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Composer Stephen Goss at a Moscow performance. Read about his Park of Idols on page 8.

On the cover: autograph excerpts from Park of Idols by Stephen Goss, courtesy of the composer and Les Editions Doberman-Yppan.
Eclectic Influences: An In-Depth Look at Stephen Goss’s Park of Idols for Cello and Guitar

By Kimberly Patterson

Introduction
Despite the relatively small repertoire for cello and guitar, the duo offers a wide spectrum of sonic possibilities. In Park of Idols Stephen Goss explores these possibilities in a language that is at once accessible and intriguing. The work is a triumph in that Goss succeeds in extending technical and stylistic boundaries without sacrificing either the beauty or the depth to be found in the unique collaboration between the two instruments. Park of Idols is a kaleidoscopic pastiche that takes the cello and guitar through myriad styles of avant-garde rock, classical music, and jazz, creating a work that is sonically unpredictable yet always pleasing.

Praised by Classical Guitar Magazine as one of the most “interesting composers in Britain today,”2 Stephen Goss (b. 1964) is known for his striking guitar compositions as well as a growing number of chamber works and mixed media pieces. His music has garnered international praise for its creativity in mixing genres and styles. The International Record Review has stated that “despite the eclectic nature of his influences...Goss's musical language comes across as brilliantly integrated.”3 A guitarist himself, Goss was a founding member of the Tetra Guitar Quartet based in the United Kingdom and has also collaborated with such artists as Paco Peña and John Williams. He is currently Professor of Music and Head of Composition at the University of Surrey, United Kingdom.

Composed in 2005, Park of Idols was commissioned by cellist Leonid Gorokhov and guitarist Richard Hand. Upon commission, Goss asked for specific notable artists, albums, or compositions in any musical genre that they particularly admired. What Goss received was an extensive, wide-ranging list, spanning classical to progressive rock music. He then used the roster of artists and pieces to create a diverse collection of six musical tributes.

Park of Idols takes its name from a 1938 painting by the surrealist artist Paul Klee (Figure 1). To interpret the painting musically, Goss translated the words to mean a group, or “Park,” of musical heroes (idols). The musical idols from whom Goss drew inspiration include Frank Zappa, Dmitri Shostakovich, Pat Metheny, John McLaughlin, Allan Holdsworth, and Robert Fripp. Each of the six movements pays homage to one or more of these idols by quoting or referencing their music. The pre-existing material found within Goss’s composition can be extremely transparent or totally disguised among the notes. Some movements are almost complete transcriptions of compositions, while others are mere sketches or adaptations, referencing the material only slightly. Goss notes that in one movement in particular, “Cold Dark Matter,” the quoted material is “scattered, filtered, stretched and reassembled so that the original is only faintly suggested.”

Goss’s compositional interests are in the continuum that lies between transcription and composition and in the ways in which pre-existing material can be used to create unusual and interesting music. The practice of transcription is common in classical music, allowing composers to pay homage to their beloved musical heroes while imposing their own original style on the piece. Some arrangements even surpass the original composition in terms of popularity and artistry by unveiling the latent possibilities within the piece, Ravel’s orchestral arrangement of Mussorgsky’s

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1 Stephen Goss, Park of Idols (Newport, South Wales, UK: Cadenza Music, 2006); reissued by Les Éditions Doberman-Yppan (DO871), 2014.
4 Stephen Goss, “Inter-textuality in My Recent Music,” Composition Seminar, Lamont School of Music at Denver University (Oct. 2, 2006).
Pictures at an Exhibition being a prime example.

As Michael Russ points out, this work “would possibly not have gained its place in the musical canon, even as a piano work, had it not been for Ravel’s transcription.” Goss uses known material to shape his work; however, it would be inaccurate to say that his music surpasses the original. The original is simply shown through a new perspective, creating an exciting work for the underplayed medium of cello and guitar.

Since the rearranged movements of Park of Idols belong to an incredibly broad musical scope that ranges from Shostakovich to Zappa, one might wonder whether a common link binds the unique movements together. What relates each movement to the next has nothing to do with a continuing key, structure, or style, but rather with the inspiration that the idols provide. Therefore, musically speaking, each movement is a separate entity. Jonathan Leathwood, guitarist and lecturer at the University of Denver, candidly writes, “Park of Idols is an example of the kind of mixed bag that Goss delights in: a kind of anti-unity.”

Because the piece may be viewed as a disjointed or fragmented work, it encourages the listener to experience it as a musical journey, a sonorous ride through disparate genres and styles. Accordingly, Park of Idols can be classified as a set of miniatures, drawing upon the music of specific musical heroes.

Overview of Movements

Park of Idols (2005) for cello and guitar
A. “Jump Start”
B. “Cold Dark Matter”
C. “Fractured Loop”
D. “Malabar Hill”
E. “The Raw” (for solo guitar, originally from The Raw and the Cooked, 2004)
F. “Sharjah”

A. “Jump Start”
The opening movement, “Jump Start,” pays homage to Frank Zappa (1940–1993), a legendary electric guitarist, composer, and singer. Zappa composed not only in the rock and pop genre but also for classical orchestra. Musically, it is hard to classify Zappa’s style. Kelly Fisher Lowe writes:

It is difficult to label his music…Zappa’s stylistic complexity combined with a deep, varied, and extensive catalog of work, and an utter refusal to repeat himself musically while at the same time borrowing generously from his previous works (and thus creating a strange body of inter-textual work), makes it difficult, especially for the novice, to access and appreciate his work.8

A self-taught composer, Zappa experimented with an array of genres and styles, making his music sound original, distinct, and personal.

“Jump Start” is inspired by the harmonic vocabulary and quirky melodic sense that can be found in Zappa’s music. The harmonies are based on a chord sequence that Goss derived from various Zappa pieces, including “Project X” and “G-Spot Tornado.” Goss compiled the specific chords into a file entitled “Chord sequence for groove,” which served as the harmonic template for “Jump Start” (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Chord sequence for groove.9

Because Goss borrowed solitary chords from numerous Zappa pieces instead of transcribing a section of music, it is almost impossible to distinguish the original works that are referenced. The distinct jazz chords that Goss borrowed from Zappa’s pieces to form “Jump Start” combine 7th, 9th, stacked, and open chords.

“Jump Start” starts with a jolt: the guitar and cello strum boisterous chords, segueing into a soaring melodic cello line. The first section is an eccentric conversational exchange between the two instruments. The cello varies between singing a proud melodic line and percussive plucking, weaving in and out of rhythmic unison with the constantly strumming guitar. The middle section brings a more sensual side to the movement as the cello caresses long, flowing notes while the guitar wanders through twisting harmonies. The sinister yet exuberant finale section drives the movement to an exciting finish.

B. “Cold Dark Matter”

“Cold Dark Matter” borrows its name and takes inspiration from Cornelia Parker’s 1991 mixed media artwork, in which the artist reassembled the fragmented remains of a garden shed that was blown up with explosives by the British army.

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9 Stephen Goss, email to Kimberly Patterson, October 3, 2012.
The shards and pieces of the shed were then rearranged and wired, suspended around a single glowing light bulb (Figure 3).

In reference to the work, Stephen Goss writes, “I liked the idea behind Cornelia Parker’s sculpture—the idea of space in and around an exploded object. In the artwork, familiar objects are seen from an unfamiliar perspective.”

Goss’s “familiar object” in his “Cold Dark Matter” movement is Shostakovich’s 14th Symphony. A solemn and somber work, the symphony is based on eleven different poems, most of which detail death and the reluctance to greet one’s mortality.

The basis for Goss’s “Cold Dark Matter” is the first movement of the symphony, titled “De Profundis.” Set to a poem of the same name by Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), the movement takes inspiration from a lament for deceased lovers:

Those hundred lovers
are asleep forever
beneath the dry earth.
Andalusia has
long, red-colored roads.
Cordoba, green olive trees
for placing a hundred crosses
to remember them.
Those hundred lovers
are asleep forever.

Much like the symphony, Goss’s piece starts in a cold and icy manner. The cello is scored to play in a very high and quite unforgiving register in addition to playing pianissimo, dampened by a mute. The extreme register is exactly the same as the symphony, though Shostakovich uses the violins to sing his high-registered melody, a range better suited to the violin than the cello. The sheer height of the register can be incredibly uncomfortable for the cellist. However, it adds a sense of timidity to the distant and forlorn beginning.

Figure 4 shows the opening theme of “De Profundis.” This theme references the melody of Dies Irae (Day of Wrath), the well-known thirteenth-century Latin hymn that describes judgment day for the dead.

In Goss’s skeletal quote of the melody he retains the register as well as the initial dynamic. However, he omits the smaller neighboring notes that fill in the melody, thus highlighting the notes of tension (Figure 5). The effect emphasizes wide, disjointed leaps and chromatic steps. The rhythm is also augmented into slow, simple quarter and half notes, creating a sensation of lingering. These changes create a sense of suspension and spatial awareness, which correlates directly back to Cornelia Parker’s artwork.

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12 Stephen Goss, email to Kimberly Patterson, October 3, 2012.
A large portion of the movement consists of a question-and-answer dialogue between the cello and guitar. The dialogue, however, is not a robust and vibrant exchange of musical ideas, but a distant and almost introverted conversation. The distant feeling is true to Goss’s intentions, which were, as he writes, to “recreate that sense of space in the music with reference to the musical language of Shostakovich.”

C. “Fractured Loop”
“Fractured Loop” refers to Herbie Hancock’s 1964 jazz standard “Cantaloupe Island” from his Empyrean Isles album. The piece, which eventually became a classic in the jazz world, was later re-recorded with the Grammy award-winning jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, whom Goss imitates in “Fractured Loop.” “Cantaloupe Island” is a combination of funk, modal, and free jazz. Originally scored for piano, cornet, bass, and drums, the piece allows each melodic solo instrument to improvise freely over a subdued accompaniment. Nora Kelly observes: “Herbie Hancock…wrote [the tune] to sound more like improvisations than ensemble melodies, so that the warmth and fullness of a supporting instrument would not be missed…each instrument is allowed great flexibility of interpretation.”

Metheny’s improvisation in “Cantaloupe Island” is an incredible feat technically and musically. Compiling snippets of Metheny’s guitar solo, Goss reworks the fragments to form a shorter yet cohesive version of it. In order to highlight the guitar and the player’s mastery of the exquisite technique needed to perform the movement, the cello accompanies with a restrained, underlying funk pizzicato bass line. The result is a swing-type blues groove, locked with syncopated conversational rhythms (Figure 6).

D. “Malabar Hill”
The inspiration for “Malabar Hill” came from a 2003 tour featuring the T etra Guitar Quartet. Goss, a member of the quartet, toured with the group throughout the Middle East, the Far East, and India. While in India, the group resided in Malabar Hill, a residential area of Mumbai. Goss and Richard Hand, another guitarist of the quartet and dedicatee of Park of Idols, started to hold frequent improvisatory practice sessions. These sessions eventually produced some of the essential ideas for Park of Idols.

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15 Stephen Goss, Park of Idols (Cadenza), 8.
16 Stephen Goss, email to Kimberly Patterson, September 12, 2012.
18 Ibid.
19 Stephen Goss, Park of Idols (Cadenza), 11.
20 Stephen Goss, email to Kimberly Patterson, October 3, 2012.
“Malabar Hill” borrows its melody from a Mahavishnu Orchestra song entitled “Dawn,” from the 1971 album *The Inner Mounting Flame*. The Mahavishnu Orchestra was a jazz-fusion group led by John McLaughlin from 1971 to 1976 and again from 1984 to 1987. McLaughlin combined elements of classic Indian music, electric rock, and Western classical music to create an individual and unique sound.\(^{21}\)

In the original song “Dawn,” the electric guitar sings a beautiful melody over a slow jazz groove accompaniment. In Goss’s adaptation, the cello takes the melodic rein while the guitar accompanies with slow-moving chords, to be played in a “deadpan” style. The introduction of the trance-like chordal motive sets the perfect atmosphere for the tranquil and melancholic lament of the cello (\textit{Figure 7}).

While the cello takes the listener on a serene yet emotional journey, the guitar remains a source of emotionless stability. The “deadpan” instruction creates an intriguing juxtaposition of emotions: the stoic nature of the guitar chords versus the emotive and poignant melody of the cello. It is interesting to note that Goss’s arrangement of the song is a mere minute long (“Dawn” totals just over five minutes) and uses only a relatively small portion of the melody found in the original song.

**E. “The Raw”**

“Malabar Hill” segues into the only solo guitar movement of the piece, “The Raw.” Goss scores the guitar to play \textit{attacca}, transitioning smoothly from the fourth to the fifth movement. “The Raw” is originally from Goss’s 2004 work titled *The Raw and the Cooked* for guitar duo, a set of miniatures that references musical “greats,” like Park of Idols. As in *Park of Idols*, stylistic allusions in *The Raw and the*...
Throughout “The Raw” Goss captures a certain tonal ambiguity that constantly transports the listener to new and heightened musical realms. The harmonies twist and turn, leaving listeners to relinquish their expectations and accept the intriguing and mesmerizing sonorities. The composition becomes dreamlike and continues to evolve with incredible beauty.

F. “Sharjah”

The final movement, “Sharjah,” is a tribute to the progressive English rock band King Crimson and their song “Sartori in Tangier.” Formed in 1968, the band experimented with an array of musical genres including rock, jazz, folk, classical, psychedelic rock, and Indonesian gamelan music. “Sartori in Tangier,” from the band’s 1982 Beat album, was directly influenced by the 1950s beat generation. Those who followed the ideals of the beat generation strongly opposed conformity and encouraged self-expression and creativity. Notable beat figures include Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac.

Based on “Sartori in Tangier,” “Sharjah” imitates the guitar style of Robert Fripp. The cello line in particular is taken directly from the song’s guitar solo. In contrast to the song, the guitar in “Sharjah” is not the main voice but rather the accompaniment, playing a freshly minted part underneath the melody. Goss’s title, “Sharjah,” derives its name from the Middle Eastern city Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. The inspiration came during the 2003 Tetra Guitar Quartet tour and references the Middle Eastern flavor found in “Sartori in Tangier.”

“Sharjah” is a polyrhythmic movement in which the cello plays in a 12/8 compound meter while the guitar simultaneously plays in a simple meter of 4/4. Because of the metric variance, a cross-rhythm ratio of 3:2 is heard throughout the piece. The beginning of the movement appears in Figure 10.

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27 Stephen Goss, <i>Park of Idols</i> (Cadenza), 15.
28 Stephen Goss, email to Kimberly Patterson, October 3, 2012.
29 Stephen Goss, <i>Park of Idols</i> (Cadenza), 16.
The guitar introduces a steady yet syncopated rhythm, creating an uneasy but intriguing opening. A syncopated rhythmic style was quite common in the progressive rock genre. When the cello enters, the triplet notes sound compressed and untamed against the consistent and stable pulse of the guitar. Throughout the movement, the guitar holds the tempo, while the cello line runs wildly and dramatically ahead.

Harmonically, the piece tends to sound as if it has clear Middle Eastern roots because of the phrygian dominant scale, a scale extremely common in music of that region. The scale is distinctive because of the augmented second interval interspersed between the beginning half steps (See Figure 11).

However, Bill Bruford, drummer of King Crimson, insists that the piece was solely improvised and not composed with a particular mode or geographic region in mind. Below is an excerpt from an email exchange with Bruford:

Both tracks were essentially improvised, usually over a firm and steady foundation by stick player Tony Levin. Individual parts were not suggested or proposed by other members—you reacted to what was going on as the spirit moved, and either the track/idea made it to the album or was binned.

Whether or not the musicians had subconsciously dabbled in playing with the phrygian dominant scale, the piece is, nevertheless, clearly based on the mode. Consequently, both the melody and harmony sound exotic in musical flavor and sonority.

In Cornelia Parker’s artwork Cold Dark Matter, familiar objects are seen from an unfamiliar and new perspective, much as in the unfamiliar collaboration of cello and guitar. Goss incorporates a non-traditional medium into his compositional language to create a fascinating sonic world full of richness, intimacy, and spirit. His unconventional and alternative musical influences help to shape this piece into an evolving portrait of music through the ages.

31 Bill Bruford, email to Kimberly Patterson, September 16, 2012.
Hailed by the Chicago Sun Times as a “superb cellist,” Dr. Kimberly Patterson was the founding cellist for the Tesla Quartet, winners of the 2012 Fischoff Chamber Music Competition as well as prizewinners of the 2012 London International Quartet Competition and the 2013 Bordeaux International Quartet Competition.

She is the cellist of the Patterson/Sutton cello and guitar duo. Their debut album, Cold Dark Matter: Music for Cello & Guitar, was released by MSR records in 2013. Patterson is currently a member of the Colorado Symphony.

A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music with academic honors, Dr. Patterson earned her Master’s of Music Degree at the Juilliard School and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Colorado at Boulder.