Forecast (2021)

for solo percussion and field recordings

Dave Maric · c. 13 minutes

Forecast was commissioned in 2020 by the remarkable young percussionist Elliott Gaston-Ross, who about seven years earlier had played my music in the final of BBC Young Musician of the Year. I wrote it in the depths of the pandemic. It's in two parts. Throughout, the performer is accompanied by one continuous track of field recordings made at Bamff Wildland, the rewilding estate in Perthshire where I live and work.

Part 1 is for marimba with two sets of tuned wooden planks. Its soundscape comes from lo-fi audio taken from trail cameras I had placed around the estate's rewilded wetlands. You hear the mostly nocturnal sounds of beavers, jackdaws, barn owls, blackbirds and other birds, along with running water and creatures rustling through vegetation. Now and then people gather near the cameras, usually on nature tours, and you can just about hear their voices. At one point my daughter Flora, barely a year old at the time, can be heard singing to herself. Sometimes the marimba locks tightly onto these sounds, answering the chomp of a beaver or a jackdaw's triplets. At other times it floats freely above them, and the tempo pushes forward and pulls back as the recordings change.

Part 2 is for vibraphone with gongs and cymbals. Here the backdrop is the wind turbines on Bamff and, further north, the huge wind farm at Drumderg. I recorded them with a LOM Geofón (a microphone based on seismic sensors) and contact mics, which pick up the mechanisms and hidden internal roar of these giant sentinels. Synth pitches are gradually added, mostly to bring out harmonics already in the soundscape. The vibraphone starts with its motor off, slow and resonant, and the gongs and cymbals are often struck with the reverse ends of the mallets. The motor only comes on near the end, as the turbines slowly fade away.

Forecast is something like a dream unfolding into reality. These landscapes were my day-to-day lived experience. The positive effects of rewilding are tangible, and so is the joy of meeting these sometimes playful creatures in often intimate circumstances. But the pandemic added a new and darker dreamlike layer. It felt as though our imminent future was being foretold while it turned directly into the present, as if time had already run out.