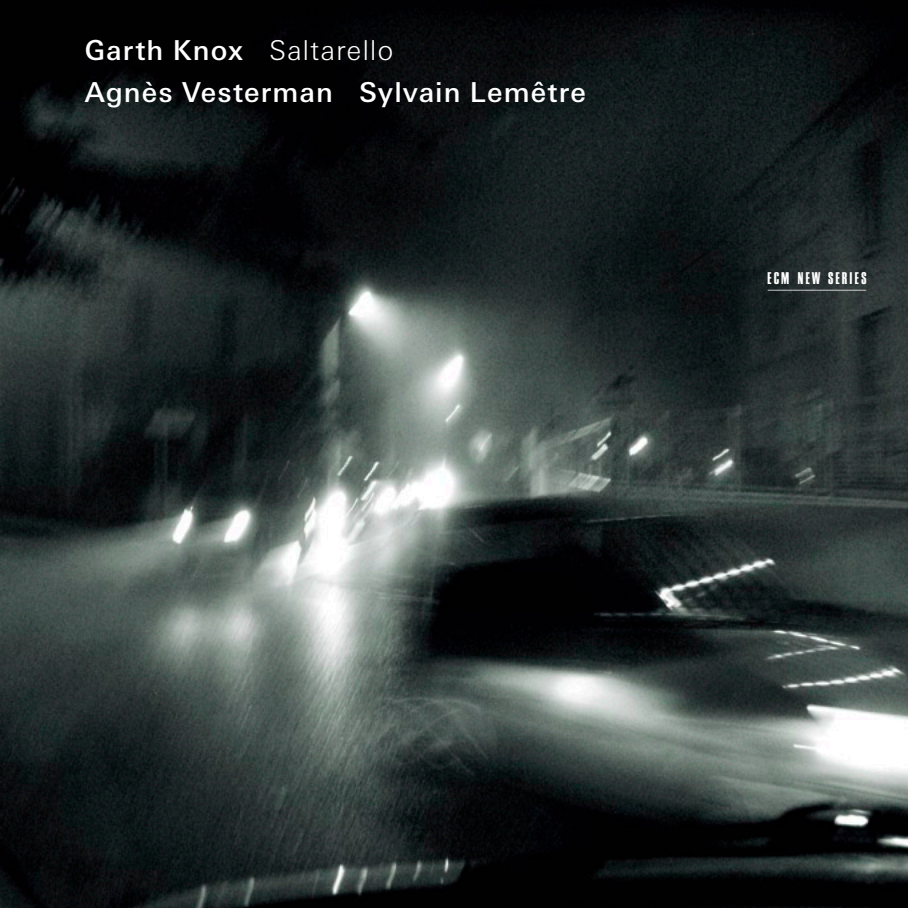


Garth Knox Saltarello

Agnès Vesterman Sylvain Lemêtre

ECM NEW SERIES





## **Saltarello**

**Garth Knox** viola, viola d'amore, fiddle

**Agnès Vesterman** violoncello

**Sylvain Lemêtre** percussion

- 1     **Black Brittany** 4:00  
 based on the traditional *Black is the Colour of my True Love's Hair* and *Leaving Brittany* by Johnny Cunningham  
 arranged for viola d'amore and violoncello
- 2     **Henry Purcell** (1659–1695)  
**Music for a While** 3:29  
 arranged for viola d'amore and violoncello
- 3–5     **Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741)  
**Concerto for viola d'amore in d-minor** RV 393  
 I Allegro 3:23  
 II Largo 2:19  
 III Presto 3:45  
 arranged for viola d'amore and violoncello
- 6     **Garth Knox** (\*1956)  
**Fuga libre** 7:41  
 for viola solo  
*In memory of Ruth Inez Aphthomas*
- 7     **Hildegard von Bingen** (1098–1179)  
**Guillaume de Machaut** (ca. 1300–1377)  
**Ave, generosa** 7:22  
**Tels rit au ma[t]in qui au soir pleure**  
 arranged for fiddle and percussion

- Kaija Saariaho** (\*1952)
- 8 **Vent nocturne** 6:58
- I. Sombres miroirs (Dark Mirrors)  
for viola and electronics  
*For Garth*
- John Dowland** (1563–1626)
- 9 **Flow my Tears** 4:03
- arranged for viola d'amore and violoncello
- Kaija Saariaho**
- 10 **Vent nocturne** 5:49
- II. Soupairs de l'obscur (Breaths of the Obscure)  
for viola and electronics  
*For Garth*
- 11 **Three Dances** (14th century) 5:48
- Saltarello I – Ghaetta – Saltarello II  
arranged for fiddle and percussion
- 12 **Pipe, Harp and Fiddle** 5:16
- based on the traditionals *Port na bPúcaí*,  
*Chanter's Song* and *Star of the County Down*  
arranged for fiddle and percussion

All arrangements by Garth Knox











## For Lightness and Clarity

“Saltarello” is a mobile structure of musical “snapshots” taken from nearly one thousand years of music. Each of my instruments – medieval fiddle, viola d’amore and viola – brings its own perspective and sound world to the chosen pieces, and is complemented by its corresponding partner (fiddle/percussion, viola d’amore/cello and viola/electronics). But as well as “travelling” to visit and discover these distant times and places, the aim was to “bring back” the pieces to the present day and to explore them here and now without destroying their inherent qualities. For this reason an aesthetic order was preferred to pure chronology, in the hope that the pieces’ “neighbours” would shed light on the similarities and differences between them.

*Black is the Colour of my True Love’s Hair* is a traditional Irish air which so fascinated the Italian composer Luciano Berio, that he made a folk/contemporary version of it in his *Folk Songs* for voice and small ensemble. Alongside this is a “traditional” tune, which was actually written very recently by one of the leading Scottish fiddlers, Johnny Cunningham, who died prematurely a few years ago. Celtic folk music is one of the hidden threads which run through this CD – it resurfaces on medieval fiddle in the last track, *Pipe, Harp and Fiddle*, and there are traces of it on viola in *Fuga libre*.

In our version of Purcell’s *Music for a While* the cello begins by laying down the walking bass loop, and the endlessly inventive melody is taken by viola d’amore, but as the piece progresses, the roles are switched so often that the two instruments overlap, merge and become

one. The answering companion piece to this is John Dowland's *Flow my Tears* which comes between the two parts of *Vent nocturne*. The three strophes are first "sung" by the cello, followed each time by a free instrumental commentary on viola d'amore, as was standard practice for Elizabethan lute players at the time of Shakespeare.

In recent years, the tendency in baroque music has been to reduce the number of players in order to gain lightness and clarity. Taking this idea to the limit, we present here a Vivaldi concerto reduced to its bare essentials – the melodic/harmonic viola d'amore line and its complementary bass played on cello. In this intimate chamber version, the spontaneity and purity of Vivaldi's thinking is even more astonishing. The link from Vivaldi to modern times is provided by *Fuga libre* for viola. This free fantasy, which begins hesitantly in a kind of baroque jazz style, builds up momentum until a vortex pulls it into a "crash" after which high and low notes are separated into different universes. In the slow central section we hear them evolving in their parallel worlds until the final section reunites them and they run away together in a breathless gallop.

The oldest piece in the collection, Hildegard von Bingen's song of praise to the Virgin Mary is treated here as a gradually expanding instrumental commentary. It links directly into a song by Guillaume de Machaut, so when the percussion makes its entry we in effect move forward by two centuries, from a-cappella religious ecstasy to the time of courtly love and the forward-looking, almost romantic plainte, "Who laughs in the morning, will cry in the evening".

Kaija Saariaho's work (written nearly 900 years after Hildegard's) explores the sound the bow produces when it is drawn across a string, a soft breathy sound, like breathing or wind. In *Vent nocturne* this "white" bow noise is amplified and multiplied by electronics and woven into a tissue with the composer's own breathing sounds and some electronic wind-harp effects. The solitary viola line crosses this wind-swept arctic landscape sighing and slowly descending in an endless glissando. Pitch becomes breath, breath blows into wind, wind swirls into music.

The saltarello was a lively, medieval dance named for its peculiar leaping step (from the Italian "saltare" – to jump). Our first *Saltarello* has a small "free" bar which comes round every time the tune is about to repeat. We made this more obvious by making it last progressively longer each time it occurs, and more and more free until it turns into a natural link to the second dance, *Ghaetta*. This "estampie" has the feel of stamping feet, providing a natural foothold for percussion, and the final *Saltarello de la pioggia* has its place as a complimentary but contrasting answer to the first *Saltarello*.

In the final track, we return to the opening folk thread, and pay homage to the three main instruments of Celtic music – the bagpipes, the harp and the fiddle (with percussion of course!). These can all be imitated on the fiddle – especially the medieval fiddle as played here, with its flat bridge for the drones in pipe music, its beautifully wooden pizzicatos like the harp, and its rasping gut-stringed edge for the rustic fiddle style.

Garth Knox



Recorded December 2009  
Auditorio Radiotelevisione svizzera, Lugano  
Tonmeister: Stephan Schellmann  
Cover Photo: Jean-Guy Lathuillère  
Liner Photos: Daniel Vass  
Design: Sascha Kleis  
Produced by Manfred Eicher

An ECM Production

In collaboration with RSI Rete Due, Lugano



© 2012 ECM Records GmbH

© 2012 ECM Records GmbH

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



ECM New Series 2157  
476 4501