

About the album

This album is an exploration into what classical music means now and what possibilities lie ahead for not only the viola but the genre itself.

I composed every track you will hear. I performed every instrument (*except the piccolo, as performed by my wife, Amy Taylor). I engineered and mastered the album myself.

As a classical musician for over 50 years, I am always searching for innovative ways to approach the viola and classical music. From a Viola Etude inspired by the likes of Eddie Van Halen, to a Viola Quintet arranged for all level of player, I aim to push the boundaries and redefine the category of classical music.

1. **Tucutoco** is loosely based on two characters from the poem La Danza Negra by Puerto Rican poet Luis Palés Matos. It's a love story between the violin and the cello. They intertwine like two dancers - sometimes together and sometimes distancing from one another. The percussion provides the fuel and madness of the dance.

2. **Maia** is dedicated to the daughter of a good friend from my school days in Puerto Rico. Maia was newly learning to play the violin and seeing her excitement and enthusiasm for the instrument inspired this Puerto Rican Danza. The Danza style was popular in Puerto Rico during the 19th and

early 20th century and is a part of the island's musical heritage as much as a waltz is to Vienna. I felt it was time to pay homage to this musical style as I made my living for many years playing this type of music in Puerto Rico.

3. **The Immigrant** is a Viola Quintet commissioned by the American Viola Society for the AVS festival. Each viola part is written for varying levels of experience, from beginner to professional. "The Immigrant" is meant to be music personified. Music is having a dream and is recalling its own voyage and evolution through space and time.

4. **1791** Mozart and Rossini were early inspirations when I started learning the violin at age 5. However, I have always loved listening to different styles of music from Ravi Shankar to Duran Duran. Back in the 80s there was an album that came out called *Hooked on Classics* - it was classical music set to a drum beat. My friends in the classical world thought it was in very poor taste and that it foretold the end of classical music - but I absolutely loved it!! I thought it would be fun to make my own version of the concept.

5. **Blue Eddie** is a viola etude in the style of Eddie Van Halen. Van Halen was an innovator and a hugely talented artist. I wanted to compose something that would challenge my own use of the viola, the sounds it can produce and how it does so. Just as Van Halen utilized extended.

techniques for the guitar, "Blue Eddie" pushes the technical limits of the viola. In recording the piece, I also used a guitar distortion pedal so that part of the sound would be somewhat "electrified". I also tried to write the etude in a more Van Halen-esque/Blues manner - hence the name.

6. **Yom HaShoah** (Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust). This piece is written for string quintet and is dedicated to those lost in the Holocaust.

7. **But Peter** is scored for string quintet, celesta and percussion and is a celebration of childhood and the freedom of imagination. Anyone who knows me knows I'm a big Disney fan, especially the early works. This piece is all about flying with Peter Pan and letting the air hit my face as we fly towards Neverland. ... "but Peter, how do you get to Neverland?"

8. **Devil's Shake** The concept for this piece came from *The Devil's Trill* by Tartini composed in the mid 1700's for violin. In my piece it is the viola that plays the principal role and, as such, the trill technique got an update. By adding the bouncing bow to match the speed of the left hand trill, it becomes a shake.

9. **Whistle a Tune** Every album I create has a piece written for my wife to play. The piccolo much like the viola is underrepresented in the repertoire. I wanted something upbeat and fun, and the sound of the piccolo

reminded me of a whistler out for a stroll on a sunny day. Someone just walking down the street whistling a tune to themselves to keep them company. I also placed it at the end of the album so I could do a fade away with the music, unlike all the other pieces which end with a definite gesture.