

## *Cantor*

Lisa Illean

Expressed better than I could, A.S. Byatt writes of Willa Cather's work: "their newness is contained in an extraordinary lucidity..." I was drawn to the directness and simplicity of Cather's text as a conduit for imagining the way a variety of vocal mannerisms might be folded and absorbed in subtle ways into an individual voice. In *Cantor* the woman's voice is gentle but resilient, as she contemplates the land around her, contends with loneliness and finds peace in solitude. Bearing solitude



gracefully is a recurring theme: in atmosphere, *Cantor* is both desolate and intimate. At times the music should be sung or played with spontaneity, as if it is being improvised to oneself. I draw on three of Cather's poems, each underpinning one of the movements in *Cantor* (titled 'stirring', 'stealing' and 'closing' respectively). All set in twilight (either dawn or dusk), Cather creates in these striking images of water ditches glinting like "swift, bright" lances flung across the land and the "trackless dust" of the mid-west plains. Her descriptions of the natural world—of light, water and sounds—are beautifully rendered and seem invested with a sense of wonder that persists from childhood. So breathing sounds and gestures permeate *Cantor*, and recurring flaring patterns evoke glowing shafts of light. There are also traces of other elements—a polka? A hammer dulcimer?—never explicitly mimicked but colouring the fabric of the music. Cather speaks of an impulse towards "finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole..."

There are some sounds that could be radio static, or rain—or both—and I like this ambiguity, the soft delineation between inside and outside worlds. *Cantor* superimposes cycles of lines, waves or impulses, creating a convergence of layers composed of simple elements. Musically, the texture is like a tableau upon which the voice carves its line. Aligning myself with the locale of Cather's texts, I draw in an imaginative and subtle way on some of the vocal traditions brought by the huge wave of transatlantic immigration to Nebraska in the 1890's—and invite the vocalist to do the same. I am fascinated by the voice's empathetic inclinations—for example, by the way tone, pace or accent are often sensitively adapted in response to another.

[This is a studio recording of the work made by Jessica Aszodi and Ensemble Offspring on 22/09/2017]

**Lisa Illean (b.1983)**

Lisa Illean is an Australian composer of acoustic and acousmatic music, living and working in London. Her music has been described as “exquisitely quiet shadows shaded with microtunings” (*The Sydney Morning Herald*) and “a compelling exercise in stillness and quietude” (*The Australian*). Works span pieces written for orchestra to those commissioned for new, prepared or adapted instruments, and sound works conceived for unique spaces. Her ensemble works have been performed internationally. She has recently worked with BBC, Sydney and Melbourne symphony orchestras, London Philharmonic Orchestra, members of the Philharmonia Orchestra and Ensemble Offspring. She has a background that also encompasses electronic composition and sound design; and has created site-specific sound pieces for the Arts Centre, Melbourne, and the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver. With the generous support of Australia Council for the Arts she is currently working on a set of pieces for voice and electronics with soprano Juliet Fraser.

Lisa is completing doctoral research at the Royal College of Music (as a Soiree d’Or scholar). This arose out of her work with non-tempered tuning systems, and her compositions paying close attention to sonority, subtly unfolding harmonic forms, auditory phenomena and perspective. This music has been awarded a Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize (2016) and the Corbett and Hurlstone Prize for outstanding achievement from the Royal College of Music. [www.lisaillean.com.au](http://www.lisaillean.com.au)

**Jessica Aszodi** is a singer and a scholar, who uses her voice to realize music from a wide gamut of styles and genres. She has been a soloist on record for Chandos, Ars Publica & Hospital Hill, & on stage with ICE, the Melbourne, Adelaide & Sydney Symphony Orchestras, Victorian Opera, at the Melbourne & Adelaide Festivals, Tectonics, Aldeburgh & Tanglewood. She holds a DMA from the Queensland Conservatorium/Griffith University.

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<http://ensembleoffspring.com/>

**Cantor** by Lisa Illean. Composed in 2017. Duration: 14’19

Performed by Jessica Aszodi (soprano) and Ensemble Offspring with Roland Peelman (conductor)

Recorded 23/09/2017, Carriageworks, Sydney, New South Wales.

Recording Producer: Bob Scott

Copies of the score available from Lisa Illean: [lisaillean@gmail.com](mailto:lisaillean@gmail.com)

Copies of the recording available from: Stephen Adams, ABC Classic FM

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