

**Garth Knox
D'Amore**

Music for Viola d'amore from 1600 to the present day by Hume, Marais, Ariosti, Huber, Moser, Knox and from Celtic traditional sources

**Garth Knox: Viola d'amore
Agnès Vesterman: Violoncello**

ECM New Series 1925

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When Garth Knox – one of the most versatile and adventurous viola virtuosos of our time – makes his solo debut on ECM with an entire programme played on the viola d'amore, it is obviously in a spirit of discovery and experiment rather than of historical reconstruction, even though historically informed performances play an essential role. Fascinated by the outstanding technical, sonic and expressive possibilities of the instrument (for example when scordatura is used i.e. different kinds of tunings for the seven strings), the former violist of the Arditti Quartet has experimented widely and quite naturally incorporated early, traditional and contemporary pieces in this programme. While Swiss composer Klaus Huber's "...Plainte ..." is based on Turkish scales, Huber's fellow countryman Roland Moser explores different "Manners of Speaking", whereas Knox himself combines a quite faithful arrangement of Ockeghem's "Malor me bat" with free improvisation.

His juxtapositions of old and new and of "popular" and more abstract music develop into a poetic journey through time and space, that – in spite of an ever-present underlying melancholy – leaves plenty of space for humour, playfulness and sheer virtuosity. As a bass imposes itself for reasons of harmony and balance, Knox wrote additional cello parts for all the pieces he arranged himself. They are played here by French cellist Agnès Vesterman. The extraordinary sound of the duo is captured in the generous acoustics of the Austrian monastery St. Gerold, one of ECM-producer Manfred Eicher's favourite recording locations, especially for early and baroque chamber music.

In his performer's note to the present recording Knox tells the story of his first encounters with this soft and discreet instrument that has always been confined to the small chamber due to its softness and already by 1800 had become some kind of curiosity – considered an anachronism in the age of dawning industrialisation. Some afternoons spent in a studio in Italy kick-started a coup de foudre-love affair: "I was quickly seduced by the gentle sweet sound of the seven playing strings (so rich in harmonics) and intrigued by the mysterious presence of the seven sympathetic strings that add an intimate resonance that happens on the playing strings", writes Knox. He once described these resonating strings as a "kind of memory" for the instrument: "Everything that is played on the normal strings leaves acoustic traces in the sympathetic strings – not a straight echo, but a kind of harmonically encoded souvenir".

While in the 18th century this effect was perceptible only in very small rooms, Garth Knox has developed an electronic way of amplifying only the sympathetic strings with the regular strings left with their original sound. This effect is employed in his musical-theatre project "Jeux de Mémoires", directed by Emmanuèle Stochl that, by building an entire system of

references, resonances and memories, carries Knox's obsession with the Viola d'amore to even higher symbolic and metaphorical levels...

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Garth Knox could be heard on two very different previous ECM-releases: as a member of the Arditti Quartet on a disc with quartets by German contemporary composer Peter Ruzicka, and on accordionist Frode Haltli's "Passing images", released in 2007. He was born in Ireland and grew up in Scotland. After seven years in the Ensemble Intercontemporain his international reputation spread when, in 1990, he joined the Arditti String Quartet which then had a repertoire of 600 or so quartets from the 20th century and was (and still is) collaborating with all major living composers. Since leaving the quartet in 1998 Knox has given premieres of viola works by Henze, Ligeti, Schnittke, Ferneyhough and many others. As an improviser he has performed with musicians such as George Lewis, Steve Lacy, Joelle Léandre, Dominique Pifarély, and Bruno Chevillon. His two Viola solo CDs have met with unanimous critical acclaim.

Agnès Vesterman, born in Boulogne-Billancourt near Paris was cellist of the prize-winning Arpeggione quartet from 1998 to 2001 and has recorded soloworks, sonatas and string quartets. She has collaborated with improvising musicians such as Vincent Courtois and Ernst Reijseger and is co-founder of the Circé Ensemble that brings together artists from different genres to explore the common grounds of composition, improvisation, dance and performance.

CD-package includes 20-page illustrated booklet including a performer's note by Garth Knox and an essay by Paul Griffiths.