

# DUO LENZ – FROM THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

By WILLIAM YEOMAN

2006 saw the 400th anniversary of Dutchman Willem Janszoon's sighting of Australia, the first ever by a European. In March 1606, Janszoon followed the west coast of Cape York as far as the point he named Cape Keerweer ('Turnabout'). Among the many commemorations in Australia during 2006, one of the most curious, and, from a classical guitarist's perspective, exciting, was the release of Duo Lenz's second disc 'From the Summer Solstice'. Exciting, because it features premiere recordings of works for two guitars by Richard Charlton, Peter Sculthorpe, Paul Svoboda and Richard Lenz himself (his substantial five-movement suite, celebrating Christmas in Australia, gives the disc its title and had the distinction of being broadcast nation-wide on both the summer solstice and Christmas day); curious, because the disc wasn't originally conceived as being either commemorative or even all-Australian.

Although I had written an introduction for the booklet notes accompanying 'From the Summer Solstice', I was largely ignorant of this latter fact and so, determined to find out more, I invited Ruth and Richard Lenz to enlighten me over some refreshments in a cafe nestled among the spectacularly beautiful botanical gardens in King's Park that overlook Perth.

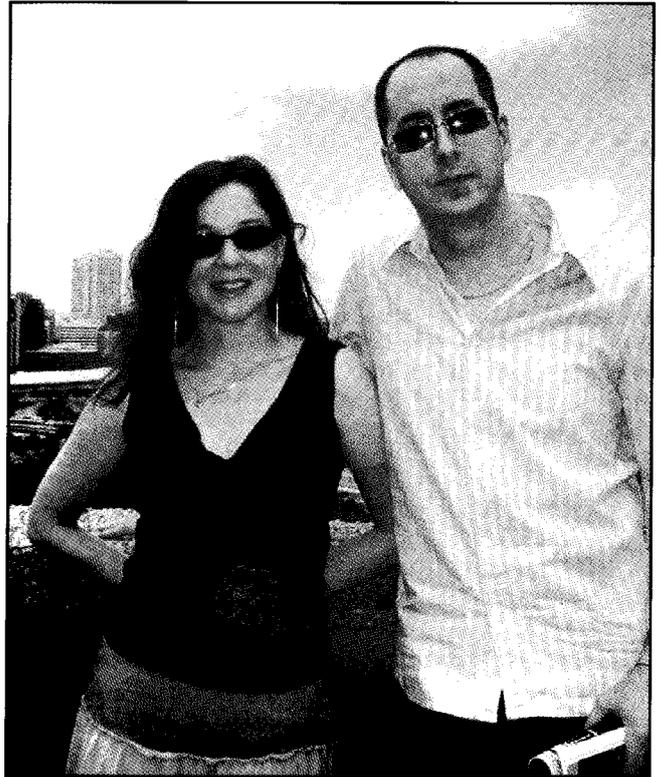
'How did it come about?' asked Richard, turning to Ruth.

'It gradually emerged...oh, the orange juice is *mine*,' said Ruth, momentarily distracted by the waitress who had just brought over our drinks.

'It wasn't really the plan to do an all-Australian recording,' continued Richard after the waitress left. 'At first we were simply going to do premier recordings of new works, whatever the nationality of the composer, but when we went over the repertoire we'd been playing in our concerts we realised the new pieces were actually all by Australian composers. And then it just started to evolve.'

'Richard had also written *From the Summer Solstice* in 2001,' added Ruth, 'and it ended up being an ideal centrepiece for the disc, having been written by a Dutchman who was writing about a country he decided to make his home. The works that surround it are all by Australian-born composers. But there was no real premeditation – a pattern emerged naturally.'

'Then when I started to think about the idea of using a map for the cover of the disc, I realised that this year is the 400th anniversary of the first sighting of Australia by Europeans,' said Richard. 'And both of us also realised that we were just one state short of representing each part of



Duo Lenz.

Australia. Only Victoria misses out. But that wasn't deliberate!

'No, we noticed all this retrospectively', agreed Ruth. 'Everything has been rather serendipitous!'

Once a real concept did begin to take shape the next step was to get the composers themselves to contribute to the booklet notes, something Richard Lenz said they were all only too happy to do.

'Yes, they were all keen to be more involved in the project. It made it much more interesting; it meant we were able to get to know the composers a little better, as well as to get some feedback on the recording.'

Exploration is a theme that runs through the entire project; not only is each work a response to some aspect of Australia's culture or landscape but much of the music also explores the technical resources of the guitar in novel and often witty ways. Richard Charlton's *Nightsongs – Four Collected Duets* are a case in point.

'Richard Charlton's pieces really make full use of the guitar to create a picture,' said Ruth. 'In the actual piece *Nightsongs* we have all these insect noises. And then there are those funny little sounds at the beginning of *Refractions* which really extend your technique as well as your imagination.'

Richard drank the remnants of his ice chocolate and looked out the window at the gardens and

the cityscape beyond. 'There's actually some new techniques in the Charlton pieces that, to our knowledge, haven't been used before. There's a right-hand technique where you play harmonics as part of an arpeggio – you put down a chord with the left hand and then there are artificial harmonics that you mix with normal tones. It involves a continuous cross-string action – it gives a really mysterious sort of sound.'

'In *Nightsongs* there's a similar technique,' said Ruth. 'We both found this a little tricky at first, but once you've got it, it's fine. But it is very unusual. Then, in the same piece, there's the scraping of a coin against the fret. Actually, we were playing *Nightsongs* to Richard Charlton in Darwin in 2005, just before we performed it, and he said 'Can you find another way of making an insect noise? Is there another sound you can do?' So I just got my finger and depressed a string over the sound-hole. As a result the string hit the fret and he said 'Yeah, that sounds really good'. So there were things that emerged from our working with him, things that weren't in the score. Well, they are now as a result!'

Richard Lenz also arranged Paul Svoboda's solo piece *Aurora* for guitar duet. 'We were already using it as an encore in our recitals, with me improvising a second guitar part, but we wanted to make it even more interesting. So we came up with the idea of using a 12-string guitar to make the piece really sparkle. We then recorded it on mini disc just to make sure Paul Svoboda was happy with it, which he was.'

Other works on the disc are deceptively simple. 'My *Dyhana* (after Satie) is technically straight-forward,' continued Richard, 'although you do need to pay a lot of attention to the tone quality. It's a very lyrical piece, but you really need to sweeten the tone to bring it off. Which in a way makes it very difficult to play. If you put a finger wrong, everything comes out. If you have bad nails, it will come out. It's very exposed. Especially on the recording, where we were very closely miked.'

'Ditto with the Sculthorpe,' added Ruth. 'He uses the most beautiful sounds of the guitar. And he uses a resonant tuning that adds to the overall effect. The middle section of *Darwin Calypso* is particularly dark and mysterious. But one of the things we're over the moon about is how a live audience responds to the works featured on the disc. It's definitely brought a whole new angle to our recitals by being able to talk about the music. Getting people to understand it. I think audiences enjoy the fact that it's new and refreshing.'

You can actually hear the audience reaction. 'In *From the Summer Solstice*', when we finish the very fast run at the end of 'Celebrations', people generally respond with oohs and ahs. Or they look at each other when we do something unusual. And those insect noises always get a laugh!'

Postscript: A few days after my conversation with Duo Lenz I asked two of the composers whose

works appear on 'From the Summer Solstice', Peter Sculthorpe and Richard Charlton, about writing for the classical guitar and how the Australian landscape influences their music.

**Peter Sculthorpe:** While I do have a fair understanding of the guitar, I don't play it. At one stage, I did plan to learn it but my good friend John Williams, felt that a limited knowledge of the instrument could inhibit my inspiration. If I write anything that is unplayable, he puts it right. I love the sound of the instrument and I began writing for it because of my friendship with John.

On the whole, Australians are fringe-dwellers living around the edge of the continent. Artists are drawn to the mystery of its interior and to its seeming spirituality. In my own case, while I am not a religious composer in a sectarian sense, most of my music seeks the sacred in the landscape.

**Richard Charlton:** Bringing the four duets [that comprise 'Nightsongs'] together was my idea and happened before Duo Lenz's disc – it was as an excuse to publish them myself as a book called 'Four Collected Duets' and subtitled 'Nightsongs'. I think I just got sick and tired of presenting them separately and thought they would be much nicer in a single volume. They were all written for friends who are well-known Australian duos, so from that point of view they deserved to be brought together. I did not envisage they would be played altogether and they are certainly four separate and unrelated works but, now that I hear them I am quite pleased with the order in which they follow each other.

Each of the duos has played pieces that were not written for it, i.e. ZOO duo have recorded *Spiral Ellipse* (which was written for Duo Lenz); Duo Lenz has now recorded *Romanza* and *Nightsongs* (which were written for Duo Agostino and ZOO Duo); the Agostinos have also recorded *Spiral Ellipse!* This is a lovely interweaving of ideas and talents.

I think much of my inspiration comes from the landscape but not always. An idea or a mood I want to express may come from something quite unrelated to the piece at hand – like *Spiral Ellipse* – this title was essentially coined after much of the music was composed, but the initial idea was somewhat 'circling' in nature. I had an idea of lines of music intersecting and going around.

Having something (a concept) to hang a piece on – as in the movement *Nightsongs*, helps me to define a piece and give it purpose. This movement is about the night and nocturnal dreams – in an Australian sense this translates into the sounds of insects and frogs – heard but unseen, giving rise to melodies and songs – 'dark' at first and then more ecstatic and romantic. I wanted to create the feel of the 'air' more than anything, a heavy, humid summer night.

The guitar is well suited to evolving my ideas partly because it is *my* instrument, but also

because of the un-European quality of the modern Australian guitar. For me the piano or violin, for instance, has a pre-defined sound – the modern classical guitar, especially Australian instruments, are much less so. Unless you are deliberately evoking its Spanish heritage, it can sound like a new voice, fresh and alive. There is also the association with the pop genre, I very much like to blur the lines between 'classical' and 'pop' or 'jazz' – music should not be put into boxes. I think people outside Australia often have trouble in classifying composers like myself or Phillip Houghton or even Ross Edwards for that matter. We are often lumped into the 'World Music' selection in record stores. I haven't worked out yet whether this is a compliment or a criticism!

Following is a complete track listing of 'From the Summer Solstice'. Samples, including a complete recording of *Dhyana*, may be heard at [www.duolenz.com](http://www.duolenz.com)

1. *Dhyana\** (Contemplation after E.Satie) - R. Lenz. 2-5. *Nightsongs* (Four Collected Duets) - R. Charlton (Refractions\* - Romanza - Nightsongs\*\* - Spiral Ellipse). 6-10. From the Summer Solstice\* - R. Lenz (Awakening - Eventide - Blessings - Serenity - Celebrations). 11-12. Two Guitar Duets - P. Sculthorpe (Darwin Calypso\* - Sea Chant\*\*). 13. *Aurora\** - P. Svoboda.

\* premiere recording \*\* premiere recording of this version 'From the Summer Solstice' is available direct from Duo Lenz ([www.duolenz.com](http://www.duolenz.com)).

**Luthier**  
Nylon Guitar Strings

**THE IDEAL STRINGS FOR THE MOST DEMANDING GUITARIST!**

Classical / Flamenco guitars by world-renowned makers.

Large selection of sheet music, CD's, videos & accessories all related to the Classical / Flamenco guitar.

Buy/Sell  
Vintage Guitars.

**Luthier**  
Music Corporation

341 W. 44 NYC 10036 T: 212.397.6038 F: 212.397.6048  
guitar@luthiermusic.com www.luthiermusic.com

## Atahualpa Yupanqui



## New DVD from Guitar Masters Imports...

**Atahualpa Yupanqui - El Legado**  
Atahualpa Yupanqui (1908-1992) was the legendary Argentinian folksinger/ guitarist who took a Native American name as a way of championing Native American rights. He was born Héctor Roberto Chavero Haram in Pergamino, Buenos Aires province. Yupanqui died in Nimes, France in 1992 at the age of 84.

This beautiful 99 minute DVD, imported directly from Argentina, features the great singer/guitarist Atahualpa Yupanqui talking about his long career, and playing and singing his most famous songs. The DVD documents how Yupanqui won the admiration of people from all around the world simply by fact that he sang with such deep sincerity and with great poetry about the the wonderful Argentine countryside and its people of many origins. Always accompanying himself on the guitar with his very distinctive and emotional style. A must for lovers of South American music. Spanish with English subtitles.

DVD £12.99 including VAT plus:  
Post & packing 10% UK, 15% EUROPE,  
INTERNATIONAL £11.05 plus: 20% Post & packing

Available now from

**ASHLEY MARK PUBLISHING COMPANY**

1 & 2 Vance Court,

Trans Britannia Enterprise Park,

Blaydon on Tyne NE21 5NH, United Kingdom.



TEL: +44 (0) 191 414 9000 FAX: +44 (0) 191 414 9001

e-mail: [mail@ashleymark.co.uk](mailto:mail@ashleymark.co.uk) Web: [www.FretsOnly.com](http://www.FretsOnly.com)