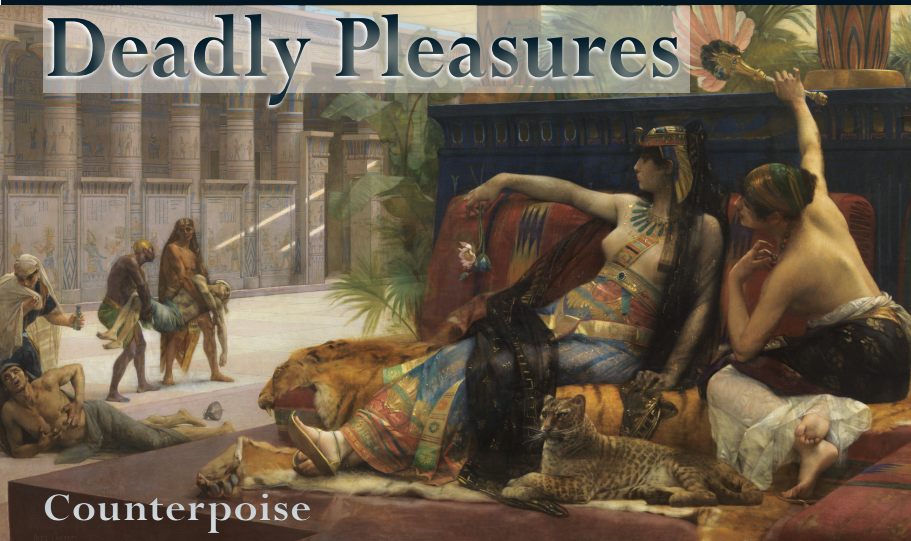


Deadly Pleasures



Counterpoise

Since its inception in 2008, Counterpoise has, true to its name, sought to balance opposing elements – music, text, visuals, dance – in various permutations. Often incorporating spoken narration into our programmes, we have resurrected the forgotten genre of melodrama, of which many examples were composed by Schumann, Liszt, Grieg, Mendelssohn, Strauss and many other composers of the 19th century. The medium of spoken narration and musical accompaniment was taken up, often within larger works, by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Weill, Walton and others. Of the works we have commissioned from leading composers of our own day such as John Casken, David Matthews, Edward Rushton, Charlotte Bray, Jean Hasse and Ross Lorraine, some reinvent the genre of melodrama, other fuse music with film or video in innovative ways. Our début disc presents four representative examples from the repertoire we have fashioned for ourselves, including two of our commissioned ‘melodramas’.

Deadly Pleasures **John Casken**

A poem by Pushkin, called *Egyptian Nights*, tells of Cleopatra offering herself for a night to any man prepared to die the following morning. Two suitors present themselves and are duly executed the following day. Pushkin failed to complete the tale but D.M. Casken in his novel *Ararat* proposes a neat solution: the third suitor enjoys

his night of love but has no intention of fulfilling the rest of the contract.

John Casken’s *Deadly Pleasures* is a setting of the Pushkin tale, as translated and completed by Thomas Thomas, for narrator and four instrumentalists (Thomas’s verse in fact accounts for fully two-thirds of the narrative). The first suitor, ‘proud Flavius’, a grey-haired soldier who fought at the Battle of Philippi, becomes a ‘bashful novice’ in the arms of Cleopatra: ‘Venus controls him now, not Mars’. Next comes the youthful Kriton, an epicurean, poetic type, who, perhaps too highly strung, initially fails to respond to Cleopatra’s charms. Never before has she experienced such slackness, but just as dawn is about to break, Kriton bursts into life.

The final suitor is a nameless youth, whom Cleopatra recognises, from a birthmark on his brow, as the offspring of her incestuous union with her brother Ptolemy. She nevertheless keeps her side of the bargain, though the young man himself, at break of day, drugs Cleopatra with mandragora, kills the executioner Mardian and escapes.

John Casken’s setting exploits the opportunities provided by Thomas’s richly descriptive text for dramatic characterisation. Each of the three suitors is assigned a different instrument as he is introduced: the trumpet for the soldier Flavius,

the violin for Kriton, the poet-musician, and the saxophone for the nameless youth.

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid
Benjamin Britten

The inspiration for Britten’s *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, op. 49, came from the *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid, a collection of legends that in many cases deal with transformation. The six characters chosen for illustration by Britten were Pan, Phaeton, Niobe, Bacchus, Narcissus and Arethusa, and it is perhaps notable that several of these characters were victims, in one way or another, of beings more powerful than themselves. The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* were written in 1951 for the British oboist Joy Boughton, but can be played to expressive effect, as here, on the soprano saxophone.

Actaeon **David Matthews**

The text for *Actaeon* – chosen by David Matthews himself, a former student of classics – is taken from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the translation by Ted Hughes. The poem tells the story of Actaeon who, out hunting one day, stumbles across a grotto where the goddess Diana is bathing naked with her female attendants. Diana, outraged at being observed in such a state, looks for a weapon with which to strike. Finding only water she scoops up a handful and splashes Actaeon’s eyes with it.

From his forehead immediately bursts ‘a rack of antlers’. He has been turned into a stag. As he leaps away from the grotto, ‘amazed at his own lightness’, his own hounds begin to give chase.

The whole pack, many named individually by Ovid, pursues Actaeon over crags and cliffs. Eventually he is cornered and torn limb from limb, his friends urging the hounds to finish the task even while calling for Actaeon ‘to hurry and witness this last kill of the day’. Only when the life of the unfortunate Actaeon has been ‘torn from his bones’ does ‘the remorseless anger of Diana, goddess of the arrow, find peace’.

Matthews’ score captures both the beauty of the natural landscape (swirling arpeggios on violin and piano evoke the cascading water in the bathing scene) and the thrill of the chase.

The trumpet is associated particularly with the goddess Diana, while the saxophone frequently takes the part of Actaeon – note especially the questioning phrases at Actaeon’s transformation into a stag and his subsequent groans. The final part of the work has a pastoral folk-like quality: a poignant elegy for Actaeon, who meets his death on the very hills where he had once been so happy.

The story of Actaeon was depicted by Titian in a pair of paintings, *Diana and Actaeon* and *The Death of Actaeon*. The latter is in the National Gallery while the former was recently saved for

the nation, to be shared by the National Gallery and the National Gallery of Scotland. David Matthews' conception of Actaeon was inspired by the Titian paintings and shaped by Eleanor Bron's delivery of the narration from an early stage.

Cabaret Suite

Benjamin Britten
(arr. Iain Farrington)

The Spider and the Fly

Funeral Blues

Boogie-Woogie

When you're Feeling like Expressing your Affection

As international tension and economic depression intensified in the years leading up to the Second World War, Benjamin Britten and his partner Peter Pears felt, as artists outside mainstream society, increasingly alienated. They decided to emigrate to America and although they stayed there only three years, it was long enough to get a taste of American style and values. Even before the move, Britten had demonstrated a facility for imitating jazz style and his American folk opera *Paul Bunyan* (to a libretto by W. H. Auden) might – he later said – have been followed by works more specifically designed for Broadway, had things turned out differently.

The *Cabaret Suite* was devised by Iain Farrington from various pieces of the period. 'The Spider and the Fly' is from Britten's incidental music

to J. B. Priestley's 1939 play *Johnson over Jordan*. 'Funeral Blues', from the Auden/Isherwood play *The Ascent of F6* (1937), was set to music by Britten for the extraordinary cabaret artist Heidi Anderson. 'Boogie-Woogie' is from the incidental music for Ronald Duncan's *This Way to the Tomb* (1945). 'When you're Feeling like Expressing your Affection' was a poem written (possibly by Auden) for the GPO Film Unit to encourage customers to make long-distance calls by pressing 'Button A'.

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Deadly Pleasures is published by Schott Music Ltd, text by D.M. Thomas after Pushkin.

Actaeon is published by Faber Music Ltd, text by Ted Hughes after Ovid.

Britten 'Boogie Woogie' © 1977 by the Britten Estate. This arrangement © 2012 by the Britten Estate. Arranged by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

'The Spider and the Fly', 'Funeral Blues' and 'When you're Feeling like Expressing your Affection' are arranged by permission of Faber Music Ltd.

The full texts for *Deadly Pleasures* and *Actaeon* can be found at <http://www.counterpoise.org.uk>

Counterpoise is grateful to the RVW Trust, ACE England, Prof. Arnold Whittall and the late Mrs Margaret Calland for their generous support of this recording.

The actress Eleanor Bron appreciates every opportunity to work with musicians, narrating pieces such as *Façade*, *Babar*, *Oral Treason* (Kagel), *Enoch Arden*, *Carnival of the Animals* (with her own verses) and works by Debussy, Sibelius, Satie and Bernstein. She has written, with John Dankworth, a song cycle: *Elizabeth Dreams*.



Donald Maxwell made his operatic debut over 35 years ago with Scottish Opera. His repertoire of over a hundred roles ranges from the Baroque to the contemporary and includes the great Italian comic baritone roles such as Falstaff, Bartolo, Don Pasquale and Melitone. He has appeared at the Met, La Scala, Salzburg Festival, the Royal Opera House and Vienna Staatsoper. Away from opera he performed in cabaret at seven Edinburgh Festivals. He was Director of the National Opera Studio from 2001 to 2008.



Counterpoise is a highly acclaimed ensemble consisting of some of the most sought-after instrumentalists in the UK. It was formed to give the first performances of *On the Edge* by Edward Rushton, with the aim of crossing musical genres, exploring the relationship between music, poetry and visual elements, and seeking also to develop aspects of narrative and other extra-musical influences. The ensemble has since then commissioned and premiered works by several leading composers, including those on this recording.

Counterpoise has appeared at the City of London, Buxton, Cheltenham and Newbury Festivals, as well as other significant venues up and down the country including Kings Place, London, and St George's Brandon Hill.

'delivered by Counterpoise with aplomb'

- The Times

'weird and wonderful'

- The Independent



photo Nicky Colton-Milne

Alexandra Wood has given recitals at various international festivals and appears regularly at the Wigmore Hall, South Bank and Kings Place. She was a prizewinner at the Wieniawski, Tibor Varga, Yampolsky and Rodolfo Lipizer competitions. The leader of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and City of London Sinfonia, she is invited to guest lead other ensembles including London Sinfonietta and Aurora Orchestra. She has premiered two violin concertos written for her (by Hugh Wood and Charlotte Bray).

Deborah Calland has given recitals in the USA, France, Germany, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, as well as venues throughout the UK, including the Cheltenham and City of London Festivals. Specialising in contemporary music, she has commissioned works by leading composers including Huw Watkins, Diana Burrell, Hugh Wood, Sally Beamish, Rhian Samuel and Einojuhani Rautavaara. Her disc *North Star* was released by Deux-Elles in 2006.

Kyle Horch has been a prizewinner at many competitions in Britain, Europe and the USA, and given recitals at many venues in Britain and abroad. His two CD recordings on the Clarinet Classics label, ChamberSax and AngloSax, have received international praise from reviewers, as has the recent CD of his chamber music project, Flotilla (Big Shed Music). He has also recorded as a soloist and chamber musician for the Music Chamber, Herald and ABC Classics labels. Apart from his own projects he works as a freelance saxophonist with many British orchestras and other ensembles, and is saxophone professor at the Royal College of Music in London.

Iain Farrington has an exceptionally busy career as a pianist, organist, composer and arranger. He has performed at all of the major UK venues as well as abroad, and played at the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics. He has worked with many of the country's leading musicians, including Bryn Terfel, Lesley Garrett and Sir Mark Elder, and performs regularly as a soloist, accompanist and chamber musician. His compositions and arrangements have been performed at the BBC Proms, the Royal Wedding 2011 and across the world.

Deadly Pleasures Counterpoise

with narration by Eleanor Bron and Donald Maxwell



Titian, Diana and Actaeon, Photo © The National Gallery, London/ The National Galleries of Scotland.

Recording engineer and producer - John Taylor. Narrations recorded by Patrick Naylor.

Booklet Notes - Barry Millington

Photos for Counterpoise - Nicky Colton-Milne

Cover artwork - Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Those Condemned to Death, Alexandre Cabanel, Royal Museum for Fine Arts Antwerp © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw, photo Hugo Maertens

Recorded in Potton Hall, Suffolk, 24th and 25th January, 2013

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DXL 1151 Playing Time: 66 mins

DDD

Deadly Pleasures

Counterpoise

with narration by Eleanor Bron and Donald Maxwell

Deadly Pleasures**John Casken***ensemble, narrator, text by D.M. Thomas after Pushkin*

- [1] Cleopatra's Challenge; Flavius, the Old Soldier;
Kriton, the Youthful Musician; A Nameless Man 26:38

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid**Benjamin Britten***soprano saxophone*

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| [2] Pan 2:42 | [3] Phaeton 1:22 |
| [4] Niobe 2:48 | [5] Bacchus 1:57 |
| [6] Narcissus 3:45 | [7] Arethusa 3:07 |

Actaeon**David Matthews***ensemble, narrator, text by Ted Hughes after Ovid*

- [8] Actaeon encounters Diana; Metamorphosis;
e Hunt; Epilogue 14:12

Cabaret Suite**Benjamin Britten, arr. Iain Farrington***ensemble*

- [9] e Spider and the Fly 3:28
[10] Funeral Blues 2:40
[11] Boogie-Woogie 2:27
[12] When you're Feeling like Expressing
your A ction 1:21



Compact Disc Digital Audio. High resolution 24-bit recording and mastering

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