

The Road To Easterbrook (and other Journeys)

This album is all about journeys- journey through life, and the places and people I've met along the way. Its also about the journey I've been on as a guitar player. Ultimately though it's about the things that have made me the person I am today.

1. The Road to Easterbrook

Easterbrook is a wonderful place in Devon where superbly talented craftsmen make wonderful guitars called Brook. This piece was written on a Tamar, but here performed on a 12 fret Tavy model. The tuning is DADGAD, and I wrote it to suggest the impending excitement a visit to the workshop induces (as well as the winding roads that makes undertaking the journey so exhilarating!)

2. Cranborne Chase

One of several pieces on the album written with a partial capo. This one is also in DADGAD with the capo at fret4 (strings 4, 3 and 2). I named it after a wonderful part of the Dorset countryside, a county I lived in most happily for 15 years of my life, and to which one day I hope to return.

3. Mho Mhaili Bheag Og

The folk tradition is full of tragic songs, and this one is probably the most tragic of all. Two lovers elope together when the father of the girl (Mhaili) refuses to allow them to see each other. The father sends his men in hot pursuit, and in the ensuing skirmish the girl receives a accidental fatal blow from her lover. This arrangement is in CGDGAD and is based on the wonderful version by Scottish super group Daimh, from the album Diversions

4. Tamar Valley

One of the earliest pieces I wrote on my cherry Brook Tamar, in DADGAD with capo at fret 2. I love the fact these guitars are named after rivers- the Tamar played an important part in my childhood, and the Tamar Valley is breathtakingly beautiful.

5. Prelude

Many versions of this have been recorded over the years since writing it in the mid 90's for a school production of Romeo and Juliet (this piece was used for the famous balcony scene). For this one I borrowed my friend Leon's baritone Tavy. Standard tuning but C to C. I think this piece just sounds huge in this low tuning.

6. Leo's Waltz

Leo is my youngest son. I wrote this to try and put across the unconditional love a father feels for a son. This version is written as a guitar duet. I used my yew Tavy (tuned CGCGCD but with a partial capo at fret 9. This creates some rather unusual discords, which I rather like!) The second guitar is an Alhambra 6p classical in standard tuning.

7. Sunrise Over Easterbrook

Another reference to the Brook workshop, where I happened to spend a wonderful weekend listening to some great music back in the summer of 2013. Waking up on Sunday and being able to see the sun rise on

the rolling Devon hills was quite magical. I wrote one of the tunes of this piece that very morning. CGCGCD tuning, played on my yew Tavy.

8. Sunday Morning in January

One day in January I was reading the Metro newspaper on the train into work, and came across the statement that that week was infamous for being the most depressing week in the year (something about more suicides at that time of year, immediately following the Christmas period, than any other). Well, that was really hammered home to me that week when one day not long afterwards I saw the sad sight of a train platform shelter completely covered in flowers and cards- a young man had taken his life. Again sitting down on a Sunday Morning that week, when I had unexpectedly found myself a little time to play, the piece was penned with the sights and thoughts of the week very much at the forefront of my mind. It uses a partial capo at fret 3, with CGCGCD tuning.

9. Si Bheag Si Mhor

One of a handful of traditional tunes on this album, this one penned by the great blind Irish harper, Turlough O Carolan. The title means Big Hill Little Hill, and this arrangement was my take on an arrangement by guitarist Phil Hare. I can never tire of this tune!

10. She Moved Through the Fair

Probably my favourite traditional tune. My arrangement in CGCGCD is like a summing up of all the wonderful versions I had been listening to in researching this tune, but especially Sinead O'Connor. I'm not sure what die hard traditionalists will make of my guitar solo in the middle, like the great composer Vaughan Williams in describing his 4th symphony- "I don't know whether I like it, but its what I meant"- I feel it suits the rather ambiguous story. Many commentators claim that there is a verse missing- we never find out why one of the lovers dies and appears as a ghost in the last verse.

11. Catherine's Song

This is the first of two very personal tributes to people I have lost (both emotionally and in the very real sense) recently. This track was written for my soul mate and mother of our children, and written on mothers day, a few months after a difficult separation. I miss her very much. CFCGCD tuning with partial capo at fret 8.

12. Summer Rain

This last track was written after the death of my friend Eric from lung cancer. This brave man never deserved such a horrible illness, but he never once felt sorry for himself, and always tried to live his life to the full in his final months. I wrote the piece in the week following Eric's passing. I was sat by the patio door overlooking the garden, noodling away on the guitar. It started to rain, and there was that wonderful smell of rain hitting grass that is somewhat intoxicating. I thought that Eric would have found great beauty in that moment (he loved nature in all its forms) and so 'Summer Rain' was created. Rather than rerecord this piece for the album this is the original (take 3) demo recording I did at the time. I don't think I have ever been able to match the emotion of this take.

All music by Robbie J except tracks 3,9 and 10, which are trad. arranged by Robbie J