Vigil 2016

Dave Maric

For	solo piano with electronics and chamber ensemble, with spoken voices	
Instrumentation	solo piano (upright or grand, with digital delay) and voice, analogue monosynth, sampler – 2 cl (2nd dbl b cl), sop sax, ten sax, tbn – 2 perc – 4 vln, 2 vla, 2 vc, 2 db – all players also speak	
Duration	c. 30′	
Movements	1. Eight in Twelve and One 2. Late (1970s) 3. London Brick 4. Sunday Lunch	5. Anguish 6. Turbofolk 7. False Union 8. A Late Duet
Text	*Stewartby (Brickworks)* by Carol Watts	
Commissioned by	the Cheltenham Festival with funds provided by the Hargreaves and Ball Trust	
First performance	9 July 2016, Parabola Arts Centre, Cheltenham Festival. Dave Maric (upright piano/electronics) with members of the Goldfield Ensemble and students of the Guildhall School of Music	

In early 2005 the old upright piano in my parents' home kept vigil beside my dying father, Žarko Marić. It had been moved a few metres from its original place in the dining room into an extended part of the house, and for a while he slept next to it, before a brief stay at the local hospice. During that time I recorded many of our conversations, mostly asking him about his past – a subject he had increasingly wanted to talk about in his final years, but in which his children had only ever taken a passing interest. They had been too busy distancing themselves from the universe of awful truths it contained.

He arrived in the UK in 1948, a 29-year-old refugee from Yugoslavia, by way of camps in Italy and Germany. His experiences, like those of so many in the Balkans during the Second World War, were brutal and dark. He was one of 13 children, eight of them boys who made it into adulthood, and he never returned to his homeland. Of the 13 there was just one sister, but her name was forgotten.

How does someone adjust to a "normal" life on the outskirts of a boring suburban British town like Bedford after such an experience? He spent the rest of his working life with the London Brick Company, toiling in the gruelling, sooty furnaces and chimneys near the not-quite-so-idyllic village of Stewartby, Bedfordshire.

My mother, Katina Athanassopoulou, arrived shortly after him: a 19-year-old from Sparta, via Athens, the result of a semi-arranged relationship proffered by family and friends. Her disappointment on arriving in Bedford was tangible, but she endured it nonetheless.

My parents' past lives were powerfully pent up within them. Combined with an idealised suburban "normality" – post-war aspirational materialism, perhaps – this created some wildly extreme and potent tensions in the household, ranging from the hilariously absurd and surreal to the inevitably emotionally fraught.

They had four children, of whom I am the youngest, and in 1978 a very terrible upright piano joined this often rather unruly, eccentric and dysfunctional family.

From my childhood the piano was witness to it all: the family glued together, perpetually fighting, then breaking apart. It was the instrument that helped turn me into a slightly peculiar musician, and on occasion it was smothered by a glut of electronic instruments and amplification (courtesy of my school's music department), with which I gleefully annoyed the hell out of everyone… not much has changed there.

Currently, it remains a faithful companion to my mother, watching TV with her every day.