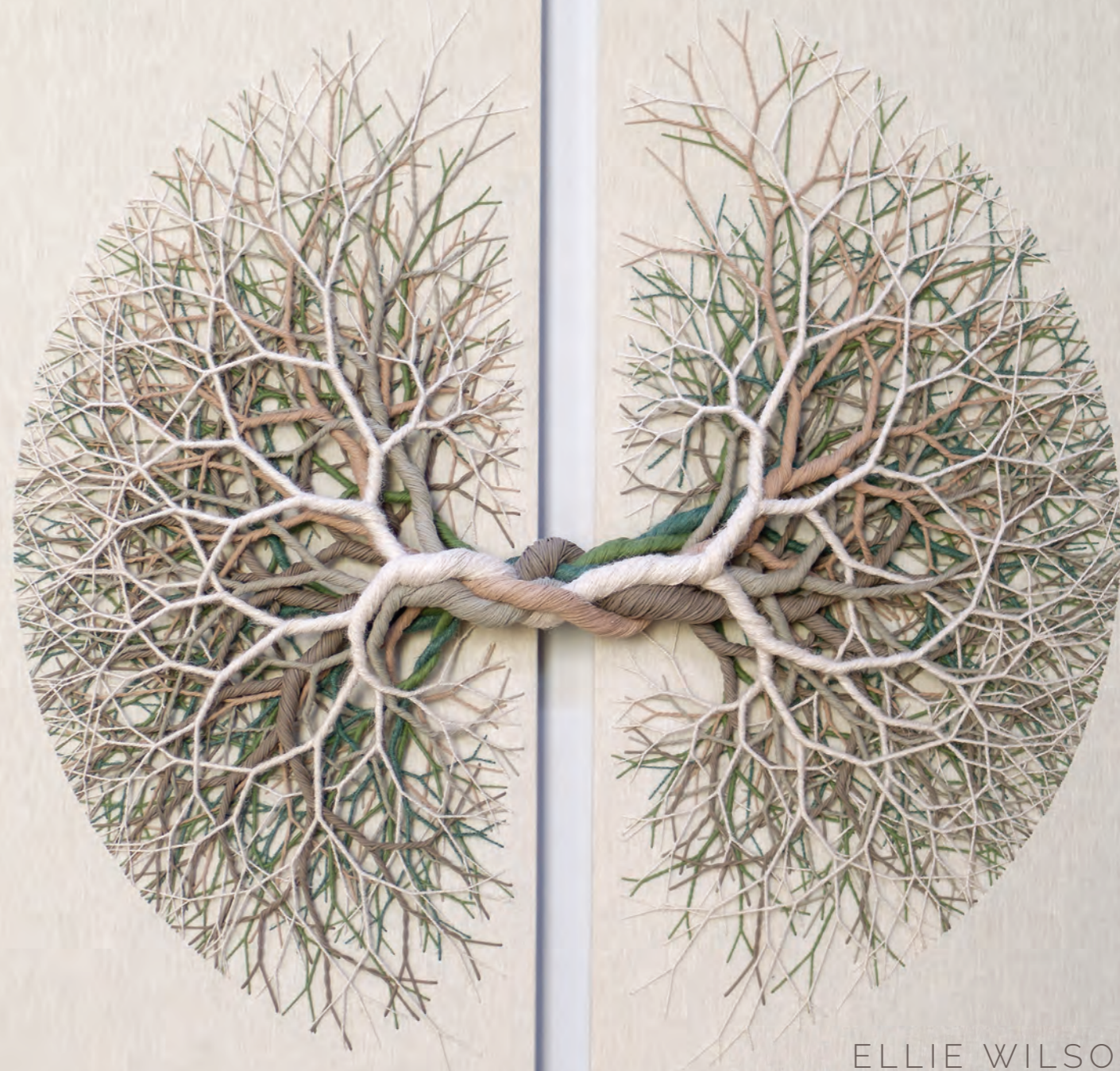


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ELLIE WILSON
MEMORY ISLANDS

MEMORY ISLANDS

Introduction by Dr Andrew Thompson PhD MRCP – Cognitive Neurologist, London

What do you remember?

Speaking to a lot of people about their memories, a few things quickly become clear.

Firstly, not all memories are alike.

The capital of France. How to ride a bike. The smell of my grandparents' house.

Passwords for a dozen online accounts. The reason I just walked through to the kitchen.

How I felt on the day my little brother was born. I remember all of those things, but each in a different way – and each using different parts of my brain. That complexity of memory maps onto the intricate architecture of the brain, in ways that we are still working to fully understand.

Secondly, not all *people* are alike.

Those structures of memory work differently in each of us, and for some they are disrupted or damaged as we go through life. Sometimes this is temporary, as Ellie vividly describes that it was for her father in her note on *Delta*. Sometimes it is sadly permanent and irretrievable. Those people have taught us a lot of what we do understand about how our memories work.

Above all, it becomes clear that our memories – complex and fragmented and unreliable as they can be – are fundamental to who we each are as human beings.

It is through the lens of our memories that we see, and process, and understand everything that happens to us. They give the events of our lives context and meaning. It is not just a simple mental list of our experiences that does that. It is the emotions that are inextricably tangled through them. It is the re-living and re-telling of those experiences as we fit them into the stories of our lives. It is the memories that our families pass down to us, the memories of our cultures – even of the landscapes and buildings where we have lived. They all knit together to give us each our own narrative identity.

The works on *Memory Islands* offer fascinating and beautiful perspectives on that strange landscape of memory. Modern shapes are woven from the fabric of ancient sounds. Figures evolve as they are repeated, and take on new meanings, in new contexts. Words and sounds from the past resonate through to the present ...

For me, this music explores how memory has made Ellie who she is – how memory makes each of us who we are.

UNNAMED UNSEEN (hardanger fiddle and electronics) is inspired by a line from Robert Macfarlane's book *Landmarks* about nature words falling out of our language: *'Once they go unnamed they go to some degree unseen. Language deficit leads to attention deficit.'*

His book is full of regional/archaic words to describe land, nature, and weather. I particularly like 'Smeuse' – a gap in the base of a hedge made by the regular passage of a small animal.

DELTA (violin and electronics) was created entirely on violin with my pizzicato chopped up and spread across drum sample pads, allowing me to play patterns that wouldn't have fallen naturally under my fingers. It was inspired by my father's recovery from a coma after a cardiac arrest (he thankfully made a full recovery).

As his brain fired up, memories were replayed as if happening for the first time, then filed away in the right places. In *Delta*, I was thinking about the electrical pulses that transmit this information around the brain. Memories returned slowly at first but then the floodgates opened. It reminded me of a TV documentary I'd seen where a dried-up riverbed filled with water after a monsoon; the water found its way through all the previously carved chasms and cracks in the bed (not dissimilar to the grooves on the surface of a brain) and then into a large river.

BY THE TIME I GOT BACK PT. 1 & 2 (violin, voice, piano and electronics) is a 2-part composition. Part 1 is a duet with my late grandfather Leslie Wilson, reminiscing about his experiences and lost years as a Navy seaman in World War II; a poignant reminder of the sacrifice made by so many young people of his generation. He died in 1992 and I love that his memories live on, thanks to a cassette tape saved from a school project. In contrast to the reflective qualities of Part 1, Part 2 is more uplifting, representing the second chapter of my grandfather's life.

*They had decided to send me to the bleedin' Far East,
Now this time they're fighting in Europe and we're winning for a change,
This is a time now in the War when they'd already dropped the atomic bomb.*

*Do you know what had happened to me? They lost me and reported me as a deserter,
Still stuck in Australia, I can't even get home to get demobbed.
But eventually I got a draft on a destroyer called the Wessex.
I got on that boat; I didn't have a bleedin' penny,*

I know it seems a long while ago, but it just seems like bloody yesterday to me, you know?

*I mean I was 22 when I went in, just before my birthday
And by the time I got back I was in my twenty-ninth year,
The young years of my married life were wasted
And that was my lot!*

REMEMBERED

MINDPOP (electric violin and electronics) is a memory that comes to mind suddenly and involuntarily. This has happened to me a few times recently. Memories so buried I hadn't even thought about the rather mundane events since the day they happened. The main motif throughout may not sound much like a violin, it's played through a TC Helicon VoiceLive to create the sound I've nicknamed the 'choir of angels'!

HALYARD (violin and electronics) was written, performed, and recorded by me in Imogen Holst's Cottage in Aldeburgh on a very dark and rainy day. You can't help but be inspired by the magical Suffolk coastline. In this work the percussive clinking of halyards (metal rope that pulls up the main sail on a boat) against masts is reproduced by striking the string with the wood of the bow (col legno).

WILL I DREAM? (violin and electronics) is a quote from the 1984 film *2010: The Year We Make Contact* in the moment the onboard computer HAL 900 confronts his digital 'mortality' – all memories erased. Most of the sounds you hear have originated from the violin, manipulated through FX pedals and computer-processed effects.

ERASED

THANK YOU

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Dedicated to Thom and Nathaniel.

All works written and recorded at home, except *Halyard*, which was written and recorded in Imogen Holst's Cottage, Aldeburgh, Suffolk.

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Halyard recorded by Ellie Wilson
Produced by Ellie Wilson and Thom Ashworth
Mastered by Ben Wiffen

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Music written and performed by Ellie Wilson
Ellie Wilson: violin, electric violin, hardanger fiddle, piano, percussion, programming
Thom Ashworth: bass, programming
Jay Chakravorty: additional programming on *Mindpop*

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