DUSTIN O'HALLORAN

It's always tempting to draw conclusions as to why a musician feels drawn to a certain style or sound. In Dustin O'Halloran's case, one can't help but wonder whether it has something to do with a childhood spent in Phoenix, Arizona, one of America's most populated cities, yet one buried in the Sonoran Desert. Does this sparse yet vivid music reflect an early desire to escape from the hustle of urban life to the peace of the desolate wilderness? Or is it connected to Los Angeles, where he continued to grow up beneath clear blue skies in a thriving cultural metropolis? Perhaps, though, it's indicative of seven years spent living in the rural Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy, where O'Halloran developed his idiosyncratic piano skills following time spent in the underappreciated but critically acclaimed band, Devics. Maybe, even, it's symptomatic of his current existence in Berlin, a city famed for its bohemian nightlife, but whose wide streets and plentiful parks offer a rarely celebrated tranquillity that's unusual for a capital city. In all honesty, the answer's probably not important. What really matters is the music.

It's this music that has led O'Halloran to become known as one of the most significant figures in a scene that has variously – and perhaps misleadingly – become referred to as, among other things, 'neo-classical' or 'post-classical'. Neither are terms with which O'Halloran is comfortable: though he's worked predominantly with piano and strings in recent years, his collaboration with Adam Wiltzie (Stars Of The Lid) under the name A Winged Victory For The Sullen underlines his enthusiasm for other textures, and he's dabbled with electronica too, something he acknowledges is far from unlikely to happen again. Instead, O'Halloran would prefer it if his music were simply labelled 'timeless', and a cursory listen to any of his work since the first Devics album suggests it's as accurate an epithet as one is likely to muster.

O'Halloran first received widespread recognition after Sofia Coppola invited him to contribute music to her award-winning *Marie Antoinette*. Amid the film's vibrant colours, and the admirably incongruous sounds of the new wave, post-punk and electronic acts who dominated the movie's soundtrack, O'Halloran's solo piano pieces provided welcome moments of eloquent stillness. He'd already been composing for a considerable time, though: in fact, it wasn't long after he'd begun to teach himself how to play piano at the age of seven – having been inspired by the sounds coming from the ballet lessons that his mother gave – that he started to perform his own work. Soon, the influence of the likes of Chopin, Arvo Pärt and Debussy was supplanted by a fondness for more esoteric acts – Cocteau Twins (whose Simon Raymonde would later sign him to his label, Bella Union), Gavin Bryars, Morton Feldman and Joy Division – and, by the time he was 19 or so, he was writing songs with Sara Lov, whom he met at Santa Monica College, where he was studying art.

Devics, whose hazy dream pop won them considerable plaudits, went on to record five albums. (Formally, they've never actually split up.) But, by the time their last release, *Push The Heart*, came out in 2006, O'Halloran already had two albums of solo piano pieces under his belt, written in the Italian farmhouse to which he'd relocated after the turn of the millennium. It was the first of these that attracted Coppola's attention – the second called largely upon work for the movie itself – but initially he'd been reluctant to release it, as he considered his compositions too naïve and his playing too unskilled. Arguably, however, it was their very Satie-esque simplicity that made them so haunting and earned them a place in the Bella Union catalogue, while the simultaneous emergence of other likeminded souls – including Jóhann Jóhannsson, Max Richter and Nils Frahm – helped establish a healthy musical environment in which he could flourish. Indeed, Frahm has regularly engineered recordings for O'Halloran, while Johannsson mixed 2011's *Lumiere*, his last studio album (released by UK independent label Fat Cat), and has a studio beside O'Halloran's.

Since the release of *Piano Solos Volumes 1* and *2* in 2004 and 2006, O'Halloran has gone on to score a number of films and TV shows. These include Drake Doremus' *Breathe In* (starring Guy Pearce and Felicity Jones) and *Like Crazy*, which won Sundance's Grand Jury Prize, while, most recently, he's worked on 2015's Indian drama *Umrika* – which won the Audience Award at Sundance, and gave him his first opportunity to compose for a full string orchestra – as well as the ten episode *Transparent*, a comedy drama for Amazon which picked up two Golden Globes in 2015, and for which he composed the music in just five weeks. O'Halloran's also released two further solo collections, including the live recording, *Vorleben* (2011), as well as winning further fans – and selling out prestigious seated theatres – with A Winged Victory For The Sullen, whose two albums (released by Erased Tapes in Europe and Kranky in the USA) showcase Halloran's trademark, delicate melodies awash in his colleague Adam Wiltzie's ambient atmospherics. Their most recent release – *ATOMOS* (2014) – emerged from an irresistible invitation to work with Wayne McGregor, the Resident Choreographer of The Royal Ballet in London, and further emphasises O'Halloran's eagerness to explore new musical realms.

Whatever his influences or inspirations, whether they be cultural or geographical, it's clear that O'Halloran's become a singularly serene presence in a world full of noise. A minimalist master of the intricate and the intimate,

he’s earned respect and admiration across the globe, and his work is more than deserving of – and increasingly associated with – the very accolade that he’s always sought: timeless.