



**LORELT**

# Silvina Milstein chamber works

**LONTANO**

**ODALINE DE LA MARTINEZ**  
*conductor*

**ANGELICA CATHARIOU**  
*mezzo-soprano*

**TARLI-VARBANOV PIANO DUO**

**of gold and  
shadows**

**volume 2**

## of gold and shadows, Volume 2

### Silvina Milstein: Chamber Works

LONTANO

**Odaline de la Martinez** *conductor*

**Tarli-Varbanov Piano Duo**

**Angelica Cathariou** *mezzo-soprano*

**Dominic Saunders** *piano*

**Torbjörn Hultmark & Bruce Nockles** *trumpets*

**Helen Tunstall** *harp*

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1	<b>in a bowl of grey-blue leaves</b> for two pianos	14:24
2	<b>fretted sounding-boards</b> for mezzo-soprano and piano	13:36
3	<b>while your sound lingered on in lions and rocks</b> for two trumpets and harp	10:32
4	<b>shan shui (mountain – water)</b> for nonet	17:50
	<i>Total playing time</i>	56:25

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# The spaces between: music by Silvina Milstein

*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, then in Cambridge with Alexander Goehr. With Goehr she shared 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 with 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, revised in 2017), 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).

As part of the present eight-work cycle, *de oro y sombra* concludes this album's companion volume, and it heralded the concern with 'blended sonorities' (pairs or trios of identical instruments, often embedded in a mixed

ensemble) which characterises the whole cycle. 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 homogeneous textural landscapes of *in a bowl of grey-blue leaves* (2014), for two pianos, and – outside the cycle – of *ushnarasmou / untimely spring* (2015), for choir.

What lies beyond shadow? Colour again, might be the first answer – the finest nuances of paint or ink on canvas (the aforementioned septet is a homage to the subtle background shadings of Vermeer’s paintings of women in domestic spaces) or on silk (in the piano duo, which reimagines a poem by Mandelstam through the prism of Chinese calligraphy). But the restored variety of performing forces in the output since 2014 seems matched by a broadening approach to subject matter, as if these finely shaded dream-forms were ready once again to take on all the manifold world.

Perhaps indicative is the way colour has migrated – in *fretted sounding-boards*, one of two texted pieces composed in 2015 (*ushnarasmou* is the other), and the composer’s first writing for voice since 2001 – from the work’s title to its internal borders. Each section of John Fuller’s prose-poem is introduced by a vocalise abstracted from the passage of text that follows; the vowels of ‘Josiah-blue’, ‘piano’, ‘green’ and

‘gold’ establish moods that are confirmed by the ‘barometer readings’ which introduce each section proper. Colour as coastal phenomenon: land and ocean.

Or it has disappeared completely. ‘It has been said,’ Milstein writes in the programme note for her most recent mixed ensemble piece – which concludes both the present album and the *of gold and shadows* cycle – ‘that the *shan shui* style of Chinese painting goes against the common definition of what a painting is: it refutes colour, light and shadow and personal brushwork.’ No colour, but stylised geography: peak and valley.

In the opening stanza of Wallace Stevens’ poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, contending voices implore the protagonist to ‘play [...] a tune beyond us, yet ourselves, / A tune upon the blue guitar / Of things exactly as they are.’ This is music by Silvina Milstein, a composer for whom the world is itself, illuminated.

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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* and *shan shui (mountain – water)*, 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* 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 the trios *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.

**in a bowl of grey-blue leaves** (2014)  
*for two pianos*

My duo for two pianos borrows its title from a line in Osip Mandelstam’s poem ‘Silentium’, and is inspired by Scriabin’s remark that his Tenth Sonata is a sonata of insects: ‘insects are born from the sun ... they are the sun’s kisses ...’.

Out of hushed expanses of trills and tremolos, as if brought about by the brush of a Chinese calligrapher, splashes of ink break the primordial homogeneity of the silk scroll to congeal transiently into interweaving melodic lines.

*in a bowl of grey-blue leaves* is dedicated to Fiammetta Tarli and Ivo Varbanov.

**fretted sounding-boards** (2015)  
*for mezzo-soprano and piano*

*fretted sounding-boards* is a setting of John Fuller’s prose-poem ‘A Brief History of the Piano’. John Fuller wrote to me that in his poem

the historical dimension is neither sharply insisted upon, nor, I think, particularly traceable in either individual composers or schools of composers. But I did want to use the celebrated descriptions in the calibration of Torricelli’s barometer to trace some aspects of the development of pianistic style. They seemed so suggestive! I ended up deciding to leave it to the interpretations of individual readers which is Clementi, which is John Field, is that Liszt in there, and so on.

Each of the five sections of my setting is introduced by a vocalise anticipating certain richly sonorous words of the ensuing paragraph: a sort of magical spell conjuring a mood, that eventually finds confirmation in the barometer reading as each paragraph of the prose-poem comes to life.

**while your sound lingered on in lions and rocks** (2016)

*for two trumpets and harp*

Inspired by Rodin's sculpture *Orpheus and the Furies*, my trio for two trumpets and harp borrows its title from Rilke's telling of the death of Orpheus at the hands of the raging maenads:

*They tore you to pieces at last, in a frenzy,  
while your sound lingered on in lions and rocks,  
and in trees and birds. You still sing there.*

Rainer Maria Rilke (trans. David Young),  
*Sonnets to Orpheus*, I, 26

**shan shui (mountain – water)** (2017)

*for nonet*

It has been said that the *shan shui* ('mountain – water') style of Chinese painting goes against the common definition of what a painting is – it refutes colour, light and shadow and personal brushwork. As the contemporary Chinese

painter Zhang Hongtu explains: '*Shan shui* painting is not an open window for the viewer's eye; it is an object for the viewer's mind. [It] is more like a vehicle of philosophy.'

My *shan shui (mountain – water)* outlines a dream-like form that relies on a small variety of gestures. While sometimes behaving like traditional musical 'motives', these can also unfold without the expectations of classical development, instead recalling the calligraphic brushstrokes of ancient Chinese painting. This way of composing was inspired by the pictorial language of Guo Xi's *Early Spring*, a late 11th-century silk scroll regarded as the epitome of Northern Song monumental landscape. The entire piece consists of a slowly unfolding processional ascent that falls into three segments of increasingly shorter duration, the first one extending for nearly two thirds of the work (as if time had stopped) and the last consisting of just a couple of evanescent phrases. While pictorially inspired elements provided the material for the piece and its framing devices, the composition's phraseology attempts to 'translate' the stylised movements of the samurai and their concubines in the opening procession of Kenji Mizoguchi's film *Utamaro and his Five Women* (1946).

The composition of *shan shui* was generously supported by a Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust.

*Introduction & notes* © 2019 Silvina Milstein

# A Brief History of the Piano

## *80 Très-Sec*

The humour is a little tart, as if to say: 'This is what the fingers can do, so let them do it. But you and I know very well that it is not quite enough.' There: at a touch they are off again! The sky is Josiah-blue, and the tutor's wig has been laid aside for perspiration.

## *78 Beau-Fixe*

How simple is melody, a natural continuity and variety: the seed, the shoot, the leaf, the flower, the seed! The family assembles. Let us then have refrains, rondos, parterres, but nothing to disturb the tranquillity of the afternoon.

## *76 Variable*

In the furniture of our sensibility the green has modulated into gold, as the bee chooses nectar for the hive and the orchard trees are cut into fretted sounding-boards. In a drawing-room you may now hear whispers and the thudding of the heart at the same time, as the hands continue to move.

## *74 Vent ou Pluie*

Why is it that the rose-and-ochre west brings a tear to the eye? The boy with his hand on the latch of the garden gate is more likely to be leaving than arriving, and of any two notes the second will fall away. Whatever may be carried across an evening lawn is the better for being only half-heard or left untested. Where is everybody?

## *72 Tempête*

All is lost! In a fury of isolation the hero's hands descend together from shoulder-height as if to shut the fiend at last in his thundering coffin. A crimson curtain rises to show him doing it again and again. All is not lost!

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'A Brief History of the Piano', from 'Four Prose Poems', *The Dice Cup* (Chatto & Windus, 2014).

# 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.

## **LONTANO**

*(Track 4 only except where otherwise specified.)*

Piccolo	<b>Rowland Sutherland</b>
Alto flute	<b>Hannah Grayson</b>
Clarinet	<b>Andrew Sparling</b>
Trumpet	<b>Torbjörn Hultmark</b> ( <i>track 3</i> ) <b>Bruce Nockles</b> ( <i>track 3</i> )
Horn	<b>Steven Sterling</b> <b>Richard Steggall</b>
Piano	<b>Dominic Saunders</b> ( <i>tracks 2, 4</i> )
Harp	<b>Helen Tunstall</b> ( <i>track 3</i> )
Violin	<b>Caroline Balding</b>
Viola	<b>Kate Musker</b>
Double bass	<b>Adam Wynter</b>

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.

Greek mezzo-soprano **Angelica Cathariou** has performed a wide range of operatic roles including Euridice and Tragedia in Peri's *L'Euridice*, the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, Britten's *Phaedra*, and as a soloist in symphonic works by Mahler, Beethoven and Jani Christou at venues across Europe and in the USA. She has appeared with renowned orchestras such as the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, and with conductors including Claudio Abbado, Stuart Bedford, Michel Plasson and Pierre-André Valade. She holds a PhD from the University of York and is Assistant Professor at the University of Macedonia, Greece.

She has extensive experience as a performer of twentieth- and twenty-first-century music, including Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*, Berio's *Folk Songs*, Peter Maxwell Davies's *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, Arvo Pärt's *Stabat Mater* and George Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*. She recorded the world premiere of Nikos Skalkottas's *16 Melodies* for BIS ('... a rich creamy voice and superb Skalkottas interpreter' – *BBC Music Magazine*), and Xenakis's *Zyia* for Saphir, for which latter she was awarded the Orphée d'Or 2012 Prize for best recording of contemporary vocal music.

Husband and wife **Fiammetta Tarli** and **Ivo Varbanov** are both concert pianists with a passion for unconventional music production of the highest quality. When in 2013 they joined forces and started performing as a piano duo, a chemistry of musical personalities was immediately apparent. The fact that they met as pupils of the eminent Hungarian teacher Ilona Deckers in Milan accounts for their refined central European sound culture; yet in many aspects they seem to complement each other in rich textures of never-ending dialogue. In addition to their success as a duo, both continue to perform as soloists and in various other chamber-music formations. In 2014 they founded the independent audiophile label ICSM Records.

Executive producer: Odaline de la Martinez  
Producer: Wadim Radishevskij (track 1); Odaline de la Martinez (tracks 2–4)  
Engineer: Wadim Radishevskij (track 1); Adaq Khan (tracks 2–4)  
Editing: Wadim Radishevskij (track 1); Adaq Khan (tracks 2–4)  
Mastering: Adaq Khan

Track 1 recorded on 4–5 August 2017 in the Krzysztof Penderecki Concert Hall, Radom, Poland  
Track 2 recorded on 7 May 2017 at The Warehouse, London  
Track 3 recorded on 18 October 2016 at The Warehouse, London  
Track 4 recorded on 19 October 2017 at The Warehouse, London

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