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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Composer
Brian Noyes (1949) Wales/UK
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TITLE
Points of Decision

Year of composition
2006/07

Instrumentation
Picc/2; 2/Cor A; 2/Bass Cl; 2/Contra Bn; 4;2;3;1;Harp; Perc (4); Stgs

Duration
29 min.

Place of premiere performance
BBC Broadcasting House, Manchester, UK

Date of premiere performance
19/02/2008

Performers
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra; James MacMillan

Publisher
Unpublished

Record company
not commercially recorded.
recording available of premiere performance: BBC recording
E-mail: brian.noyes@ukf.net
Edition-No.:
Performers: BBC Philharmonic Orchestra
Price: recording not for commercial resale

MOTIVATION
I have long been fascinated by the work of the nineteenth century poet John Clare. He was born into an illiterate agricultural family, and worked as a farm labourer, but through his own inner strengths and talents created a body of work which, I believe, is an equal to those other romantic poets of the time who were lauded to posterity. It is the determination, and inner sense of his own worth, contrary to the society around him, that makes him stand out from others because he had to work at his craft so industriously and against such odds.
These are the aspects of the person, and personality, which inspired my work, but this is also coupled with reading his account of his escape from an asylum to which he had been committed, because of his “excess of poesy”. As a natural ‘rhymer’ he had written poetry constantly, and his doctors had found that this contributed to his mental deterioration! The account, “Journey Out of Essex”, is a tragic account of his 3-day walk home without food or drink.

This is fascinating enough, but coupled with reading his later poetry one realises the artistic talent of such a person, born without silver spoons, or any sort of advantage. These are the ideas which I still find admirable, and which have inspired other compositions with Clare as a pivotal force, for example my latest piece, "A Surfeit of Realities" for Clarinet Quintet.

PROGRAMME NOTE

Symphonic Metamorphoses after John Clare

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra – James MacMillan
The artistic temperament can take many varied guises and have an equally varied outcome according to personalities. It is fascinating to see how poets, artists, musicians, etc., have persevered with their craft in, sometimes, the most difficult of conditions and doggedly continued to write, paint, and compose. This is, perhaps, the attraction for me of the poet John Clare, the Northamptonshire 'nature poet' of the early nineteenth century.

Born into an illiterate family of farm labourers, he was a natural poet, who was also an exquisite poet of nature, but also a sharp and clear-headed observer of the human condition. However, a fascinating and disturbing element of his life was how poetry, itself the art that gave him credibility, purpose, and meaning, was also to alienate him from his fellow countrymen, who did not understand his sensitive personality, or his poetry.

It was this alienation that began his descent into his own inner (constructed) world, and which led to him being sent to Matthew Allen's Asylum at Epping Forest for recuperation. Without visitors from family or friends, and torn away from those whom he loved, it is no wonder that he longed to return home. Several times he considered escaping. Perhaps daunted by the task of walking the 90 miles home, perhaps reticent about disobeying authority, Clare began the process of making his decision.

The idea for "Points of Decision" comes from considering these moments when he might feel confident about escaping, retreat from this decision, yet again make one, and even return back to his room. Because of his sensitive personality I imagined him prevaricating about making this decision to escape: he knew his position in society, respected order, and was underneath a very strong and determined character. Nevertheless, he was there because of his nervous and delusional mental state, and this, I imagined, contributed to him making decisions and retreating from them.

However, the music is not programmatic, but symphonic in design, developing a theme, and its characteristics, of melodic contour, intervals, rhythms, etc.. This is done in conjunction with a Scottish folk song called 'Highland Mary", which he says he hummed to himself on his long walk home, giving him solace. He documents this in an extraordinary prose piece which he wrote immediately on returning home to Northborough, called "Journey out of Essex" Again the characteristics of this song are absorbed into the fabric of the music, and create the many and varied emotive moods that the piece journeys through. I imagined him to be at times determined, jovial, lonely, deranged, and also elated, and these moods all appear within the progress of the piece, which forms an extended one movement symphonic design.

The piece was developed for performance and recording by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra as part of spnm's season of events 2007/08.
The first performance took place at Studio 7, Broadcasting House, Manchester on 19th February 2008, conducted by James MacMillan.

BIOGRAPHY

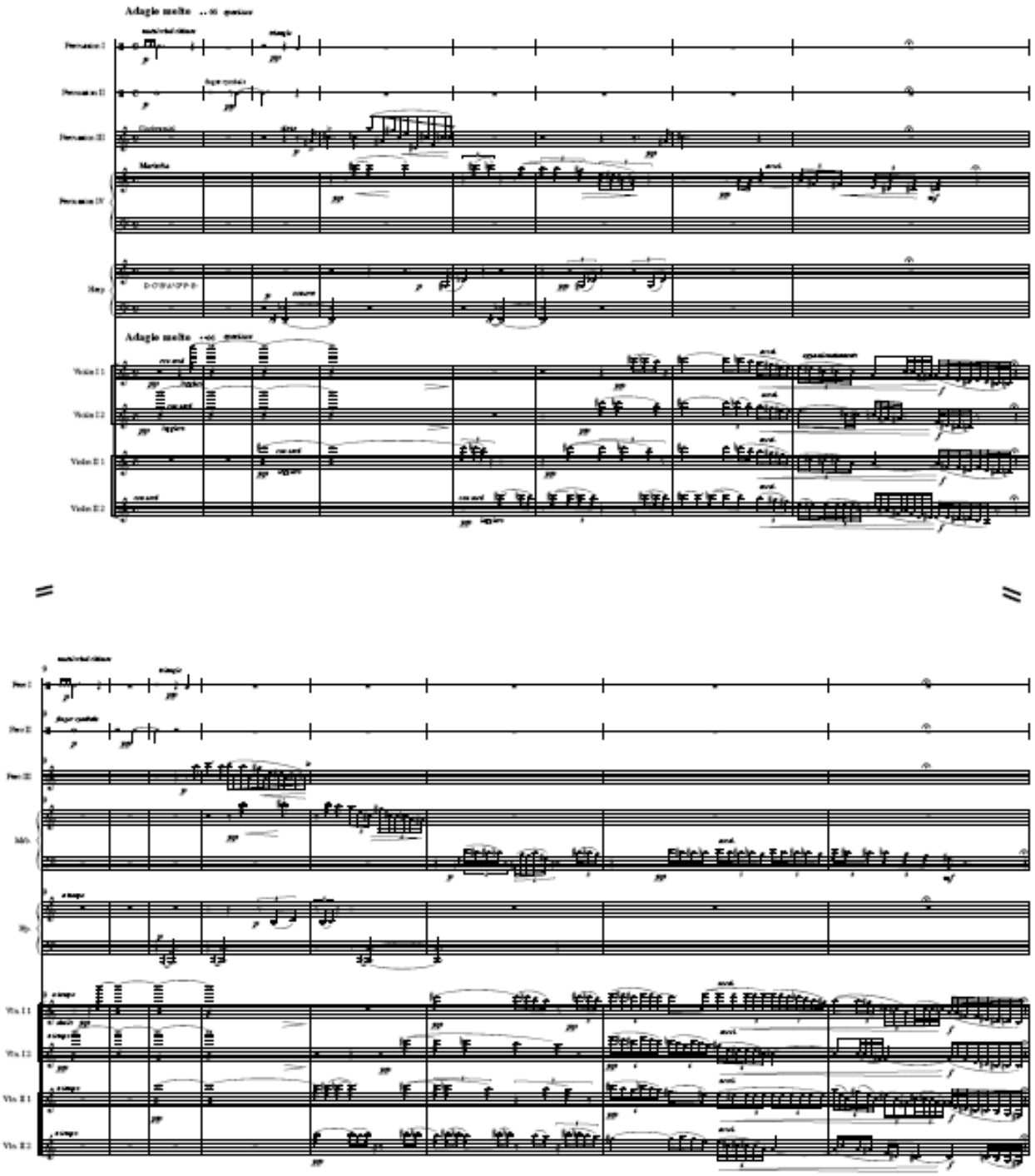
Music has always been around me in some form or another, but I began my musical education by studying classical guitar at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. I freelanced as a performer for several years, but my interest in composition grew from those times. This I studied, firstly, at Cardiff University with Dr David Wynne, and then continued at Goldsmiths' College, London, with Stanley Glasser.

The most important times for me, though, for learning compositional skills, were attending the Dartington Summer School, when Sir Peter Maxwell Davies taught there, and also a weekend of workshops at Aldeburgh School of Advanced Studies with Sir Harrison Birtwistle. Since that time I have had pieces performed by Lontano (ICA London), Singcircle (Vale of Glamorgan Festival), Music Projects London, (Almeida Festival) the Hilliard Ensemble (Christ Church College Canterbury), the Latvian Radio Choir (Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea University), Cantemus Chamber Choir Wales, and most recently the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in February 2008. The orchestra performed my orchestral score "Points of Decision" in Manchester as part of an spnm/BBC collaboration, and the piece was broadcast on the Radio 3 "Hear and Now" programme in September of 2008. I am currently a 'Shortlist' Composer for the spnm (Society for the Promotion of New Music) from October 2007 until 2010.

Points of Decision

(Symphonic metamorphoses after John Clare)

Brian Noyes



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