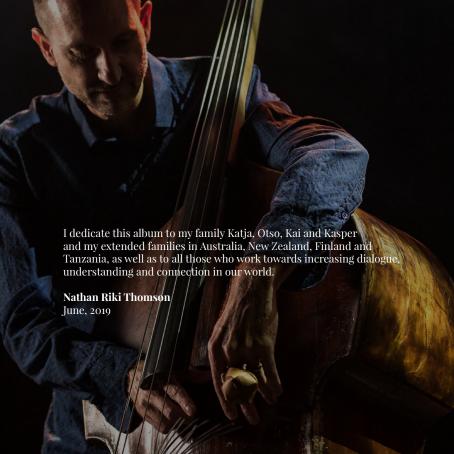
Nathan Riki Thomson

he music on this album is inspired by exploring the theme of Resonance from various perspectives as part of my artistic doctoral research. Resonance is viewed in this context as a metaphor for intercultural dialogue and collaboration, searching for points of connection or resonance with others and recognising the importance of this in an increasingly divided world. The physical phenomenon of resonance is also explored through a series of attachments developed for the double bass in collaboration with instrument maker Juhana Nyrhinen.

My live doctoral concerts have included visuals created in real time by filming close up images of salt, seeds and dried leaves resonating and reacting to bass frequencies driven into a metal plate, together with a seating

system that enabled the audience to experience the physical resonance of frequencies through their bodies. Lastly, *Resonance* is seen as a means for gradually forming a personal artistic identity.

I wish to thank my fellow musical collaborators Adriano, Hildá. Maija, Otso, Petra and Simon, as well as instrument maker Juhana Nyrhinen and dancers Amandine Doat, Fornier Ortiz, Njara Rasolo, Elina Valtonen, and choreographer Satu Tuomisto for their dialogue and inspiration. A big thank you also to my big hearted producers Simon Allen and Adriano Adewale, sound engineer Mikko Haapoja, Sibelius Academy, UniArts, Kristiina Ilmonen, Svante Forsbäck, Ville Tanttu, Daniel Malpica and Sibarecords producer Pauli Raitakari.



Liner notes by Simon Allen

reparing to work on Resonance in the studio I find myself in the live room, standing a little too close to Nathan and his double bass. listening as he warms a few notes. This was something I had done many times years before -a familiar feeling of being drawn by curiosity for sounds rarely heard coming from a bass. The detail and colour he liberates from his instrument is an old friend. On this occasion he was playing with musical material for the track Seeds - right hand strumming high up at the head of the bass whilst his left hand fingers slapped and plucked just below in



The sound was intricately complex and face-to-face across the fingerboard I heard every fine detail in the same profile as its creator. Looking down there's the familiar rich patina of Nathan's instrument with its patches of lifted grain that I know will move. crackling under the pressure of a finger. I remember the close-up photograph of the surface of this instrument that is wrapped around the cover of his previous CD Shaped By The Sea (2013). That image features a square patch of lighter grained wood, beautifully



Capturing this intricacy is a challenge further complicated by another aspect of investigation within the project. Nathan has long experimented with buzzing devices and preparations added to his bass, small attachments that modify the sound. Now in collaboration with instrument maker Juhana Nyrhinen a wide variety of attachments have been devised; some are

exquisitely finished, whilst others - pleasingly - are still prototypes. The playful nature of their collaboration is written across these small carefully crafted objects now scattered across a table. Once attached to the bass the shakers and rattles become agitated by physical vibration and the bass resonance is clothed by a rougher texture. A leaf of thin sheet metal with rings hanging pierced around its' edge rattles when attached to the bass scroll, and a selection of small box shakers chatter and shush affixed to the bridge. Pulling across a string activates a thousands tiny crises - a cloud of microscopic sounds surrounding the core of plucked string. After a while the physical energy of the string diminishes enough that the weight of rattling metal rings comes to rest, leaving the lighter seeds in their shaker box shushing until they too fall still almost abruptly, exposing the naked hum-tail of singing string. It is as though the sound has three endings – as if a pencil has drawn three times loosely over the same outline.

In addition, there are tiny woven shakers worn like rings on the hands and larger shakers around the ankles. And finally a series of small thumb pianos attach to the bridge, complete with their own built-in buzzers and based upon the design of Tanzanian llimbas – another instrument that Nathan has studied in depth. Altogether these things produce a dense counterpoint with qualities of surface and grain that lend a

kind of tangibility to transient sound – and by turns, the strings of the double bass seem to run through dry leaves, or nestle in a forest layer of natural materials and colour.

Nathan's will to expand the bass palette into this grainy area, clearly springs from years of his life led in Tanzania and Zambia. To suggest that his music bears the influence of that time understates the depth of that experience. His relationship with Tanzanian culture is one of bone deep mutual adoption within which music forms a part. This aspect of his sound surfaces occasionally in the recordings on this disc, but is for the most. part hidden, existing beneath the surface, fused into a unique voice. One occasion when this experience appears identifiably is in the track Resonator where filimbi flutes lead the texture. The colour and articulation of these

overtone flutes are unmistakeably Tanzanian in origin, but their music and function is new: the bass even finds its way towards behaving like a filimbi too. More often, the everyday reality of being changed by infusion in another culture exposes itself in subtler ways. We hear it manifest in the track Seeds. where the interplay of right and left hand shows more in common with the physical dexterity of playing Ilimba than traditional approaches to the bass. I wonder - how many listeners might recognise this without being prompted by knowledge of Nathan's history? The fact of the question testifies to his approach, whereby the effects of culture find primary resonance deep below the musical surface. This is work founded upon respect for traditions and cultural ownership, not as a constructed method of approach, but as a fundamental sensibility.

Looking back over his three major album projects beginning with *Under Ubi's Tree* (2008), through *Shaped By The Sea* (2013) and on to this album *Resonance*. I see a shift in musical trajectory which we catch sight of in these present recordings. Both the earlier recording projects exuberate with colour and rhythmic drive.

which although still present in *Resonance*, feels differently motivated. The earlier albums are richly orchestrated and often take the listener by the hand to dance or run at breakneck speed with the music. Again these qualities are still found here, but I feel that now the listener is more often invited to sit and listen closer; or take a slow walk around the pieces to examine them from many angles.

This quality needs to be captured faithfully. Thankfully our recording and mix engineer Mikko Haapoja also possesses the ears of a performer and field recordist. Experienced too in the world of art installations, he's no stranger to the unusual, and by the time he has finished preparing the studio, the double bass is necessarily surrounded by microphones – ready to be blended according to the specific needs of each composition.

This project documents several discoveries. Aside from experiments in extending the bass acoustically, we hear Nathan's ongoing collaboration with Otso Lähdeoja's live electronics. Instead of projecting his electronics through speakers, here Lähdeoja's sound is projected through the body of the double bass using speaker drivers physically attached to the instrument. In effect, the wood of the bass becomes both cone

and cabinet of a large speaker. imparting unique colouration to the sound. Thankfully these mildly invasive attachments are fitted to a new bass - not the old friend mentioned above. The relationship between bass and electronics we hear in the tracks Sonar Lines In The Air and Third Space Bass is a mix of both clear rhythmic association and connections that elude easy explanation. Sitting behind laptop and a web of inputs and outputs, any live electronics performer is destined to appear inscrutable, but even through these electrical interfaces Lähdeoja communicates a sensitivity of touch. His mastery enables their duo to articulate ideas with the same immediacy in communication as any acoustic pairing. After listening for a while, my face hurts a little from smiling.

Underpinning all three of the recording projects

mentioned above is the musical partnership between Nathan and percussionist Adriano Adewale; a collaboration that is difficult to articulate economically in words. Suffice to say that in combination they offer no distinction between hand and glove; the length and breadth of their collaboration is bound deeper within the music than ears can reach. This is the bedrock upon which Nathan has carefully curated the personnel for this recording, both in front of and behind the microphones.

These recordings present music for which the choice of musicians, engineers and producers is integral to compositional process. The group assembled is as broad as in previous projects but the ensembles are smaller – translucent studies in musical relationship that show us different modes of musical communication.

During a week in the studio these extraordinary people are introduced to me through the compositions – each piece crafted to illuminate a particular musical exchange. For Roots Of The Baobab Tree Nathan offers up a controlled hurricane of sheer joy in duo with Maija Kauhanen's kantele, dancing with irrepressibly euphoria around the bass. Invisible, for which Hildá Länsman has penned the Sami lyric, shows an astounding depth of feeling and colour in her voice and is as spacious a song

as I have encountered. **Petra Poutanen**'s voice and guzheng
in *Migration By Sea* brings a
muscularity and economy to
the measurement of time and
space that is at ease painting vast
architecture. Her pairing with
Nathan seems to be pushing at the
walls and ceiling of the studio in
search of wider space.

For my part, I arrived in Helsinki to work as co-producer with Adriano Adewale and was looking forward to a duo improvisation with Nathan at the end of the joblist. In practice, things turned out differently. My instrument was a small hard suitcase carrying a selection of springs ranging in dimension from short, thin wound lengths to long spiralling heavyweights. Springs assembled across their suitcase as a resonator were an instrument I had only just finished building - it had never before left the house: and after four days in the control

room it was my turn to play. Although we had collaborated on a piece a year beforehand by email and I had worked briefly on *Shaped By The Sea*, this was the first time I had played with Nathan in 10 years – and the tape rolled for the first note. One of the results is *Palm Oil & Chilli*.

After this, reluctantly I returned to the control room for the recording of *Ode To Nana*. Named as a homage to berimbau master Nana Vasconcelos. Ode gives us the Thomson/Adewale duo's finest experimental play. Taking us for a gentle ride they find a level of harmonic discourse that is extraordinary for such a pairing of bass and single stringed berimbau. On CD, this piece is truncated to suit context - the vinyl version however continues much longer through territory of extreme delicacy. Similarly, on vinyl you will find some other tracks in alternative versions

and with the special warmth of that medium. Listening to my old friends playing it was inevitable to feel overwhelmed by their gravitational pull. I had to join in, and *Laminar Flow* is a segment of the trio that resulted.

Meeting again as a trio, after 10 years spent migrating. building families and charting new paths; the conversation is different, the fingerprints the same. And as is ever the case, the enduring imprint of useful musical conversation lies beneath the aural surface: it can sustain the longest are of time. Creative musicians crave the kind of practical and intellectual challenges offered in making the works in these recordings. So there are many reasons why the mention of Nathan Riki Thomson amongst musicians will see them wreathed in smiles.

Simon Allen 21/05/2019

- 1. Cycles (Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared double bass, ankle shaker, vocals, stomp box
- 2. Oaidnemeahttun / Invisible (music: Thomson. Lyrics: Länsman) Hildá Länsman, vocals, joik Nathan Riki Thomson, double bass, ankle and hand shakers, vocals
- 3. Sonar (Allen / Lähdeoja / Thomson): Simon Allen, plucked and bowed springs / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared and augmented double bass. hand shaker

- 4. Ode to Nana (Adewale / Thomson): Adriano Adewale, berimbau / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared double bass
- 5. Seeds (Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, double bass, ankle shaker, vocals / Kasper Thomson, voice / Field recordings of native birds from Australia and New Zealand



- 6. Roots of the Baobab Tree (Kauhanen / Thomson): Maija Kauhanen, prepared kantele / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared double bass, ankle shaker / Adriano Adewale, additional shakers
- 7. Lines in the Air (Lähdeoja / Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared and augmented double bass / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics
- 8. Palm Oil and Chilli (Allen / Thomson): Simon Allen, bowed and plucked springs / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared double bass
- 9. Resonator (Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared and augmented double bass, ankle shaker, didjeridu, Wagogo overtone flute / Adriano Adewale, hand sounds / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics
- 10. Third Space Bass (Lähdeoja / Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared and augmented double bass, ankle and hand shakers / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics

- 11. Laminar Flow (Adewale / Allen / Thomson): Adriano Adewale, berimbau / Simon Allen, struck springs / Nathan Riki Thomson, double bass
- 12. Migration by Sea (Poutanen / Thomson): Petra Poutanen, vocals, guzheng / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared and augmented double bass
- 13. Resonance (Thomson): Petra Poutanen, vocals / Otso Lähdeoja, live electronics / Adriano Adewale, percussion, vocals / Nathan Riki Thomson, prepared double bass, ankle shaker, vocals
- 14 Lullaby (Thomson): Nathan Riki Thomson, double bass

Oaidnemeahttun / Invisible Sámi lyrics by **Hildá Länsman**

Savkkastalan jogain ajain sattocalmmiiguin, dola njuovccain aimmuin, eatnamiin oahpasiin, apmasiin gulahalan dalaeiin dolociin nu mii njuorranit libardit sajis mii ii leat, leat gostige lihkka leahkkime, min aiccamis sanit mat eai gavdno, leat leahkkime Savkkastalan jogain ajain sattocalmmiiguin, dola njuovccain

I am whispering with the river and pond with the grains of sand and tongue of fire with those who are familiar and those unknown I communicate with both present and ancient times so we move and flicker in a place that is not there, is nowhere, yet still exists sensed, instinctively words that can't be found, do exist I am whispering with the river and pond with the grains of sand and tongue of fire



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R S Q A E

