

mimih

*for
flute, violin, cello
piano, clapsticks*

Sadie Harrison

(2017)

mimih

for David and Peter

Aboriginal people in the rocky environments of western and south-western Arnhem Land relate stories of spirits which they call *mimih*. The *Mimih* taught the first people how to survive on the Arnhem Land plateau and also instructed them in dance, song and art. *Mimih* are still depicted in a popular form of wooden sculpture thought to be an adaptation of artefacts used in ancient mortuary ceremonies. The sculptures are regarded by the Aboriginal communities as a way of sharing their way of life with the outside world whilst also containing complex references to their cultural traditions. The Maningrida people describe the *Mimih* as extremely thin, having necks so slender that a stiff breeze would be fatal. For this reason they emerge to hunt only on windless days and nights. As soon as a breeze develops, *Mimih* run back to their rocky caverns and disappear inside. (www.maningrida.com)

My musical interpretation of the *mimih* is in five brief sections that run continuously: *The Land of the mimih spirit*; *The Dance of the mimih spirit*; *The Lament of the mimih spirit*, with *The Dance* and *The Land* repeated. The structure of the piece is related to the repeating but varied layers of decoration on the sculptures, with the Indigenous clapsticks marking the changes between sections. *The Land* is full of bird song, transcriptions of Northern Territory Pied Butcherbirds, Yellow Orioles and Rainbow Pittas against a backdrop of slow atmospheric piano chords representing the vastness and age of the country. *The Dance* is fast and quirky, a depiction of the spirits jumping about the rocks, with its music based on an Arnhem Land tune called *Truganinni's Song*. *The Lament* is composed from overlaid versions of a melody collected by anthropologist, Domeny de Rienzi in 1830. He entitled it *Air australien des sauvages de la terre d'Arnhem*. The music is a meditation on the post-colonial destruction of much Aboriginal culture, with the clapsticks almost entirely absent from the landscape.

Mimih was commissioned as part of my Residency with Künstler Bei Wu, its first performance taking place on 24 June 2017 in the Chamber Music Hall of the Künstler Bei Wu Sculpture Park, Wesenberg. The concert marked the inauguration of Bei Wu's Indigenous Australian Art Gallery, in collaboration with the Australia Now Festival and Australian Embassy. The Residency is supported by an Arts Council England/British Council International Development Grant. The work is dedicated with gratitude to David Ng and Peter Wilmot Thompson. © Sadie Harrison 2017 with acknowledgement of www.maningrida.com.

Duration: c. 8 minutes



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