

# SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE b.1934

CD 1 76:07

## TRAGEDIA

- |                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1 Prologue                            | 1:36 |
| 2 Parados                             | 2:15 |
| 3 Episodion: Strophe I – Anapaest I   | 3:49 |
| 4 Antistrophe I                       | 1:34 |
| 5 Stasimon                            | 2:23 |
| 6 Episodion: Strophe II – Anapaest II | 3:50 |
| 7 Antistrophe II                      | 2:21 |
| 8 Exodos                              | 2:45 |

## 9 FIVE DISTANCES FOR FIVE INSTRUMENTS 13:52

## THREE SETTINGS OF CELAN FOR SOPRANO AND FIVE INSTRUMENTS

- |                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| 10 White and Light | 5:07 |
| 11 Night           | 3:33 |
| 12 Tenebrae        | 4:52 |
- Christine Whittlesey soprano*

## 13 SECRET THEATRE 27:48

*Ensemble InterContemporain  
Pierre Boulez*

CD 2 74:43

## 1 ENDLESS PARADE 19:25

FOR TRUMPET, VIBRAPHONE AND STRINGS

*Håkan Hardenberger trumpet*

*Paul Patrick vibraphone*

**BBC Philharmonic Orchestra**

**Elgar Howarth**

## 2 PANIC 18:21

*John Harle saxophone*

*Paul Clarvis drum kit*

**BBC Symphony Orchestra**

*Sir Andrew Davis*

## 3 EARTH DANCES 36:46

*The Cleveland Orchestra*

*Christoph von Dohnányi*

[DDD]

Sir Andrew Davis appears by courtesy of Teldec Classics International GmbH.

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# SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE

There is no more distinctive voice in British music today than that of Harrison Birtwistle. From the elemental, ritual clarity of Tragoedia in 1965 through to the wild, scandal-provoking Panic for saxophone, drum-kit and orchestra 30 years later, Birtwistle has followed a clearly defined artistic path and pursued a highly personal kind of modernism in music.

Born in Accrington in Lancashire in 1934, Birtwistle studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music in the 1950s, and was one of a group of talented and influential musicians to emerge from the college, including the pianist John Ogdon and fellow-composers Alexander Goehr and Peter Maxwell Davies. Musical revolution was in the air: while continental Europe experienced its effects first in the application of the new theories derived from the music of Webern, in works such as Boulez's two-piano Structures of 1952, it was only in the next decade that the impact of Birtwistle's contemporaries was generally felt in British musical life. While elements of mime and drama crossed into that great classical arena, the concert hall (in Ligeti's hilarious Aventures, the provocative antics of Bussotti and, closer to home, the works of Peter Maxwell Davies himself), Birtwistle's own theatrical response was far more radical. Taking his cue from Stravinsky's seminal ballet score Agon, he absorbed the structural principles of Greek tragedy and made them his subject-matter, producing the work that made his name and established his unmistakable voice, Tragoedia.

Drama, abstract and concrete, has remained central to Birtwistle's thinking. The result, on one hand, has been a series of operas, beginning with the violent, anguished Punch and Judy in 1968, and continuing through The Mask of Orpheus, which occupied him during the 1970s and was

first performed in 1986, and Gawain (1991), on to his most recent stage work, The Last Supper, first performed at the Deutsche Staatsoper in Berlin in 2000. At the same time, works such as Secret Theatre of 1984 and Five Distances for Five Instruments (1993) have continued the exploration of dramatic and spatial qualities in music for the concert hall, and the inherent drama of the concerto has sparked a number of works in this form, including the piece for trumpet and orchestra Endless Parade, written for and first performed by the trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger in 1987.

The notion of a parade of images is common to both these works. In Secret Theatre, the source is Robert Graves's poem of the same name, opening with the lines:

*When from your sleepy mind the day's burden  
Falls like a bushel sack on a barn floor,*

*Be prepared for music, for natural mirages*

*And for night's incomparable parade of colour.*

[...]

*It is hours past midnight now; a flute signals*

*Far off; we mount the stage as though at random,*

*Boldly ring down the curtain, then dance out our love.*

With Endless Parade, on the other hand, the initial spark, as related in the composer's own programme note, was a personal experience:

One summer I was in the Italian town of Lucca, a medieval labyrinth of streets encircled by impressive walls. One of the churches [actually, the cathedral], even has a labyrinth carved on its façade, as if to reinforce the city's maze-like identity. My visit coincided with 'Festa', and a long procession of tableaux vivants snaked its way through the narrow streets. I became interested in the number of ways you could observe this event: as a bystander, watching each float pass by, each strikingly individual yet part of a whole; or you could wander through side alleys, hearing the

parade a street away, glimpsing at a corner, meeting head on what a moment before you saw from behind. Each time the viewpoint was different, yet instantly identified as part of one body.

Just as this parade could be observed from different vantage points, so Birtwistle has fixed on the idea that a piece of music can also be observed from different perspectives – the analogy of a crystal is one he has made – in contrast with the sense of direction and impulse (including the progress towards a climactic point) that has long dominated Western musical thinking. The immensely powerful *Earth Dances* for orchestra (1986) is an avowed expression of this concept, and at the same time a structural tour de force, with the musical material divided into what Birtwistle has described, with geological inference, as six ‘strata’ identified by register (*Secret Theatre*, in contrast, has only two). The stratification turns the orchestra from its familiar collection of instrumental families into a multi-voiced ensemble of ever-shifting relationships.

Away from the sphere of opera, Birtwistle’s most significant writing for the voice has been in his nine settings of verses by the surrealist poet Paul Celan (1920-1970), in the translations from the original German by Michael Hamburger; these were composed between 1989 and 1996, the year of the first complete performance. Birtwistle had by then simultaneously reached his largest ever single audience and inadvertently become a symbol of musical outrage when *Panic* was performed at the Last Night of the Proms in London in September 1995. It was a bit late in the day for the composer to take on the role of musical enfant terrible, although the row had been brewing for some time when hecklers had decided to show their disapproval of his music at the first revival of *Gawain* at the Royal Opera House. ‘What was he doing, the great god Pan, / Down in the reeds by the river? / Spreading ruin and scattering ban, /

Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat, / And breaking the golden lilies afloat / With the dragon-fly on the river’ wrote Elizabeth Barrett Browning at the opening of ‘A Musical Instrument’. These words, remembered from schooldays, prompted this riotous score, like *Tragoedia*, a ‘goat-dance’, but one that invokes the chaotic energy of Pan rather than the controlled formality of tragedy, and the two works together provide an eloquent frame for this survey of three decades of Birtwistle’s music.

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Photo Frans Schellekens

Joanna MacGregor with Harrison Birtwistle  
at the recording of *Antiphonies for Piano and Orchestra*.

# HARRISON BIRTWISTLE



*Antiphonies  
for Piano and  
Orchestra*

*Nomos*

*An Imaginary  
Landscape*

JOANNA  
MACGREGOR  
Radio Filharmonisch Orkest  
MICHAEL GIELEN  
BBC Symphony Orchestra  
PAUL DANIEL

## HARRISON BIRTWISTLE (born 1934)

There are two categories of composers; those for whom it is a craft, to be acquired painstakingly over many years, and those for whom writing is as natural as breathing, an utterly compulsive and unselfconscious act of communication. Harrison Birtwistle belongs unquestionably to the latter group; he is the most natural and individual voice to have emerged in British music since Michael Tippett.

Independent attitudes and methods characterise Birtwistle's work. His way of constructing pieces is entirely personal, intuitive, and probably as a result he is always chary of discussing his own music except in the most factual way, not for any reasons of exclusivity or privacy, but simply because procedures that he uses almost instinctively cannot be expressed easily in anything as hard edged as words. Stylistic influences are, however, more easily enumerated: Stravinsky and Webern in the economy and preciseness with which every expressive point is made, Messiaen in the fondness for hieratic, ritualistic structures, Varese, perhaps most of all, in his approach to sonority, a penchant for extreme registers, and an utterly unprejudiced attitude to form.

## ANTIPHONIES FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA NOMOS

### AN IMAGINARY LANDSCAPE

More than twenty years separate the two early works by Harrison Birtwistle on this disc, *Nomos* (1968) and *An Imaginary Landscape* (1971), from the most recent, *Antiphonies for Piano and Orchestra* first performed in 1993. If the music drama *The Mask of Orpheus* is taken as the great watershed in Birtwistle's development, then both *Nomos* and *An Imaginary Landscape* belong to the pre-*Orpheus* period; indeed *Nomos* was

written only just after Birtwistle's very first stage work *Punch and Judy*. And if the completion of *Gawain* in 1991 is taken as the next important point of articulation in his career, then *Antiphonies* was the first large-scale instrumental example of the language that Birtwistle developed for the epic scale of that operatic subject.

Examples of that bold, rhetorical style erupt frequently through the highly patterned surface of *Antiphonies*, in which the role of the solo piano is less like that of a conventional concerto soloist and much more like the ambiguous role that Birtwistle gives his instrumentalists in *Secret Theatre*, which he wrote in 1984. There the wind players seem to be engaged in a ritual that operates according to a hidden set of rules while the strings supply the background textures. The string writing has a similar function in *Antiphonies*, while the exchanges between the piano and the rest of the orchestra move on a separate musical plane above them.

Yet the soloist's function is very much that of a coordinator and unifier; the piano writing is dense and heavily chordal, and acts as a kind of harmonic centre to the work, so that the orchestra is free to operate independently. The 'antiphonies' of the title are created by the way in which the harps and tuned percussion echo the piano at crucial moments, a description of one of the ways in which the work progresses rather than a definition of its principal method of working. And though there is a hint of a reprise in the quiet ending of *Antiphonies* Birtwistle has spoken of the beginning and end of the work as arbitrary, as though a door were being opened and closed on music which was continuing indefinitely.

Through the 1960s Birtwistle had explored the conventions and rituals of Greek drama, and for a

commission for the 1968 Promenade concerts he went back to the same rich source. In classical Greek the word *nomos* had two meanings; it signified the law, the social and political order of the state, but it was also used to denote the melodic patterns for the playing of the reed pipe, the *aulos*, used to accompany dramatic recitations and to send troops into battle.

That abrasive wind sound seems to be evoked in Birtwistle's work by the quartet of amplified soloists - flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon. Throughout *Nomos* they unfold the work's basic musical formula, and the continuity of this remorselessly unfolding melody contrasts with the highly sectioned music for the rest of the large orchestra (without violins), in which the musical material is constantly recycled and reassessed. Overlaid on this musical discourse is a strikingly simple dramatic device: at the start of the work the wind quartet is barely audible, but grows steadily louder as the work progresses, until it obliterates and silences the orchestra altogether. The "law", Birtwistle's melodic formula, has finally asserted itself.

By the time he composed *An Imaginary Landscape* three years later Birtwistle was beginning to move towards the sound world of his stage work on the Orpheus legend. If one wanted to find a portmanteau title for a Birtwistle work of that period, [which includes his most celebrated early score, *The Triumph of Time*] then 'imaginary landscape' would be as good as any. It is a title first used by John Cage for a series of electronic works in the early 1950s but it is peculiarly appropriate for a composer who has frequently used a geographical metaphor to describe the way a listener might orientate his or herself in his music: 'One starts, stops, moves around, looks at the overall view, fixes one's attention on a particular feature or on a detail of

that feature or on a fragment of that detail or on the texture of that fragment.'

Birtwistle calls *An Imaginary Landscape* a 'processional', and the progress of the music is that of a steadily unfolding musical frieze which seems to be oblivious to the passage of normal human time. The ensemble of brass, percussion and double basses is divided into instrumental choirs, which are reassigned in the middle of the work; the groups of instruments call to each other, oppose or ally themselves with their colleagues, until finally they abandon their separate identities to play together for the final, very quiet chorale, composed in memory of the composer's mother.

Andrew Clements

## HARRISON BIRTWISTLE (né en 1934)

Il y a deux catégories de compositeurs: ceux pour qui il s'agit d'un artisanat, laborieusement acquis au cours de longues années, et ceux pour qui l'écriture est aussi naturelle que de respirer, une façon de communiquer impérative et spontanée. Harrison Birtwistle appartient certainement à la seconde catégorie; sa voix est la plus naturelle et la plus individuelle qui se soit fait entendre dans la musique britannique depuis Michael Tippett.

Des attitudes et des méthodes indépendantes caractérisent l'oeuvre de Birtwistle. Sa façon de construire un morceau est entièrement personnelle, intuitive, et c'est probablement pourquoi il hésite à parler de sa musique, sinon d'une façon très pragmatique, non pas pour protéger son exclusivité ou sa vie privée, mais simplement parce que les procédés qu'il emploie presque par instinct ne peuvent pas s'exprimer

**HARRISON BIRTWISTLE**

- ❑ CARMEN ARCADIAE  
MECHANICAE PERPETUUM 9:20
- ❑ SILBURY AIR 16:16
- ❑ SECRET THEATRE 25:44

**THE LONDON SINFONIETTA**  
**ELGAR HOWARTH, Conductor**

Produced by Roy Emerson  
Engineer: Martin Haskell  
Recorded in Conway Hall, London. January 1987

**SUBSIDISED BY THE**  
**ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN**

**Arts Council Funded**



The three works brought together on this disc constitute a trilogy of sorts; when Harrison Birtwistle composed the earliest of them, *Silbury Air*, in 1976 and 1977, he did not consciously embark upon a sequence of pieces that would be completed seven years later with *Secret Theatre*. Rather the notion of the three works as a unity was to a large extent circumstantial, encouraged by the facts of their commission and first performances. All were written expressly for the London Sinfonietta, which gave the premieres, and all are therefore scored for the Sinfonietta's basic complement of fourteen instrumentalists, with the addition of a harp in *Silbury Air*. Birtwistle had already provided one work for the London Sinfonietta, the extrovert and virtuosic *Verses for Ensembles* of 1969, which uses only wind and percussion. The commission from the Koussevitsky Foundation that elicited *Silbury Air* clearly demanded something very different. By 1976 the composer had composed the first two acts of his large-scale 'lyric tragedy' *The Mask of Orpheus* (eventually to be completed in 1983), and with that had effectively rounded off one phase in his creative development. The kinds of musical and dramatic continuity explored in the opera were replaced in *Silbury Air* and subsequent works by an investigation of how discrete and unrelated musical objects may be connected in a coherent and meaningful way. In *Silbury Air* the relationship between the objects is regulated by the use of the 'pulse labyrinth' with which the score is prefaced. This array of carefully proportioned metronome speeds and durations indicates paths which the music may follow through the work, and the juxtapositions of pulse which are allowed, but it does not prescribe the overall structure; that remains within the composer's gift. In the course of the piece the music threads its way three times through the labyrinth, twice returning to its starting point; on

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the third occasion any further exploration is prevented by the intrusion of a sequence of four harp chords borrowed from an earlier work and hence not part of the network at all. The point to which the music returns is a quiet pulsing E played by the strings; from that it grows outwards each time towards the statement of a melody, perhaps the very 'air' of the work's title. Silbury Hill is a famous and mysterious archaeological site in south-west England, a prehistoric man-made mound imposed upon the countryside. Birtwistle has frequently referred to his music as 'imaginary landscapes' through which the listener must journey, to be confronted with its recurrent features from ever-changing perspectives. Silbury Hill offers just such an artificial landscape, and one which carries with it an aura of magic. In *Silbury Air* it is the emergence of the melody that casts a spell over the work, giving it shape and purpose, imposing itself upon Birtwistle's carefully controlled and intricate landscape. Soon after the first performance of *Silbury Air* in 1977, Birtwistle wrote a shorter work to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the formation of the London Sinfonietta the following year. Where the *raison d'être* of the preceding work turns out to be melody, that is the one element excluded by design from *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* ('The Perpetual Song of Mechanical Arcady'). It juxtaposes six kinds of musical mechanism to create, a jagged, pulse-dominated structure, forcing them into continuity by the superimposition of separate dynamic and registral schemes. These move on a different time-scale from the mechanisms, so that repetitions acquire varied and distinct characters, and the pauses between them on long held pitches assume increasing importance as the work ricochets through its course. The climax is reached at such a moment, when the extremes of dynamic and

register are suddenly thrown into violent opposition.

Between *Carmen Arcadiae* and the composition of *Secret Theatre* in 1984 Birtwistle completed a number of substantial scores, most notably the choral and orchestral ... *agm...* (1979), the remaining music of *The Mask of Orpheus*, the Clarinet Quintet (1980) and the 'mechanical pastoral' *Yan Tan Tethera* (1984).

Yet his compositional preoccupations remained unchanged, and *Secret Theatre* returns again to the duality of pulse and melody.

For anyone seeking a simplistic continuity between these three Sinfonietta works, *Secret Theatre* could be characterised as combining the melodic elaborations of *Silbury Air* with the clockwork mechanisms of *Carmen Arcadiae*, but that would utterly devalue the dramatic and dynamic exploitation of the two elements which fuels the complex work.

Ritual, implicit or explicit, has been a constant impulse in Birtwistle's music, influencing his abstract instrumental writing as profoundly as it has directed his theatre pieces. *Secret Theatre* encompasses a hidden ritual, one for which the listener is offered no explanation; its title is taken from a poem by Robert Graves, in which the poet promises 'an unforeseen and fiery entertainment'. The ritual is enacted by the chamber orchestra itself, divided into two bodies, the 'Cantus' and the 'Continuum'. The Cantus instrumentalists are instructed to play from solo positions at the front of the ensemble; flute, oboe and clarinet are more or less constant members of this group, though at certain moments they are absorbed (musically and physically) into the Continuum, and sometimes they are joined by the trumpet, horn or two violins.

The music of the Cantus is essentially linear, melodic: its instruments play in unison throughout, whether it be 'simple' unison,

rhythmic unison or heterophonic unison in which the melodic line is allowed to unravel into separate strands. The material for the Continuum is in contrast conceived vertically, built from a collection of 'clockworks', ostinatos interlocked and sometimes superimposed. The two layers do not represent a musical foreground and background in a conventional sense; it is very much the interplay of equals; there are times when the Continuum's complexity threatens to overwhelm the Cantus, and, as the work progresses, it throws up its own soloists to vye with those at the front of the stage.

There, then, is the work's ritual, its 'secret theatre': the instrumentalists move between the groups according to a set of hidden rules; the listener is admitted to a rite for which he or she can know no justification, but which carries a musical and dramatic power of a very singular kind.

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Though it may seem a little premature, even academic, to start carving up the output of a composer still in his 30s into 'periods', it is clearly possible to detect three distinct creative phases in Harrison Birtwistle's music to date. Birtwistle has spoken of a gradual change of emphasis from composition to composition, though it operates equally on a broader time scale, from one creative phase to the next.

'I find there is a definite creative evolution within myself, and different pieces take on different aspects of this. For the sake of simplicity one can divide this evolutionary process into three layers. The top layer is something that has come to full fruition in a previous piece and which is already in decline in the next piece. The second layer is something that has been thrown up in the previous piece, comes to fruition and into full bloom in the next piece. And the third layer is something that is like a seed and is in the process of germinating to appear in a later piece. But there are many more layers than this of course.'

Of the three works on this record *Verses for Ensembles* (1969) marks the end of the second phase in the evolutionary development of Birtwistle's music, while the two vocal pieces stand at the beginning of the third and current phase.

The title of *Verses for Ensembles* neatly encapsulates many of the characteristics common to the music of this period, inaugurated in 1965 by *Tragoedia Verses*: verse and, inevitably, refrain form; ritualised, 'artificial' structure; structural repetition on both small and large scale, often in interlocking, independent cycles; variation within static 'frames'.

*Ensembles*: instrumental resources used to articulate and clarify the cyclic verse-refrain principle. In *Verses* the total ensemble is divided into independent smaller ensembles, each with their own sharply—almost graphically—defined material and imagery. These ensembles are superimposed, juxtaposed, set against one another in a maximum-contrast 'block' rather than 'linear' continuity.

In *Verses* contrast and functional separation is emphasised by the spatial distribution of the instruments on the stage. There are seven playing positions: at the very front are two stands which are used for 'special occasions'—solos and suchlike. Behind these, in the form of two halves of a semicircle, are the positions for the two symmetrical woodwind quintets—the left-hand one for an ensemble of high-pitch instruments (piccolo, oboe, E flat and B flat clarinets and bassoon), and the one on the right for the low ensemble (alto flute, cor anglais, B flat and bass clarinets

and contra bassoon). Behind these sits a brass quintet (two trumpets, horn and two trombones) from which the trumpets occasionally break away to play either at the front, or on the raised 'stereophonic' platforms at the very back of the stage, immediately behind the two separate groups of unpitched and pitched percussion.

*Nenia—The Death of Orpheus*, composed in the year after *Verses*, initiated the third creative phase, which has already produced important works for voices and instruments, such as *The Fields of Sorrow* and *An Imaginary Landscape*, and a large-scale orchestral work, *The Triumph of Time*: all, perhaps in a way, 'studies' for the grand opera *Orpheus* (as *Tragoedia* was for the chamber opera *Punch and Judy*, 1967).

Although *Nenia* shares both the Orpheus legend and librettist (Peter Zinovieff) with the opera, they are in no other way connected. The title refers in fact to a particular kind of ancient Roman funeral dirge and to the name of the goddess that was invoked. Even though the instrumental resources of *Nenia* are highly reduced compared to *Verses*, one notices that Birtwistle has now begun to group instruments according to uniform timbres, in contrast to the mixed timbre ensembles of *Verses*. Thus the basic instrumental continuity of *Nenia* is carried by a homogeneous group of three bass clarinets. Until, that is, one breaks away (at the words 'The snarls of venomous, jealous women awoke Orpheus') and becomes a solo B flat clarinet.

This change, and the wide range of vocal techniques the soprano soloist is asked to produce, is of course dictated by the exigencies of the text. Humming, pitched and normally inflected speech, phonetic extension, arioso and outright melody are all called into play—sometimes simultaneously—by the need to provide narrative, declamation, song or the invocation of the name EURIDICE and, after the entry of the B flat clarinet, ORPHEUS.

*The Fields of Sorrow* shares the Orpheus-orientation with *Nenia* (the text by Ausonius from the *Aeniad* refers to the souls of lost lovers wandering around the underworld); and shares the spatial, symmetrical layout of the voices and instruments with *Verses*, though the actual constitution of the instrumental groups develops the single-timbre principle of *Nenia*.

Unlike *Nenia*, however, the continuity of *The Fields of Sorrow* is not dependent on the text, but is laid out in the formalised manner of *Verses*. But gone is the hard-edge, high-contrast dynamism of *Verses*, and not merely because it would be inappropriate in a setting of the text. For in his third phase Birtwistle has initiated a primarily melodic, non-dynamic, processional style which might appear to have more in common with first phase works such as *Monody for Corpus Christi* than with the post-*Tragoedia* music.

Now colours and densities evolve and change gradually as in a procession across a landscape, and Time is not sharply subdivided (as it is in *Verses*) but unfolds as a broad, slowly-progressing continuum. Of Time, music's most precious commodity, Birtwistle has recently said: 'Music is the one medium where Time can transcend itself more than anything else. With poetry you are always up against language and meaning—in theatre too—while with painting you're up against the frame, which limits the size and scale. Time scale in music is something which has nothing to do with the length of a piece—and new concepts of Time are my main compositional preoccupation.'

Michael Nyman



# Harrison BIRTWISTLE

- 1934 Born in Accrington, Lancashire, 15 July
- 1952-55 Studies composition with Richard Hall at the Royal Manchester College of Music; subsequently, the clarinet with Reginald Kell at the Royal Academy of Music, London
- 1957 *Refrains and Choruses* for wind quintet
- 1959 *Monody for Corpus Christi*, for soprano and three instruments
- 1960 *The World is Discovered*, for 12 instruments
- 1962-65 Director of Music at Cranbourne Chase School
- 1962-63 *Chorales for Orchestra*
- 1964 *Entr'actes and Sappho Fragments*, for soprano and chamber ensemble
- Three Movements with Fanfares*, for chamber orchestra
- Narration: The description of the passing of the year*, for a cappella choir
- 1965 *Ring a dumb carillon*, for soprano, clarinet and percussion
- Tragoedia*, for wind quintet, string quartet and harp
- 1965-66 *The Mark of the Goat – Dramatic Cantata for Children*
- 1966 *The Versions of Francesco Petrarca – a dramatic work for baritone, chamber ensemble, school orchestra and mime*
- Awarded Harkness International Fellowship enabling him to reside for two years in the USA – for the first year as a visiting fellow of the Faculty of Music at Princeton University
- 1966-67 *Punch and Judy – chamber opera*, commissioned by the English Opera Group
- 1967 *Monodrama*, for soprano, electronic tape and 5 instruments
- 1968 *Nomos*, for four amplified wind instruments and orchestra
- 1969 *Down by the Greenwood Side*, dramatic pastoral for soprano, speakers, mimes and ensemble
- Cantata*, for soprano and chamber ensemble
- 1970 *Medusa*, for chamber orchestra
- Nenia on the Death of Orpheus*, for soprano and chamber ensemble
- 1971 *Meridian*, for voices and ensemble
- The Fields of Sorrow*, for voices and ensemble
- An Imaginary Landscape*, for brass, basses and percussion
- Chronometer*, for electronic tape
- 1972 *The Triumph of Time*, for orchestra
- 1973 *Grimethorpe Aria*, for brass band
- In progress: *Orpheus* [opera in three acts]



# Chronometer

*Chronometer* is entirely made up from the sounds of clock mechanisms which have been computer-analyzed and regenerated onto 8 tracks. (Reduced in this recording by two.)

In the original recordings both air- and contact-microphones were used to collect sounds from widely differing sources: for instance the Natural Science Museum, London, provided some of the oldest clock sounds still available, while Big Ben was the source of the ostinato which dominates the piece. Besides repetitive sounds, the strikings and bell mechanisms of the clocks were also collected.

About 100 different recordings, of varying durations, were analyzed by the computer electronic music system at EMS, London. All subsequent manoeuvres were made by computer regeneration rather than by tape-montage techniques. The programme used to reinterpret the graphic and numerical music score was MUSYS.

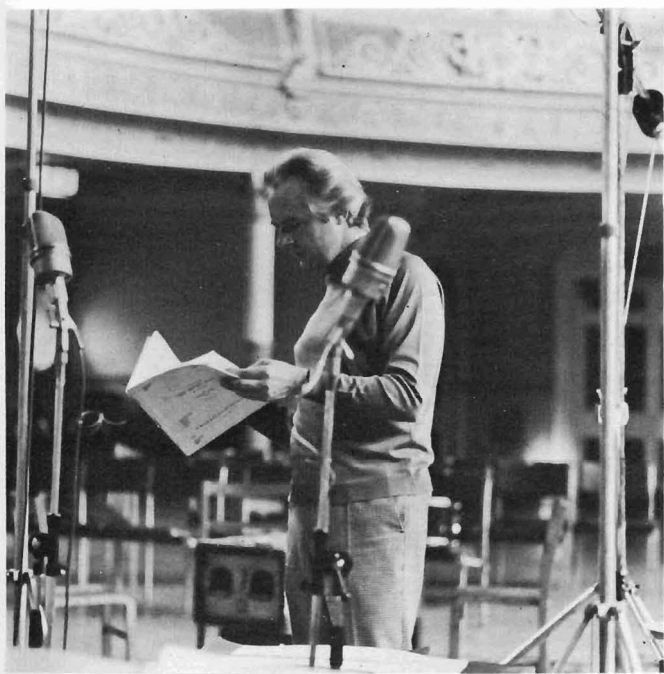
The most obvious musical structures in *Chronometer* are: the solid repetitive slow sound of Big Ben with which it starts and which is dominant throughout; three 2-minute interludes of very fast complex sounds where every change is preceded by a short pure signal; a number of very dense, short, fast-moving structures with complex dynamics; and a series of transformations of the striking and chiming of the 'Wells Clock', with which the piece ends.

Some sections are much changed from the actual recordings — almost any specifiable alteration to a sound can be made with this method — while some of the most complex juxtapositions use frequencies and timbres as close to the original as possible.

The brass band occupies a special place in British musical life. Widely admired, yet almost completely isolated from other forms of music making; entirely amateur in its playing status, yet at its highest level, virtuosic in instrumental technique; deserving a new, rich, continuing repertoire, yet extremely conservative in its musical taste, it presents for the present day composer a paradox, at once an exciting potential medium, yet one whose specialised instrumentation and cautious musical approach combine to produce a somewhat daunting challenge.

Nevertheless, in the past few years several composers outside conservative circles have tackled the problem with great enthusiasm, enlivening and revitalising a repertoire which had become in-bred and stale.

Each of the composers on this disc has come to the brass band from a different background: Henze from the main-stream of European tradition with no previous knowledge of such a grouping of brass instruments: Takemitsu, the Japanese composer, by way of the brass ensemble (itself previously unknown to him) and in an arrangement of my own: Birtwistle from childhood memories of bands playing in his native Accrington in the north of England—and co-incidentally in a neighbouring village of Grimethorpe where he had relatives living in the late 40s: and myself from the inside as a former bandsman.



score of 4 trumpets, 1 horn, 4 trombones and 1 tuba for full band of 26 players using the orthodox band scoring.

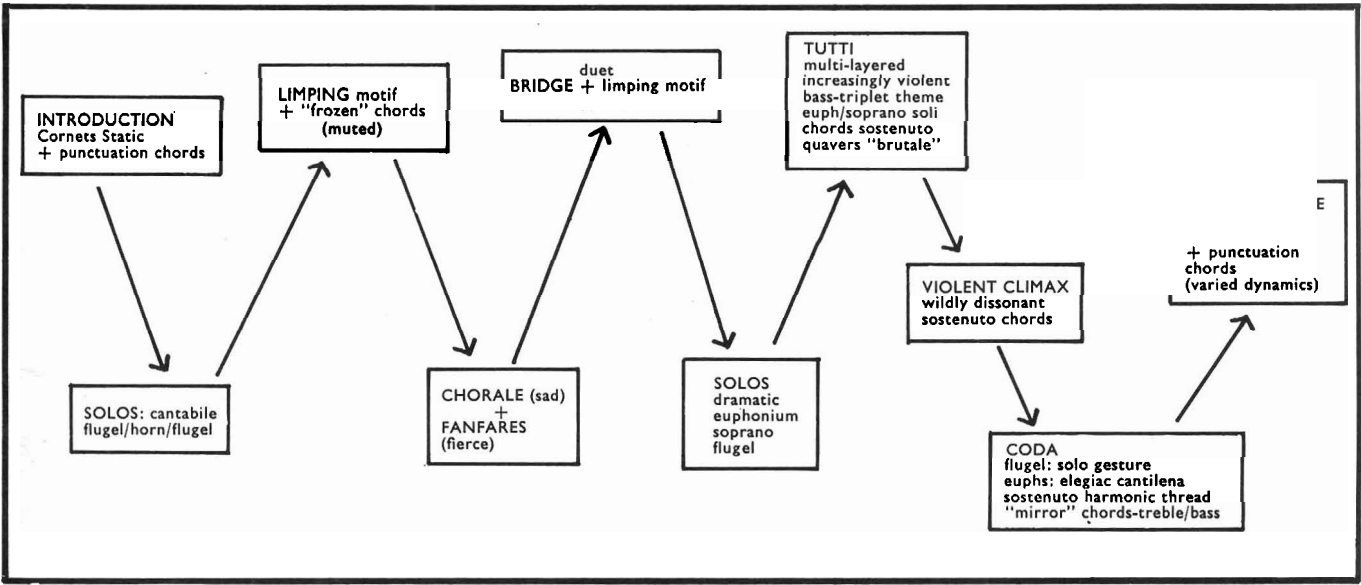
Birtwistle's GRIMETHORPE ARIA, was the first work commissioned by the Grimethorpe band from a leading composer and dates from 1973. Uncompromisingly bleak in mood, mostly slow in tempo, its anguished, pessimistic harmonies have not yet endeared it to band audiences reared on more ear-tickling fare. Like Henze, though in a different way, Birtwistle has re-structured the traditional scoring, rejecting the hierarchy of massed cornets and unison tubas in favour of individual parts. The result is a dense, yet multi-layered texture, massive in the great climaxes of the work (doubled in this performance on the two bands).

The shape of the piece may be summarised as follows:

Henze's RAGTIMES AND HABANERAS was written in 1975 in response to a commission from the Grimethorpe Colliery band, with funds provided by the Gulbenkian Foundation. With no knowledge of traditional scoring nor of the instrumental style (except for a list of the instruments and a couple of gramophone records), Henze has produced a brilliant entertainment of 11 miniature pieces whose glittering textures give a new sonority to the band's traditional instrumentation.

As the title suggests he makes much use of the dance rhythms he has become so fond of in his "Cuban" period, indeed the work often relates closely to the lighter pieces of *Voices* a work of about the same time. Throughout there are other musical references too, from a variety of sources—jazz, Sigmund Romberg, Kurt Weill and Mahler, all adding spice to these echoes of the Caribbean "heard" in terms of the British brass band.

Elgar Howarth



Grimethorpe Aria, startled the band public of 1973 into an awareness of a wider musical world; fortunately for audiences of the future its strongly felt and realised emotional content will assure it a place in band history of much more significance than any mere passing succès de scandale—rather as a masterpiece of the repertoire.