



Photo: John Ferro Sims



# O DUO: SEARCHING

WORKS FOR PERCUSSION DUET



I TRACK LISTING

1	<b>'PRESTO' (SUMMER), FROM THE FOUR SEASONS</b> ANTONIO VIVALDI ( <i>arr. Oliver Cox</i> )	02'48		
	<b>FRENCH SUITE NO.5 IN G MAJOR</b> J. S. BACH ( <i>arr. O Duo</i> )			
2	ALLEMANDE	02'24		
3	COURANTE	01'38		
4	SARABANDE	02'08		
5	GAVOTTE	01'09		
6	BOURÉE	01'16		
7	LOURE	01'03		
8	GIGUE	03'21		
9	<b>SEARCHING O DUO</b>	11'25		
	<b>SUITE ESPAÑOLA</b> ( <i>excerpts</i> ) ISAAC ALBÉNIZ ( <i>arr. O Duo</i> )			
10	CÁDIZ	03'45		
11	ARAGÓN	03'42		
	<b>SILENCE TWICE BROKEN</b> FRASER TRAINER			
12	AT THE DOUBLE		02'01	
13	SECRET SONG (BREAKING SILENCE)		05'58	
14	KING PAIR		03'48	
15	<b>MAD RUSH</b> PHILIP GLASS		13'14	
16	<b>PRELUDE IN C MAJOR (HARP) OP.12 NO.7</b> SERGEI PROKOFIEV		02'15	
17	<b>MUSICA RICERCATA VII, CANTABILE, MOLTO LEGATO</b> GYORGY LIGETI		04'49	
18	<b>PRELUDE NO.5 IN D MAJOR</b> DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH		02'12	
19	<b>SIGNALS FROM SPACE</b> OLIVER COX		09'23	
				<i>Total playing time: 78'21</i>

Produced, engineered & edited by Matthew Dilley

Recorded on 13th–15th November 2013 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Cover photograph by Gillian McBain

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen

Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: John Dickinson



Photo: Sussie Ahlborg

## I FOREWORD

With this album, we are hoping to give you a taste of the huge variety of different styles and sound worlds which a percussion duo is capable of creating (and re-creating!). We have therefore included a number of our favourite 'classical' pieces, most of these originally written for the piano or other keyboard instrument, and transcribed and arranged them for our tuned percussion instruments such as the marimba and vibraphone. These have been interspersed with several contemporary works, three of which have been written either by, or for the duo, including the title track of the disc, 'Searching'. We hope you enjoy it....!

*Oliver  
G.*

*Oliver*

Not only have percussion instruments found, over the course of the past 100 years or so, their rightful place as versatile and colourful members of the orchestra, but their opportunities have increased exponentially – one only has to think of landmark works such as Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat* (1917), Bartók’s *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* (1938), the sudden explosion of percussion ensembles during the 1960s and 1970s, the institutionalizing of the marimba as part of an ensemble with the work of the Modern Jazz Quartet, or the development of the percussion concerto since what was probably the first example of the genre, by Milhaud in 1929.

In particular, the emergence of the marimba as a melodic instrument, and its increased versatility, meant that the province of the percussionist became much wider than just newly composed works. Thus it is that O Duo’s repertoire ranges from the baroque to early 20th-century repertoire as well as specially written percussion music. It may seem remarkable that the music of composers such as Vivaldi and Bach transfers so well to the new medium, but it is less so if one recalls that baroque composers in general were some of the greatest arrangers of their own work, and that the extended range of the modern marimba together with multi-stick technique enables the performance of both the highly virtuosic, as is the case with the Presto from Vivaldi’s *Quattro Stagioni*, and the intimately lyrical, as demonstrated by O Duo’s transcription of the Sarabande from Bach’s French Suite No.5.

The music of Isaac Albéniz is perhaps a less obvious choice for transcription, but nonetheless a very good one. His *Suite Española* was written as a set of four pieces for piano in 1886–7, and republished posthumously in 1912, with a further four pieces. They are all character pieces, portraying different regions of Spain (which at the time of composition included Cuba), usually by means of a dance form. Cádiz is represented by a *saeta* (even though the *saeta* is not typical of

Cádiz), which in O Duo’s arrangement positively sparkles, making the most of the music’s chromatic sidesteps and its melodic beauty, and Aragón by a lively free-form *jota* that modulates wildly.

Prokofiev’s *Harp Prelude* comes from a set of ten he wrote while still a student, during the years 1906–13, while Shostakovich’s Prelude No.5 is from his remarkable set of 24 Preludes and Fugues, written between 1950 and 1951. They both transfer so beautifully to the new idiom that one would think they had originally been written for pitched percussion – the *moto perpetuo* style of the Prokofiev is particularly felicitous.

Ligeti’s *Musica Ricercata* is a set of eleven pieces for piano, written in 1951–53. The extraordinary seventh movement is built from a fast *ostinato*, originally in the left hand of the piano, which is completely independent from the right hand, a simple melody that is gradually harmonized and played in canon against itself; the piece seemingly disappears into eternity. Philip Glass’s *Mad Rush* was originally written in 1979 as part of a dance project with the choreographer Lucinda Childs, four years after his notorious *Einstein on the Beach*, with which it has much in common. If it sounds clearly minimalist to us today, it was seen at the time as something of a departure from Glass’s earlier, rigorous style: indeed, it was initially Part 4 of a series called *Another Look at Harmony*.

British composer Fraser Trainer wrote a double concerto for percussion and orchestra called *Breaking Silence* for O Duo, Sinfonia ViVA and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 2012–13; *Silence Twice Broken* is a newly written piece for duo alone based on material from the earlier work. It explores a great range of timbres, and moves from fast, virtuosic writing in “At the Double” to music that emerges gradually from tiny sounds, reminiscent of the natural world, in the central “Secret Song”, to the compelling but enigmatic character of “King Pair”, which, while it nods in the direction of classical minimalism, is subsumed in a mysterious

and beautiful ritualistic tolling and tinkling. The composer himself says of the work “The second of these three pieces, ‘Secret Song (Breaking Silence)’ is full of intimate sounds on the very edge of silence and is probably not one to put on whilst doing the ironing – more a sit down, pour a drink, turn up the volume and turn down the lights type of listening experience... Here, I wanted to explore the things that percussion instruments are much less known for, hence the singing cowbells, tiny clicks, ticks and scrapes as well as the wonderful Acme wind-bird-steam, the amplifier of heavy breathing – one for each player. ‘King Pair’ and ‘At The Double’ are much more rhythmically highly charged, both centred around the idea of two players jostling for space around one marimba with various sustaining and punctuating instruments set alongside, making for a very physical and energetic few minutes of fun and games with the odd attempt at a moment of contemplation squeezed in amongst the frenetic action.”

O Duo’s own composition from 2011, *Searching*, begins with an exploration of timbre that suggests electronic sound, before moving onto a pulsing, dance-like section that changes constantly, both rhythmically and timbrally, until the music almost comes to a complete stop; it begins again, however, with a meditative section for vibraphone and bow which in turn gives way to what one might describe as a cadenza for unpitched percussion, before the final section returns us to the earlier pulsing dance material and back to the origins of the piece in the quasi-electronic ether. O Duo say of the piece that it “was composed with inspiration taken from the minimalist movement, though features quite a variety of different instruments. The piece represents a journey spent, as the title might suggest, ‘searching’ for something and the emotions and feelings this journey throws up – sadness, longing, excitement, anticipation among others. One thing that has been apparent as we have performed this piece many times over the last few years,

is that it can mean something very different to each individual listener. For this reason, we have chosen not to offer a particularly detailed note, but to let each listener create their own story...!”

If *Searching* possibly suggests sounds from another world, Oliver Cox’s *Signals from Space* does so explicitly. The composer writes that his initial ideas were “reminiscent of strange and alien landscapes as well as a kind of battle in Outer Space, hence the title of the piece, though this can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the inspiration that comes from the Inner Space accessed through meditation, which has been a huge factor in the acceleration of my creative drive over the last year or two.” The work explores a very wide variety of timbres by employing many different instruments, including such unexpected things as two metal pipes, a metal bucket with rivets, a spring coil, bowed glockenspiel and tuned alpine cowbells. Though the piece is made up of clearly differentiated sections, the composer notes that it is a continuous work, taking the listener on a journey through space.

Ivan Moody

Described by *The Daily Telegraph* as ‘brimming with style and panache’, alongside international performances, in recent years O Duo has won a Special Commissioning Award from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and been appointed Artistic Directors of the Children’s Classic Concerts series in Scotland revealing their artistic quality, passion for commissioning new repertoire and dedication to education work.

Renowned for their ‘phenomenal artistry’ (*The Daily Telegraph*), O Duo has performed across the world. Highlights include appearing twice at the BBC Proms, at the Last Night of the Proms in Hyde Park and most recently to give the premiere of *Wilful Chants* by Stephen Montague with the BBC Symphony Chorus, recitals at the Wigmore Hall, Cheltenham and City of London festivals. O Duo gave the premiere of Stephen McNeff’s *Concert O-Duo* at the Barbican as part of BBC Symphony Orchestra’s 80th birthday concert, and has performed an eclectic repertoire including Bartók’s *Sonata with Artur Pizarro* and *Vita Panomariovaite*, and music by Moondog (the iconic American composer) at the Barbican.

Concert appearances further afield include performances at the Al Bustan, Harare and Mexico City festivals and in Paris, Madrid, Lucerne, Zug, and Seinajoki, and tours to Germany and Bulgaria. Orchestral performances include concerto appearances with the BBC Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, London Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestras. In 2013 O Duo gave the world premiere of Fraser Trainer’s new percussion concerto firstly with Sinfonia ViVA and then with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Their successful appearance in Melbourne included a series of concerts and innovative interactive workshops for children.

Oliver and Owen were both scholars at the Royal College of Music and they formed O Duo in 2000. Graduating with First Class Honours in 2003 they immediately took up the first Junior Fellowship to be given to a percussion duo at the RCM. Twice winning Best Music Act of the Fringe at the Edinburgh Festival, O Duo joined the Young Concert Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2005–2007.

O Duo released their first CD on the Sony BMG label in 2007 to critical acclaim, including being featured as CD of the week in *The Daily Telegraph*. Making a great impact on the UK music scene, O Duo has broadcast with BBC Radio 2 and 3, Classic FM, and recorded with the BBC Symphony Chorus. Furthermore, as outstanding communicators, They have worked at Abbey Road and Sony studios on television and film scores and broadcast on Channel 4 and BBC Television.

Oliver and Owen take a keen interest in education work. They have given workshops and concerts in schools and special needs centres throughout the UK, and led creative education projects involving composition and performance with the London Sinfonietta, Philharmonia Orchestra and Sinfonia ViVA. O Duo has given children’s concerts throughout Scotland including at the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow and Queen’s Hall Edinburgh with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Orchestra of Scottish Opera and special guests.

O Duo’s repertoire spans more than 300 years and is an invigorating mix of popular classics and accessible contemporary music played on two marimbas, vibraphone and a huge array of percussion. They are passionate about commissioning new work and expanding the percussion duo repertoire.