

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, dark, curly hair, wearing a white collared shirt and a patterned tie. She is looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. She is wearing large, ornate gold earrings with circular designs. Her hand is visible near her neck, adjusting the tie.

Lyrita

Eleanor Alberga

Dancing with the Shadow

On a Bat's Back I do Fly

Langvad

Ensemble
Arcadiana

Eleanor Alberga

Works for Chamber Ensemble

Ensemble Arcadiana

Flute, Karen Jones

Oboe, John Anderson

Clarinet, Jon Carnac

Bassoon, Meyrick Alexander

Horn, Richard Watkins

Piano, Junyan Chen

Percussion, Julian Warburton

Violins, Thomas Bowes and Oscar Perks

Viola, Ralph de Souza

Cello, Robert Irvine

Double Bass, Lynda Houghton

Conductor, Thomas Kemp

	Dancing with the Shadow (1990)	
	<i>Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano, Percussion</i>	
1	Duo	5:01
2	Trio	5:39
3	Quartet	4:37
4	Quintet	7:35
5	Sextet	3:34
6	On a Bat's Back I do Fly (2000)	13:50
	<i>Flute (Piccolo), Clarinet, Horn</i>	
	<i>Violin, Cello, Piano, Percussion</i>	
7	Langvad (2006)	13:15
	<i>Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn</i>	
	<i>2 Violins, Viola, Cello, Double Bass</i>	

Total playing time 53:36

Recorded at Wyastone Concert Hall, 11-12 October 2021
 Producer/Editor: Stephen Frost

Cover image : Eleanor Alberga, photo by Ben Ealovega

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Dancing with the Shadow

Duo-Trio-Quartet-Quintet-Sextet

Eleanor Alberga is always at pains to tell her listeners that her pieces can be enjoyed as pure music, without narrative and associations. So, the three pieces in this album evoke countless varieties of moods, textures, relationships and energies that will speak uniquely to the ear of each individual listener. But Eleanor's ever-curious, inventive and fertile sensibility means there is almost always an intriguing subtext of her own to everything she writes. And this is always worth exploring.

Dancing with the Shadow was written in 1990 and is scored for six solo instrumentalists. Although originally commissioned by the ensemble Lontano for choreographer Sue MacLennan as a dance piece, this context is relatively unimportant, for its five movements are more focused on the idea of shadows than on dancing.

Eleanor conceived the piece as an evocation of the individual's attempts to explore their darker side, the "shadow" of the title. At the time she wrote it, Eleanor was fascinated with psychology and in particular with the Jungian notion of the self and the "shadow self" and of the need to integrate conscious and unconscious to achieve a kind of psychological unity. She describes the piece as, "consistently dealing with the negative and positive sides of the human psyche and charting the way an individual comes to terms with and even embraces the riches of their shadow."

The journey therefore is not one fraught with drama and crisis but is more of a playful dialogue - by turns dreamy, animated, reflective and humorous. Each movement is scored for a different combination of instruments, and each successive movement adds an extra player. The first is a duo for clarinet and piano; the second a trio for flute violin and cello; the third a quartet for flute, clarinet, percussion and piano; the fourth a quintet for flute, clarinet, piano violin and cello. It culminates in a sextet that resolves the dialogue between self and shadow-self - "a boisterous chase", as Eleanor says, with instruments "tumbling over repeated chords and African-inspired rhythms." It is a glorious resolution and Eleanor was delighted when after a recent performance, an audience member, clearly moved, told her that she felt "sorted out" after listening to it.

The premiere was conducted by Odaline de la Martinez. Since then, a suite of three movements has been recorded and performed many times. Eleanor revised the complete work in the early 2020s and this had its concert premiere in 2022.

Ten years after *Dancing with the Shadow*, Eleanor was commissioned to write another piece for a small group of solo players by *Kokoro*, the chamber ensemble of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. She created another scintillating work for them, **On a Bat's Back I do Fly**, inspired this time by a song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the play, the song is sung by the fairy spirit Ariel who, anticipating being released from his master Prospero's service, imagines the idyllic, carefree light-hearted existence he will have reclining in a flower head or flying on the back of a bat.

*Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.*

As a young girl growing up in her native Jamaica, Eleanor often heard Thomas Arne's 18th century setting of Ariel's song and was drawn to it because it evoked the magical world of Ariel. This version is occasionally fleetingly referenced in Eleanor's piece. "Those who know Arne's setting," Eleanor explains, "may notice the motif to which he sets 'merrily, merrily'. I was attracted to this motif - it seemed so fixed to its words, yet this 'merrily' comes from a different world, one understood by bats, cowslips and fairies and perhaps only distantly by humankind."

This sense of taking the listener to a different non-human world - be it a fairy, animal or spirit one - is a distinctive quality of Eleanor's music. She has a fecund imagination and delights in going to the edge of human experience. Indeed, she sometimes ventures way beyond it. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the way Eleanor has kindled this mysterious and unusual sonic world in 'On a Bat's Back I do Fly' is her

use of tuned percussion, which draws the listener gently into Ariel's playful miniature kingdom – a backlit world, as Eleanor describes it, that is both, “bright, yet nocturnal and other-worldly.”

Reflecting on this otherworldliness, Eleanor recalls that in her younger days she used to be a keen motorcyclist, ducking and weaving through London traffic, to get to rehearsals and performances. The sensation of whizzing down back streets, her hair blown about in the wind, was thrilling. It was often, she recalls, “a bit like a fairground ride.” Thus, it was not hard for her to imagine what it might feel like to snuggle into the fur of a bat's back as it dips and dives through the night air. This sense of adventurous, edgy motion animates much of this short piece until eventually the tiny bat, represented by violin and piccolo, flutters into invisibility in the night sky. Eleanor describes it as, “evaporating slowly into the ether.”

Langvad is another title with a hidden meaning. Eleanor composed the work six years after ‘On a Bat's Back I do Fly’ for a summer chamber music festival run by her husband, the violinist Thomas Bowes. The festival was based in the tiny Danish settlement of Langvad, around the house of Kirsten Kjaer, a self-taught painter from Jutland, which had been turned into a museum. The festival was created by two retired doctors, John Anderson and Harald Fuglsang, in a spirit of freewheeling creativity. They called the festival a ‘jamboree.’

Eleanor often took part in the festival as either pianist or composer and Tom reminisces that it was characterised by a sense of freedom, a feeling that that almost anything could happen there.

Langvad suggests length in Danish and the hamlet is true to its name. It is, as Eleanor remembers, “in the middle of nowhere... with just one single long road running through it.” This, she thinks, probably gave her the germ of an idea for the piece, which might be “of a long parade, perhaps by circus folk, or a history of events in someone's life or in nature.”

Langvad is made of one movement, within which there are a variety of different moods. It begins with a clarinet, telling a story as it were. The story then develops through contrasting episodes until a solo violin introduces a new atmosphere of calm and wonder before a return to a faster finish. Eleanor admits with a smile that originally

there was no specific narrative story in her mind and that the thought of the circus troupe came afterwards. However, she acknowledges that **Langvad** is indeed more linear than many of her compositions, almost as if the story needed to be carved out of the sound world as a sculptor chisels out of stone. As so often, Eleanor returns to the listener, emphasising that her own narrative is only one tale of many. It is as if she is encouraging each listener to embrace the spirit of the Langvad jamboree and conjure their own imaginative worlds and associations out of her extraordinary music.

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Eleanor Alberga is a highly regarded British composer with commissions from the BBC Proms and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Her work is noted for its depth of craft, its colour and vibrancy and for making a deep emotional impression on audiences at first hearing. With a substantial output ranging from solo instrumental works to full-scale symphonic works and opera, her music is performed all over the world. Born 1949 in Kingston, Jamaica, Alberga decided at the age of five to be a concert pianist. Five years later, she was composing works for the piano. In 1968 she won the biennial Royal Schools of Music Scholarship for the West Indies, which she took up in 1970 at the Royal Academy of Music in London studying piano and singing. A budding career as a solo pianist - she was one of 3 finalists in the International Piano Concerto Competition in Dudley, UK in 1974 - was soon augmented by composition with her arrival at the London Contemporary Dance Theatre in 1978 where she ultimately became the company's Musical Director - conducting, composing and playing on LCDT's many tours. At different times over the course of her early career, Eleanor was a member of the African dance company Fontomfrom and played guitar and sang with the Jamaican Folk Singers. She was part of the duo Double Exposure with her husband, the violinist Thomas Bowes, and together they founded and nurtured the Arcadia Festival, an original music festival in the English countryside where they live. It was on leaving the London Contemporary Dance Theatre that Alberga was able to fully embark on her calling as a composer. Since then, interest in her music across all genres - orchestral, chamber, vocal, as well as works for stage and screen - has accelerated,

while her output has continued to grow. In 2015 her commissioned work *Arise, Athena!* for the opening of the Last Night of the BBC Proms was seen and heard by millions, and cemented a reputation as a composer of huge originality and consummate skill. Eleanor has gathered several awards, most notably a NESTA Fellowship in 2000 and a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award in 2019. In 2020 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. Eleanor was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2021 for Services to British Music.

www.eleanoralberga.com

Ensemble Arcadiana is a multi-format group formed of some of the most highly sought after instrumentalists in the UK. Created for performances at the Arcadia Festival, these World Première recordings of Alberga's music were made immediately after the 2022 event.



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