

*Baltimore Songlines* (2006)

Peter Sculthorpe

“During the 1990s, I began a series of works that incorporate material suggested by the indigenous music of northern Australia, together with Balinese gamelan-like figurations and bird-song. These works were inspired by Bruce Chatwin’s book, *Songlines*. In it, Chatwin writes about the Aboriginal concept of totemic ancestors singing themselves into existence and journeying across the land with their songs. *Dream Tracks* and *From Nourlangie*, both written for the Verdehr Trio, are two of these works.

*Baltimore Songlines* was also written for the Verdehr Trio, for first performance in the National Aquarium in Baltimore, Maryland, celebrating the opening of the Australian Wing of the Aquarium. An enormous river gorge has been built inside the aquarium. Similar to those in Umbrawarra and Kakadu in Australia’s Northern Territory, it houses the whole range of flora and fauna that exist in such gorges.

Set in one movement, it seems to me that the music of *Baltimore Songlines*, is self-explanatory. Apart from the opening, which is based upon an indigenous lullaby, all the material, especially the tumbling chant that follows the lullaby, was inspired by visits to the Northern Territory. Towards the end of the work, a section for solo piano suggests the music of the didjeridu, an instrument that has its origins in Australia’s north. I feel that *Baltimore Songlines* is the summation of my so-called ‘songlines period.’ Unlike the other works in the series, some of its thematic material tends to recede over the course of the work, giving way to new ideas. In this way, I was able to suggest both journeying and the continual renewal of the natural world.

*Baltimore Songlines* was commissioned by the Australian Embassy, Washington, D.C.; the Baltimore Aquarian; the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; and Michigan State University.”

—Peter Sculthorpe

The world premiere of *Baltimore Songlines* was on October 26, 2006 for the opening of the North Australia Wing of the Baltimore Aquarium, Baltimore, Maryland.

Peter Sculthorpe (1929–2014) was born in Launceston, Tasmania and educated at Launceston Church Grammar School, the University of Melbourne, and Wadham College, Oxford. He was composer-in-residence at Yale University while visiting the United States as a Harkness Fellow in 1966–1967, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sussex in 1972–1973. He received the degree of Honorary Doctor of Letters from both the University of Tasmania (1980) and the University of Sussex (1989), and that of Honorary Doctor of Music from the University of Melbourne (1989). Appointed Reader in Music at the University of Sydney in the late sixties, he became Professor in Musical Composition (Personal Chair) at that university.

Sculthorpe wrote in most musical forms, and his output, numbering over three hundred fifty compositions, relates easily to the unique social climate and physical characteristics of Australia. Furthermore, his country's geographical position caused him to be influenced by much of the music of Asia, especially that of Japan and Indonesia. In later years, his interests also included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island music and culture. Certainly he is Australia's best-known composer, and his works are regularly performed and recorded throughout the world.

He was the recipient of many awards and prizes for his music, including an Australian Film Industry Best Original Music Score Award for *Manganinnie* in 1980, and the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) Most Performed Australasian Serious Work Award for his *Piano Concerto* in 1985. Recordings of Sculthorpe's orchestral works and music for strings have won Australian Record Industry Awards (ARIA) for Best Classical Music Recording in 1996, 2006, and 2015.

Sculthorpe was made an Officer of the British Empire in 1977, and in the same year was awarded a Silver Jubilee Medal. He became an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1990, and the following year was elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. In 1994 he received the Sir Bernard Heinze Award for outstanding services to Australian music, and in 1998 was named one of Australia's Living National Treasures. In 2002 he was elected to Foreign Honorary Membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Sculthorpe's life and works are discussed in Michael Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929–1979*; in Deborah Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe, A Bio-Bibliography*; in Graeme Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer*; and in John Peterson, *The Music of Peter Sculthorpe*. His personal memoirs are entitled *Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life*.

Additional information is available at Sculthorpe's archive at the National Library of Australia, Canberra: <http://www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/sculthorpe-collection>.