

GERRY FOX TO FINGAL'S CAVE

Seeing you for the first time from a wooden sailing ship, red mast ablaze. I could see why you had so entranced young Felix Mendelssohn. The glorious Hebrides Overture, inspired by your outlandish landscape, is a work I had set to images in the past. So when my composer friend Ned Bigham and I decided to create a new piece for film and music, I thought immediately of you.

That initial sight was extraordinary: white crests of waves crashing violently against your rocky cliffs topped by grassy slopes far above, unmistakable dark holes announcing the entrances of three separate sea caves, the third and largest a curling fissure that disappeared into nothingness.

"That's Fingal's Cave!" shouted the captain in his yellow oilskin and sea wester. As we sailed around your shores, out of nowhere, endless columns of basalt cliff formations rose into view. Where did these strange pillars come from? Keats himself wondered if the giants who came down to the daughters of men had taken a whole mass of these columns and bound them together like bunches of matches.

Overjoyed to be here, and at one with your solitary beauty, even whilst stormy skies threatened, I clambered along your perilous sea edge, listening to the hissing sounds of sea water draining away through endless cracks in those haunting, unique swathes of hexagonal edifices.

Eventually I found my way around to the cave opening as waves washed, sea spray drenching my body. I entered your imposing interior. At first I admit I was a little disappointed. I expected you to be vast and cavernous. But you were just a long chasm, densely packed with oily, purple-hued symmetrical pillars separated only by a rushing torrent of water repeatedly hitting the back of the cave before retreating. The more I watched, the more fascinated I became, as if inside a musical instrument, an immense organ, as Kluge, Keats, Mendelssohn & companion described you, black and resounding and absolutely without purpose.

The sea surged forward, glittering shards of foam swirling. Keats rightly remarked that for solemnity and grandeur it far surpasses the finest cathedral! And your sound! So that's how Mendelssohn had hit upon that unmistakable opening melody right there and then, the reverberating echo of the waves from the high vault utterly musical and awe-inspiring. If only we could capture your spirit anew, that never-ending ebb and swell...



LETTERS LIVE



JESSICA YU TO LEITH

I remember you Little Blue corridor with the red stripe. Someone on the telephone in the flat next door with a raised voice.

I saw inside a cashmere coloured carpet and an egg-yolk wall. You never know how quiet you can be until you're gone overseas and walked around all day with the only person who hears your voice the apron you buy a sandwich off. I remember the swimming pool during women-only hour and no lanes, just a large square space. Women criss-crossing, swimming dart-ways, adjacent horizontally across, vertically, this ways, that ways, making up their own rhythms. One asking me how to do it, how to swim. Blowing bubbles is a good place to start, I said, and she blew and blew.

Kingway Sweet Peanuts and Jerry's Homemade sweets. Finest in Scotland in the window. Radishes in a packet from Sainsbury's. Bitter red skin and sweet white flesh. Open the brown envelope. PLEASE DO NOT BEAD. Small gallery with artist coats and blinking slide shows and people out the front trying to reverse parallel or having a smoke. Click. A lady with a dog. Click. Three generations of family crowded into the one frame. Click. The beach. Click. Black.

