

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES SPRING · SUMMER 2010

Concerts at The University

Wednesday 28 April 2010

7.30pm

Reid Concert Hall

Edward Harper Memorial Concert



Aisling O'Dea · violin
Clea Friend · cello
Simon Smith · piano

Piano Trio 'The Devil and St Stephen'

Edward Harper

Edward Harper composed his piano trio in 1991 in response to a commission by the Leda Trio, who premiered it the following year. The piece is in a single movement. In the first section, a passage with repeated semiquavers in the strings comes three times, followed the first time by a cello solo, the second time by a violin solo, and the third time by violin and cello together. This gives way to the middle section, a rhythmically intricate passage for all three instruments played almost entirely *pianissimo*. When the repeated-note music returns it builds to a considerable climax which, shortly after the melody which has generated much of the preceding material is finally revealed in its original form, dissolves into a chain of trills which lead to a broader *pizzicato* passage. This in turn leads to the slow closing section, a rather rarefied passage with a passacaglia-like single line in the piano and sighing figures in the strings which gradually open out into more expansive melodic music. The piece ends with twelve bell-chimes in the piano.

The composer writes:

"The work is based on two tunes which I also used in the chamber opera *The Mellstock Quire* and the orchestral song-cycle *Homage to Thomas Hardy*. These are the reel *Devil among the Tailors* and the hymn tune *St Stephen*. Hence the work's subtitle, 'The Devil and St Stephen'."

Calum Robertson · clarinet
Louise Paterson · cello
John Bryden · piano

Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano

Edward Harper

This work, in one movement of approximately 15 minutes, aimed to exploit the lyrical qualities of the ensemble and the piano is predominantly used in octaves as a third melodic line. A slow introductory section leads to an *allegro*, at first light in texture, but gradually becoming more aggressive. At the climax a cello solo leads into the second half of the work, which is elegaic in mood. Much of the melodic material was derived from a short lament for cor anglais written previously by the composer and a version of this ends the piece. The harmonic material develops from a short sequence of chords from Schubert's String Quartet. The piece, in fact, was commissioned by The Hebrides Ensemble and written as a tribute to mark the bicentenary of his birth in 1997, when it was first performed in an otherwise all Schubert programme.

Irene Drummond · soprano
John Turner · recorder
Louise Paterson · cello
John Kitchen · harpsichord

The Ash Grove and Lights Out

from *Lights Out*

Edward Harper

In 1915 Edward Thomas left his home in Steep, Hampshire, to serve in The Great War enlisting in the Artist's Rifles. His is a very private kind of language, expressing a deep sensitivity to nature and a very personal response to the war. Tonight, two of the four poems set by Edward Harper to an unusual combination of instruments - voice, harpsichord, recorder and cello - will be played. *The Ash Grove* is a little fantasy on that folk tune, which appears at the end on the tenor recorder. *Lights Out* is a *passacaglia*, repetitions of the opening sequence of notes in the harpsichord forming the underlying structure. The cycle was written in memory of Kenneth Leighton, and premiered in Wakefield Cathedral in 1993.

INTERVAL

Kindertotenlieder (Songs on the death of children)

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) arr. Edward Harper

These moving, deeply felt and uniquely beautiful songs date from 1901-4. To set Rückert's poems, Mahler used a highly developed chromatic language, but within what are often very simple, linear textures. Much of the music's expressive power stems from the contrast between these elements. The work was originally written for voice and piano, but it is clear that it was conceived with an orchestra in mind – indeed, some passages almost look like a piano reduction of an orchestral score. However, Mahler's approach to the orchestra here is intimate. He colours the very often sparse contrapuntal lines with a variety of solo instruments. There are relatively few moments where the full orchestral sound is used and these are mainly in the storm section of the last movement. This makes the work suited to a version for chamber ensemble which again uses individual instruments to colour the lines, though inevitably, because of the smaller number of instruments, the colours are sometimes very different from Mahler's orchestral version. I had at my disposal a string quartet, a piano and three wind instruments of my choice. The horn had to be one of them (there are some phrases which couldn't be played on anything else) and I chose the flute and clarinet – together with piccolo and bass clarinet – because of the wide range of colour and register these afford. I had a long think about the role of the piano, apart from its obvious use in providing the bell-like sounds required at crucial moments. Mahler's instrumentation gives much of the original piano figuration to the harp, which is used almost entirely as a kind of continuo instrument, giving a luminous resonance to the orchestral sound. Whilst there are moments where I use the piano in a similar way, I felt a need to establish it as an equal partner within the ensemble, sometimes supporting but also emerging on occasion as a solo instrument. Most notably, I use it at the opening of the first song and towards the end of the last, where it gives a childlike simplicity to the heavenly lullaby. This arrangement was commissioned by the Hebrides Ensemble with financial support from the Scottish Arts Council.

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James Lowe · director

Beth Mackay · mezzo soprano

Anna Jones · flute and piccolo

Calum Robertson · clarinet and bass clarinet

David Rimer · horn

Ruth Crouch · violin

Robert McFall · violin

Kathryn Jourdan · viola

Louise Paterson · cello

Simon Smith · piano

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht gescheh'n!
Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!
Die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!

Du musst nicht die Nacht in dir
verschränken;
Musst sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!
Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!
Heil sei dem Freundenlicht der Welt!

Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen

Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle
Flammen
Ihr sprühet mir in manchem Augenblicke,
O Augen! Gleichsam, um voll in einem Blicke
Zu drängen eure ganze Macht zusammen.

Dort ahnt' ich nicht, weil Nebel mich
umschwammen,
Gewoben vom verblendenden Geschicke
Dass sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr
schicke,
Dorthin, von wannen alle Strahlen stammen.

Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten
sagen:
"Wir möchten nah dir bleiben gerne,
Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal abgeschlagen.
Seih' uns nur an, denn bald sind wir dir ferne!"

Was dir nur Augen sind in diesen Tagen:

In künft' gen Nächten sind es dir nur Sterne."

Now will the sun as brightly rise
As though no evil befell last night!
The evil befell just me alone!
The sun, it shines on all mankind!

You must not enfold the night
within you;
You must immerse it in eternal light!
A lamp has gone out in my abode!
Hail to the world's gladdening light!

Now I see clearly, O eyes why such
dark flames
So often leapt out at me,
As if you wanted to concentrate
The whole sum of your strength in a
single look.

Yet I never suspected (because of
the mists that hovered round me,
All spun by the deceitful loom of fate)
That those bright beams already
sought to journey
Back home, to the place where
every beam originates.

You wanted with your shining light
to tell me:
"We'd dearly love to stay here by you,
But this our destiny denies us.
Ah look at us, for soon we'll be far from
you!"

What are but eyes to you, these
present days,
In nights to come will be to you but
stars."

Wenn dein Mütterlein

Wenn dein Mütterlein
Tritt zur Tür herein,
Und der Kopf ich drehe,
Ihr entgegen sehe,
Fällt auf ihr Gesicht
Erst der Blick mir nicht,
Sondern auf die Stelle,
Näher nach der Schwelle,
Dort, wo würde dein
Lieb' Gesichtchen sein,
Wenn du freudenhelle
Trätest mit herein,
Wie sonst mein Töchterlein!

When your mother dear
Comes in through the door,
And I turn my head,
To look across at her,
'Tis not on her face
That my glance falls first,
But upon that place,
Nearer to the floor,
There, where your dear face
Always used to be,
When all bright with joy
You would come in with her,
In bygone days, my daughter dear!

Wenn dein Mütterlein
Tritt zur Tür herein,
Mit der Kerze Schimmer,
Ist es mir, als immer
Kämost du mit herein,
Huschtest hinterdrein,
Als wie sonst ins Zimmer!
O du, des Vaters Zelle,
Ach, zu schnelle
Zu schnell erlosch'ner Freundenschein!

When your mother dear
Comes in through the door,
In her candle's shimmer,
It's as though you always
Came in with her too,
Toddling after her,
As you used to do!
Oh you, your father's flesh and blood,
Ah, gladdening light
Too swiftly extinguished!

Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen

Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!
Bald werden sie nach Hause
gelangen.
Der Tag ist schön! O sei nicht bang!
Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.

How often I think they're just out walking!
They won't be much longer, they'll soon
be returning.
The day is fine! O never fear!
They're only taking the long way back.

Jawohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen
Und werden jetzt nach Hause gelangen.
O sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schön!
Sie machen nur den Gang zu jenen Höh'n!

Oh yes, they've only gone out walking
And even now they must be returning.
O never fear the day is fine!
They're only taking the path in to the hills!

Sie sind uns nur vorausgegangen
Und werden nicht wieder nach Haus
verlangen!
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höh'n!
Im Sonnenschein! Der Tag ist schön
Auf jenen Höh'n!

They've only started out before us
And won't come back home at all!

We'll soon overtake them, up on the hills,
In the sunshine! The day is fine
Upon the hills!

In diesem Wetter

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
Man hat sie hinaus getragen.
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
Ich fürchtete, sie erkrankten;
Das sind nun eitle Gedanken.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen,
Das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
Man hat sie hinaus getragen.
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,
in diesem Braus,
Sie ruh'n, als wie in der Mutter Haus.
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,
Von Gottes Hand bedeckt,
Sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus!

Friedrich Rückert

In this grim weather, this raging storm,
I'd never have sent the children outside,
But out of the house they've borne them.
I had no say in the matter.

In this grim weather, this howling gale,
I'd never have let the children outside,
I'd fear they might catch an illness;
Now these are but idle thoughts.

In this grim weather, this dreadful blast,
I'd never have dared let the children outside.
I'd fear they might die tomorrow,
Now this is no cause for worry.

In this grim weather, this raging storm,
I'd never have dared send the children
outside.
But out of the house they've borne them.
I had no say in the matter.

In this grim weather, this howling gale,
This raging storm.
They rest, as if in their mother's house.
No storm can now frighten them,
The hand of God protects them,
They rest as if in their mother's house!

Edward Harper was born in Taunton, Somerset in 1941. He started to play the piano at the age of 12, and at 16 won a scholarship to Christ Church, Oxford where he gained a first class honours degree. He subsequently studied with Gordon Jacob at the Royal College of Music, London, and with Franco Donatoni in Milan.

For over forty years Edward Harper was on the staff of the Faculty of Music at Edinburgh University, where he was a Senior Lecturer. He was also Director of the New Music Group of Scotland, which he founded in 1973, and he has been described as "playing a crucial part in opening Scotland's ears to fresh musical experience".

Harper's early works experiment with serial and aleatory techniques but with *Bartok Games* (1972) he established a more tonally based style that allows taut cellular and repetitive motifs to expand into large climaxes and fuller melody.

He was frequently been inspired by literature, having a special affinity with Thomas Hardy's writing. Two chamber operas, *Fanny Robin* (1975) and *The Mellstock Quire* (1988), based on Hardy episodes, were composed for the Edinburgh University Opera Club; the first of these has since been performed in America and New Zealand and is now available on a CD on the Metier label. *Homage to Thomas Hardy* (1990), a song cycle for baritone and orchestra, showed how Harper could conjure the images and humour of Hardy's writing and mould them into a coherent concert piece.

Other important works are the full length opera *Hedda Gabler* (1985) commissioned by Scottish Opera; *Intrada after Monteverdi* (1982/3) which, in its orchestral version, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra has performed internationally; and *In Memoriam Kenneth Leighton* (1990) for cello and piano or cello and orchestra. Some of the later pieces published by OUP include *The Fiddler of the Reels* for string orchestra (1993) and *Lights Out* (1993) to poems by Edward Thomas for soprano, recorder, cello and harpsichord.

Edward Harper died on 12 April 2009.