



Gargoyle

words by edwin webb

with

music by edward lee

GARGOYLE

This CD was recorded digitally and remastered from a real time Dolby B/C cassette copy of a 15 ips. 4-track master recording, suitable for broadcasting or the mastering of discs and cassettes. Unfortunately, as these tapes no longer exist, there are a few points at which it has not been possible to recapture the original clarity of the words.

The contents are a project in words and music, created in 1984. Previous work in combining the spoken word with music had taken several forms: Poetry and Jazz, settings of poems by noted classical composers, and the aural poetry in live performers, by artists such as Bob Cobbing. This CD differs from all of these. The compositions reflect a diversity of artistic influences to generate meeting points for literature, music and theatre, in which the music itself draws upon a wide variety of contemporary classical and popular references. And unusual in this sort of venture is the fact that the musicians in the group are themselves also performers of the readings.

The tape may justifiably be called an album in that it consists of a set of self-contained compositions which contrast considerably in style and format.

Words: texts throughout by Edwin Webb.

Music: compositions throughout by Edward Lee.

THE PERFORMERS

Felix Cross: Now Director of Nitro, the Black Theatre Company. At that time, leader of reggae/calypso band, Felix and the Cats and performer on the Alternative Comedy circuit. He was just about to enter upon his successful career as a writer of musical theatre.

Edward Lee: Now a composer working predominantly through the Elm Village Arts website. At the time of the recording he had made a reputation in music education, and had recently published *Pop, Rock and Ethnic Music in School* (CUP, 1982)

Terry Mortimer: Now a successful actor-musician. At that time he had just begun to act as a Musical Director for the National Theatre, where his music for the production *Strider* was greeted with very favourable critical reviews.

Edwin Webb: Now retired from his university post, engaged in various writing projects. Books and articles on literary and educational themes widely published; and for his "distinguished contribution to English in education" was honoured with a Founding Fellowship from the English Association.

NOTES ON THE COMPOSITIONS

These notes are not intended as criticism, but as a first guide to orientate the listener to the words and to the music.

Gargoyle reflects upon a cathedral close. It begins with a piano prelude, in which Breughel-like peasants clump rather unrhythmically around the close. A change of texture introduces the first voice. An assembly of voices then develops further the theme; the whole composition creating several changes of direction and mood, during which the troubled spirits of the gargoyles are heard.

Among the Ruins projects various aspects of Greek classical culture. First, a speaker reflects on the coming to life of ancient sculpture. A transition leads to the second and third parts of the work to recreate something of the essential spirit of Euripides's *Bacchae*. According to this legend, the women of Thebes were called by the god Dionysus to celebrate his mysteries. The track attempts to re-create the eerie sound which the oracle would have made. Men were strictly excluded from the festival and male intruders were torn limb from limb by the frenzied women. A polyphonic and dissonant piece for bouzouki gives a modern perspective on the events.

Osiris was originally an instrumental piece, created by Edward Lee for the group CMU. A version of the piece by the band can be heard on *CMU: The Leeds Concert*, available as a free download on www.elmvillagearts.co.uk.

Edwin Webb described how the poem came into being in his introduction to a first realisation of the words and music piece at a concert given in 1982. (A recording – *Sounds Like: the Garnett College Concert* – can also be heard and downloaded free from the above website).

Many years ago now I first heard Ed's musical composition, Osiris, and some years after that I found myself engaged in an attempt to reconstruct an experience which belonged to a civilisation now distantly remote from us. In trying to realise that work, I realised, too, that I was from time to time aware of the return to a pulse in the music of Ed's composition. And at a certain point there were certain coalescences, at which the music somehow prefigured some of the images I was trying to identify. So now in a composite presentation we offer Osiris, the Egyptian God of the Dead and of the Living Reborn.

In this version the listener first overhears one of those who are waiting, in the moment before dawn, when the entire civilisation of ancient Egypt was poised on the edge of survival. When Osiris -- the god of the dead and of the living re-born -- gives the sign (the flooding of the Nile), there follows a celebration in music which traces back to the African source of the river.

In **Landscape of a Dream** the voice of Terry Mortimer is meshed with a texture of guitar-based electronics, created by Ed Lee. The words and the music combine to re-create the drama of a dream experience of early childhood.

Ventriloquist: The ventriloquist's dummy speaks! The musical framework evokes the atmosphere of a variety theatre, but with a difference...

A Skein of Tangled Hair is a piece in which three voices project strange and disturbing images through a network of lines from Spanish and electric guitars. In this arrangement, the whole effect of the piece is both bleak and urgent.

Casualty could be described as a radio drama in four minutes. The composition is scored for three voices, and is prefaced and concluded with piano music. The listener witnesses a scene played out, perhaps, in a psychiatric hospital.

In **Northern Coastline** the music creates a seascape. The voice weaves in and out; selecting, from the natural setting, incidents and images familiar to all. Finally there is recalled a strange perception of childhood, the effect of which is to recast time remembered. Apart from the piano part of Terry Mortimer, the backing was created entirely on the electric guitar.

Running times:

<i>Gargoyle</i>	6.37
<i>Among the Ruins</i>	7.32
<i>Osiris</i>	6.28
<i>Landscape of a Dream</i>	5.41
<i>Ventriloquist</i>	3.13
<i>A Skein of Tangled Hair</i>	1.44
<i>Casualty</i>	3.48
<i>Northern Coastline</i>	8.24
Total length:	43.34

THE POEMS

Gargoyle

Roof leads shimmer
With rebounded rain;
The church growls a
Reverberating bass

While voices unison
A choir of praise, their
Rhyming quatrains drowned
In the slingshot clatter.

A bundle of feathers drops,
Regathers; beneath
The berries' bloodburst
Of the rowan tree, a magpie
Struts upon clipped grass.

A crown of staves
Springing from the skull,
Gargoyle gurgles.
Between distended lips
Gouts of spumed water
Torrent from stone,
A sputter of gutturals spout
From the sculpted throat.

While eyeless sockets stare
From the jutting head,
Agonies of water
Jet. Listen. Beneath

Unseasonal summer's
Slab-grey sky, there chokes
The unknown mason's mask –
Mouthing the thick speech

Of a gift of tongues.

Among the Ruins

Veined in marble, laurelled and bird-strewn,
these are immortalities' memorials,
broken, worn; and this is the temple of
oracular heaven's once all-seeing pantheon.

Sculptor-tricked, see how the gods' gouged eyes
face the sun. And in the warm Aegean dawn
feel the numbed skin of stone begin to thaw.

Osiris

Trailing a dawn sky that conceals
The coming season and its sign,
Night's creatures track their prophecies
Across earth's shadowed passageways.
A wrinkled sheath of water fills:
Nile's delta lifts, spreading her slow thighs ...

Faith, and fear, urge the morning on.
Listening for lips of tide to answer,
The watchers wait, mouthing thin
Vocables of prayer, while the year
Still hangs in a cloud of whisper --
A calendar of sun, moon, stars
Drawn to their appointed moment.
And now, the final waiting ...

Between

Invading desert sands the urgent
Arteries swirl, divide the vulture's
Carcass'd grip. Channels stiffened in
The hills' embrace of perfumed dead
Speed the gathering stream: small flares
Sweep to the north, papyrus reeds
Quiver to their force; the serpent
Shifts its coils ...

And there, now! the dog star
Leaps its chains, pierces a low tent

Of dawn pitched in the Egyptian
Night. The liquid pulses quicken,
Nile's withered flanks of water
Stretch, then surge into sunk veins the sun
Baked dry ...

Fleshed sinew tenses, writhes:
Through opened limbs of land spent floods
Subside, gasping on the drowned seed.
A swollen length of river drives
On into the bellied Mediterranean
Sea ..

Landscape of a Dream

Under the hooded eyes
Of watchful birds of prey
He pressed into the night –
While sleepyhead dreamt on
Through day's loose memories.

Centuries of stunned rock
Disclosed their captive sealed
In undergrounds of sleep;
By darkness woken he broke
Free and stole into the world.

His blunt head drove into
The unaccustomed air:
Wedged slabs that split and sheared
Sped crusts of prayer
Whose stones, like words not heard,

Trailed shafts of silences
Down untongued throats of scree.
Above, dragons' teeth cast on walled
Crag leant against the sky,
Tore at a clouded moon.

From this slow and wounded birth,
As the humped shape crawled,
Fleshed fingers fumbling clawed,
Shed nursling coil and caul
That fell to hardened earth.

On the shaping scarp quick
Jags of pointed light froze
Headstone blocks of granite;
Swollen lips burst, pent cries
Drowned in a flood of thunder.

Down slopes of shaken hills
Dumb vowels rolled, re-echoing.

A phase of moon: stars drill
Pulses of receding fire.

Still he crashes wildly on.
Lurching across the curtained heights,
His maimed hands brand
The ridge of sky where cairn
And cromlech, thrust between

Thin cusps of dawn, will soon
Unstitch the night, unscreen
This scarred and broken land
The flickering of an eyelid
Flames, the sun consumes.

Trapped in a strip of day
Specked motes of dust dance.
Warmth of morning breaks
Through territories of sleep.
The falcon shreds its prey.

Young manikin awakes,
Stretches, rubs his eyes,
Erasing mysteries
The darkness sensitised.
Light burns the image black.

Day starts re-born: but each
Dull thud the monster made
As he stalked the landscape
Of a dream, resounds now
Through an infant head.

Ventriloquist

Packed among dirty underwear
the crumpled miniature awaits
his master's shaping skill;
makes language of habitual gesture
whose sotto voce re-creates
the alter ego of a painted smile.
An empty, papier-mâché head,
loose wooden limbs, bright swivel eyes
are jerked to life each time
the master plots his exercise,
rehearsing both parts of the mime --
the words he speaks, the words he never said.
Speech glides with an accustomed ease,

deft practised hands pull strings that tie
performer to his clown.
The master's wide, unblinking eyes,
fixed head, slack jaw, conceal the lie:
the puppet's mouth moves freely on its own,

the scripted lines no longer rhyme.
New phrases improvise a rhetoric:
I say I say I say
the thin sounds screech; the dummy talks,
the glazed ventriloquist is dumb --
tongue stopped, his lower lip hangs from a thread.

Stiff servant hands repack
soiled linen in a makeshift bed;
clasps fumbled lock the suitcase lid.
Inside, the dummy suffocates --
but still the muted voice repeats:
I say I say I say
I say

A Skein of Tangled Hair

Locked in sublunar dream, two lovers pledge
Souls tensed bodies twin; an ageing housewife
Curtseys to the swollen moon a madman reaches through;
Its flattened disc of light

Mounts dark declivities of silvered
Flesh which lovers thrill, to touch; thin arms out-stretched,
The kneeling woman rattles two old pennies
In a battered purse ---.

Torn fingers clasp the broken sparrow morning
Salvaged, its tiny weight of sky caught where
The hawthorn tree snags passing drifts of moon; keen hands
Trace love's geometries,

A skein of tangled hair snares galaxies
Of stars, blown nebulae; through the kitchen
Door a chink of gold lights up the corner
Of a scullery yard.

Clumped fists tighten, hurl the fluttering bird
Into the stream; the waters shatter, a thousand
Mirrored fragments shudder, briefly rise;
Then speed toward the sea.

Casualty

Clutching his bloody head
Between gnarled hands
The casualty crashed his way
Into the waiting-room,
Spun on the chequered tiles
And hurtled back
Through an open door.
Legs splayed, his heels trod
Quicker and still smaller steps,
His thin arms jerked
As he hauled frail threads of air...
Then crumpled to the floor.

"My head is breaking,"
Screamed the broken man.

The bland consultant calmly
Sipped his cup of tea
And gestured to
A hard-backed chair.

Brown paper never mended broken head
The white-robed surgeon said.

"But doctor, you don't know
The pains I have!

My head is split,
My limbs have bones
That don't belong to me."
Between the torn flaps of his mouth
The patient yelled,
"Doctor, you don't understand.
I tell my legs to move,
They run away
And I must follow after.
And things get worse.
Last Friday night I tried
To mount the stairs to get to bed –
Though my left leg gaily climbed
My right leg dragged me down!
But worst of all are times
I lie awake at night
And feel I do not feel
My feet at all."

A safety pin won't stitch dismembered limbs
The white-robed surgeon said.
And sipped his cup of tea.

Head buried in the angles
Of his twisted arms,
The patient bawled
Behind his back,

"And I have fires, doctor!
Doctor, you don't know
The flames that burn inside me,
How they flare
And scorch my eyes –
So when I try to weep
Dry tears of dust
Erupt from craters of my face!"

The hypodermic won't put out a funeral pyre
The white-robed surgeon said.

"But doctor, I don't think
You understand,"
The casualty falsettoed,
As the limbs he did not own
Stepped a wild gavotte
Above the body rolling on the floor.
"Last night I put
My limbs away
And wrapped my body in a blanket
So I wouldn't be disturbed.
And I lay quiet, quiet, see...
But doctor! doctor!
Though I pressed my skull
To the sounds of night,
I couldn't hear a thing !"

That's because there's no-one listening

The white-robed surgeon said,
And deftly stirred his tea.

Northern Coastline

From walls that fall to foam
Dawn scattered seagulls, aimed
Them into raucous skies
The evening gathers when
They target surely home:
To rock scoured by wind and rain
They cling, draped on each broken ledge
In pools of shifting white;
Below, on a shelving beach,
The hurl of seas now beats.

Dully day retreats:
Fractured shadow scars the face
Of cliffs that line this coast,
And the lowering light grafts amber
To the sundered cast
Of a towering ruin;
Its base surrounded by strewn
Fragments of the jagged
Sculpturings of ice and sun,
Cleft fists and fingers down.

Shorn from its fathering rock
The sea-bound giant sunk
In gathering sands divides
The pull of waters as they break:
Fashioned by each tide
And caverned by the lash of storms
Waves tongue a throat of stone;
Where it mouths the open sea
Loose swelling ridges strike
And shape as they deform.

By the force defined which cut
The outline of this bay,
Quick seas devour gaping jaws
Ground out of sheer sides
Of rock: above the pause of tides
A choke of water swells,
The sound of drowning hollows out,
And a surge of waves unloads
Its wash of cargoes to the mood
That evening settles.

Pinned to their moving map
Of sky, edged clouds trace
Seaward to the fading light,
And a last seagull drifts
Above a wedge of whitened stone:

A sudden flurry of wings
Releases the bird, unfolds
A silent arc of flight and rings
The base of a flooded pillar; then on
Its crumb of saving rock alights.

Along the angled edge a line
Of shattered cliffs cleave
To the evening sky,
The silhouette of a man
Completes his narrative;
In a mask of shadow
Scans the jutting stack,
Its features and those shards
Time broke from fathering rock
Collected in the gathered sands below.
And as the aftertow of sea
Drags in to memory
Bright views of splintered light,
Along another summer's beach
He'd run, before, a child,
The present tense of waters beats –
And the quickened pulse recalls
That spell when rock and sea
And sand were made of touch
And taste and smell and not
These words for time's recall.

The shriek of gulls still haunts
This reach of space the sky
Suspends above a falling sea:
Today, collecting histories,
Memory mimed that wild and rising
Pitch of noise which once had streaked
The air, curved in a downward
Thread of white; fixed in
The moment's wonderment, the young boy stared...
Then pointed to that hidden spot
Where a strange sea-bird
Had plunged into the rock –
Flown on, and out, the other side.

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GARGOYLE

and other poems

by

Edwin Webb