

Gathering Paths: an installation. (1998)

Pre-recorded soundscapes and percussion. Variable duration. Ms

*Gathering Paths* is a collaborative work made by artist Barbara Freeman and composers David Lumsdaine and Nicola LeFanu. It was commissioned and first shown at the Sonorities Festival in Belfast.

Barbara and I first met in Ireland, at the Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig, and David and I composed much of *Gathering Paths* at Annaghmakerrig's sister colony in Catalonia - the Centre for Art and Nature at Farrera. So the work has grown out of many meetings, many gatherings; in turn it invites listeners and viewers to find their own way through the strands we have woven together to discover their own song-line in Barbara's artwork or their own journey through the composers' soundscapes.

Early in the collaboration, when Barbara was showing David and myself her initial sketches, she spoke of exploring 'that which is willed, that which is unwilled'. From another perspective one might describe this work as a meditation on the natural world- of which we are all a part. All our choices have consequence on the world around us - but to what extent is that world inconsequential?

The aural aspect of this collaboration consists of three distinct layers of sound. At the heart of the music lies *Farrera Textures*, a recorded soundscape made by David in the high Pyrenees in June 1997. Streams, cowbells, distant voices, not- so - distant dogs, crickets and grasshoppers are heard in the context of summer birdsong: chattering redstarts and swallows give way to the extended song of the nightingale. Night has fallen and the second half of the soundscape becomes a nocturnal study: owls, insects, toads and a nightjar.

In complement to these sounds, which have been edited but not 'treated' in any way, comes a strand which is heard live in concert, though recorded in the installation: music for a percussionist. This is 'willed' music, which I composed at Farrera in the very context in which David was out recording. Sounds of wood, metal, skin and stone: rhythms and repetitions that arose in parallel to those going on around me. Although in my sketches I notated rhythm and contours from speech, calls and natural sounds, the music is not descriptive: it is a response, not a picture.

Between these two strands, or layers, comes a mediating one which David and I composed together. Here pre-recorded percussion sounds are transformed, filtered and mixed so that they move imperceptibly between the percussion music and *Farrera Textures*.

Uppermost in my mind as we worked was the fact that the audience' would be looking at Barbara's work, moving through it, while listening; thus their experience would be very different from that of the concert hall listener who is not free to wander back and forth, either literally or in the head. So I was interested to compose a music that did not move inexorably forward in the causative way of most of European repertoire. In *Farrera Textures* night inevitably follows day but the creatures are unpredictable: sometimes elusive, sometimes assertive. So it should be with the experience of *Gathering Paths*.

Nicola LeFanu

