

## FLOREANA<sup>1</sup>

*A traveller should be a botanist,  
for in all views plants form the chief embellishment.*

**Charles Darwin Journal of Researches: into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle Round the World (1839), ch. XXIII, 604.**

Whilst **FLOREANA** sets the concluding remarks of *On The Origin of Species (1859)*, the compositional premise of this movement returns to September 1835, when the second voyage of HMS Beagle brought Charles Darwin to Floreana, known at that time coincidentally as Charles Island, after Charles I. In this setting Darwin observed and questioned the significance of nature's variation. Writing four months later from Sydney to his friend John Stevens Henslow, Darwin noted:

Amongst other things, I collected every plant, which I could see in flower, as it was the flowering season ... I shall be very curious to know whether the Flora belongs to America, or is peculiar. I paid also much attention to the Birds, which I suspect are very curious. —' See *Correspondence* 1: 485.

**FLOREANA** traces the development of a single species of *Paeonia lactiflora*, "Pecher", which bloomed in my garden in October 2008 and brought immense joy. This magnificent flower was comprised of over eighty-four petals, of which none were exactly identical, sublime degrees of variation ranging from subtle to substantial.

Like the island, an active volcano with potential for explosive eruptions, **FLOREANA** metamorphs from below the surface as a labile environment, mysterious and enigmatic. Textures unfold over time in response to shifting sonorities of harp, strings and percussion, with clarinet and flute botanically illustrating the eighty-four petal morphs of the peony as an increasingly vibrant but delicate palette of life. The concluding solo echoes the birdsong of the Floreana Mockingbird, *Mimus trifasciatus*, which was uplisted on May 20, 2008 from Endangered to Critically Endangered, the highest threat category on the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List 2008 for birds at risk of extinction. At that time, only 137 Floreana Mockingbirds were known to still exist.

My sincere thanks are extended to Dr. Joanne H. Cooper, Curator, Bird Group, The Natural History Museum, England for introducing me to Dr Paquita Hoeck, Zoological Museum, University of Zürich, Switzerland, who has generously shared field recordings of the rare Floreana Mockingbird, undertaken at Gardner, December 2008. I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Gina Murrell, Assistant Curator of the Herbarium, University of Cambridge, England for her spontaneous enthusiasm in showing me Darwin's Gálapagos specimens, a moment which fired my inspiration.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Floreana**, the southeasternmost island in the Gálapagos archipelago, named after Juan José Flores, first president of Ecuador.  
*flores*, Spanish, flowers