

HUSH

NORA ON THE MAKING OF HUSH

I am excited, happy and proud to present to you this long-awaited dream called HUSH. This album consists entirely of music from the 17th century, but not in the way you might be expecting. You may even think they were written just now. A small introduction to battle your confusion...

Coming from a family of early music practitioners, I have loved the music of Monteverdi, Purcell and Dowland from an early

age. I regularly perform this music, and consider it extremely close to my heart. But besides performing these songs in the traditional way – accompanied by a lute, theorbo or baroque guitar – I have always heard an alternative version prowling in the back of my mind.

Since many of these songs are constructed simply – a figured bass line and a melody – the creativity of the performers was an essential part of the performance practice of these songs. The instrument was often left to personal choice and the accompaniment was mostly improvised: in essence, not very different from a jazz lead sheet. Yet, the modern day treatment of these songs largely has a strong focus on historically informed performance, following the vast amount of research into the way this music might have sounded originally. This regularly leads to the songs sounding a specific stylized way,

which is quite far removed from the musical language of the broader audience of today. I often noticed that many of these songs have a simple, pure and beautiful character that is not so different from certain pop songs of my generation. When playing early music to people who are not necessarily familiar with the classical tradition, I noticed that it often speaks very directly to them (interestingly, more so than romantic or modern repertoire). However to many of these people, the authentic performance practice tends to get in the way of their understanding and enjoyment of the music.

With HUSH, I wanted to approach these songs from the viewpoint of modern day musicians. After having this idea in my mind for several years, I met Marnix, tried out a few songs with him and found him to be the ideal partner in crime for this project. Coming from a pop background, but with infinitely wide

musical interests, Marnix jumped on the material like a child in a candy store. By stripping the music to its bare essence, often singing in a lower key, removing mannerisms and looking at them through the lens of 21st century musicians, we started to redefine the songs. We were also careful to retain the original spirit: where Purcell or Monteverdi wanted to create a ballad, a lament or a funky song, we translated those motivations into how today's musicians approach a ballad, a melancholy song or a groovy track. Armed only with two voices and an electric guitar, we aim to shine a new light on these songs and hope to be able to introduce a wide audience to the sheer beauty and timelessness of this music written four centuries ago.

- Nora Fischer

MARNIX ON THE MAKING OF HUSH

Until about four or five years ago, I had never consciously heard any 'early music'. Monteverdi was a name I vaguely knew but you could have easily convinced me that Purcell and Dowland were footballers in the English second division. At the time, I had just joined a collective of musicians called Splendor in Amsterdam. For my first concert at the Splendor venue I thought it would be cool to do half of the show with my own band and the other

half with another Splendor musician. Nora was one of the other new members and since she's from a totally different musical background I thought that might make for an interesting mix. After a bunch of e-mails back and forth, Nora suggested we do a few early music pieces. Unaware of that term or the fact that I was now part of a long-awaited dream, I started listening to some of the music she sent over and was amazed by how much it resonated with me. Somehow it reminded me of a few 60s records I love by bands like the Zombies and the Beach Boys. I truly believe that some of these pieces would fit perfectly on Pet Sounds!

I must admit that in the beginning I couldn't listen to any of the 'traditional' recordings Nora sent over for more than 20 minutes. The baroque style instruments I could get on board with, but the style of singing was so far from what I was used

to that it distracted me from what I felt were simple, heartfelt pieces of music. Luckily this was exactly the reason that Nora wanted to reshape these songs and suddenly I found myself in a playground of possibilities. There was one little obstacle though: my inability to read or write sheet music.

The first pieces took me days to figure out because I had to do it all by ear. I'm a bit faster now but part of the reason I was so slow remains: I was often amazed by what I'd find. This way of dissecting the music before being able to play it almost felt like private composition lessons by Monteverdi or Purcell. I'd often repeat a melodic phrase like the one in *O Cessate di Piagarmi* dozens of times because I could feel – but not yet fully grasp – its beauty. Or I'd giggle at yet another clever compositional trick, like the descending bass line with the beautiful top notes in *Hush, No More*.

I'm a songwriter myself and through studying their material these great composers who have been dead for hundreds of years suddenly felt very near, almost as if I could sense what they were thinking. On the other hand it humbled me deeply, because brilliance is never far away in this music. There's a clear reason it has survived so many years: It's still awesome.

- Marnix Dorrestein

LINER NOTES

O CESSATE DI PIAGARMI

Most of the material on this album was suggested by Nora, but it was actually Marnix who put this piece forward. This made Nora laugh as it was one of the first songs she learnt for her singing lessons. The song is part of a collection of arias that were bundled for beginning vocal students, and so it will likely be familiar to anyone who has had classical singing lessons. For this 'almost too obvious' reason it didn't even occur to Nora to consider it for HUSH, but *O Cessate* in fact became one of our favourites. The lyrics are intensely sad and usually sung in quite a dramatically expressive fashion. We took a calmer approach to give expression to the text in another, more restrained, way.

COME ALL YE SONGSTERS

This song is from Purcell's semi-opera *The Fairy Queen*, which is a musical adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All kinds of magical creatures are constantly singing and dancing around in the enchanted forest. Since we felt that Purcell wrote it as a groovy song for the fairies to dance around to, we interpreted it with that in mind.

AUGELLIN

Stefano Landi is not as widely known as most other composers featured on this album, but his music is no less beautiful. He was one of the most influential composers in the development of opera – a genre that was born in the 17th century. The score for *Augellin* is a simple bass line and melody, so we tried to find a sound that evokes the bird described in the song.

OBLIVION SOAVE

This is one of the most well-known lullabies in the history of opera, set in a story full of jealousy, revenge and planned killings. Poppea, the mistress of the Roman emperor Nerone, is about to be slaughtered by her admirer Ottone on the orders of the emperor's wife... basically your everyday operatic spiderweb of intrigues. Just before Ottone arrives, Poppea's nurse Arnalta sings this beautiful lullaby for her. In the midst of all this sneakily planned violence, this blissful song provides an oasis of peace and beauty.

VI RICORDA

This is a love song from Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*, in which Orpheus has just met the love of his life, Eurydice. He sings a song to celebrate his love for her, but also to remind us of his miserable existence before he met her. It's a beautiful text in which depression and joy are closely knitted, concluding that true happiness can only exist when having experienced intense sadness. We've tried to create a version that expresses both emotions: a joyful love song with a melancholic undertone.

INTORNO ALL'IDOL MIO

Oh, the Italians and their love songs: so beautiful. A piece in which wind, breath and breezes are asked to kiss the sleeping beloved. We were struck by the purity of this song, and tried to perform it as softly, delicately and peacefully as we could. It must be noted that Marnix was listening to Nancy Sinatra's *Bang Bang* a lot at the time.

CAN SHE EXCUSE MY WRONGS

There are several mysteries connected to this song. It's not even clear if the music or the lyrics were written first. But since the music is quite energetic and upbeat, and the lyrics are more subdued (and as there is also an instrumental version of this song) it's generally believed that the music came first and the lyrics were added later. Another uncertainty is the identity of the lyricist and the object of desire. The lyrics present a typical Petrarchan (non-sexual) lover, and are mostly believed to form a personal plea to Queen Elizabeth I. Regardless of the song's ambiguous origins, we have a combination of a strong and upbeat bass line, and a sad and sometimes angry and frustrated text. To us, it seemed logical to create a certain aggression both in guitar and voice, and to focus on the bass notes in order to infuse the atmosphere with a deep and dark character. The slightly psychedelic intermezzo is a little piece that Marnix wrote and that somehow found a new home in this song.

COLD SONG

This song, one of the strangest and most haunting of the period, is one of our favourites. A character called 'The Cold Genius' is reluctantly awoken from his slumber. As he emerges, frozen and furious, he sings this intimidating song. Purcell wrote the vocal line as a written-out stutter, as if the singer is also emerging from a motionless state. We have chosen a different approach, using other musical tools to create icy details.

CUM DEDERIT

Vivaldi is actually chronologically a bit on the late side in regards to this project. It's a different type of composition: not really a song-structure like most others, but similar to a through-composed aria. It's stylistically a little different to the rest of the album, but we couldn't leave this haunting piece out. It's so eerie and mysterious with its chromatic lines and pulsating bass notes. It's also the only religious piece of music on this disc, as well as the only Latin text; slightly an outsider in several ways but a gem we couldn't resist.

SEBBEN, CRUDELE

This song is about loving someone despite their continuing rejections. “Although, cruel love, you make me languish; I will always love you true. With the patience of my serving, your pride I will be able to tire out.” It is so silently beautiful that we tried to keep it as simple and pure as we could.

WONDROUS MACHINE

Hail! Bright Cecilia was composed by Purcell as an ode to Saint Cecilia, patron saint of musicians. Several musical instruments swing by as if they were dramatic characters, and in *Wondrous Machine* it is the organ that is the centre of attention. It has a funky bass line and a groovy melody, and it was one of the first up-tempo songs we chose. We had a lot of fun playing around with ways to replace the typical coloraturas (the rapid singing of a line of notes) with small instrumental commentaries.

HUSH, NO MORE

This was the first song we ever played together. It became the title track as the word ‘hush’ incorporates so much of what we wanted to address: quietness, intimacy and the gentle whispering of songs. *Hush, No More* is a lullaby from *The Fairy Queen*, and though it seems simple, the harmonies that emerge are so unexpectedly beautiful that it made Marnix jump through the roof. When playing live, we always try to create complete silence in the room. We know we’ve succeeded when the air conditioning in the hall becomes disturbing.

- 1 **O Cessate Di Piagarmi** *from Il Pompeo*
Alessandro Scarlatti
Composed in 1682
04:05"
- 2 **Come All Ye Songsters** *from The Fairy Queen*
Henry Purcell
Composed in 1692
03:01"
- 3 **Augellin**
Stefano Landi
First published in 1620
03:26"
- 4 **Oblivion Soave** *from L'Incoronazione Di Poppea*
Claudio Monteverdi
First performed in 1642
02:31"
- 5 **Vi Ricorda** *from L'Orfeo*
Claudio Monteverdi
Composed in 1607
02:37"
- 6 **Intorno All'Idol Mio** *from Orontea*
Antonio Cesti
First performed in 1656
04:15"
- 7 **Can She Excuse My Wrongs**
John Dowland
First published in 1597
03:04"
- 8 **Cold Song** *from King Arthur*
Henry Purcell
Composed in 1691
03:07"
- 9 **Cum Dederit** *from Nisi Dominus*
Antonio Vivaldi
Composed ± 1739-1745
04:53"
- 10 **Sebben, Crudetele** *from La Costanza In Amor Vince L'Inganno*
Antonio Caldara
Composed in 1710
02:37"
- 11 **Wondrous Machine** *from Hail! Bright Cecilia*
Henry Purcell
Composed in 1692
02:51"
- 12 **Hush, No More** *from The Fairy Queen*
Henry Purcell
Composed in 1692
04:29"

HUSH

All songs (re)arranged by
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