



**LORELT**

# Silvina Milstein chamber works

**LONTANO**

**ODALINE DE LA MARTINEZ**  
*conductor*

**DOMINIC SAUNDERS**  
*piano*

**HELEN TUNSTALL**  
*harp*

**of gold and  
shadows**

**volume 1**

# of gold and shadows, Volume 1

## Silvina Milstein: Chamber Works

LONTANO

**Odaline de la Martinez** *conductor*

**Dominic Saunders** *piano*

**Helen Tunstall** *harp*

**Adam Wynter & Ben Daniel-Greep** *double basses*

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1	<b>ochre, umber and burnt sienna</b> for septet	15:59
2	<b>Piano Phantasy</b> after Mozart K. 475	13:37
3	<b>a thousand golden bells in the breeze</b> for harp and two double basses	16:57
4	<b>de oro y sombra</b> for fourteen players	25:52

*Total playing time* 72:28

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Flutes	<b>Rowland Sutherland</b>	Violin	<b>Caroline Balding</b>
Bass flute	<b>Fergus Davidson</b>		<b>Ruth Ehrlich</b>
Clarinet	<b>Andrew Sparling</b>		<b>Simon Kodurand</b> ( <i>track 1</i> )
Trumpet	<b>Torbjörn Hultmark</b>		<b>Andrew Roberts</b> ( <i>track 4</i> )
	<b>Bruce Nockles</b>	Viola	<b>Kate Musker</b>
Horn	<b>Richard Steggall</b>	Cello	<b>Sophie Harris</b>
	<b>Richard Bayliss</b>	Double bass	<b>Adam Wynter</b>
Harp	<b>Helen Tunstall</b> ( <i>tracks 1 &amp; 3</i> )		<b>Patrick Wilder</b> ( <i>track 1</i> )
	<b>Helen Sharp</b> ( <i>track 4</i> )		<b>Ben Daniel-Greep</b> ( <i>track 3</i> )

## The spaces between: of gold and shadows

*John Fallas*

Between shadow and shadow the light falls, spreads, is absorbed or reflected in varying degrees by pigment, metal, earth. Coloured in lavender, blue, gold and black, perceived through half-light or illuminated by mystic fire, this is music by Silvina Milstein, a composer for whom the world is not so much peak and valley, land and ocean, as the nightly cadence of dusk and all the tumultuous daylight possibilities that it gathers in – light, and the spaces between.

Milstein was born and grew up in Buenos Aires, but moved to the UK at twenty in the wake of the Argentinian military coup. She studied in Glasgow with Judith Weir and Lyell Cresswell, before a move to Cambridge provided the initial occasion for an exchange of ideas with Alexander Goehr which has been of continuing importance. At the root of this affinity are a close and vivid sense of the Schoenbergian heritage (expressed in Milstein's case in the analytical work that led to her book *Schoenberg: notes, sets, forms*), an interest in compositional pedagogies, an absorption in the possibilities of influence from other art-forms, and a certain stubborn distance from both the mainstream and the avant-garde.

A creative engagement with earlier music informs the works of this time and just afterwards: the *String Quartet* (1989) and *Piano Phantasy* (1992, heard in a revised and extended version on the present album), and perhaps also *Nova Polska* (1992 again), a sort of neo-Baroque cantata on a text by Caroline Smith. The ideal of study and contemplation as productive of new creation has informed Milstein's teaching at King's College London, whose music department she joined in 1990, while her own music has found an increasingly personal path between displacement and evocation of its source materials, which range from Monteverdi through Scriabin to fragments of Argentinian popular musics – tango, milonga, bolero ...

*Nova Polska* was a beginning as well as a culmination: the first of five works with text written over the next decade, including one more to words by Smith. Of even more lasting significance, it inaugurated a working relationship with the conductor Odaline de la Martinez, who led two Milstein premieres with BBC forces in 1995 and whose own ensemble Lontano has given eight further first performances to date, besides enabling further hearings for key works such as the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group commission, *de oro y sombra* (2011).

The latter work heralded a concern with what the composer refers to as ‘blended sonorities’, created by embedding pairs or trios of identical instruments within a mixed ensemble. Thus the flutes, horns and trumpets of *de oro y sombra* or the three violins and two double basses of the septet *ochre, umber and burnt sienna* (2012), with the paired double basses and trumpets then recurring in two trios with harp (2012 and 2016 respectively). Thus, too, the now entirely homogeneous textural landscapes of *in a bowl of grey-blue leaves* (2014), for two pianos, and *ushnarasmou / untimely spring* (2015), for choir.

In and around these works, too, Milstein began to conceive of a larger structure which would house diverse but interconnected, mutually illuminating forms and instrumentations – whether in live concert performance, or in the virtual space of a CD recording such as this. It is an organising principle as elusive yet suggestive as the sounds and motivic patterns from which, fractal-like, its constituent parts are composed, and it repeats and extends with characteristic modesty their readjustment – ever so subtle, ever so profound – of our relationship as listeners to time and to musical material.

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The eight compositions that form the cycle **of gold and shadows** share a concern with the exploration of states of heightened awareness, and with the creation of evocative modes of musical continuity arising from the use of ‘shards’ of familiar materials as starting points for free association.

The two largest works in the cycle – *de oro y sombra* on the present CD, and *shan shui (mountain – water)* on Volume 2 – were inspired by the mysterious symbolic spaces depicted in certain ancient Chinese landscape paintings, while the *Piano Phantasy* and the piano duo *in a bowl of grey-blue leaves* (which

opens Volume 2) inhabit a world of sensuous eroticism. A concern with ‘blended sonorities’ through the use of pairs or groups of the same instrument within a mixed ensemble, or of homogeneous sonorities such as a piano duo, provides another binding feature – as also in *a thousand golden bells in the breeze* and *while your sound lingered on in lions and rocks*, where a harp is enveloped by pairs of double basses and trumpets respectively.

Like renderings of a mountain from many sides, under different lights, and at different scales, this cycle of compositions invites listeners on a multifaceted contemplative journey.

## **ochre, umber and burnt sienna**

*for septet*

(2012)

Men have used earth pigments for depicting their imaginings since prehistoric times, but I am particularly attracted by Johannes Vermeer's use of ochre, umber and burnt sienna in some of his paintings of women in their private spaces. While visiting a Vermeer exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, I became absorbed in a mode of looking at those portraits that involves focusing on how their expressive backgrounds – saturated with tiny strokes of earth pigments – invite us to enter domestic spaces, in which pensive women ponder and rest.

*ochre, umber and burnt sienna* is written for a septet consisting of flute, harp, three violins and two double basses. While the two double basses play in their highest register, one of the violins (with its bottom string tuned a semitone lower than usual) provides a bridge that binds the ensemble into a monochrome whole made of hues of earthy tones.

*ochre, umber and burnt sienna* was written for Lontano and is dedicated to Odaline de la Martinez.

## **Piano Phantasy**

after Mozart K. 475

(1992, rev. 2017)

In modelling my *Piano Phantasy* on Mozart's Fantasia in C minor, K. 475, I was particularly attracted by the implications of the sudden and unexpected modulations of Mozart's opening bars. The stability of the tonic is weakened to such an extent that when the dominant key is finally reached it carries little of its usual reaffirming tension, and seems but a remote tonal area within the continuously shifting tonality. The writer and pianist Charles Rosen commented that 'its opening material offers, within the classical style, no way of continuing without the introduction of new material, new tonalities, and new tempi'.

My *Piano Phantasy* is also centred on a sort of C minor, and follows a similar tonal and formal trajectory in its combination of the symmetries of classical phrasing and forms with a rhapsodic, almost improvisatory feel.

*Piano Phantasy* is the earliest piece in this cycle of compositions – Andrew Ball gave its premiere in 1993 – and was revised and extended in preparation for the present recording.

**a thousand golden bells in the breeze**  
*for harp and two double basses*  
(2012)

This work borrows its title from an image in Sudhana's journey of spiritual realisation, as related in the final chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Midway through his pilgrimage the youth seeks a female teacher, who to those unable to understand her virtues appears to dwell in the polluted realm of lust and desire. People who can only project their own illusory world-views on her wonder why such an evidently calm, pure, profound and wise young man wishes to submit to the power of her sensuality.

As Sudhana approaches her palace, he is engulfed by the sound of a myriad golden bells rustling in the breeze. He finds her 'draped with a radiant mesh made of all kinds of precious substances, shining with an array of countless celestial jewelled ornaments'. Sudhana learns how some of her disciples have transcended passion and attained absorbing joy simply by gazing at her. For others, talking to her has been a 'gate' to the essence of sound, while many have reached ultimately liberating knowledge and tranquility by kissing and embracing her.

I first composed a version of the piece for harpsichord, in 2009; then the present version in 2012. The two works are related in the manner of a Picasso 'series', in the sense that the second is not a mere re-instrumentation but a radical reinterpretation of the detail and

overall design of the original. The harpsichord piece consists of four 'gates' or sections, while the trio comprises an introduction and two 'gates'. In both versions, on entering each gate we hear a phrase evoking the chiming of an ethereal carillon, which returns at the very end of the work.

**de oro y sombra**  
*for fourteen players*  
(2011)

*Two gates the silent house of Sleep adorn;  
Of polish'd ivory this, that of transparent horn:  
True visions thro' transparent horn arise;  
Thro' polish'd ivory pass deluding lies.*

*Aeneid*, trans. J. Dryden, Book 6, lines 893–6

*de oro y sombra* ['of gold and shadows'] includes pairs of flutes, horns and trumpets as well as a harp and a string sextet with three violins. It follows closely from a previous ensemble work, *surrounded by distance* (2008), where I had been drawn to exploring the indefinable yet seemingly precise manner in which musical shapes and configurations arise spontaneously in my awareness as evocative appearances and illusory continuities. But this time the use of brass sonorities, which occasionally punctuate the continuous veil of translucent chords resting on the hollow sound of a bass flute, led me to uncharted territories.

While composing the piece I became attracted by the mysterious spaces depicted in some ancient Chinese landscapes that I encountered at an exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris. Seen from a distance, one of these thin horizontal hand-scrolls – coloured in muted ochre and pale lapis lazuli – seemed like a full-scale ‘tiger of gold and shadows’ (to borrow a phrase from Borges) lying in a glass case. But as I approached it, instead – no longer being able to see the totality at a glance due to its extensive width – I could discern a dense web of boulders, cliffs, a stream crisscrossed by footbridges, and winding paths bounded by balustrades that emerge to later disappear into masses of thickly foliated trees. I was particularly attracted to the combination of a densely saturated foreground with extended areas of open and vast background. Though mostly without apparent hierarchies, this intricate mountain landscape is effectively punctuated by two solitary figures, which despite their minuscule size function as powerful focuses of attention: at the centre a boy carrying a basket of ‘mushrooms of immortality’, and at one extreme an alchemist ‘standing alone on a promontory, surrounded by an ocean of clouds ...’.

*de oro y sombra* consists of four sections, running continuously, entitled:

**first gate:** *of polish’d ivory this*

**second gate:** *that of transparent horn*

**echoes:** *thro’ transparent horn arise*

**shadows:** *thro’ polish’d ivory pass*

The beginning of each section is marked by the return of elements from the opening bars of the piece.

*de oro y sombra* was commissioned by Birmingham Contemporary Music Group with financial assistance from Arts Council England West Midlands and the following individuals through BCMG’s Sound Investment scheme: Viv and Hazel Astling, John Barnden, Amanda Cadman and Peter T Marsh, Alan S Carr, Christopher Carrier, Simon Collings, Alan Cook, Ann Copsey, Anne P Fletcher, Richard Hartree, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Louis Lemieux, Peter Marsh, Judith Matthews, Rosalyn and Philip Phillips, Kim and Kay Prior, Michael and Sandra Squires, Theresa and John Stewart, Nest Thomas, Janet Upward, Judith Weir, Elizabeth and Barrie Withers, and Doreen and Harry Wright. It was premiered under the baton of Oliver Knussen.

# Music and Meditation

*Francesca Fremantle*

A striking feature of Silvina Milstein's music is its sense of mystery – a feeling it arouses of touching something extremely intimate, yet at the same time remote, as if originating among the stars. Her work has a meditative quality which, as she recognises, is deeply influenced by her Buddhism.

Schopenhauer believed that, of all the arts, music alone is capable of expressing the essence of reality:

The composer reveals the innermost nature of the world, and expresses the profoundest wisdom, in a language that the reasoning faculty does not understand.

He himself became interested in Buddhism, having discovered that his own philosophy was remarkably close to that of the Buddha. To put it in the simplest terms, both present the view that we do not experience reality directly, but only our subjective version of it. In Buddhist language, we are dreaming our existence as human beings. What we truly are, and what the world is in itself, remains forever beyond the reach of the mind, accessible only by meditation – unless, perhaps, also through music.

Buddhism is a tradition, on the one hand, of exuberant and sensuous imagery, and, on the other, of meditative experiences where space, time and materiality dissolve. Silvina's music reflects both these strands: the intensely sensual and passionate, and the transparent, spacious and otherworldly. At times she may be inspired by the words of ancient texts and legends, as in *a thousand golden bells in the breeze*, at others by the dreamlike Buddhist–Taoist vision of the world that underlies *shan shui*. The shimmering textures of her writing for strings, harps and flutes, and the rich, glowing sonorities of horns and trumpets, create a magical world of appearances which, like life, may be called an illusion, but can also become a gateway to reality.

To pass through that gateway is to let go into mystery: existence dissolves into non-existence, music into silence, thought into the unknowable. We are always, in a phrase from Rilke which Silvina took as the title of another composition, 'surrounded by distance'. A similar evocation of space, a sensation of floating or soaring in a realm of infinity and timelessness is present in *de oro y sombra*. It opens up a vision of a limitless, interpenetrating universe, where every part reflects and contains the whole: a vision set forth in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, from which *a thousand golden bells in the breeze* draws its imagery.

Pierre Boulez observed that creativity is a form of generosity. We might even say it is an act of love (both passion and compassion), which is the essence of meditation. For meditation, properly understood, is a state of complete openness suffused with love: the very same state from which creativity arises, simultaneously within us and beyond us. It is the source not only of the creative act of the composer, but also that of the performers and listeners, who together complete the work of art, united in the experience of a world transcending time and place. It is such a world that Silvina Milstein's music invites us to enter.

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*A renowned scholar of Sanskrit and Tibetan tantra, Francesca Fremantle is the author of Luminous Emptiness: Understanding the Tibetan Book of the Dead (Shambhala Publications, 2001), as well as having collaborated on the first English translation of that text in 1975.*

Since its foundation in 1976, **Lontano** has been recognised as one of the UK's most exciting and versatile exponents of twentieth- and twenty-first-century music. Lontano's work includes themed seasons in London, opera and music theatre productions, concerts and tours throughout the UK and abroad, and regular recordings on its own LORELT label, as well as workshops and educational projects. Lontano also records for numerous other labels including Albany Records, Summit (USA), Da Capo (Denmark), Metier Records and Retrospect Opera (UK). The ensemble is internationally renowned, and its tours have taken it to many countries in Europe as well as both North and South America.

Cuban American composer and conductor **Odaline de la Martinez** pursues a demanding and successful career composing (particularly opera), conducting (in repertoire from Mozart symphonies to the latest contemporary music), and recording CDs – often with LORELT (Lontano Records), which she founded in 1992. Martinez studied at Tulane University (USA), at the Royal Academy of Music – where she founded her ensemble Lontano in 1976 – and at the University of Surrey. With Lontano she has travelled the whole world.

Martinez was the first woman in history to conduct a BBC Prom at the Royal Albert Hall, London. She has received numerous awards including a Marshall Scholarship from the British Government, a Guggenheim Fellowship (USA), and the Villa-Lobos Medal from the Brazilian Government. In 2017 Martinez was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Surrey.

Odaline de la Martinez is in demand throughout the world both as an orchestra and opera conductor and with her ensemble Lontano. She has recorded over 40 CDs for LORELT, her own record label, as well as for Summit, BMI and Albany Records in the USA, Chandos, Metier, Retrospect and Conifer Classics in the UK, and Da Capo in Denmark. As a musician she has acquired a remarkable reputation for her versatile and eclectic vision, and supreme ability to work with others to make that vision a reality.

**Dominic Saunders** read music at York University, winning the Wilfrid Mellers Prize and graduating with first class honours. He then attended the Royal Academy of Music in London on the Lloyds Bank Scholarship, and won numerous prizes there. Since that time he has gained increasing recognition for his work as soloist, accompanist and ensemble player in a wide range of styles. He has performed at the BBC Proms and all the main London venues, throughout the UK and Europe, and in the USA and the Caribbean.

Dominic was a founder member of Jane's Minstrels, the instrumental ensemble created by the singer Jane Manning. He is pianist with Icebreaker, and has appeared with other leading ensembles including Lontano, Endymion and the London Sinfonietta. Contemporary music is a special priority and he has premiered the works of numerous composers. Recordings for commercial release have included a disc of chamber music by the Scottish composer Eddie McGuire (Delphian Records), which was selected as an 'Editor's Choice' in *Gramophone* magazine.

Born in London, **Helen Tunstall** studied at the Royal College of Music with Marisa Robles and Fiona Hibbert. She is principal harpist of the London Sinfonietta and leads a busy freelance career playing solo, chamber and orchestral music with all the major London orchestras and ensembles. She is also a top London studio player recording classical, contemporary, film, TV and commercial music.

Helen Tunstall is a professor at both the Royal Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and is dedicated to the promotion of contemporary music through her work with Lontano, Endymion, the London Sinfonietta and other groups. Besides the two trios by Silvina Milstein for LORELT, her recent recordings of contemporary work include pieces by Richard Baker (*Risveglio* for solo harp), Alison Balsom (*Paris*) and Greta Bradman (*My Hero*).

Executive producer: Odaline de la Martinez  
Producer: Odaline de la Martinez (tracks 1, 3, 4); Andrew Sparling (track 2)  
Engineer: John Taylor (tracks 1, 3, 4); Adaq Khan (track 2)  
Editing: John Taylor (tracks 1, 3, 4); Adaq Khan (track 2)  
Mastering: Adaq Khan

Track 1 recorded on 8 May 2012 at St Mary's Church, Walthamstow, London  
Track 2 recorded on 20 October 2017 at The Warehouse, London  
Track 3 recorded on 17 December 2014 at The Amadeus Centre, London  
Track 4 recorded on 14 December 2014 in the Coombehurst Studio, Kingston University London

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