

# RE DISCOVERIES 3

with Denis Smalley

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ringin' Down the Sun (2002) | 6 channel electroacoustic music |
| Resounding (2004)           | 6 channel electroacoustic music |
| Wind Chimes (1987)          | stereo electroacoustic music    |
| Spectral Lands (2011)       | 6 channel electroacoustic music |

PRESENTED BY

SERG (SOUND EMPORIUM RESEARCH GROUP)  
AND  
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

AT

JOHNSTON HALL  
THURSDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2014  
19:30 - 20:30



## **Ringling Down the Sun (2002)**

Ringling Down the Sun was commissioned by the Danish Institute for Electroacoustic Music (DIEM) and first performed in Aarhus in 2002.

It was while working on the commission Aarhus that I came across the Danish tradition of “ringing down the sun” – the tolling of church bells, which signals the end of the working day and the descent of the sun through dusk and on into night. The tolling signal, and all it represents, remains part of Danish culture, even if it is now more “abstract”, in that it no longer necessarily has a real function in daily life. This idea seemed metaphorically to coincide with my attitudes towards the sounds, contours and spaces I was emerged in at the time, and thereafter it steered the direction and preoccupations of my composition.

There is a number of tolling, resonant sounds which, although they may be set off with striking attacks, draw us inwards, in contemplation. There are circling, pulsed garlands which travel and radiate energy. There is a prevalence of descending contours – drifting, floating, falling – and sometimes descents into sombre hues. But the sun also has to be “rung up”, and so the form of the piece is governed by the progress of wave-like, cyclical contours. Lastly, there is the spatial dimension itself, designed to evoke both the open spaces of the outdoors – sky, landscape, and even coastline – but also the more intimate, surround feeling embodied inside resonances.

## **Resounding (2004)**

Resounding was composed as a companion piece for Ringling Down the Sun. It was commissioned by Sonorities for the 2004 Festival in Belfast to celebrate the opening of the Sonic Arts Research centre (SARC). The commission was supported by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The title refers to the ringing of resonant sounds, the filling of space with sound, and to the notion of sounding again – as heard, for example, in the cyclic rhythms of resonances, prolonged, decaying, or sent travelling through the “orchestrated” listening space. Spatially, two ideas are prevalent – resonance heard as if from the interior of objects of varying dimensions, and the external resonance of spaces as experienced, for instance, in a large cathedral. The idea of sounding again is also at the heart of the formal progress of the piece, which focuses on the return of materials in changed surroundings. Furthermore, sounds previously encountered in Ringling Down the Sun are taken up and given new lives.

## **Wind Chimes (1987)**

The main sound source for Wind Chimes is a set of ceramic chimes found in a pottery during a visit to New Zealand in 1985. It was not so much the ringing pitches which were attractive but rather the bright, gritty, rich, almost metallic qualities of a single struck pipe or a pair of scraped pipes. These qualities proved a very fruitful basis for many transformations which prised apart and reconstituted their interior spectral design. Not that the listener is supposed to or can always recognise the source, but in this case it is audible in its natural state near the beginning of the piece, and the ceramic quality is never far away throughout. Complementary materials were gathered to expand the piece's sound-families, among them very high metallic Japanese wind chimes, resonant metal bars, interior piano sounds, and some digital synthesis. The piece is centred on strong attacking gestures, types of real and imaginary physical motion (spinning, rotating objects, resonances which sound as if scraped or bowed, for example), contrasted with layered, more spacious, sustained textures whose poignant dips hint at a certain melancholy.

Wind Chimes was commissioned by the South Bank Centre, London, and was given its first performance in the Electric Weekend at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. The computer transformations were carried out in the former Digital Studio of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales, Paris, and the piece was mixed in the Electroacoustic Music Studio at the University of East Anglia.

## **Spectral Lands (2011)**

The “spectral” of the title has two meanings. It refers both to the ambiguous, sometimes spirit-like auras of voices, birds and natural phenomena inhabiting an imagined landscape, and to the idea of “spectral space” – the impression of space and spaciousness created by the placing and motion of sonic materials within the audio spectrum. The textures of spectral space interact both with the dimensions and distances of spatial perspective, and with the types of spaces evoked by voices, birdsong and environmental sounds, to create “lands” with distinctive spatial qualities.

In the back of my mind as I composed the piece lay the experience of a recent visit to Golden Bay, in the north-west corner of the South Island of New Zealand - the long coastal sweep, the sounds in the native bush, and the blurring of differentiation in certain lights and weathers between land, mountains, sea and skies. Particularly striking was the expansive, deserted beach at Wharariki, where winds blowing over the sand-drifts soon cover up any trace of human presence; enormous rocky outcrops

loom out of sand and sea, and enclosed resonant caves contrast with the openness of the landscape. I was equally taken by landscape views in the Corbières in the south of France, where most of the piece was mixed. Amidst the sunny days, there can be dramatic skies, swift-moving cloud strata, noisy gusts and flows of wind in the trees, and if the rain suddenly descends, vibrant textural energies. But Spectral Lands should not be considered a literal or specific landscape portrait. The ambiguity of the sonic spectres is such that some listeners may construct their own images or narrative, while others may prefer to respond to the musical discourse in a more abstract way.

Spectral Lands was commissioned by the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and the Centre for Research in New Music (CeReNeM) at the University of Huddersfield, and was given its first performance in the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in November 2011.

### **Composer's Bio**

#### ***Denis Smalley***

Denis Smalley was born in New Zealand in 1946. He studied music at the University of Canterbury and the Victoria University of Wellington prior to studying at the Paris Conservatoire with Messiaen, and with the Groupe de Recherches Musicales. He then moved to England, living initially in York where he completed a doctorate in composition at the University of York. Until 1994 he was Senior Lecturer in Music and Director of the Electroacoustic Music Studio at the University of East Anglia. He then moved to City University, London as Professor of Music and Head of the Department of Music. He retired from City University in 2009, and is now Professor Emeritus.

Denis Smalley been active as a composer of electroacoustic music for thirty-five years, and his works have been widely acclaimed, winning a number of international awards including the Prix Ars Electronica in 1988. In 2008 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Huddersfield for his achievements in electroacoustic music. He has made original contributions to thinking about electroacoustic music, in particular his investigations into the listener's perception of electroacoustic music, and his development of the notion of spectromorphology (the shaping of sound spectra through time). His most recent major writing was published in *Organised Sound* (12) 1: Space-form and the Acousmatic Image. A book on his music and ideas was published by GRM/INA in the Polychrome Portraits series - in English in 2010, and in

French in 2011 - and there are associated on-line resources available at [http://www.institut-national-audiovisuel.fr/sites/ina/medias/upload/grm/mini-sites/smalley/co/siteWeb\\_Smalley.html](http://www.institut-national-audiovisuel.fr/sites/ina/medias/upload/grm/mini-sites/smalley/co/siteWeb_Smalley.html).



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