

In 2018/19 I received a Finzi Trust Scholarship for a travel and composition project. I am very grateful to the trustees for their support. My proposal was for an in-depth musical response to mountain hares comprising three mini expeditions in Scotland and the Peak District, and the composition of a piece for chamber ensemble.

Gerald and Joy Finzi were keen naturalists and the trustees thought that they would have been interested. I was awarded £2,370 to cover travel, food and composition time. The composition, *Timidus* (after the Latin name for the mountain hare) is for violin, cello, piano and clarinet and is in two movements.

During each of the first two trips I spent nine days walking and camping in the northern reaches of the Cairngorms National Park, observing and learning about mountain hares. Most of my time was spent high up and alone but I had some planned and chance human encounters. Gradually I became more attuned to the presence of these elusive arctic animals. I saw them most days and wrote down musical ideas inspired by these encounters and my experiences in the landscape. I also uncovered more about societal reactions to mountain hare culling on shooting estates. For the final trip I spent three days in the northwest of the Peak District. I didn't see any hares but I found plenty of evidence and used the time to work on *Timidus*. What follows is an account of the three trips and the composition process.

DISCO BALL

Waiting

The mountain hare, *Lepus timidus*, is a survivor from the last ice age and is related to Arctic and Greenland hares. As the ice sheet retreated and the UK and Ireland became encircled by sea, mountain hare populations in these countries evolved to become two unique species: *Lepus timidus scoticus* and *Lepus timidus hibernicus*. Both are different from the brown hare, *Lepus europaeus* which arrived in the UK more than ten thousand years later, possibly during the Iron Age. There are small populations of mountain hares elsewhere in these islands, including in the Peak District where they were introduced for shooting.

Scottish and Irish mountain hares tend to live in unfarmed and upland terrain. Here they can eat a variety of grasses, herbs, bark from young trees and shrubs, small stems, buds and heather. These non-agricultural landscapes also provide cover and camouflage for them to lie in their 'forms' – very shallow indentations in the ground (see picture). Neither mountain nor brown hares burrow. They live above ground including when breeding and suckling. They avoid predators by staying still and downwind and by being remarkably camouflaged. As a last resort they will run. They can run at up to 45mph and have the ability both to turn sharply and leap high. Melodically speaking they are angular and can modulate fast! Compared to the majority of brown hares, mountain hares do this on uneven upland terrain, covering rocky scree and peat hags with remarkable speed and agility. They are also fortunate in having some of the best running ground on the dry, exposed mountain tops. This is especially the case in the Cairngorms where the retreating ice scraped the range into a great plateau with some mighty moguls around it. On a rare windless summer's day these tops can feel like playgrounds on top of the world; in winters they are some of the most exposed and wind-blasted terrains in the northern hemisphere.



Mountain hare 'form' in centre of picture. First trip.

Mountain hares have to deal not only with common predators such as foxes, buzzards, stoats and humans but also with mountain specialists such as golden eagle, pine marten and wildcat. They are also affected intimately by climate change. Whilst brown hares moult and maintain the same colour, mountain hares in Scotland change their 'pelage' three times a year: from smoky blue/brown to a similar colouring with patches of white; from 'patched' to fully white (though the ear tips stay black throughout); and from white to smoky blue/brown. In Ireland where there is less snow the mountain hare is more brown and russet, even 'golden'. Occasionally an Irish mountain hare will turn pie-bald, and only rarely fully white. In Scotland mountain hares are also called 'blue' hares. Blue hares become white, in tune with the twin forces of daylight hours and falling temperature. With the snows in the Cairngorms arriving thirty days later than fifty years ago, blue hares now find themselves caught out. As the days get shorter they change into their fully white coat, only for the temperature to hike and delay the snow. As I saw for myself, a snow-white hare on a brown landscape is easy picking for predators (see picture). Also, in the milder winters the parasitic ticks which feed on hares (and other animals including humans) are no longer killed by the cold. Considering that one hare can 'host' more than a thousand ticks, this is an issue.



Small mountain hare caught out by climate change. Second trip.

For both of the first two trips I took the sleeper train from Euston to Aviemore, in the Cairngorms National Park, Northeast Scotland. Cairngorms National Park is the largest and most recent of the UK national parks. It is unique among them in that it is a conglomeration of mostly private landed estates, each of which has significant autonomy, and many of which offer commercial shooting and fishing. It is a national park by collaboration, and it protects a vast area that is the only truly arctic landscape in the UK. The Cairngorms are high enough and cold enough to have at least some snow patches throughout the year and they host within the plateau and massive folds the UK's largest population of blue hares.

I had always been fascinated by European brown hares during my childhood in the countryside of East Worcestershire. When I was at university I read Seamus Heaney's translation of a Middle English lyric from the late 13th century. The original poem is attributed to a Shropshire family and is in the form of an incantation or 'litany'. The hunter must recite this on first seeing a hare. Only if these *seventy-seven* names are called might the hare be delivered into the hunter's power and the cooking pot. It struck me as similar to a magpie incantation from my childhood. 'Good morning, Mr Magpie, and how's your wife?' we would chant so as not to be cursed by bad luck. Here was Heaney finding in the brown hare mystery, heft, and so many sides. 'And now, Sir Hare, good-day to you' follows an incredible rhythmic litany which includes names such as: the starrer; the stubble-stag; the long lugs; the stook-deer; the wild one; the hug-the-ground; the lurker; the race-the-wind; 'the sudden start, / the shake-the-heart...' and 'the creature no one dares to name.'

Ten years after reading this poem I was sixty miles northwest of Aviemore in the central Highlands. I was walking with my sister in a snow blizzard on one of the Munros that march along the north shore of Loch Mullardoch in Glen Cannich. Visibility was ten feet and hearing was even less. We were ensnared in snow and my sister was walking just ahead of me. She turned and put up a hand to signal a halt while pointing with her other to the ground at her feet. Sitting in its form was a white mountain hare. I approached cautiously to stand beside her. It seemed strange to me that the hare didn't move. In the relative silence of us pausing in the gale while the snow spun around us, the hare looked both of us in the eye and we three shared something. Then, slowly, it turned and walked away.

In severe cold animals will reduce their movements in order to conserve energy. Birds won't fly, if at all possible. I've seen a blackbird cross the corner of snowy field in Warwickshire with such a slow wingbeat that its collapsing flight path is more like the sine-wave of a low note. For all animals, however, saving energy is forgotten in a crisis. The ancient impulses of hide, fight or flee kick in. A mountain hare can make a 'sudden start' across snow (see picture) yet our hare could not have looked less concerned by us. In fact it seemed in control of the encounter, while we were the startled ones.

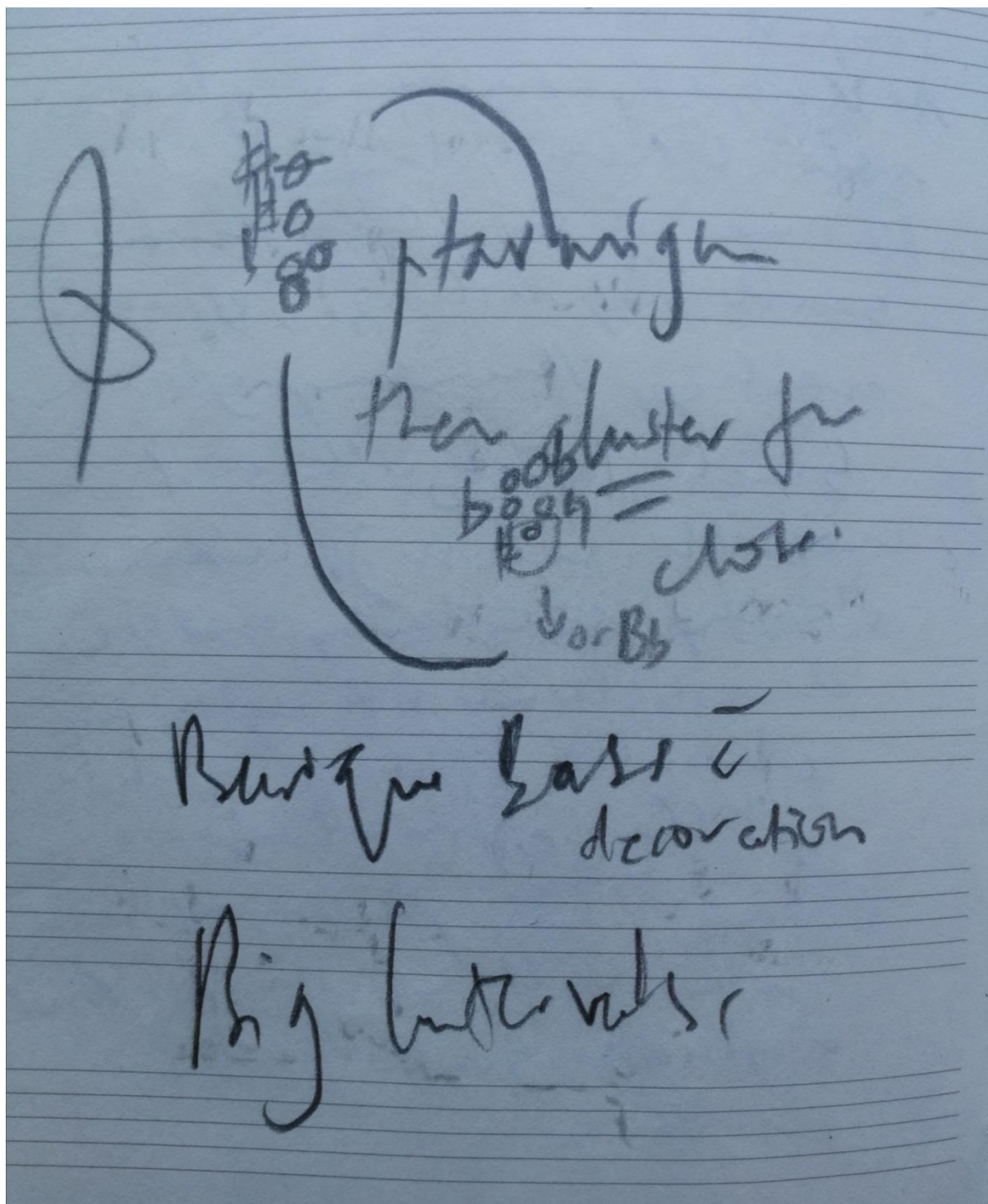


A Scottish mountain hare (not yet fully white). © Andy Howard

It is possible our hare had never seen humans before. Glen Cannich is remote, and that northern flank of Munros even more so. Some hares don't live even one full year, and most only for two or three (although there is one documented case of a wild mountain hare living for eighteen years!). Also, I don't remember ever having met another human on those particular Munros. And finally

mountain hares are not shot by gamekeepers or paying clients in Glen Cannich. So it is possible that in the eyes of that hare we were an unknown and unthreatening species.

In truly remote places, where humans are either unknown or not associated with threat in intergenerational memory, their acceptance by animals can be surprising and disarming. After the encounter in Glen Cannich I experienced this in East Greenland. Greenland has a strong folk tradition of humans and other animals relating and shape-shifting. Take a bird such as the ptarmigan. In the Scottish highlands you would be lucky to see any. They'll see you before you see them and they'll hide or whirr away, because they know that humans have shot them for hundreds of years. In East Greenland, however, by the calving face of the remote Knud Rasmussen glacier, our climbing team of five came across a small flock of ptarmigan in a close-cropped patch of jewel-coloured heather. The birds remained at ease just ten feet from us and grazed the heather while we chatted with the theatre of the valley behind us. This sociable little covey regrouped themselves every now and again into different clusters. I turned these clusters into chords for *The Singing Glacier* (see photograph). It wasn't just the ptarmigan in Greenland. On the same trip there was an endearing arctic fox cub who danced in our company and seemed to be surprised when we didn't join in!



Ptarmigan chords. Knud Rasmussen glacier, East Greenland, 2016

Another hare encounter finally tipped me into composing a piece. Shortly before the Greenland trip I was up Mount Shehy in Co. Cork on a blue-skied day in July. At the top I had enjoyed the view of the sparkling western coastline, with its endless inlets, and the myriad greens in the tight patchwork of fields inland. As I was descending the lip of the hill into the seclusion of the mountain range I disturbed two large russet-gold forms. They rose up side-by-side and, staying glued like this, pushed through the vegetation. They were close enough for me to hear the texture of their contact with the heather and coarse grass. Strangely they stayed in tandem as if the flank of one were part of the other. The Shehy range takes its name from the Irish *Cnoic na Seithe*, meaning 'Hills of the Animal

Hides', so perhaps the hill was used to this hide-to-hide synchronicity, for this was a flow of ginger-gold. They turned, keeping the same glued formation, then doubled back before splitting to break the horizon behind me. Throughout this cunning manoeuvre, I recognised them as foxes ... then huge hares ... then foxes! I had to challenge my mind to accept the long ears and short tails. Only then did I realise that I had seen the fabled Irish mountain or 'golden' hare. Of course, if I had been hunting, their strategy would have confused me and saved the life of at least one. As it was, they just outwitted me on all counts!

Finally, since returning from the Cairngorms and Peak District trips, I have had an encounter which has also challenged my idea that lack of contact might lead to greater intimacy between animals and humans. I was in East Hertfordshire, where you would expect that every brown hare has seen a human. Admittedly this is a little-known and particularly remote valley that has been lost to time for decades while it awaits the building of 10,000 houses ('Harlow and Gilston Garden Town'). I sat at the edge of a cabbage field and held my breath as a large brown hare emerged out of the cover of bluey green leaves. The black and white flowers were particularly suited to merge with the black tips of the hare's ears. But when it revealed itself fully the iridescent browns of its fur were like a painting. It approached me and stopped at a distance at which we could have reached to touch. We stared at each other for some time. When it walked on I had the strange feeling that we could have spoken. Or that we had, in some way.

In the Cairngorms blue hares have to be alert to humans. Private estates in the national park that manage their grouse for commercial shooting will often kill over a thousand blue hares a year. Yet, despite my being a predator species, during my two trips there I experienced these 'direct' eye-to-eye encounters. I was even more surprised to hear Andy Howard's stories. Andy lives near Inverness. He is the author of *The Secret Life of the Mountain Hare*. I was lucky to attend his book launch in the Inverness branch of Waterstones at the end of my first trip. Andy has spent the last four years getting close to blue hares in the Cairngorms. His process is guided by acceptance which he earns by extraordinary patience. He has a high threshold for cold. He will lie in snow in the vicinity of a hare for up to four hours. Gradually, both he and the hare relax. Over weeks and months getting to know a particular hare he will get so close that he could touch it - not that he would. Over recent years he has built up relationships with individual hares and taken photos of remarkable intimacy and understanding. At the end of my second trip we sat in TGI Fridays in Inverness, shared stories and discussed how I would evoke these animals through music. We also talked about the possibility of collaborating in the future on a new project about sea otters.

Watching

It was cold when I arrived at Aviemore early in the morning of October 17th 2018. I treated myself to a cooked breakfast at the Cairngorm Hotel while waiting until it was late enough to call Andy and also Anna Fleming. At the time Anna Fleming was Education and Inclusion Officer for Cairngorms National Park. We had been introduced online by the poet Helen Mort, with whom I had journeyed to Greenland and created *The Singing Glacier*. Anna runs a blog called *The Granite Sea*; she contributes to *The Guardian* and *Caught by the River* and her debut book is published later this year. It's called *Time on Rock: A Climber's Route into the Mountains*. She suggested that she pick me up at Nethy Bridge to the northeast of Aviemore and we begin the walk together. I caught a bus there and then we drove a few miles up a ribbon road to Dorback Lodge where the road stops. Leaving her car beside a sign that warned of deer culling and high calibre rifles, we stepped onto the heather and into the hill.

Anna couldn't speak about mountain hares on behalf of Cairngorms National Park because hare-culling in the park had become a hot topic, sparking demonstrations outside the Scottish Parliament

and coverage in the national press. She could speak as a writer, climber and mountaineer, however, who had seen hares many times.

Just south of the grand old lodge building, we crossed the sandy flats and Dorback Burn, then joined a vehicle track on the southern side which led up into the mountains in a south-easterly direction. After a time it brought us to a shallow crossing of a smaller burn called Allt na h-Eirgh which cuts a surprisingly deep cleft down the long slope of a mountain called Geal Charn. At the crossing the burn widens and turns a corner towards the flats beyond. There were large bleached rocks and a few old Caledonian pines, one of which stood sentinel on the bend. The scene had something in it from Walter Scott, at least in comparison to the wider surroundings where bare mountains and commercial conifer plantations dominated. We left the burn and followed the track higher. Then we left the track and began the ascent proper of Geal Charn. After tramping through deeper heather on a steeper incline we stopped for lunch on a rock that stood alone in the heather sea. I shared with Anna my enthusiasm for the Heaney poem that I've already quoted and which she didn't know; and she told me of George Ewart Evans' classic book, *The Leaping Hare* which has become a favourite.

In the quiet we looked back towards that distant and picturesque Caledonian pine on the corner by the burn. Anna described how, the previous winter, she had walked there in snow and noticed a white mountain hare sitting beneath it. The hare watched her unceasingly while she ate her lunch by the frozen waters. As we looked around and behind us to the heights, back down across the sandy flats to Dorback Lodge and away over the autumn-coloured brashy bogs towards Inverness, I asked Anna a question. How would she represent the mountain hare on stage?

After she left her job with the National Park her next article for *Caught by the River* touched on this conversation. (I have changed 'seven days' to 'nine days' for accuracy's sake!) In this article she also addresses the issue of hare culling, immediately after which she writes:

The controversy and uncertainty around hares is perhaps a new iteration of the ancient, complex relationship between man and hare. 'The Names of the Hare', a Middle English poem from the thirteenth century (translated by Seamus Heaney) highlights conflicting human attitudes and understandings of the hare. The poem is a huge litany of hare names: 'the jumper, the rascal, the racer'; 'the hug-the-ground, the lurker, the race-the-wind, the skiver'. Like an annual for a disruptive year group, the names capture the multiplicity of the hare's character and behaviours. The poem also gestures to our troubled relationship with hares, a long cultural history of not quite knowing where to place them. With this uncertainty comes superstition – tales of omens, hauntings and fire. I suspect that the wealth of hare nicknames is because their proper name was taboo. Like Lord Voldemort, perhaps direct naming was considered dangerous – a linguistic avoidance that in turn increases the hare's enigmatic power. In the Cairngorms, Gaelic place names refer to many animals: Allt Bheadhair (Burn of the Adder), Creag a'Chait (Cliff of the Wildcat), Creag nan Sionnach (Rock of the Foxes); there are none for geàrr or maigheach, the hare.

George Ewart Evans, a writer who collected hare folk stories from around Britain, suggests that our troubled relationship with hares exists because they are an archetype. Hares crop up in ancient art and stories all over the world, dating as far back as 12,000 years ago, when someone etched a hare into the limestone walls of Grotte de Gabillou. Evans proposes that the hare is an ancient mythical symbol that humans used to understand themselves: hares play 'an interpretive role, being as it were mirrors wherein [man] sees his own moods, his own virtues, his own vices.' (*The Leaping Hare*, p. 239).

Recently, I met Bill Carslake, a composer and hare enthusiast who is starting a new project marrying his two interests: composing music inspired by mountain hares. At the start of his research journey (nine days of hiking and camping in hare-country), we walk into the hills, talking hares, behaviour, superstition and gamekeepers. We settle on a boulder – a solid lichened lump in a sea of brown heather – and share stories of profound personal encounters. I point to the Scots pine where I lunched with the hare.

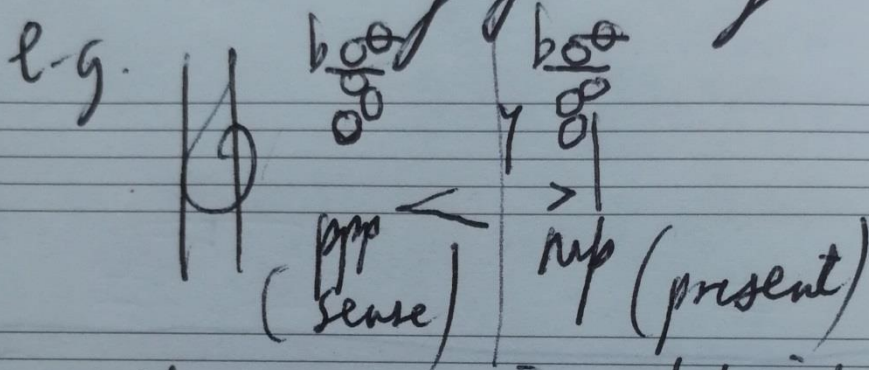
As we sup tea in the cold wind, Bill asks, “How would you represent a mountain hare on the stage?” I pause, turning the unusual question over like a pebble in my mind and a surprising metaphor leaps out. A disco ball. Hares catch the eye in a dazzle of (almost ridiculous) movement. The hare’s myriad nature – running, hiding, watching, relaxing, frisking, quaking, yawning, bathing – are flashes of a thousand glittering faces. And beneath this reflective exterior, something is hidden. There is always an aspect of the hare that remains unseen, unknown. They are creatures of the mountain.

With the analogy of a ‘disco ball’ spinning in my mind, it was time for us to part. Anna’s wine-red hat and dark curls bobbed into the distance until parts of the heather itself. I finished the tea and headed up Geal Charn. Later, at a higher and colder altitude, I turned to take in the wider breadth of the view. To my surprise a magnificent rainbow dominated the valley, ready, like a medieval bow, to pull music out of the land (see picture). I thought again of the disco ball and its light refractions. I notated a ‘rainbow chord’ (see picture) - which was to become a significant feature of the piece - and continued up the hill.



Rainbow on Day One of first trip. Dorback Lodge is in the distance on the other side of the yellow flats, in the path of the rainbow. The cleft of Allt na h-Eirigh is visible under the rainbow but not the crossing with the sentinel pine.

1st day continued - The
rainbow. Chord, that
starts very faintly,



as it grows, just add pitches,
not different notes.

Regular heather burning by gamekeepers is a very common feature of the Cairngorms landscape. If you look at satellite imagery of the national park on Google Earth you will see a mighty patchwork of darker and lighter green strips, with the odd black one where there has been a recent burning. The guidance agreed by the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs is that these fires burn: with the wind direction; no more than 30 metres wide - with 55 metres as a maximum; a maximum

area of two hectares. There is further guidance on the frequency of burning, and the following note on why the highest parts must not be burned. In contrast to the mountain's bowels, flanks and shoulders, the brows, crowns and crests can be: 'particularly exposed to the wind (or salt-spray) with severely wind-pruned vegetation, mostly forming a prostrate and sometimes sparse mat less than 10 cm thick'.¹

I reached the shoulder of Geal Charn and found myself watched from a distance by a parcel of hinds to the south. In the watery late-afternoon light they were framed by the vast and rocky drop of Glen Loin behind, to the South, with the heights of Glen Avon beyond that. They turned down into Glen Loin and disappeared. I turned too but to the East and, reaching the crown of Geal Charn, I walked with ease along the flat upland between it and Geal Charn Beag, enjoying huge views to the south and firm ground underfoot. This 'prostrate' vegetation is so wind-blasted that it hugs the shallow soil hard, and makes for fantastic walking. In my newly buoyant state I thought, now, surely, I will see the first hare.

These remote tops are away from the tourist trail and un-trampled by humans. They provide less nutrition for the deer and grouse than the ground lower down. Yet for sheer variety of vegetation, a mountain crown like this can be hard to beat. There are miniature willow and birch trees which, at a height of one inch, still provide red and gold autumn leaves to catch the light. Tall yellow grasses and squat banks of red sorghum moss are offset by white lichens set on scattered rocks which catch the sun and glint with embedded flecks of quartz.

For a virtuoso of concealment like the mountain hare this elevated tundra provides 360° views and the perfect ground for escaping by running. Yet after walking two miles further eastwards I was still, to my eyes at least, alone on the hill. Even within the distinct view of my binoculars I tricked myself many times into thinking I was staring at one. As the light faded on the plateau I dropped via steep deer tracks into an enormous gully between Geal Charn Beag and Carn na Ruabraich. Yellow birch and exposed heather roots clung to the vertiginous sides, as did I, as I descended deep into a stag-loud glen. At my intrusion their bellows punctuated the gathering night, and the silence after each blast strengthened deepened the seclusion and solitude. I picked my way to the gully floor and pitched my tent by the river, out of energy and a long way out of reception. Soon I was clambering up the steep side right above my tent in the blackness, without my compass, relying on my head-torch and the stars for positioning, broaching clinging to great bristling eyebrows of heather. I needed so much to get high enough for phone reception and contact with my girlfriend. It took me much further up than I had imagined but what a relief, eventually, to find those one or two 'bars' of reception by holding the phone into the sky and to exchange some words with her.

On the way down I got lost and berated myself for not taking the compass. Finally I tumbled into the tent and reflected on 'Day One' of the trip. No hares seen. That morning in the hotel at Aviemore I had rung Andy. 'You can count on it', he said, 'at any one time, there will be at least fourteen watching you'. I liked this precision detail. Undoubtedly Anna and I had been watched. Was it that our talking had had the effect of telegraphing my presence for the rest of the day? At 6ft 5inches with a large rucksack, was I too obvious? Or was it that I was not yet tuned in?

The second day began with sun. Lots of it. Warm in the glen, the trees blazing autumnal colours and the river glittering – the glen a channel of beauty charged to explode. Crossing the river involved some dicey traversing of a rock face to reach a place where I could cross via stones rather than take off my boots and wade. On the eastern side I climbed an extremely steep corrie, sometimes having to rely on the heather roots for holds - never a good idea and especially not with a heavy rucksack. Relieved I reached the top and walked some distance on the new plateau. Up here, exposed to the

¹ *The Heather and Grass Burning Code (2007 version)*. Defra and Natural England. London: 2007, page 7

wind, it was significantly colder. At some point I stopped and looked back to the craggy walls on the far side of a chasm a hundred yards south of where I had camped. A golden eagle lifted from my side and crossed the hidden river in a few easy beats. At the other side it rested, tall and imposing, on a rock surrounded by heather and looked back towards me. Through my binoculars it seemed almost as large as the stags that had bellowed the previous evening. I watched the sentinel, and I have no doubt the sentinel watched me.

Writing

Shortly after seeing the eagle, as I walked east, I saw my first hare. It ran from me, the white on the top of its tail lit by the sun, running with graceful phrasing as it turned a little this way, a little that. Of all the hares I was to see, the movement of this one was for me the most fluid. Or perhaps the gift of seeing one released in me a pure focus that simply watched - I can still see it now. Here are the notes I made, my writing spidery because of the cold:

Day 2

1st sighting.

Tall, duncerly,

gamine, light,

bouncy.

grey, bits of white.

2nd sighting.

"There he goes"

Florence. Big. Head
held high ~~over~~
whiter than the 1st.
50 yards.

Over the next eight days my notebooks filled with these depictions of hares. Here, in a sunlit meadow of mosses on a high ridge, a nut-brown athlete bursts from my feet in an almost hard-to-credit thrust of acceleration and muscle-mass, flattening the hillocks in its path. In *The Leaping Hare* George Ewart Evans and David Thomson describe this late and sudden starting of the hare. 'If you

approach a rabbit cautiously, he will run towards his burrow immediately he sees or hears you. A hare will wait watching you until you are almost upon her, and then with one bound, long and high, start leaping away, her hind legs reaching out before her forelegs at each leap...'. In my experience it is not always a long and high first leap, it is just a large-hearted ability to begin extremely fast. The heart of the hare is in fact very much larger in proportion to its body size than in rabbits and many other animals. In rabbits the heart represents about 0.3% of the body weight; in humans it is 0.5%. In hares it is more than double that: 1 - 1.8%! 'The size of the heart and volume of blood, together with the long hind legs and powerful loins account for the exceptional speed and powers of endurance of the hare' (H. G. Lloyd, correspondence quoted in Evans, Thomson, *The Leaping Hare* 1972). Earlier that same day a joker, nearly fully white, jumps from my feet. It has great tufts of hair around its eyebrows, and it has been hidden in an abundant bed of dark green, thick heather. How did I not notice this whiteness?! It executes a peculiar loose-limbed dance, first one way then back, even springing towards me, before running away and disappearing into a heather hollow just ten feet from me. No amount of looking or waiting discovers it.

I believe that this kind of surprise jumping and doubling-back may be similar to the techniques of distraction used by stoats. In speed and ferocity a stoat is like a miniature cheetah. But just before the kill it throws in a brilliant trick. As it closes in on a rabbit, it will suddenly toss itself in the air, land on its back, jump and writhe, and give its all in a bizarre dance routine. This hypnotises the rabbit into an astonished, wide-eyed stasis, and makes the subsequent kill a simple affair. I doubt very much whether hares are susceptible to this as they are incredibly intelligent. In fact I felt that, once more, I was the bamboozled one in the encounter – arrested in my tracks by hare skill. Hares are, on the whole, extremely solitary animals from the moment they are born. Leverets emerge fully furred and with their eyes open. Within a day or two they are separated by their mother and each is left alone in its own 'form', visited by the doe only for suckling, and ensuring the highest chance of survival for the leverets. So how and where do they share all these skills of trickery?

After my trips were completed I read of one aspect of hare life in *The Leaping Hare* that connected with a question that had been hanging in my mind. On the second day of the first trip I came across hundreds of hare pellets around a medium-sized rock in a superb position overlooking The Neilead and the River Avon. The Neilead is a grand 200ft escarpment running north-northwest from a big lonely house at Inchrory towards Tomintoul. The remoteness – with one unpaved dusty track stretching four miles and running the gauntlet of rock-falls to the house – resembles the perfect hideout for a James Bond villain; and the views above and beyond it are spectacular. Up here by the hare rock there was some exposed and closely-cropped grass surrounding it but I didn't think it could account for so many hares gathering here. They will certainly congregate in large numbers to eat at night, but I had a feeling this place had something else to it. Might this be a gathering place for other reasons? In *The Leaping Hare* I found – in this highly erudite, deeply researched and grounded book – a similar query: '...on some occasions they appear to hold meetings the purpose of which is unknown' (*The Leaping Hare*, p. 27)

During my second trip, in the snows of December I saw white hares running over huge peat hags, demonstrating an almost unbelievable speed and lightness of touch. They soared over the snowy monuments and appeared too soon on the next horizon, it seemed to me. At full speed the forelegs of a mountain hare often don't touch the ground. Instead they paddle the air while the all-powerful hind legs tilt the hare into flight. I came across hare carcasses that had been shot, and marvelled at the length of the hind legs and feet. Musically what is inspirational is their ability to switch from stillness to sudden, virtuosic speed, and back. With their coat-changes, their varieties of physique between individuals, their ability to disappear and appear, mountain hares embody flux – and for me they embody that profound musicality that Heaney found in the natural world. In one of his earlier

poems, *Song*, from the collection, *Field Work* (1979) he refers to '...that moment when the bird sings very close / To the music of what happens.'

In 2013 Heaney wrote his final poem, *In Time*, a heart-breaking piece dedicated to his toddler granddaughter, with whose barefoot 'toddler wobbles' he dances with while 'Listening to Bach'. He tenderly invokes the 'Energy, balance, outbreak / At play for their own sake' in her and sees her 'years from now / (More years than I'll be allowed)'. For now, he and she 'foot it lightly / In time, and silently'. 'Energy, balance, outbreak / At play for their own sake' seems to me an essential element in mountain hare. This element of play in mountain and brown hares is dwelt upon in some depth by Ewart Evans and Thomson in *The Leaping Hare*. Why else, they ask, do hares race alongside aeroplane when they take off at airports around the world? (And why, they ask, do they 'indulge in the curious drumming with their paws on the ground?') Of course hares are not alone in this instinct of racing for fun. There is a wonderful story in James Macdonald Lockhart's *Raptor* (2016) about a pilot who was flying down the east coast of Greece. The pilot 'recorded being overtaken by a golden eagle while the aircraft was travelling at 70 knots [80.5 mph]. As the eagle passed the plane at a distance of 80 feet the bird turned its head to glance at the aircraft before it eased past it at a speed, the pilot estimated, of 90 mph.'

In both the Cairngorms trips I experienced the mutual watching that I have already described in other encounters. I don't know if I was accepted in the way that Andy describes; I certainly wasn't as close or as relaxed. Yet, at times, I experienced a mutual settling into connection within the huge spaces around us. At the end of the first trip I experienced a surprising double connection. By crawling upwind I had got close to a large hare. It had a head that was big and jowly like a dog's. It frowned and stared at me in a manner that brought to mind a Roman general assessing his legionaries. I was close enough to have the strange experience of its face and eyes filling the sights of my binoculars and watching me. As I was settling into these big amber orbs my sixth sense told me of a larger presence nearby. I looked up. Above and to the left of the hare, where the ground rose towards the horizon, there lay broadside in the sun a golden stag. He was magnificently beautiful and was a very unusual yellow gold colour. He had tight skin, the muscle-tone of a Great Dane, twelve-point antlers and was in absolutely peak condition. He was the most impressive and unusual stag I've ever seen and, unnervingly, he also didn't take his eyes off me either. The golden stag chord sequence is introduced in the second movement of *Timidus* and was to be marked by the entry of the French horn.

My intention was to score *Timidus* for wind quintet. I had in mind the American ensemble, 'The City of Tomorrow' which specialises in contemporary music. I had met the members when I held a composing residency at Banff in 2012. We talked about collaborating, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity. I had a niggling doubt, however, as to whether I could write 'into' the mountains just with wind instruments. I'm sure it would be possible but I felt the need for more earthiness in the sound-world. It was only during the third trip, in the Peak District, that it became clear that I needed to write for clarinet, violin, cello and piano – the fabled combination for Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. I had been arranging my three *Particles* for this instrumentation for Alisios Camerata of Zagreb, and I had fallen in love with the sense of ground and space. The lower ranges of these instruments provide grit and heft yet they all have bright upper reaches. The high strings can evoke the wind and the combination of piano and clarinet is a gift for space. Also the clarinet is able to carve silence in a unique way, whittling the blur between sound and no sound, or imposing noise as harshly as any eagle. I knew by now that wind, space and silence would be vital energies in the piece and was happy to resolve on this combination.

There are sacrifices in this grouping which I still feel. The rainbows that I saw in the first two trips were already significant by then, and the 'rainbow chord' features in both movements. I hear this

chord expressed so clearly by wind quintet. Then there is the ease with which a wind quintet could evoke the wind! There's also a loss of ephemerality in the current grouping and I attribute this to the piano. There is something so solid and lasting about a piano. And then there is the loss of the French horn... I feel this the most. I have in fact included an optional part for the horn to enter in the second movement when the golden stag appears.

In his 2009 book, *The Master and his Emissary* Iain McGilchrist (consultant psychiatrist and English professor at Oxford) challenges theories that the two halves of the brain work with separate functions. He demonstrates how both hemispheres share all responsibilities. Over breakfast at a friend's house he asked me to imagine myself as a small bird. I am to focus intently on a seed on the ground. My senses draw purposefully down via the sharp point of my beak, with which I shall, with pinpoint accuracy and great speed, pick up and eat the seed (traditionally a 'left hemisphere' activity). At the same time I am consciously a prey target, so my senses are as globally aware as the land and my head and body shape will allow (traditionally a 'right hemisphere' activity). I am, if you like, simultaneously master, object and story-teller. In my limited experience, settling into circumspection with a seer like the mountain hare and integrating both sides of the brain into global absorption was a feeling of calm alertness... of merely being an animate part of it all. My deepest experience of this was when doubly observed by the hare and the stag. I think this may be because while the hare was in a sense the thing I sought, I felt so deeply seen by the golden stag as to be targeted.

Hares have quite narrow heads and huge eyes and their field of vision is remarkable. There are probably still people who can achieve the almost improbable 'plucking' of a hare. There is a point or blind spot, directly behind its head, that the hare cannot see. The art is to approach the hare from behind, downwind and silently – which is almost impossible – then pick it up by plucking the hair of its neck between thumb and forefinger. My grandmother was once presented with a hare plucked for the pot in this way. My hope is that once a group has performed *Timidus* once its members will try rehearsing and performing it in a hemispherical seating position, so that each player is only in eye contact with one other player. In this way I hope to relay the hare's multiple gazes and also to draw the audience's attention into the spaces between the players' sightlines.

Wind is a spirit-partner to anyone outdoors. It can ease your ascent or it can lift you off your feet, throw you to the ground and smash your assumptions apart. It can change a walk on a flat mountain-top into a physical and emotional endurance challenge, or caress your face and hair. It is also the great modulator of temperature. If you were to close your skin on a mountain-top, your eyesight might register sunshine and expect warmth. But the additional wind-chill factor can cut through the best and thickest gloves and make simple manual tasks like flicking a lighter almost impossible. One evening on the first trip I was caught out like this, unable to light my stove for some time. For the second trip I made sure I packed an extra-large lighter that can be activated with a fist! Wind can also rub out silence and create a type of sound torture. This is often magnified by today's synthetic materials. With a hood wrapped tightly around your ears and chin your inner experience can be unrelenting scratching. This can be especially tiring if there is no lull in the wind. Before coming to the Cairngorms I had indeed experienced winds that had picked me up, especially in the west of Ireland. I had been warned about the strength of the Cairngorm winds. What no one had mentioned, however, was their constancy. As much of the Cairngorms range is high plateau there is *nothing* to break the wind's path. If you are up there you are merely incidental to it.

On the second trip in December I decided to follow roughly the same route as the first, and to note the seasonal contrasts. I was walking eastwards again towards the Lecht ski area late one afternoon. I had just negotiated my way past the 'Bond villain' house at Inchrory. The light was fading and the wind was running high and fast, increasing in fierceness as the evening drew in. I was relieved at the

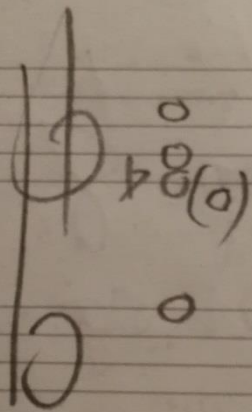
prospect of camping in the shelter of an abandoned croft called Lagganauld which lies at the head of a pass above the house. The wind was shrieking along this mountainous throat that reaches all the way from the Forest of Glen Avon in the West only finally to dissipate in the wide valley of Uisge na Meann beyond Lagganauld. Reaching the L-shaped croft I walked around its grey, rendered walls, confident of finding shelter in the courtyard at the elbow corner. To my surprise and annoyance the wind reached down and pulverised every recess. Disheartened I headed down the pass to find shelter nearer the big house. As I descended the pass the noise of the gale found a new resonance. It was as if I were walking along the central reservation of a major motorway that was in full spate without a hint of gaps between the vehicles. Lower down I found a stand of hazel bushes and pitched the tent. I was well beneath the path of the wind, or so I thought. It was now screaming incessantly. During the night it found my hiding place, reached down and, with a casual flick, flung the pegs from the ground.

The second movement of *Timidus* includes an attempt to evoke this wind. I have tried to assemble component energies in order to bring it about. I am always inspired by the 20th Century Polish composer, Witold Lutoslowski. I love his ability to create a natural result via many particulars. You could say that he whole-heartedly embraces entropy. As the pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, said in his 2006 BBC Reith Lectures, 'all music dies'. Every phrase re-enters the eternal silence, and every instrumentalist feels the need to breathe. This was what made the Cairngorms winds so incredibly humbling: they didn't need to take a breath. Of course they did, but it was on a timescale beyond imagining. As a reminder of the wind's power, towards the end of composing the wind sequence in the second movement I lost my way for many months and couldn't work out how to continue.

In addition to the music inspired by the experiences of being in the wind and the mountains; of seeing hares and rainbows and the golden eagle; *Timidus* also includes 'found music'. In a similar way that 'found poetry' does not alter or add to the words that are re-used (though it may alter their order) my approach to 'found music' is always to quote it first in the key in which I encountered it. The wind blowing across the cylinder of a signpost at Corgarff Castle in Cock Bridge produced a chord (see picture). Apart from being a beautiful chord, it was a reminder to me that wind produces or 'sings' different chords in every resonant space in the landscape, including the glen itself. Even the unstoppable roar of the wind 'motorway' had different notes – as a Frank Auerbach brush-stroke expresses paint in different pitches of thickness – and I regret not notating them.

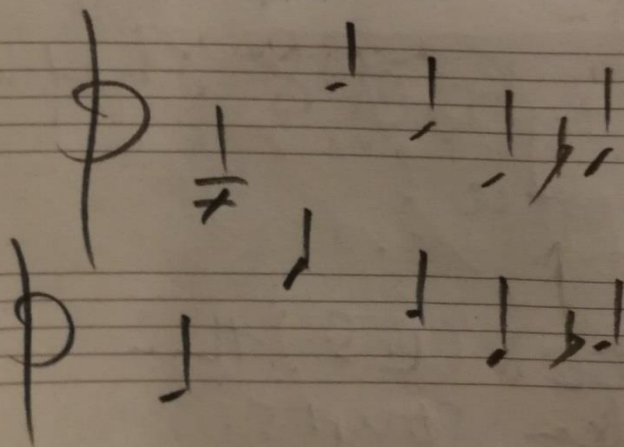
11) Tinkling: The rapid movement of their feeding (w: as wu/cl)

12) The wind notes from the pipes



G_{70}

vortex =



introduce it
up a 4th.

In finding a way forward in the composition the answer is usually found in my notebooks from the trips. The 'vortex' melody above, drawn from the pipe chord (itself generated by wind) was my way forward in the conundrum of how to continue the wind passage. Again and again the notebooks have been the way through. They remind me that what nature shares is enough. There is no need to add more motivic or melodic material, or to put a convenient melodic filter on the experience.

In addition to the natural characteristics of the piece the element of threat also lives there. I felt I needed specifically to include the human threat. It is a common experience for Scotland's wildlife, which has been hunted prolifically for so long. Most of the suddenness in the music comes from the speed and surprise of the hares and from the wind. Some of it, however, comes from the human ability to stop an animal in its airborne or earthly tracks. In the absence of predators such as wolves and lynx – hunted to extinction – humans maintain a whimsical position at the top of the upland food chain. The different communities of landowners, policy-makers, commercial hunters, wildcats or ptarmigan, exist in a Swiftian imbalance. Each human party claims a duty of care, and each animal population seizes its chances, sometimes growing to a size that is well above what the land can sustain. Amongst the humans, I encountered defensiveness, humour, suspicion and warmth, all couched in the verbal silence that is common to all country people.

There are over 150 land-holdings in the Cairngorms National Park. Many are private estates which are managed to provide commercial shooting of deer, red grouse and mountain hares. Shooting estates in the Cairngorms can kill a thousand mountain hares per year. They do this so that grouse don't have to compete for the young heather shoots which both species enjoy. The young heather is there because of the systematic burning, and the availability of young heather means that both hare and grouse numbers rise significantly. Both species are shot by paying hunters but grouse are far more profitable. Hunters pay into the thousands per day to shoot grouse and only into the hundreds for mountain hares. The Scottish government issues compulsory quotas for the number of deer that each estate must kill per year, in order to keep the population sustainable and avoid fines. Yet the government issues no quotas for mountain hare or grouse.

The call of the red grouse is a tricky one to notate: one mahogany-hard croak followed by a sequence of deep, sharp iterations. The call often breaks the silence just after the bird has launched on rapidly whirring wings, which are short and arced. This flight path punches forward and then suddenly switches to a soar. Red grouse can reach speeds of up to 70 mph and have the ability, not unlike hares, to change direction quickly. During the third trip, in the Peak District, I watched a grouse shoot past me, high up and impossibly fast in a very strong wind. An unkempt bundle of feathery jetsam, it seemed to be more hurled by the wind than flying. To my surprise it managed to pull itself into an arc to slow down before flying back into the face of the gale! They are not alone in this skill. James Macdonald Lockhart describes the golden eagle's ability to integrate with the wind: 'Wind-dwellers, they are at home inside the wind and can fly into a headwind as easily as they can fly out of it. There are accounts of eagles holding themselves motionless in wind so ferocious that men could not stand upright and slabs of turf were ripped from the rock and flung hundreds of yards.' (*Raptor*, 2016.)

On my second trip in the Cairngorms I was lucky to spend a morning with Scott Newey of the Hutton Institute, which is the largest scientific research centre in Scotland, and one of the largest in Europe. We met at Cock Bridge and drove to the Goodbrand and Ross Tea Room in Corgarff. After coffee and chats we left the building and walked up the track behind it towards the source of the burn called Allt na Ciste, observing the hare footprints in the snow as we went. Scott has spent the last nineteen years studying upland ecologies and is an expert on mountain hares. He shared much valuable information about their habits and how they interact with other hill dwellers including humans. We discussed how climate change is affecting all these populations. He suggested that milder winters

are good news for mountain hares in some respects, making it easier for them to dig through snow cover for food.

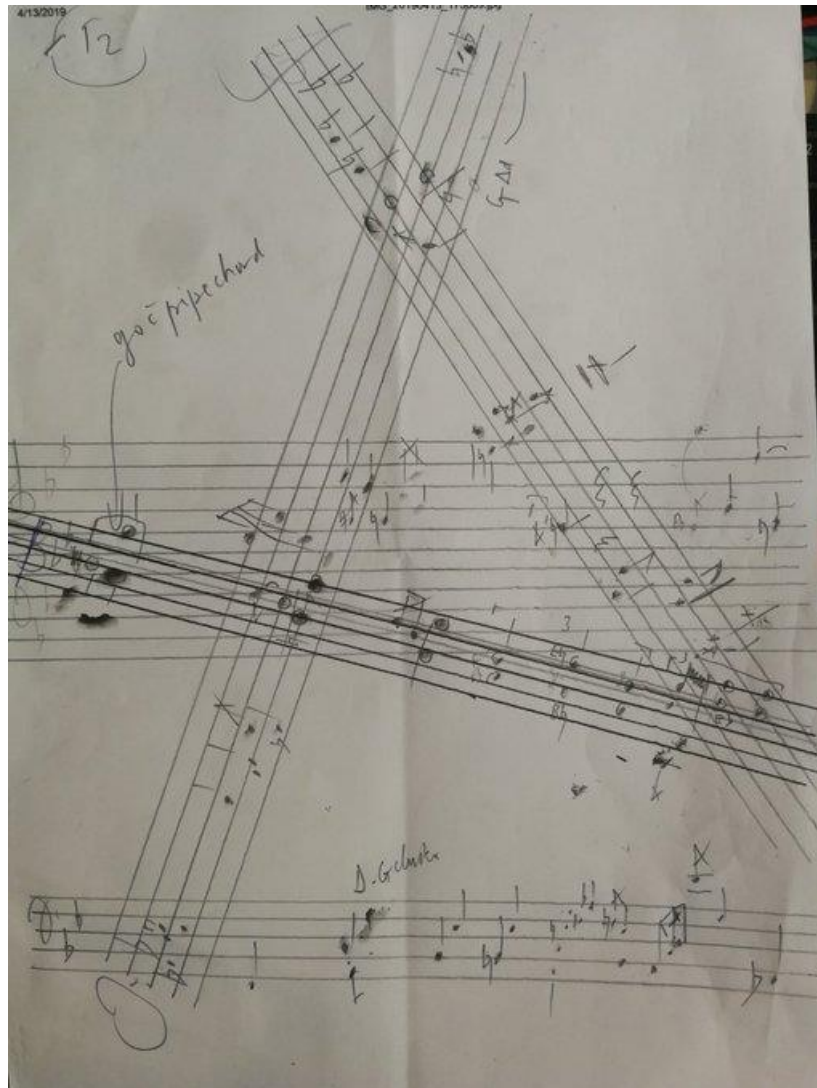
Scott described upland ecology management as like gardening on a vast scale. Any population, whether it be capercaillie, grouse, mountain hare, golden eagle or human, can be encouraged but it will generally be at the expense of others. Recently, so-called re-wilding programmes have been introduced in Scotland, on a grand scale. In the absence of predators such as wolf and lynx these initiatives still need human intervention to manage the interactions of species. The landowners with the most land in Scotland are a Danish billionaire couple, Anders and Anne Holch Povlsen. They are turning vast areas towards re-wilding. In order to do this they have chosen to shoot enormous numbers of deer so that the native Caledonian Pine trees can regenerate. Most Caledonian Pines in the Scottish Highlands are over 200 years old. The Povlsens are rich enough to run their estates at a deep loss. Most estates need to make money and will keep deer numbers high so that paying clients can stalk them. Scott also explained that investors will buy a shooting estate in the Highlands (especially in the Cairngorms) and let it run at a loss, simply because they know they can sell it fifteen years later at a significant profit due to the rise in land prices. The area is therefore, in every sense, intensively managed and commodified.

I've tried to capture this sense of management and tension in *Timidus*. The piece is *not* wild and free. Neither are the hares or the eagles or the mountains. The only thing that is really free from the burning, digging, shooting and trampling is the wind. The UK peat moorlands have recently become a hot topic for the UK government. They provide carbon sequestration on a vast scale and will be essential if the government is to meet its carbon targets. In the last days of the first trip I was on the Farr Estate, near Inverness. I chatted to the keeper's son who is being employed by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to 'rewet' the moorland on the estate. This is an almighty job. In two large diggers he and colleagues dig peat from peat-rich areas of the moor and use it to fill in irrigation channels. These channels were dug in the 1960s to release a perceived excess of water. In the intervening decades they have become channels of degradation, washing away tonnes of soil and the moorland's capacity to capture carbon. Surrounding them as they dig are forty wind turbines. These make up Farr Wind Farm which provides power for over 58,500 homes in Scotland. The land is not wild or free.

One of the fascinating facts that Scott shared was from a colleague of his in Sweden who has reported a common behaviour in Swedish mountain hares when they are fleeing hunting dogs. A hare will run a route that is a large figure of eight. By repeating this a few times the central cross of its path amasses the heaviest scent. This junction becomes the focus of the dogs' attention and, confusingly, offers four different directions! This figure of eight has become one of the management techniques in *Timidus*, allowing me to extract a new shape from within a melody. The figure of eight scam is just another example of hare skill. My aunt once observed a brown hare being chased by beagle hounds in the English Midlands. It tore towards wet end of a field where its scent would be weaker. Once it was in the centre, while still out of sight of the hounds, it took a sharp left and ran some way. Then it doubled back and covered the same path, strengthening its scent on that route. When it reached the centre again it continued in the other direction. When the beagles arrived at the junction of course they pounded off to the left following the stronger scent, only to come to an abrupt and confusing dead-end in the middle of the field.

The last element that I have included in *Timidus* is image notation. On the second expedition, having walked east from Lagganauld and followed the River Don past Torran Dubh and Bruach Ruadh I reached Cock Bridge. Snow was falling fast in a high wind. That night the Cock Bridge to Tomintoul road – notoriously exposed and high – became a dumping ground for abandoned vehicles. I was fortunate to find a closely-planted stand of pines right next to a house with dogs in kennels outside

(working dogs - a sure sign of someone employed to manage the land). I ducked into the pines and set up my tent on the dry needles, making every effort not to rouse the dogs. I regretted not asking the owner. I discovered the next day that he is a gamekeeper employed by the Queen! In the morning I emerged quietly at the far side of the wood and stepped into a sparkling world transformed by snow. Above me Corgarff Castle stood gleaming in the sun with snow plastered half way up its walls by the storm. When I walked up the snowfield I came across evidence of a hare gathering. Heaven knows how many had come together to feed – there were footprints everywhere. I photographed these ‘footnotes’ and when I returned home I printed the photograph and super-imposed musical staves. The notes that the footprints now formed gave me the pitches and rhythms for the central section in the second movement of *Timidus*.



In our talk on the first day of the first trip Anna Fleming and I had shared our enthusiasm for Nan Shepherd's book *The Living Mountain*, drafted in 1945 and published posthumously in 1977. Having been out of print it has recently been re-released with an introduction by Robert Macfarlane. It is a visceral, tender and humble masterpiece about her experiences in the Cairngorms. Even now it shows how simplistic our approach to the natural world can be. We walk up the mountain, Nan walks *into* it. We observe the landscape, she *senses* it. We celebrate the human adventure, she *relates to and learns from* the hill. She does all of this in grounded, glinting prose that is neither

romantic nor spiritual. Indeed in her book the mountains lose their otherness – their wildness – and become living forces of which we are a part. She reminds me of the importance of practice for a musician: of entering heartily into the music again and again, and becoming as much a part of it as it becomes a part of us. On the track that marches by Cnoc Guibneach east of Lagganauld I had an experience where I became aware that the track-side stream was running towards me, the wind was flowing away from me and the grouse were flying across me. In that contrapuntal awareness my thoughts stopped and I felt the ground inside me break open. Strangely, it was the second movement of Rachmaninov's *Symphony no. 2* that surged my consciousness, filling my body with strength and resolution. It was a rich taste of the meditative engagement that is *The Living Mountain*.

From 1928-33 Nan Shepherd wrote three novels: *The Quarry Wood*, *The Weatherhouse* and *A Pass in the Grampians*. After this she struggled with her writing. This makes *The Living Mountain* all the more precious, as the product of so much reflection. Robert Macfarlane writes in the introduction: "Reading *The Living Mountain*, your sight feels scattered – as though you've suddenly gained the compound eye of a dragonfly, seeing through a hundred different lenses at once. This multiplex effect is created by Shepherd's refusal to privilege a single perspective."

I wonder if she ever saw a disco ball...