

Desert Island Discs – Simon Ingram-Hill (as of December 2020)

I might have found it easier sticking to western classical music for my choices. But I lived and worked overseas for almost 40 years before returning to UK two years ago, 25 of them outside Europe. So unsurprisingly, I have found myself straying repeatedly towards what we nowadays call “World Music”. Here I have found much of what has shaped my musical tastes and here lie some wonderful memories which will help sustain me on my desert island. Shockingly, I have sacrificed much of what dominated my first two decades when I would play Beethoven, Chopin and Faure piano or cello pieces, sing SS Wesley and Stanford’s church music and listen to the latest British and American pop/rock. These have provided a thread throughout my life and I will draw on them on my island with or without the physical recording.

My choices are placed in chronological order, noting the year when I was first introduced to them. And each will not only conjure up some very personal happy memories but also stand for me as a worthy representative for a whole musical genre.

1. **Carlos Jobim’s *Corcovado* (Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars) (1966)**. Performed by composer/pianist Carlos Jobim, tenor sax Stan Getz, Guitarist João Gilberto and singer wife Astrud. This was the cast that made a *Girl from Ipanema* famous worldwide in the early 60’s and soon became a family favourite. Later in 1991, I sat with a Brazilian friend in the same Ipanema beach café where Jobim and pals mused on the beauty of the young 17 year old as she strolled along the sand. I have chosen the slightly less famous *Corcovado* from the same album. It sums up everything I love about Bossa Nova and jazz in general and will allow my mind to wander towards Ellington, Fitzgerald and Grappelli and many other jazz greats, one or two of whom I got to see in person.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-YnyZG8fNU>
2. **Miriam Makeba’s *Malaika* (1970)**. My father was working in Mombasa, Kenya when I first holidayed in Africa and here in 1970 Makeba’s *Malaika* held sway. She was actually South African, and I was fortunate enough to see her perform some 30 years later in Mozambique, when she still had enough of that fabulously rousing voice to send me back over the years. Mama Africa’s was the voice of the Anti-Apartheid movement but *Malakai Nakupenda, Malaika* (My angel, I love you, my angel) was simply a Swahili love song speaking across cultures.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1UID0vEeqI>
3. **Mike Oldfield’s *Tubular Bells* (1973)**. The only representative of pop/rock on my desert island: no Beatles or Stones, and an odd choice perhaps, but is here because, through a friend, I got to play in the Elizabeth Hall performance in June 1973 that launched it as a hugely successful classical pop anthem. I simply played a few chords on electric organ and some pretty simple notes on the cello. No matter, I got to rub shoulders with some of my pop idols of the day and can day dream on the island of being a great musician in another life! The record itself on which Oldfield played most of the instruments and I had no part in, got Richard Branson’s Virgin Record label started and was memorably used later in the film ‘The Exorcist’.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXatvzWAZLU> (recorded in 1973 without me!)
4. **Fairouz’s *Habbaytak Bissayf* (I loved you in the summer) (1975)**. The quintessential Arabic Lebanese voice of the last six decades. After university I spent two years working in Kabul, Afghanistan where I was introduced to the music of Fairouz by an American diplomat friend with whom I played lots of Baroque music but who also had a great love of “Arab” music. *Habbaytak Bissayf* had been released a couple of years earlier. My wife tells me that in the late 70’ when she was working in Cairo, every taxi driver was playing the songs of Fairouz.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ca_brWw2LI
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvylkuUFhgU> (Fairouz in concert in 2001)

5. **Jacques Brel's *Ne me Quittez pas* (1977)**. The great Belgium chanson singer was new to me before I played piano in the show "*Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*" a compilation of 26 of his songs translated into English and brought together for four singers and a narrator. We performed in the German club in Kabul and though we played to full houses we were boycotted by the French speaking world who thought translating the great man was an absolute travesty. It was (!) and I have only listened to him in his native language since then. I am not sure about Bach, but on the whole "don't mess around with the greats" I have since learned. Perhaps this is why the Brel I will have on my desert island did not appear in the show and I only know it in its original French. No Piaf or Dylan, but Brel's protest and love songs will remind me of them.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz6r0TP4FBI>

6. **Dimitri Shostakovich's *Tahiti Trot* (1999)**. This little arrangement of "Tea for Two" was knocked off by, in my book, the greatest of all 20th century classical composers in about 45 minutes, as a dare, when this song was a Broadway 20's hit. This is not a great work of course, but the Sheba Consort which I helped form when living in Ethiopia in the late 90's, performed this at one of our concerts at the Armenian Club in Addis Ababa. My wife, who doesn't profess to be a great musician, played the theme on a modified glass harp – wine glasses filled with different levels of water to provide the sound of each note. Irritatingly, she got by far the loudest applause! So on my desert island, this will remind me of her musicianship as well as some wonderful years playing quartets and quintets from the classical repertoire with the eclectic Sheba Consort containing a Russian, Japanese, German, American and a Brit and also of Schubert's quintet, which tops my long list.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYJUJ_qzVWY

7. **Cesària Évora's *Sodade* (Longing) (2002)**. I was first introduced to Fado music by Italian friends while living in Ethiopia. My family holidays in 60's Southern Spain were dominated by Flamenco and its great Portuguese 'equivalent' passed me by. While living in Maputo, Mozambique I saw the Cabo Verde singer Cesària Évora appear on stage, barefoot and complete with trademark glass of whisky and cigarette. Her performance was quite mesmerising – and I don't doubt that that extraordinary husky voice was helped along by her props. This was not purist Fado – you have to go to the Mozambican-Portuguese Mariza for that- but the music of Cabo Verde fuses so many influences – Fado, the indigenous Morne, Afro beat and Brazilian-Caribbean. Her legacy is to be found throughout the islands today – and like in Cuba- music permeates everywhere. So on my own island I will know I am surrounded by music at all times, especially in the silences.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERY8GJ-i0I>

8. **Zoltán Kodály's *Esti Dal* (Evening Song) (2010)**. This wonderfully haunting, musically simple song I first came across when I was with the amateur choir Budapesti Monteverdi Kórus. As a kid I was steeped in Anglican church music. Living in East Europe opened me up to a more Germanic, Hungarian and Russian tradition alongside the compulsory Monteverdi. *Esti Dal* was our leitmotif, and we sang it whenever we got the chance often spontaneously, including when visiting a church in Moscow, in the caves 30 metres below ground in Slovenia, surrounded by stalactites and stalagmites, and even at my own 60th birthday party. I last heard it sung, beautifully, by the Bath Camerata at a November 2018 Remembrance Day concert.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfdtCYUZpX4>

One of the above may have to get chucked out in favour of C.V.Standford in A's Nunct Dimittis – which has the treble part opening on a pianissimo top F . I sang it as a Salisbury Cathedral chorister, first in 1963, and later at an Evensong when my father was home on leave. He had himself sung it in the 20's at Winchester, so a recording of it was a natural choice at his cremation decades later.

Book: Oxford English Dictionary (all 20 volumes if I am allowed, but the Shorter will do fine)

Luxury: Bosendorfer medium-sized Grand Piano (tropicalised, of course).