

Dream Tracks (1992)

Peter Sculthorpe

“Since 1988 I have written a series of works inspired by Kakadu National Park in the north of Australia. Some of these works have melodic material in common, the contours of each line usually being transformed in some way, both within pieces and in successive pieces. I have come to regard these melodies as 'songlines' or 'dreaming tracks'. These are names used to describe the labyrinth of invisible pathways that, according to Aboriginal belief, are created by the totemic ancestors of all species as they sing the world into existence.

Dream Tracks, then, sets out to summon up the spirit of a northern Australian landscape. The work is in four sections: *Lontano–Molto sostenuto–Lontano–Estatico*. The first section takes as its point of departure the contours of a Torres Strait Island children's song called *Monkey and Turtle*. It's a short morality tale, concerning the fate of a thieving monkey and his partner, a turtle. While there are no monkeys in Torres Strait, they seem to be a part of popular imagination. Like most songs in the area, *Monkey and Turtle* is sometimes accompanied by guitar but more often by traditional skin and bamboo drums. This serves as an introduction to the second section, which is based upon an Arnham Land chant, *Djilile*, or 'whistling-duck on a billabong.' The third section is an extension of the first, its melodic contours also appearing in the fourth section. In this final section, however, *Djilile* is ever-present, both in a much-transformed guise and in its original form. I have dedicated *Dream Tracks* to the Verdehr Trio.”

—Peter Sculthorpe

The world premiere of *Dream Tracks* was on October 31, 1992 at the College Music Society Convention in San Diego. It is the first of the works Sculthorpe wrote on commission from the Verdehr Trio and Michigan State University.

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>.