



Song of the Mountains

music by **FRANCES TURNER**

Interview by Laura Jerrard



Frances Turner BA, MPhil, LicAc, LicOHM, MBAcC, MRCHM

After studying at York University, Frances became a professional Baroque violinist, touring and recording with Britain's leading Baroque chamber orchestras. In the early 90s she started to change direction, studying complementary medicine and becoming a practitioner first of healing and massage, and then of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Fran co-ordinates and teaches Chinese Medicine Theory to LCTA's first year students and supervises in the Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine Teaching Clinics.

LCTA'S VERY OWN FRANCES TURNER HAS COMPILED AN EXPLORATORY PIECE OF MUSIC BRINGING TOGETHER THE BAROQUE WITH THE CONTEMPORARY, THE MUSIC WITH THE HEALING, THE SELF WITH THE EARTH.

What inspired you to produce this piece of music?

I went on a vision quest in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, which in itself was a very gentle and beautiful experience. But I fell in love with the land. That's never happened to me before – that feeling of your heart jumping out of your chest and into the earth. And when I got home I just started writing this music. I think it was one of those moments when a lot of different strands of life come together and something happens.

Who are your influences?

Well, I trained at York University as a contemporary composer but I was never really happy with what I wrote. When it came to going professional, life took me in the performance direction, and I spent many years touring as a Baroque violinist with London's Baroque chamber orchestras. And then, as you know, I retrained in complementary health. So I suppose those are the

three main influences. I didn't set out to do it, but looking at my Song in retrospect, I can so clearly see all three strands – the contemporary, the Baroque and the shamanic.

You recorded your CD in Weston Parish Church. Why there and how did it feel?

It's a beautiful little church, with a good acoustic and in a quiet place. That's important if you don't want aeroplanes in the takes! It's a favourite venue of my recording engineer.

What is the music about and what do the lyrics mean?

Ah well, I guess it means what it means for you. For me, it has a lot to do with getting to a stage in life where I can just be myself. Bit of a cliché maybe? It's about sound I suppose. And love. We all have a sound, and the earth has a sound. It's kind of a love song to the earth.

How did you meet the other members in the group and have you worked on other things together?

Penelope, the singer, is my sister, and right from early on in the writing I knew it was for her. I have always loved her voice, which has an enormous range and a lovely dark colour. She is a singer in Brussels and we've never got to work together before, so this was a pleasure. The violinist Caroline and I go back 20 years or more, working together. She is one of my favourite violinists, I particularly like her sound. She is both a Baroque and a contemporary violinist, which is not that common, so she was an obvious choice for a piece of contemporary music written for Baroque strings. Alison, the cellist, is also a wonderful player and colleague, and Richard is a percussionist Caroline put me in touch with when I wanted to learn drumming.

In a way it was Richard who catalysed the recording, because I took him the score to check out if the percussion part worked, and he said, "Have you got anyone to play this? If not, I'll do it!" That's what gave me the final oomph to book the recording session.

What have you learnt in the making of it?

That it's very expensive to record music! No but seriously, it has been part of a huge, long learning for me that has been about connection; connection to myself, to others and to the earth. About feeling things with my heart, allowing the reality of things and feelings. It's also been learning about actually materialising something. I'm very good at creative projects, and usually have a couple on the go at any one time, but they tend to end up in the drawer if I'm not careful. I have a constant struggle with being seen and putting myself out there, so that's an ongoing learning now, with the publicity and selling it and all that. But also from the performance point of view I learnt a lot, mainly about how to direct a recording session from the violin. You have to be very present to do that. I've played on a lot of records in my life but I've never directed one before. I'm really pleased with this recording because I can hear places where it really comes into focus.



Weston Parish Church

Who might listen to it?

I think it might have quite a wide appeal, although I find it hard to put it in a category because it's such a fusion. I suppose it's a kind of World music. I would be interested to know how someone in the business would classify it. I imagine it might appeal to people interested in new directions in contemporary music, but at the same time to people interested in self development and inner journeying.

Can you tell me a bit about the shamanic work in the Canadian Rockies?

The term shamanic always seems to cover a multitude of sins. What I did in Canada was ritual and meditation to connect to myself and to the land, to spend some time listening to inner voices, to my own direction in life. I wrote about 2/3rds of the Song straight after Canada, and the rest a bit later, after more shamanic work in Wales. This later work also involved ritual and meditation, in particular focusing on who am I, what is my purpose, where am I going – that kind of stuff. But the emphasis was more about developing a conscious awareness of the dreamtime, developing the capacity to wake up in the dreaming and to work with the dreaming in waking life.

There was one other thing I wanted to ask, and this is a bit random, but are you Jewish? For me, listening to your music reminded me of my Jewish roots: family, lighting Shabbat candles, going to synagogue...

How interesting. Yes, actually I am Jewish in the sense that my mother's mother was a Russian Jew from near Kiev.

But she married a gentile, and my branch of the family is non-practising. In a way, there is a place where all religions are getting at the same thing, and I think my music is perhaps also getting at that. I didn't set out for any specific effect, I just wrote it from my heart, that's all. ■



Fran's CD costs £7.50 (+£1.50p&p) and you can buy it on her website www.francesturner.org and from My Space.

It is also available from the reception at LCTA.

Photos by Susie Turner