CITY PIERROT ENSEMBLE
Concert 14 June 2021, City Summer Sounds Festival

Nancy Ruffer, flute
David Campbell, clarinet
Emma Arden, percussion
Ian Pace, piano
Ben Smith, electric organ
Madeleine Mitchell, violin
Bridget Carey, viola
Joseph Spooner, cello

Georgia Mae Bishop, voice (Bainbridge, Pace)
Benedict Nelson, voice (Maxwell Davies)

Joshua Balance, conductor

Soosan Lolavar, *Girl* (2017)

Girl is based on the Iranian folk melody *Dokhtare Boyer Ahmadl*, meaning the girl from the town of Boyer Ahmadl in the central section of the piece. This melody comes to the surface and is clearly outlined by the cello, later joined by violin.

All other parts of the piece also derive from this melody but in a much more fractured way. As a result, *Girl* is an exploration of folk melodies as collective memorialisation, considering how memories are warped, altered, fragmented and ultimately re-imagined across time and space.

Simon Bainbridge, *Four Primo Levi Settings* (1996)

It was whilst browsing around a New York bookstore some years ago, that I discovered a volume of Primo Levi's poems for the first time. I had already read quite a lot of his writing including The Periodic Table and If this is a man and The Truce but was quite unprepared for the power and intensity of expression that is contained within his poetry. Here was a voice of deep human understanding and compassion, who through words of vivid directness could dig deep into the soul and reveal the true horror of the holocaust without resorting to sentimentality or angst.

My Four Primo Levi Settings were written in 1996 for The Nash Ensemble and first performed at the Cheltenham Festival in July the same year. They are scored for mezzo-soprano, clarinet, viola and piano, an intimate ensemble of melancholic darkness and autumnal light, appropriate for these sombre texts.

It is perhaps in the last of my settings After RM Rilke, a remarkable reworking of Rilke's Herbsttag (Autumn Day) that one gets closest to Primo Levi's own deep

solitude and despair. He writes:

The time has come to have a home
Or to remain for a long time without one
The time has come not to be alone
Or else we will stay alone for a long time

He couldn't live with the guilt of survival and took his life in 1987. These settings are dedicated to his memory.

25 febbraio 1944
Vorrei credere qualcosa alter,
Oltre che morte ti ha disfatta.
Vorrei poter dire la forza
Con cui desideramma allora,
Noi già commersi,
Di potere ancora una volta insieme
Camminare liberi sotto il sale.
9 gennaio 1946

25 February 1944
I would like to believe in something,
Something beyond the death that undid you
I would like to describe the intensity
With which, already overwhelmed
We longed in those days to be able
To walk together once again
Free beneath the sun.
9 January 1946

Attesa
Questo è tempo di lampi senza tuona
Questo è tempo di voci non intese,
Di sonni inquieti e di vigilie vane.
Compagna, non dimenticare i giorni
Dei lunghi facili silenzi,
Delle nottunre amiche strade
Delle meditazioni serene,
Prima che cadana le foglie,
Prima che il cielo si richiuda,
Prima che nuovamente ci desti,
Noto, davanti alle nostre porte,
Il percuotere di passi ferrati.
2 gennaio 1949

Waiting
This is a time of lighting without thunder
This is a time of unheard voices,
Of uneasy sleep and useless vigils.
Friend, do not forget the days
Of long easy silences,
Friendly nocturnal streets,
Serene meditations.
Before the leaves fall,
Before the sky closes again,
Before we are awakened again
By the familiar pounding of iron footsteps
In front of our doors
2 January 1949

La strega
A lung sotto le cltri
Si strinse contro il petto la cera
Finché divenne mole e calda.
Sorse allora, e con dolce cura,
Con amorosa paziente mano
Ne ritrasse l'effigie viva
Dell'uomo che le stave nel cuore.
Come fini, gettò sul fuoco
Foglie di quercia, di vite e d'olivo,
E l'immagine, che si strugesse.

Si senti morire di pena
Perché l'incanto era vvenuot,
E solo allora poté piangere.
Avigliana, 23 marzo 1946

The Witch
For a long time under the covers
She clasped the wax against her breast
Till it was soft and warm.
Then she got up, and with great pains
And with a patient loving hand,
Portrayed the living image
Of the man she carried in her heart.
When she was done, she threw the effigy on the fire
With leaves of grapevine, olive and oak,
So it would be consumed.

She felt herself dying form the pain
Because the spell had worked.
Only then could she cry.
Avigliana, 23 March 1946

Da R M Rilke
Signore, è tempo; già fermenta il vino.
Il tempo è giunto di avere una casa,
O rimanere a lungo senza casa.

After R M Rilke
Lord, it's time: the wine is already fermenting.
The time has come to have a home,
Or to remain for a long time without one.

È giunto il tempo di non esser soli,
Oppure a lungo rimarremo soli:
Sopra i libri consumeremo l'ore
Od a scrivere lettere lontano,
Lunghe lettere dalla solitudine;
Ed anremo pei viali avanti e indietro,
Inquieti, mentre cadono le foglie.
29 gennaio 1946

The time has come not to be alone,
Or else we will stay alone for a long time.
We will consume the hours over books,
Or in writing letters to distant paces,
Long letters from our solitude.
And we will go back and forth through the streets,
Restless, while the leaves fall.
29 January 1946

Ian Pace, *Matière: Le Palais de la mort* (2021) [World Premiere]

1. A very untidy state
2. Cannot go
3. Cold, selfish, animal and inferior
4. And pleasures banish pain
5. Le Palais de la mort

This piece began to form in my mind at the time of a visit to Haworth Parsonage in summer 2019, looking round the house and in particular the square piano in one of the front rooms, and collections of music owned by Emily and Anne Brontë in particular. After reading further about the musical dimensions to the Brontë family, I began to form fantasies in my mind of a certain bombastic playing on the part of Emily (the most talented pianist of the siblings), incorporating some of the (then) popular pieces which she and Anne had in her collection, and developed an interest in creating a work of music which would be unquestionably from the present day, but incorporated aspects of the music which would have been heard in the Brontë household.

The original idea was for a piano piece, which became *Pitter-Pottering* (2021), and consists essentially of the piano part to the first movement. This consists of a continuous thread of material, derived obliquely from the *Pastoral Rondo* by Daniel Steibelt (1765-1823), which was in the Brontë music collection, and which in other guises also underpins the third and fifth movements. This is combined with derivations from a range of marches, waltzes, quadrilles, operatic overtures, and sonatas. I was not interested in writing some sort of musical evocation of the moors, nor really in setting Emily's remarkable mature poems (as various others have done, but these do not seem to me literary works requiring of any musical elaboration). Rather, the world of the Brontë sisters was the starting point for a free creative fantasia informed by aspects of their biographies, musical interests, and wider aspects of their writings.

Music played a prominent place in the Brontë household. Branwell studied the flute and organ, while Emily and Anne studied the piano, while Anne also sang. Emily was probably the most talented pianist, while Charlotte was the least musically inclined, in part because of having to give up piano study because of acute short-sightedness. Another important musical presence in the Brontë milieu was the organ installed at Haworth in 1834. Branwell in particular was deeply excited by the installation of this new instrument, parodied by Charlotte in her juvenile writing 'My Angria and the Angrians')

Anne Brontë collected a song book in 1843, consisting of a range of hymns, folk-songs and a few classical numbers. Branwell Brontë, kept a flute book, from as early

as 1831 (aged 14), consisting of similar music for flute and piano accompaniment. These have been published in rare but invaluable scholarly annotated editions by Akiko Higuchi – *Anne Brontë's Song Book/Branwell Brontë's Flute Book: An Annotated Edition* (Tokyo: Yushodo Press, 2002) – as a companion volume to the same author's *The Brontës and Music: Music in the seven novels by the three Brontë sisters* (Tokyo: Yushodo Press, 2005), tracing the many allusions to music throughout the sisters' works. These, together with John Hennessy's *Emily Jane Brontë and her Music* (York: York Publishing Services, 2018), are my most important sources.

The first movement, 'A very untidy state' is a somewhat cacophonous portrait of the world of the Brontë household, with the *Pitter-Pottering* piano part as the fundamental thread, combined in places with the flute material, distant sounds of the organ vaguely heard, free elaboration or 'commentary' from the percussion, and occasionally sonic 'background' from the strings.

The second movement, 'Cannot go' is a free setting of part of a relatively juvenile 1837 poem (whose relative simplicity made it more apt to set to music), to represent the apprehensive young Emily, afraid of but fascinated by the external world, with its strange sounds and sensations.

Both Charlotte and Emily Brontë travelled to Brussels in February 1842, where they were taught languages by Constantin Heger, at the Pensionnat Heger. Charlotte remained in Belgium for two years, and the country featured in her novels *Villette* and *The Professor*, though she was extremely rude about the country and its people in a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, probably from July 1842, part of which I quote in the introduction to movement 3 (met by an evocation of *charivari*, which Charlotte herself describes in *Jane Eyre* as 'the "rough music" made with kettles, pans, tea-trays, etc., in public derision of an unpopular person'). Emily, who had less of a cosmopolitan inclination than her sister, was notoriously ill-at-home in Belgium and unlike her sister made little attempt to integrate into this new milieu. Both sisters returned to England after the death of their aunt Elizabeth Branwell in October 1842; Charlotte would return the following January and stay another year, but Emily never did so.

The third movement, 'Cold, selfish, animal and inferior', named after Charlotte's atrocious characterisation of Belgians, attempts however to imagine Emily playing in a piano trio with representatives of the then new Belgian schools of violin and cello playing. Taking a basic rhythmic and gestural structure from Daniel Auber's duet 'Amour sacré de la patrie', from *La Muette de Portici*, a performance of which preceded the beginnings of the Belgian Revolution on 25 August 1830 (the revolutionary crowds sang this duet following the performance), I combine this with material and stylistic allusions to the violin playing of Charles de Bériot and cellist François Servais, while the piano clumsily attempts to provide a half-hearted accompaniment to them in the right hand, whilst continuing with the basic Steibelt-derived material in the left, mostly in a different metre. The movement ends with a setting of the text from Mendelssohn's *Infelice*, of which he made two versions, the first from 1834 featured a concertante part for de Bériot to play alongside the singing of his Spanish wife Maria Malibran, representing Emily's yearnings to return home.

The fourth movement, 'And pleasures banish pain', is a counterpart to the second. I use the text of the Hymn 'Prospect', collected by Anne, but in a very different musical

setting (with a nod in the direction of Charles Ives), to symbolise the more mature Emily, after her Brussels trip, rooted in the domestic environment but still drawn to the mysterious forces which she perceived in the immediate natural vicinity.

During their time in Brussels, both Charlotte and Emily wrote a series of *devoirs*, essays which served as French writing exercises, one of which was Emily's *Matière: Le Palais de la mort*. The last movement attempts to portray some of the gothic elements of Emily's work (hinted at earlier in the piece). The Haworth parsonage was a scene of death, a 'Palais de la mort' of its own, during 1848-49; Branwell died on 24 September 1848 (aged 31), Emily on 19 December 1848 (aged 30), then Anne on 28 May 1849 (aged 29), all probably from a variety of tuberculosis. Charlotte a further six years, and died on 31 March 1855 (aged 38) probably for different reasons related to complications with pregnancy. Their father, Irish Anglican priest Patrick Brontë, outlived all of them and died on 7 June 1861 (aged 84); his oldest daughter Maria and Elizabeth had both died in 1825 (aged 12 and 11 respectively); their mother, his wife, Maria Branwell, had died in 1821 (aged 38). In the final movement, the flute, piano and voice could be said to 'represent' the characters of Branwell, Emily and Anne respectively, all of whose material comes to an end, with two of them leaving the stage in the manner of Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony. But this is superseded by the world of Emily's gothic fantasies, with two pieces of text from her 'Le Palais de la mort'. The organ remains a persistent background presence (as in the whole work, except for the 'Belgian' third movement), representing the world of Patrick which continues after all the siblings are gone.

Matière: Le Palais de la mort is dedicated to long-term collaborator, friend and confidante, composer and writer Christopher Fox.

Textual Sources

Introduction: Emily Brontë, diary entry for 24 November 1834

Cannot go (Movement 2): Emily Brontë, poem 'The Night is Darkening Round Me' (1837)

Transition: Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, probably July 1842

Cold, selfish, animal and inferior (Movement 3): Italian text by Pietro Metastasio for Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, concert-aria *Infelice* (1834).

And pleasures banish pain (Movement 4): Isaac Watts, hymn, 'There is a land of pure delight' (1704)

Le Palais de la Mort (Movement 5): Reverend Patrick Brontë, letter to Ebenezer Rand, 26 February 1849; folksongs Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon' and 'As down in the sunless retreats'; French text from Emily Brontë, *Matière: Le Palais de la Mort*, *devoir* written in Brussels, 1842.

Translations

Infelice
Ah ritorna, età dell'oro, alla terra abbandonata, se non fosti immaginata nel sognar felicità. Fu il mondo allor felice che un tenero arboscello, un limpido ruscello le genti alimentò. Ah ritorna, bell'età.

Ah return, golden age, to your abandoned land, if you were more than the fancy of happy dreams. The world was merry then when a young sapling, a limpid stream, sustained the people. Ah, return, beautiful age.

Matière: Le Palais de la mort

inspirés par moi l'ami fidèle deviendra un ennemi mortel, la femme trahira son mari, le domestique son maître; nul sentiment ne peut me resister; je traverserai la terre sous les bannières du ciel et les couronnes seront comes des pierres sous mes pieds. Quant aux autres candidats ils ne sont pas dignes d'attention; la Colère est irrasionnable ['barbarisme']; la vengeance est partiale; la Famine peut être vaincue par l'industries; la Peste est capricieuse. Votre premier minister doit être quelqu'un qui est toujours près des hommes, qui les entoure et les possède; décidez donc entre l'Ambition et moi, nous sommes les seuls sur lesquels votre choix peut ['or puisse'] hésiter.

inspired by me, the faithful friend will become a mortal enemy, the wife will betray her husband, the domestic his master. No sentiment can withstand me; I will traverse the earth between heaven's banners and crowns will be as stones beneath my feet. As for the other candidates, they are unworthy of attention; Wraths is irreasonable [*barbarism*]; vengeance is partial; Famine can be conquered by industry; Plague is capricious. Your prime minister must be someone who is always close to men, who surrounds and possesses them. Decide then between Ambition and me; we are the only ones between whom your choice can [*might*] hesitate.

les voûtes, les chambres et les galleries résonnaient du bruit des pas qui allaient et venaient, comme si les ossements qui jonchaient leur pavé s'étaient subitement réanimés [breath] et la Mort, regardant du haut de son trône, sourit hidieusement de voir quelles multitudes accouraient à lui server.

the vaults, the chambers, and the galleries resounded with the noise of steps that came and went, as if the bones that lay strewn about the pavement had suddenly come back to life; and Death, looking down from the height of her throne, smiled hideously to see what multitudes hastened to serve her.

(From translations in Charlotte and Emily Brontë, *The Belgian Essays: A Critical Edition*, edited and translated by Sue Lonoff (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1996). Passages in square brackets indicate corrections made by Constantin Heger to Emily Brontë's text.)

A more extended programme note can be read at [New Piece, Matière: Le Palais de la mort, inspired by the life and work of Emily Brontë – first performance Monday 14 June 2021 | Desiring Progress (wordpress.com)]

Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969)

1. The Sentry. *King Prussia's Minuet.*
2. The Country Walk. *La Promenade.*
3. The Lady-In-Waiting. *Miss Musgrave's Fancy.*
4. To Be Sung On the Water. *The Waterman.*
5. The Phantom Queen. *He's Ay A-Kissing Me.*
6. The Counterfeit. *Le Conterfaite.*
7. Country Dance. *Scotch Bonnett.*
8. The Review. *A Spanish March.*

The flute, clarinet, violin, and cello, as well as having their usual accompanimental functions in this work, also represent on one level, the bullfinches the King was trying to teach to sing. The King has extended 'dialogues' with these players individually - in No.3 with the flute, in No.4 the cello, in No.6 the clarinet, and in No.7 the violin. The percussion player stands for the King's 'keeper.'

Just as the music of the players is always a comment upon and extension of the King's music, so the 'bullfinch' and 'keeper' aspects of the players' roles are physical

extensions of this musical process - they are projections stemming from the King's words and music, becoming incarnations of facets of the King's own psyche.

The sounds made by human beings under extreme duress, physical and mental, will be at least in part familiar. With Roy Hart's extended vocal range, and his capacity for producing chords with his voice (like the clarinet and flute in this work), these poems presented a unique opportunity to categorize and exploit these techniques to explore certain extreme regions of experience, already opened up in my *Revelation and Fall*, a setting of a German expressionist poem by Trakl.

Until quite recently ‘madness’ was regarded as something at which to laugh and jeer. The King's historically authentic quotations from the Messiah in the work evoke this sort of mocking response in the instrumental parts - the stylistic switch is unprepared, and arouses an aggressive reaction. I have, however, quoted far more than the *Messiah* - if not the notes at least aspects of the styles of many composers are referred to, from Handel to Birtwistle. In some ways, I regard the work as a collection of musical objects borrowed from many sources, functioning as musical ‘stage props,’ around which the reciter's part weaves, lighting them from extraordinary angles, and throwing grotesque and distorted shadows form them, giving the musical ‘objects’ an unexpected and sometimes sinister significance. For instance, in No.5, ‘The Phantom Queen’, an eighteenth-century suite is intermittently suggested in the instrumental parts, and in the Courante, at the words ‘Starve you, strike you,’ the flute part hurries ahead in a 7:6 rhythmic proportion, the clarinet's rhythms become dotted, and its part displaced by octaves, the effect being schizophrenic. In No.7, the sense of ‘Comfort Ye, My People’ is turned inside out by the King's reference to Sin, and the ‘Country Dance’ of the title becomes a foxtrot. The written-down shape of the music of No.3 becomes an object in fact - it forms a cage, of which the vertical bars are the King's line, and the flute (bullfinch) part moves between and inside these vertical parts.

The climax of the work is the end of No.7, where the King snatches the violin through the bats of the player's cage and breaks it. This is not just the killing of a bullfinch - it is a giving-in to insanity, and a ritual murder by the King of a part of himself, after which, at the beginning of No.8, he can announce his own death. As well as their own instruments, the players have mechanical bird song devices operated by clockwork, and the percussion payer has a collection of bird-call instruments. In No.6 - the only number where a straight parody, rather than a distortion or a transformation, of Handel occurs, he operates a didjeridu, the simple hollow tubular instrument of the aboriginals of Arnhem Land in Australia, which functions as a downward extension of the timbre of the ‘crow.’

The keyboard player moves between piano and harpsichord, sometimes acting as continuo, sometimes becoming a second percussion part, and sometimes adding independently developing musical commentary. The work was written in February and March 1969.

The poems forming the text of this work were suggested by a miniature mechanical organ playing eight tunes, once the property of George III. A scrap of paper sold with it explains that ‘This Organ was George the third for Birds to sing.’ Another fragment

identifies its second owner as ‘James Hughes who served his Majesty George 3 near 30 years penshen of in 1812 at 30 pouns year served HRH princes Augusta 8 years Half penshen of in 1820 at 30 year.’

The organ remained in the family of Hughes until a few years ago, when it was acquired by the Hon. Sir Steven Runcimen, who in 1966 demonstrated it to me. It left a peculiar and disturbing impression. One imagined the King, in his purple dressing-gown and ermine night-cap, struggling to teach birds to make the music which he could so rarely torture out of his flute and harpsichord. Or trying to sing with them, in that ravaged voice, made almost inhuman by day-long soliloquies, which once murdered Handel for Fanny Burney's entertainment. There were echoes of the story of the Emperor's nightingale. But this Emperor was mad; and at times he knew it, and wept.

The songs are to be understood as the King's monologue while listening to his birds perform, and incorporate some sentences actually spoken by George II. The quotations, and a description of most of the incidents to which reference is made, can be found in the chapters on George II in *The Court at Windsor* by Christopher Hibbert (Longmans and Penguin Books).