



Martin Kiszko: Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee(s):

Martin Kiszko

Reasons why chosen for an oral history: Award winning composer for Natural history programmes, feature films and television

Name of interviewer:

Steve Nicholls

Reasons why interviewer chosen:

Longstanding colleague and friend

Name of cameraman:

Alan Griffiths

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1. The early years

SN: Martin, well we'll start then with the first question which is your name, nationality, job, what you're up to.

MK: Well, hopefully that's one question I should be able to answer. My name's Martin Kiszko, I'm a composer and British, and today's date is 28th February, 2007.

SN: Correct. Good. Well, you're known as a composer of music for natural history films but what came first really, was it music or was it natural history?



MK: Well, I suppose it all stems back to my father really. My ancestral land is in Belarus. My father was Polish and grew up in a region of Poland which is now Belarus. He grew up in the forests and marshes, the agricultural belt, heartland if you like, of what the regions of Belarus are all about. He was also a musician. So I suppose those two things for him went hand in hand, the natural history and the music. Of course, he was involved in World War II. He came over to this country after the war. He met my mother who is English, who was born and bred in Leeds in Yorkshire. I suppose when I came along, I'm an only child, one of the things that he was keen for me to do was to first of all become a musician and I suppose secondly for him to take me on his various wild walks into the woods in this country, even if he couldn't find any marshes similar to those ones that he loved to be alongside in Belarus.

SN: *And you started getting interested in natural history, as we all do I think, by collecting things. Can you tell us a bit about your early exploits in natural history?*

MK: Yes. I think I had a childhood that was very freedom really and I just remember, as I many of us do, those very long school holidays, running in the fields, going out in the morning, coming back late in the evening, collecting butterflies. I used to love collecting butterflies and caterpillars I used to collect, and I used to have goldfish bowls all stacked up on the window ledge of our house on the council estate where I lived. And used to hope that they were all going to hatch into peacocks or red admirals but, of course, they were all cabbage whites. I didn't know a great deal about them but I just loved collecting butterflies. I loved birds. I spent a lot of time in the countryside and on the estate as well watching the house sparrows, song thrushes, mistle thrushes, enjoyed every thing that it meant really to be a boy that was interested in that kind of stuff. Tadpoles I used to keep. Newts, I absolutely adored newts. I used to have handfuls of newts and I used to keep them all stacked up in buckets and old sinks in the garden. Tortoises, I had two tortoises.

So I enjoyed all those. I suppose that's in sense with my father taking me on kind of wild walks in the woods and then venturing myself, collecting those things. I suppose that's one of the things that got me interested in natural history but in a latent kind of way. It's not something that I immediately then developed into as a teenager, suddenly thought I'm going to be interested in natural history. It was just something that I just happened to do.

SN: *So that was the real thing if you like, natural history. What got you interested in the strange and bizarre art of natural history film then?*

MK: Well, I don't know, I think that happened much later down the line. I mean I can remember the primary school I was at in Leeds. It was called Clapgate County Primary School. It was the secondary primary school I went to and it was on a council estate in South Leeds which backed on to all these open fields, and the new build of the M1 in fact at that time. I can remember every year, apart from the obligatory having to do Scottish dancing, for what reason I don't know, but we used to have all these black and white films that were brought in on the old projectors. We used to all sit and watch for an afternoon *Scott of Antarctica* (1), *Nanook of the North* (2), and some films about otters and beavers in black and white at that time. So I suppose those are my earliest recollection of natural history film.

But as I say, I think what I did from that point is I just packaged that to one side, never, ever thought of it. I was born in the red light district of Leeds in Chapeltown and then grew up on this council estate. So the thought never, ever entered my mind that I could, a, become a composer or, b, meet the people who were making natural history films. I mean that seemed so far removed from the life that I was involved in at that time. It would have been a dream to do that.

SN: *So what got you into it then? I mean Bristol's the centre for natural history film making, a long way from Leeds. How did you end up in Bristol?*

MK: Well, I suppose the route really grew through music. As a child I was classically trained. My father, as I said, was very keen that I went part-time to the music college in Leeds which I did as a child. He taught me to play the clarinet and at the age of 10 I went there part-time to study clarinet, saxophone, keyboard, theory of music. So a lot of my childhood too, my teenage years, were spent really at honing my skills as a musician and, of course, that stood me in good stead to go on to university to study fine art and music which I did at Breton Hall College, Yorkshire, which is part of Leeds University. That closed down in fact this year.

From that point on I thought, well, maybe TV or film or music might be a possible career for me. There was a real turning point actually which was 1978. I was still a student in my second year and there was a natural history drama-documentary about the voyage of Charles Darwin. In fact it was Christopher Ralling's documentary series called *The Voyage of Charles Darwin* (3). I remember seeing this as a student aged 19 and being absolutely bowled over by it. Not only by the story of Darwin and about that epic voyage, one of the world's perhaps, apart from man landing on the moon, one of mankind's greatest discoveries. Being completely knocked out by that series and thinking at that time wouldn't it be wonderful - it was the first time I suppose anything like this came into my head - wouldn't it be wonderful if I could work with people of that calibre who were able to put something like that together. People who are interested in natural history. Would it be possible?

I was lucky enough after my degree to win a place on the film and television MA course here at Bristol University, the post graduate course. I suppose that was the start of really moving into film making.

SN: *Now I think you'd probably agree that one of the key figures that kick started you into the whole business was probably Edward Williams. How did you meet him and what role did he play in getting you started in this business?*

MK: Well, Edward in a sense was my great mentor and almost like for me, a second father. My own father had, as I say, in a sense guided me through the woods, guided me through childhood. I can remember, just going back to the woods he used to carve these wonderful Lithuanian whistles, for instance, and he used to make these for me when we used to go for walks in the woods. And I suppose prime in a sense for what he hoped might be some kind of musical career that might be ahead of me.

What Edward did when I moved down to Bristol and met him for the first time was that it was the second stage of that. He began to see that perhaps I had a bit of talent, that I had a bit of potential and started to encourage that and nurture it, to hone it. To guide me through the second stage of that passage through the woods if you like, to find my feet in the natural history community. I suppose it was at the time that Edward was just completing the music for *Life on Earth* (4) in fact and I joined in at the end of that. In fact, one of my first jobs and I can remember going to see him and saying, look here, is there opportunity? I've just come out of university, I've made a little film but I've also been trained classically as a musician. Is there anything that I could do to get a bit of experience?

I don't know remember whether it was actually cleaning the studio or putting up the shelves, or carrying his coat to an orchestral session that was one of my first jobs. But certainly the second job was transferring the whole of the *Life on Earth* series for him from the old Phillips cassette tape medium, which I think was about that size or something, to the new VHS, incoming VHS medium. That was one of the first jobs that I did for him. After that he started to train me up to mix music in his studio and I ended up track laying and mixing and co-producing with him the album of the music for *Life on Earth*. So that was my first foray really with Edward into the world of natural history.

2. First film scores

SN: *And what about your first score going solo? What was the first film that you worked on?*

MK: Well, yes, there's a bit of a build-up to that first score in fact because of course Edward was still getting work in at that time. I suppose an orchestral composer but also as a composer using new techniques of transforming music, and what we tended to be doing in the studio was taking acoustic instruments and transforming the sounds of those instruments electronically. So we were creating new palettes of instrumental material for natural history programmes.

So I was really able to flex my wings with Edward working on the music for John Sparks' series, for instance, the *Discovery of Animal Behaviour* (5). I think the series that you worked on, Steve, *The Living Isles* (6). I think maybe I carried Edward's glass of water on that series or actually perhaps took a taxi ride with some of the scores. What was important about the seminal moments really for me in natural history music was that what I was learning at the same time were the nuts and bolts of what it meant to be a composer of orchestral music. Not only a composer of orchestral music but a composer who could definitely get a handle on the craft because it is a real craft. It's not something that can suddenly be picked up. It's something that has to be, a, intuitive and, b, is a technical skill, and, c, is a really hands-on, nuts and bolts, dealing with people, budgets, as you know orchestras, orchestral sessions. So, yes, there was a lot to learn that's for certain.

Those experiences of working on those projects with Edward took me, I suppose the first opportunity that arose for me to do anything myself, I don't quite remember how I got it, but I somehow got an approach from Peter Jones who was then the editor of the series *The World About Us* (7). He was making a documentary called *The World About Us: Forest in the Sea* (8) which was about kelp forests. I still to this day don't know whether I was recommended for the job, somebody decided that they were going to give me a break, or whether someone had dropped out of the project, or whatever. But I can remember going to see Peter and there seemed to be a very short period of time to actually compose this score. I'm thinking to myself, well, could I do it and at that time I had very limited resources. I had only an electric piano, a couple of old Revox tape recorders.

What I chose to do was I tried to compose a score by hooking these. In the old days before we had really sophisticated reverb, we used to line up one tape recorder with another, take the tape along one edge of that, create a really sophisticated tape delay system. So that material heard on this tape recorder could then be replayed off the head of the next one and so on, and that would overlap and overlap and overlap, creating a kind of a reverberational echo effect. So I created a score using those traditional tape manipulation procedures with the electric piano material. Also doing things like tape reversal as well. So playing the music backwards and then recording material over that and so on.

It was a really, really challenging time for me. I mean I had a lot of help from Abigail, who was to become my wife, who was a great encourager and a stalwart - you have to deliver this project, come what may get it done. Because of course at that time you're new to the business and you know what it's like meeting those incredible deadlines, and especially in the creative arts as well when you're having to deliver ideas. And especially with my discipline of actually creating that in the context of fitting beautifully, synchronically to the picture. And being the best piece of music the director's ever heard, when they turn up at the end of the day to listen what you've composed that day.

It was an enormous challenge for what I was, a fledgling natural history composer hoping to do that terrible fall out of the nest like chicks do. I'm pleased to say the score worked and it was my first proper natural history film.

SN: *What did that lead in to?*

MK: Well, it wasn't as easy a transition as you might think because, of course, often it's easy to get one project going, isn't it, but to actually make a whole career out of it, to get two or three or five projects is a different scenario. So I worked hard at trying to introduce myself to the natural history unit to meet some of the, well I wouldn't say it was up and coming producers in those days, it was actually for me a question of

how could I meet those that were really right at the top of their business. Because those were the people that actually were coming in and out of Edward's studio and who I would get the opportunity to meet. People like Chris Parsons, like Mike Salisbury and like John Sparks. Who else was there? I've mentioned Peter Jones.

So these people were kind of like gods in a sense because they'd all worked on *Life on Earth* and they'd all been involved in the next big series that was going to happen. So it was a question really of how could I dare to even speak to these people.

A lovely person that I managed to approach was

Breese. Dilys was at that time the editor of the *Wildlife on One* (9) series. I can remember not having much money in my pockets in those days and actually ringing Dilys up and saying why don't I take you out for lunch just so that I could talk to her. It took me quite a while but eventually I managed to. Then after I finished the lunch, thinking to myself I must have been completely mad spending all that money on a lunch and it might not even get me anywhere. But she was absolutely fantastic and she invited me in to pitch for one of the *Wildlife on One* documentaries at that time. I think it might have been one called *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?* (10) I think there were only two or three minutes of music in it, and there was another one called *Blubber Lovers* (11) which I did with Moira Mann. Another one was *The Natural Mystery of Play* (12) which was one of Dyllis's as well.

But I can remember going into the office at that time in those days and it wasn't a case of like you have now, sending CDs in and all that kind of thing that nobody ever listens to. It was a case of you went into the office and you had your little cassette recorder with you and you plant it on the desk, and you say, right, this is what I've written, listen to this, what do you think about this? So it was a real hard sell at that time and luckily for me Dilys took me on board and gave me those first breaks that I needed in really getting my head round, using different approaches to different types of natural history documentary material.

SN: Yes, and that's something we'll come back to as your career evolves. But at the same time, of course, you were still working with orchestral scores as well?

MK: Yes. I mean what happened there was I was very keen to prove that I could deliver the craft of orchestral composition. I felt that I really had to prove myself. My first acoustic score, which was a chamber orchestral score, in fact wasn't for natural history. It came via a film maker called David Hopkins who was a drama director. I'd spent about 2½ years meeting with him about once every month in a pub, talking about all his ideas, all his scripts, all his treatments that he was hopefully going to realise. Often you could think that these are pipe dreams that people have but I stuck with him, and the costume designer that was on the project also stuck with him during that 2½ years.

Blow me down, he got the money. It became the largest ever regional drama that Channel 4 put money into, millions at that time, which was incredible. Because I'd stayed loyal to him and my colleague had stayed loyal to him, he offered me the score and it was fantastic. It was a 90 minute score, 90 minutes of chamber orchestral music, and a real risk for me because this was going to be the one where you were going to be able to tell on that session, is what I was hearing in my head exactly what was going to be delivered at the session.

Fortunately again it was a success for me and it introduced me to now a great friend, Harry Rabinowitz, who is probably at the age of now, in his early 90s, one of the greatest film conductors the world has ever known. So I was working with Harry when he was just finishing at London Weekend Television. I had approached him because I was writing that score. I needed someone who could guide me on the orchestral craft and could actually say, yes, this is good or, no, this is bad or, no, this needs improvement. And who would also take that work and conduct it with what was actually some of the finest session musicians that we have in the UK.

So from that moment on, although I ended up conducting some of my own material as well, Harry really became another kind of godfather, musical godfather if you like, and our relationship then continued right through the 80s and continues to this day.

3. Composing indigenous scores

SN: And that brings us to a point where I think you and I first met professionally. I'm sure we met a few times when you were carrying cups of water and I was carrying somebody else's cups of water as well in my role. That was Land of the Eagle (13) which I think for both of us was a seminal moment in our careers. I remember your pitch coming in for that which was like a thesis on Western music and Native American music, and I was immediately impressed, luckily so was our exec producer. Do you want to tell us how you began to approach that rather ambitious score?

MK: It was certainly extremely ambitious and it came about because, as I said, I did the chamber orchestral music for Zastrozzi (25) but I've never really handled the full symphony orchestra. In order to prove myself for Land of the Eagle, I really needed to prove that I could handle the symphony orchestra. At that time two of the world's greatest documentary arts film makers, Barry Gavin and Denis Mark who were both at the BBC Arts Studio at that time. Through them they both encouraged me and managed to give me contacts and so on. Denis, in particular, gave me one contact which was Martin Rosenbaum, a producer at Worldwide Productions in London. He was making a film for Total Oil about erecting oil rigs in the North Sea and they wanted this huge orchestral score. It was terribly difficult, as you might imagine, to try and create some kind of emotional life about these oil rigs, almost going up and then falling again, and almost going up, and so on.

But that's what I did. They had a budget which was sufficient for a symphony orchestra, Harry Rabinowitz did the score again, they all liked it. I liked the score that I produced and I was able to present that to you guys, and to people, Peter Crawford in particular, to say, look, this is what I've done. I can write you a score for Land of the Eagle which will blend the Native American and North American landscape with that of the views of the early European settlers. I can find a way of musically making that work for you. I think it was a wonderful thing for me, for Peter and yourself, and Paul Reddish, wasn't it, to take me on at that stage. Because of Land of the Eagle in a sense was the snowball which really started my natural history career rolling.

SN: So how did you go about the actual practical process? I mean it was a mixture of orchestral with Native American instruments, some invented when we didn't now what they were. So do a bit of background into how you actually went about putting the final score together.

*MK: Yes. Well I wanted to write a score that first would orchestrally represent the vast landscapes of North America and for me that meant writing something that was in the 20th century America style. Very melodic, very expansive orchestration, very Copelandesque if you like, and that was one approach. The other was, of course, to have an integrity in the score, especially for the use of Native American music. I wanted to use Native American instruments and I had a **Navajo flute**, in fact which I've got here. This is a Navajo flute that was used on Land of the Eagles. So I used this Navajo flute and we sampled that so that it was available on the keyboard then for the performance, and I had a Native American plains drum sent across.*

Then I made a lot of instruments like leather purses. The Native Americans make the leather purses with beads inside as shakers and on your programme, Steve, on Florida we weren't sure what the Calusa tribe used but we knew that copper pipes had been found near the site, and they certainly weren't for gas central heating. So we actually decided to use copper pipes for that score. So I wanted there to be the integrity both in terms of the instrumentation, so that Native Americans watching the programme would say, yes, that

is actually culturally correct. Secondly, I wanted to use Native American material, existing songs for instance, extant material that would be recognisable to the Native America viewer but not specifically to the general viewer.

So I remember in sequence in one of the programmes, it was a sequence of a beaver moving downstream, and what I did was I took a Native American song called *The Beaver Song*, can't remember which tribe it was now, and I ran that music in, kind of transformed it a little bit in terms of melody and instrumentation. Ran that in just before the beaver arrived into shot and then continued with some other music. So for the general viewer it would've just seemed like a very nice synchronous fit of the music to the picture and emotionally correct, and correct in terms of location, etc. But for the Native American they would have immediately recognised *The Beaver Song*, and it would have been an integrity there built into the score and the narrative, which actually became a very significant and important issue for me in later projects.

SN: Yes, the search for more and more integrity with the music I think is something that characterises one strand of the way you've been working since we've met on Land of the Eagle. One way of doing that is, as we look at the wildlife that evolved in a place, so do we look at, say, how the music evolved in a place. That's one way of achieving integrity and you've done a lot with that kind of search for ethnic integrity in later projects. Would you like to tell us a little about the range of techniques you've used in that area?

MK: Yes. I suppose after Land of the Eagle I would say the floodgates opened and there were lots of offers of documentaries. Some of the very interesting collaborations I had involved trying to perfect this idea that indigenous music was important to a documentary. But also it had to have this integrity about it and of course, again Steve, you and I worked on some salient projects which were, I think, seminal in their use of how we started to use those techniques.

I remember we did a film with Maddy Prior didn't we, the well-known folk singer who collaborated with me on the score for *Shadow of the Hare* (14). In that one we wanted to keep the integrity of the mythology of the hare and of the folk mythology of England and the New Forest in tact, and we had to find ways of doing that. We found it through using those baroque flutes and ancient instruments, hurdy-gurdies and came up with, I think, a very interesting approach to actually creating a soundtrack that had an integrity for that particular film. With Maddy actually creating songs which actually helped to explain the narrative of the hare.

SN: Yes, and what that did, of course, is give music a more than incidental role in films. It gives music the role of taking on the emotional side of the film. That's something you've continued to explore, I think.

*MK: Yes, I think we found that that worked really well for us, didn't it? I mean because the film was telling the story from the hare's point of view in a sense a lot of the time, we wanted those songs really to reflect that story. Therefore it wasn't really necessary for commentary to do that for us. We wanted to advance narrative with those songs, in much the same way as in 1933 *Snow White* (15) was the first feature film where songs were used specifically to advance the narrative. So I think this is what we were trying to achieve with natural history in a way, expect that we were a bit kind of like how many years too late?*

SN: I've never thought of Shadow of the Hare as the Snow White of wildlife film making before. Yes, absolutely.

MK: Yes. Have we mentioned Ytene England's Ancient Forest? (16) We did Ytene England's the Ancient Forest where we tried to bring in those ancient instruments that I've mentioned again. Hurdy-gurdies, violins we had. We had flutes, didn't we, and whistles of various kinds, and again I think we created a score which really enhanced both emotionally and locatively and temporally, and everything that we required at that time.

Then I remember we moved from that. Our next experiment, so to speak, with your documentary again, *They came from the Sea* (17), about the crabs. Where were they based?

SN: *Everywhere, land crabs.*

MK: Everywhere, yes, I get confused sometimes because I did crab films, or maybe three. I mean one of them was on Christmas Island but yours was all over.

SN: *John Sparks did the Christmas one.*

MK: John Sparks did that one, yes. Again, looking at that film and thinking in that case how can we experiment with extending the palette more interestingly for the viewer to emotionally link with these creatures, and how these creatures are architecturally built, structurally built. I remember playing you some John [Kay] music from 1933 and saying this is an example of prepared piano. It sounded [plays piano] a bit like that except that we had screws and erasers and pencils and bits of metal all stuck in the keys, so it sounded very metallistic.

I don't know whether you were quite sure it was going to work at that time. But what was fantastic that you were there giving the composer that ability to, a, experiment and, b, go for what they thought would be that integrity in the score. Finally actually say, yes, well let's work with that and see where it takes us. It was an immensely enjoyable score to come up with. I don't know, probably the first score using prepared piano for a natural history film.

SN: *It probably was actually and last I think. The search for the kind of ethnic identify of music which is something that I think you rightly became quite well-known for, I think led you eventually to work again with John Sparks on Realms of the Russian Bear (18). That gave you an opportunity, not just to play around with sampled, ethnic instruments, but to go there and actually to be on location for a change. That obviously led to a very different and interesting kind of score.*

MK: But that was an absolutely fantastic project to work on and all credit to John Sparks. I'll never, ever forget it because again a producer who's willing to take risks, who's willing to listen in terms of actually the sharing of ideas and the sharing of approaches to a natural history project. I remember saying to John, look, wouldn't it be great if you've not only given me the opportunity of writing this score. But what about if you actually place me in Russia and we just pull in instrumentalists from all over the former Soviet Union or whatever - from Azerbaijan right up to Kamchatka to Siberia.

John just said, yes, okay, you show me how we do it, you show me what you've got in mind. I found out that there weren't only two or three instruments - the Bayan accordion, the **balalaika** and the **domra** in the Russian Republic. But actually there were 1,700 indigenous instruments. I made it my business to find photographs of every single one of them, learn about every one of those, and I compiled my own encyclopaedia, in fact it's down here in the studio, of four or five volumes of Russian indigenous instruments. Showed that to John, cut that collection down to about 150 from 1,700, cut that down to 100 where I could actually get recordings of those instruments. Played those to John from which we selected 65 and then from those 65 instruments I started to compose sketches which I thought would be suitable for the series. Then John gave his amazing go-ahead for me.

I suppose, again a real landmark moment in natural history music to have a composer to go to the country to collect samples for the BBC Natural History Unit. It was an amazing experience. Especially to arrive at the Melodia Studios in Moscow, the most famous Russian studio in the world, to find a multi-track on the floor, all circuit boards in pieces. Suddenly finding out that we're going to record straight to quarter inch at that time, or straight to DAT which was just coming in. To have all these instruments, instrumentalists fly in from all the former republics, one of them with an 18 foot long hollow plant stem which was about this thin which is used by the [Odigi] tribe. They inhale through this plant stem they call a reindeer.

So there were all these whacky and wonderful Russian instruments. I had a guy who had received all the tradition of a shaman and sent me these extraordinary songs. One of the most incredible music experiences I've ever had. He sang a song called The [Seagull] Song which is a mixture of animal cries, hyperventilation on the male orgasm, and it was astonishing. He was clipped up to a radio mike in the studio and afterwards I said there's a little bit of shake on that radio mike. He says, well, that's okay, I could do this song in the nude because that's the way it would normally have been presented.

So I think all these astonishing people, including a vocal group from Russia who couldn't understand from my score why I'd marked the score **mezzo piano**, moderately soft, or **mezzo forte**, moderately loud, because they were used to singing out in fields. They only sang **fortissimo** where they were used to being heard about three or four kilometres away. Why were they singing inside a studio?

So there was incredible cultural clashes as well that I had to learn about musically. The other breakthrough for me with that score was that not only was I able to record music in tact in Moscow and bring it back here, and actually then lay it directly against the picture. But because sampling technology had just come in properly into its own, I was able to sample every single note of all of those instruments, every single chord, every single breath, every single **pianissimo**. Then actually either start the score from scratch again back in the UK or overdub those samples on top of my existing recorded scores, or use extended motifs that I'd recorded with instrumentalists over there. So it was a whole new way of working and a whole new thing that was set off with how you might approach the natural history score.

SN: Even so, with that fantastic opportunity, you didn't abandon your work with orchestral scores as well. I mean I think we got together again with a pocketful of the BBC's money over a series called Alien Empire (19), which I very much wanted to be a big orchestral score. That led to a number of interesting decisions. But I can't remember how we started with that. But can you remember the details of how we began with that score?

MK: Yes. Well, I think another first for me really, and it came quite by accident, was introducing the BBC Natural History Unit to the use of the East European orchestras for the first time. I'd always used British musicians on my work prior to that, even though I was always paying premium rates for doing that. But I was happy to do that because it was important that British musicians should have the work.

But I remember that on our series, Steve, *Alien Empire*, we came across certain problems eventually, didn't we, with co-production deals and so on, and certain rights had to be declared and so on. We'd booked all the studios in London. We'd booked the CTS Wembley, a premier sound stage in this country at that time, and we booked the London Film Orchestra and we'd got all the best players lined up and everything. Suddenly that co-production issue came up and we realised that we weren't going to be able to afford it. At that point I had to switch all the performance to Germany. We went for the Munich Symphony Orchestra.

But just to put the record straight now. The issue with that was that for 14 years I'd used and burnt my butt using British composers. That particular Sunday of that week in *The Observer* newspaper, the back page, there was an article about the use of East European orchestras. I'd been singled out in the article. It said kind of Martin Kiszko goes off to Europe using German orchestras, and it took me by surprise really because I'd flown the flag for so many years and I'd unfortunately found myself in a corner financially on the budget.

MK: That was a very rewarding series to do, 1988, it was and a very challenging series, and I think had a bit of fun with it. I think John Sparks felt that he'd give me a few extra challenges and so he had a whole section, which I didn't think needed music at all, on mammalian penises. So he gave me these 2½ minutes to penises to score and I'm thinking I don't think that needs music but I think John's going to wind me up here. So, yes, that was a real challenge for me and good fun to do, a bit of a laugh really.

But after, yes, after that series I started to think to myself where can I find producers who will go down this particular track? Where are there projects that I would be able to get involved with in doing pieces that are

larger in scope, in terms of applying to music to picture. I suppose I'd also come out at that time out of Desmond Morris's series, *The Human Sexes* (20), so I'd done one series on animal sex and then one series on human sex.

Then shortly after that I decided that I thought I'd have a bit of a mid-life natural history and normal lad crisis. I decided I know go to Antarctica for now. I thought, well, all these people that I work with always go all round the world so I'd better go and see a bit more of it myself. That's where I went with some colleagues and had a wonderful time on the Antarctic Peninsula. But what was special about it was that it inspired me to write a major piece with the poet, Britain's foremost woman poet at that time, Anne Ridler, about Antarctica and about man's evolutionary journey from the sea to space. So I realised that piece in 2000 and that in a sense is still part of my journey, my evolutionary journey as a natural history film composer, to hopefully realise new ways of dealing with music and natural history.

4. The future

SN: *Thinking about the future, there are obviously always new people coming into the business. Have you got any advice for would be composers who are desperate to get into this strange business?*

MK: Well, I think certainly from when I started in the early 80s, I can remember the great fathers of British natural history music were Edward Williams and Sydney Sager, who was actually the music director at HTV in Bristol. Again, he gave me opportunities when I started off. I did a series for him called *The Countryside in Question* (21). In those days I was one of the youngest composers that could handle the orchestral score.

Nowadays what we find is a very saturated market for composers. Many, many courses, like universities, some of which I've taught myself, like the MA in Film Music here at the University of Bristol, where we turn out composers every year. Composers coming from cities all over the UK who want to become film composers. I mean the essential thing I think is firstly that they should be versed in the orchestral craft and the craft of film making. For me, whether it's natural history film making or any other film making, film music is a bilingual art. It demands that the film composer understands the vocabulary of film, the structure of film, the whole language of what it means to make a film as well as the language of music. What it means to structure musical forms, what it means to apply that music to picture, what it means to enhance a story narrative and so on. It's a bilingual art, you need both those languages. What we often get are students who can do one of those languages but not both, and can't apply one to the other.

So that's the important factor I would say, that it's important for the young composer to get those skills under their belt. But then it's a free-for-all, isn't it, in today's saturated environment? I mean the number of young composers that I've seen that are really, really struggling to get their head above water and get their first in, and there's no answer really to how that's done except just perseverance really.

SN: *It sounds reasonable. These are horrible questions for anybody to come out of the blue. But do you have a favourite score? It doesn't have to be one that we've worked on together. Do you have one that's really stuck in your mind for the right reasons?*

MK: That is a really difficult one, Steve, because I have certain scores that I like for particular reasons. *Alien Empire* because it was a landmark score for me in terms of, as we said, introducing East European orchestras. Working in the minimalist style of music as well and it was the first of my seven albums. So it's like having a first child in a way, you remember that moment more than perhaps you remember others. But then there's *Realms of the Russian Bear* where we had the opportunity of recording all those samples abroad, it's fantastic.

I suppose more recently I'd have to include my Antarctic score, *Sea Star* (22). The score that I composed last year for the Brunel 200, a kind of bio score if you like, bio **cantata**, about Brunel's life (*A Radius of*

Curves) (23). The big multimedia natural history piece, *Inua* (24), which was about a shaman healing the natural world using the revolutionary, pioneering, new electronic device, ultrasonic device, Soundbeam, some years ago in Worcester Cathedral. I think any work where I feel I'm working with somebody who is enabling me to push the envelope, to go to the next stage, has to be my favourite work. Because it's at that point that I feel really alive in the work that I'm doing, and I'm sure that must be the same for many composers.

SN: *That's very true. Well, that's covered most of the ground on the various questions. Is there anything you want us to go back over?*

Unidentified: The one thing that I thought of was is there any direction that you see composing going, like this picture of composing for natural history films? Whether it's positive, negative, anything [inaudible - over speaking]

MK: Yes, we did talk about how music is being used, didn't we, earlier on today.

SN: *We should cover that, yes. So the future of natural history films and music. How do you see that shaping up?*

MK: Well that's a very interesting question and, of course, I'm sure there are many opinions about it. In terms of music, I can remember a time, a few years back, when everybody was saying we've got to have rave music or club music against our sequence about snakes because we have to attract the 18-34 age group back to our natural history documentaries. I can remember saying to people, well, I'm sorry but those people are actually down at the clubs, they're not watching natural history documentaries. There's this great thrust to anticipate an audience or what audience you think there might be out there. Actually, the real audience that is out there are those young parents with children who are trapped in their house every evening with hardly any money to live on, who are not able to go out and have to watch the box in the corner.

Those are the people who need the real family viewing, great natural history ideas with music that, we've already said, is emotionally relevant to make those audiences feel that they're connected to the issue. Whether its climate change, whether it's endangered species or whatever, that you're trying to communicate in those documentaries.

So again, coming back to this whole question of integrity, what kind of scores should we be pedalling to our viewers? Should they be scores which are steeped in that integrity of tied into the location, tied into the issues, tied into the emotional language of the stories? Or are we just trying to put on an easy fix? Are we just wallpapering our documentaries with music because we think it's going to appeal to a particular audience?

As for the future of natural history music, I don't know, I'm not sure. I mean, for me my path will be to enable works that are music driven. I'm very much interested in the live natural history event, in actually having huge live events where music and natural history footage, or music and natural history narratives, can take place side by side. This is why I've spent a year and a half now trying to develop my next major project which I will hope will be a self-initiated project, on the geographical and emotional landscape of the life of Darwin. Maybe there's room for more diversity of natural history stories rather than simply animal stories.

SN: *That's good. It's an interesting future*

MK: Yes.

People, films and organisations



WILDFILMHISTORY

100 YEARS OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING

Abigail Davies

Anne Ridler

Barry Gavin

Charles Darwin

Chris Parsons

Christopher Ralling

David Hopkins

Denis Mark

Desmond Morris

Dilys Breese

Edward Williams

Harry Rabinowitz

John Kay

John Sparks

Maddy Prior

Martin Rosenbaum

Mike Salisbury

Moira Mann

Paul Reddish

Peter Crawford

Peter Jones

Sydney Sager

BBC Natural History Unit

Breton Hall College

Bristol University

Channel 4

CTS Wembley

Leeds University

London Film Orchestra

London Weekend Television

Melodia Studios

Munich Symphony Orchestra

The Observer

Worldwide Productions

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4. Life on Earth (*BBC, 1979*)
5. Animal Behaviour (*ABC, 1981*)
6. The Living Isles (*BBC, 1986*)
7. The World About Us (The Natural World) (*BBC, tx 1967 – present*)
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Glossary

Balalaika: family of Russian stringed instruments

Cantata: from the Italian 'sung'. A vocal composition



Domra: Long necked Russian stringed instrument of the Lute family

Fortissimo: meaning very loud

Mezzo forte: meaning moderately loud

Mezzo piano: meaning moderately soft

Navajo flute: Hand crafted Native American flute

Pianissimo: meaning very soft

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