches eventually fizzled out; but the viola at the heart of a quintet comprising two violins and two cellos remained, along with the image of the sea.

Many years later, in 2004, to celebrate the centenary of my teacher Priaulx Rainier, I embarked upon the project again. It was to be performed at a festival at St Ives, her home for many years. (She was a keen sailor). Recalling my original conception, it comprises some kind of 'portrait', not strictly of Priaulx herself, but taking her as an exemplar – like her friend Barbara Hepworth – of a certain type of courageous, stubborn creative spirit. I had been reading again Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which evokes the writer's memories of family holidays in St Ives; and here the character of Lily Briscoe seemed to proclaim the same challenging values. Other 'saints' beckoned: Gwen John, Lou Andreas Salome, Camille Claudel – elder sisters, if you like, of Tsvetaeva; and the role increasingly came to involve some kind of struggle or confrontation.

Another theme emerged, perhaps an echo of that Nordic, sea-borne idea that had first occurred to me: the Frieze of Life paintings of Edvard Munch, specifically *The Voice* and the *Dance of Life*, in all their obsessive variants, and the little *Dance on the Shore* in the Prague National Gallery – all of which carry that monitory columnar reflection of the moon upon the sea. I had always wanted to end the first part of my work with some kind of 'party': like the famous dinner that concludes the first part of *To the Lighthouse*. Here this takes the form of a dance employing rhythms and unusual tunings associated with Norwegian 'slatter'.

The 'death' which occurs in the interval between Part I and Part II recalls that of Mrs Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's novel. The silencing of the viola and the resulting hole in the musical texture trigger the reactions and eventually the outcome which form the narrative of the second part.

*Jeremy Dale Roberts's music is published by UYMP. Recordings include 'Croquis' for string trio, performed by members of the Kreuzer Quartet; 'Tristia' for violin and piano, Peter Sheppard Skaerved and Aaron Shorr (NMC D151). 'The Music of Jeremy Dale Roberts', a compilation performed by Lontano (Lorelt LNT 118)*

