



# TURNING THE ELEMENTS

SETTINGS OF SCOTTISH POETRY BY MATTHEW WHITESIDE, REBECCA ROWE AND STUART MURRAY MITCHELL BY POETS JANE MCKIE, STEWART SANDERSON AND HELENE GRØN.



THE  
NIGHT  
WITH...

📍 STILLS GALLERY | 23 COCKBURN STREET, EDINBURGH, **EH1 1BP**

1:00PM **13<sup>TH</sup> & 15<sup>TH</sup> AUG**

8:30PM **14<sup>TH</sup> & 16<sup>TH</sup> AUG**

📍 SCOTTISH STORYTELLING CENTRE | 43-45 HIGH STREET, EDINBURGH, **EH1 1SR**

made in  
  
**SCOTLAND**

Our concert begins with the first of two suites we commissioned in 2015 for the project **Turning the Elements**, which subsequently gave our duo its name. We asked poets Jane McKie and Stewart Sanderson and composers Rebecca Rowe and Stuart Murray Mitchell to create new works for us inspired by the early 19th century song Turn Ye To Me. The poems' themes delve into the life around and within the Scottish seascape, and our human relationship with it.

From the pure majesty of nature we plummet to the human midden. The middle section of the concert examines our seeming inability to co-exist in an increasingly globalised world or to avoid nihilism in the face of the human condition.

For the last part of the programme, we rise again to the natural world, with the second

of the **Turning the Elements** suites. The final piece in the programme is a musical setting of a poem by Nan Shepherd, which we are very grateful to have permission to use.

Lux Perpetua draws the themes of the evening together in a kind of resolution – the magnificent indifference of the natural world to human concerns, religion, even time itself.

Turn Ye To Me Verse 1

*Traditional*

Three Pieces for Soprano and Clarinet

*Rebecca Rowe*

Beautiful Feathered Tyrant – Duologue – Past Sula  
Sgeir

\*Gyre for solo clarinet

*Joanna Nicholson*

...everyone is a child of the inbetween...

*Matthew Whiteside  
poetry by Helene Grøn*

\*Do we? We do

*Beck Hansen  
arranged by Joanna Nicholson*

Turn Ye To Me Verse 2

*Traditional*

Horo

*Stuart Murray-Mitchell*

I. Ceòl Na II. Mhairi Du III. Contrary Bird

Lux Aeterna

*music by Joanna Nicholson*

Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux

*poetry by Nan Shepherd*

\*these pieces are in the evening performances only

**Beautiful Feathered Tyrant – Duologue – Past Sula Sgeir**

With the song lines shaped and phrased in a very natural way - exactly as they would be spoken - and the clarinet at times accompanying the voice, at other times in the foreground, the three pieces share tonalities and harmonic colours. The outer songs explore the relationship between man and nature very directly, using the evocative texts. The middle piece Duologue is wordless, playing with the similar qualities of voice and clarinet, by having them in unison then slowly shifting apart, either in pitch or rhythm. The priest referenced in Beautiful Feathered Tyrant will return in the closing poem of the concert, Nan Shepherd's Lux Perpetua.

**Beautiful Feathered Tyrant  
by Jane McKie**

*I bring you berries and insects; bowing,  
I leave them in a long trail behind me.*

*From a distance, I watch you pick at them  
without much relish. They're not the rough dimes  
of gelid flesh scooped out of the bellies  
of off-shore fish, or ridged pincers of crab  
torn from their joints. They're not rainbow fragments  
foraged from dumps, packets smacking of chips,  
vinegar, candied burnt-tyre viscera—*

*You style yourself like a priest: slicked into  
the totemic, your black wings and back, dressed  
with oil, fold into a surplice of fright.  
And when you roll the skulls of lesser birds  
in your white-ringed eyes, I can't look away.  
For what else can I worship at the edge  
of the world? I beg you to forgive me.*

# Past Sula Sgeir

## by Stewart Sanderson

*Past Sula Sgeir fat snowflakes fall  
onto the sightless sea. A shark  
basks on, hapt close in wintry dark  
while up aloft a single gull*

*turns back in search of cliffs, hidden  
in sleet. It beats a louche retreat  
towards this land where people greet  
and call a pile of trash a midden.*

*On Rannoch Moor a lyart stag  
plods slowly through a swirling rut  
of frozen sperm, until a shot  
cracks out. He goes down on one leg.*

*Then two. He gets back up and tries  
a crazy jig. Then down for good.  
Nearby, an freshly planted wood  
lets slip a frightened crow, which flies.*

*Light thickens. Somewhere to the south  
lies Glasgow – well-lit avenues,  
dark vennels, supermarket queues,  
the quick smile and the laughing mouth.*

*Beyond it Lanarkshire pans out  
then Ayrshire, splashed with orange pools –  
houses, an airport, prisons, schools.  
You're somewhere out there too, no doubt.*

*In rooms which could be anywhere  
the many-headed creature moves,  
makes small choices, rejoices, grieves  
a little for the dying year.*

*It never sees the shark, the stag,  
the white bird flapping out at sea  
though in rare moments you and I  
might do so, squinting over log*

*or cliff top at the animal  
which is, for now, just out of reach.  
Snow settles on the farthest beach  
Past Sula Sgeir the fat flakes fall.*

**\*Gyre for solo clarinet**

*Joanna Nicholson*

Composed in July last year, after a day kayaking under the sea cliffs at Troup Head RSPB reserve (near Joanna's house), which is Scotland's largest mainland gannet colony, this piece conjures up images of birds, or thoughts, soaring.

**...everyone is a child of the inbetween...**

*Matthew Whiteside  
poetry by Helene Grøn*

The fractured experiences of displacement suffered by refugees and migrants in an increasingly globalised world are depicted in this setting of Glasgow-based poet Helene Grøn's work.

**...everyone is a child of the inbetween...**

*and so welcome  
and so welcome  
and so by being here*

*i forgot  
forgot how to speak  
your language broke me  
In*

*whatever else you do.  
you paid for this too*

*do or didn't speak geography.  
and so had no way  
to start again.  
Forgot*

*forgot  
and  
there's a kindness in containment also  
the arbitrary ways  
and so  
After*

*after someone asked me where i was from  
and because i had no way  
of  
with lines in the sand*

*everyone is a child of the in-between  
these days  
and so  
you can't enter here without speaking.*

*i lost my voice.  
but everyone is a child  
of the inbetween these days.*

*there is kindness in containment also  
the lines in the sand  
the arbitrary ways we keep  
and so  
where can we meet?*

*where one speech meets another  
i forgot*

*you have paid for this too  
and so welcome to  
the lines in the sand*

*where one speech meets another  
and you're a child  
kindness in  
keep*

*people in  
our out  
of the inbetween  
and you paid for this too.  
the arbitrary ways  
where one speech meets another  
on these days  
of the inbetween*

**\*Do we? We do**

**Beck Hansen**

**arranged by Joanna Nicholson**

The song *Do we? We do* is from *Song Reader*, a collection of twenty songs by the American alternative artist Beck, published as a book of sheet music in 2012. An album was subsequently released with different artists performing each song in their own style, and named by *Rolling Stone* magazine as 50th on their list of 50 best albums of 2013. The publishers, McSweeney's, have subsequently expanded the project by featuring versions of the songs performed by other musicians on their website. Links to YouTube and SoundCloud performances of the songs can be contributed for inclusion.

**Horo**

**Stuart Murray-Mitchell**

### **I. Ceòl Na    II. Mhairi Du    III. Contrary Bird**

The song *Do we? We do* is from *Song Reader*, a collection of twenty songs by the American alternative artist Beck, published as a book of sheet music in 2012. An album was subsequently released with different artists performing each song in their own style, and named by *Rolling Stone* magazine as 50th on their list of 50 best albums of 2013. The publishers, McSweeney's, have subsequently expanded the project by featuring versions of the songs performed by other musicians on their website. Links to YouTube and SoundCloud performances of the songs can be contributed for inclusion.

#### ***First Song***

***By Stewart Sanderson***

*A mile or two from Ullapool  
we found a useless fishing boat  
hauled up to rot, its ragged hull  
yawning like a cod's cut throat.*

*Here and there red scabs of paint  
lent colour to the splintered wood.  
A thin dark line of faded print  
named her – Ceòl na... I understood.*

*All round, innumerable twists  
of frayed rope frizzed from stony sand:  
too many sailors' knots to list  
tying the water to the land.*

*We pressed on through the afternoon  
walking on crinkled bladderwrack,  
crisp packets, plastic bottles. Soon  
we lost sight of the little wreck.*

*After a while our nostrils grew  
accustomed to the salty reek  
of seaweed which, a week or two  
before, had broken with the slick*

*melee of fronds, handed from wave  
to wave until it washed up here:  
a rank beard for the tide to shave,  
to fold slowly out of the air.*

**Contrary Bird**  
**By Jane McKie**

*Contrary bird, black-backed, falling from rocks  
only to rise as surely as embers –*

*icy is the stormwind ruffling her breast,  
warm is the featherdown lining her nest.*

*One day is black glass; the next, gentle foam  
washing against the jutting lips of cliffs.*

*Turn ye to me, yowls the sea, turn to me.  
The bird declines, holding true to her gyre,*

*believing in the upward force that keeps  
her safe – one day it is lift; the next, grace.*

*Turn ye to me, turn, turn: do you hear it?  
Gulls live pressed against it, sheltering inches*

*from the inverse sky of submerged voices*



**Lux Aeterna**

**Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux**

(used by kind permission of the literary executor)

*Poetry by Nan Shepherd*

*Music by Joanna Nicholson*

Anyone who has stood high in the Scottish mountains will know the intoxication expressed in Nan Shepherd's poem.

The bass clarinet presents a seven-bar melody; at first split into (geological) layers from sky to inner earth, then as it might be heard in church, and finally in canon with a human voice.

**Turning the Elements** has appeared at festivals around the country including StAnza Poetry Festival (St Andrews), Fringe by the Sea (North Berwick), Sound Festival (Aberdeenshire) and Book Week Scotland (Jedburgh) - and we have taken our programmes to the Isle of Arran, Campbeltown, Dundee and Aden Park in Mintlaw (with assistance from the Hope Scott Trust), as well as performing *The Highland Fames*, a comic mini-opera by Joanna. We are currently developing a new programme of commissions, inspired by the notorious diaries of Dr Samuel Johnson and James Boswell from their 1779 tour of the Highlands.

Frances Cooper began her singing studies at the North East of Scotland Music School in Aberdeen and continued studying privately with Johanna Peters and Patricia MacMahon. She has sung countrywide with Cappella Nova and Dunedin Consort and worked extensively with various small ensembles, including Fires of Love, who released three critically acclaimed recordings with Delphian Records. Most recently she has been instrumental in forming a new ensemble, Fliskmahoy!, for three female voices and violin, a perfect foil for her duo performances with Joanna.

Joanna Nicholson was a junior student at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and on leaving school won a scholarship to London's Royal College of Music. She pursues a lively freelance career encompassing orchestral, chamber and solo playing in various styles and has written and performed numerous musical stories for children. Last summer she was artist in residence at The Barn, Banchory, where she worked on the two pieces for soprano and clarinet you will hear tonight, *Do we? We do* and *Lux Perpetua*. This spring she toured as Guest Principal Clarinet with Scottish Ballet.

[www.turningtheelements.com](http://www.turningtheelements.com)



**THE NIGHT WITH... IS A CHARITY BASED IN GLASGOW PRESENTING SALON STYLE CONCERTS OF INTERESTING MUSIC IN INTIMATE, INFORMAL VENUES ACROSS SCOTLAND AND FURTHER AFIELD. RUN BY MATTHEW WHITESIDE, IT PROVIDES DEVELOPMENT AND COMMISSIONING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG AND EMERGING COMPOSERS.**

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