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The Nash Ensemble
Sally Matthews

TURNAGE THIS SILENCE

Eulogy
Two Baudelaire Songs
Cantilena
Slide Stride

onyx

MARK-ANTHONY TURNAGE (1960-)

Chamber Works

	This Silence for Octet (1992-3)	
1	Dance	8.21
2	Dirge	7.14
	True Life Stories for solo piano (1995-9)	
3	Elegy for Andy	3.28
4	William's Pavane	1.37
5	Song for Sally	2.35
6	Edward's refrain	3.12
7	Tune for Toru	2.04
8	Slide Stride for piano and string quartet (2002)	13.02
	Two Baudelaire Songs for soprano and seven instruments (2004)	
9	Harmonie du Soir	5.51
10	L'invitation au voyage	4.32
11	Eulogy for viola and eight instruments (2003)	9.56
	Two Vocalises for cello and piano (2002)	
12	Maclaren's farewell	3.08
13	Vocalise	2.32
14	Cantilena for oboe and string quartet (2001)	10.45
	Total Time	78.34

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L'invitation au voyage

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Dont l'humeur est vagabonde ;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
– Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,
D'hyacinthe et d'or ;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Invitation to the voyage

My child, my sister,
Think of the rapture
Of living together there!
Of loving at will,
Of loving till death,
In the land that is like you!
The misty sunlight
Of those cloudy skies
Has for my spirit the charms,
So mysterious,
Of your treacherous eyes,
Shining brightly through their tears.

There all is order and beauty,
Luxury, peace, and pleasure.

See on the canals
Those vessels sleeping.
Their mood is adventurous;
It's to satisfy
Your slightest desire
That they come from the ends of the earth.
– The setting suns
Adorn the fields,
The canals, the whole city,
With hyacinth and gold;
The world falls asleep
In a warm glow of light.

There all is order and beauty,
Luxury, peace, and pleasure.

The Nash Ensemble

Lionel Friend – conductor ^[9-10]
Marianne Thorsen – violin ^[1-2, 8-11, 14]
Benjamin Nabarro – violin ^[1-2, 8-10, 14]
Lawrence Power – viola ^[1-2, 8-11, 14]
Paul Watkins – cello ^[1-2, 8-14]
Duncan McTier – double bass ^[1-2, 11]
Lucy Wakeford – harp ^[11]
Ian Brown – piano ^[3-13]
Philippa Davies – flute ^[9-10]
Gareth Hulse – oboe ^[14], cor anglais ^[11]
Michael Collins – clarinet ^[1-2, 9-11]
Ursula Leveaux – bassoon ^[1-2]
Richard Watkins – french horn ^[1-2, 11]

Sally Matthews – soprano ^[9-10]

Miles Davis, one of Turnage's musical heroes, tried for years to get his records issued without sleeve-notes, believing that the music should, and could, speak for itself. By the mid-60s he had enough clout to achieve this wish, although he broke his own rule with *Jack Johnson*, for which he wrote notes briefly outlining Johnson's life story and his significance to black people in America. After the BBC's Turnage Weekend at the Barbican in January 2003 the composer took part in a live webchat with BBCi users. One questioner asked how important it was for listeners to understand Turnage's extra-musical inspiration: did they need to be familiar with Francis Bacon's painting before they could fully appreciate *Three Screaming Popes*, for example? Turnage said, "You should be able to listen to a piece cold and not have all that information. I worry sometimes about giving the audience too much information." With this in mind I have tried to avoid being too informative in these notes.

Most of us flatter ourselves that we can spot talent before it has fulfilled its promise, tending to credit ourselves, in hindsight, with more perspicacity than we really have. You may, therefore, choose to doubt my recollection that, when I heard *Night Dances* at a BBC invitation concert shortly after it had earned Turnage the 1981 Guinness Prize for Composition, I felt sure I was in on the discovery of an important new figure in British music. I particularly admired the way he had thoroughly absorbed and integrated his jazz influences, in contrast to the classical musician's customary use of poorly-understood jazz elements as mere exotic colour or a bit of rough texture. I can't pretend to have foreseen just how significant a composer Turnage would turn out to be, though. *Night Dances* was a commendable summation of what he had learned up to then, but there were only a few pointers to the range, depth and intensity that we now know he is capable of. His real apprenticeship still lay ahead.

A crucial element of that on-going apprenticeship was the time spent at the 1983 Tanglewood Summer School studying with Gunther Schuller and, informally, Hans Werner Henze. It led to a certain crisis of confidence, as Schuller rooted out personal clichés and questioned whether Turnage really "heard" the rhythmic complexities he was writing. Turnage credits Schuller with helping him clean up a number of practical problems in his composing, and this new perspective led him to withdraw a number of works composed in the early 80s. In 1988 his

Two Baudelaire Songs

Harmonie du soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir!

Evening Harmony

The season is at hand when swaying on its stem
Every flower exhales perfume like a censer;
Sounds and perfumes turn in the evening air;
Melancholy waltz and languid vertigo!

Every flower exhales perfume like a censer;
The violin quivers like a tormented heart;
Melancholy waltz and languid vertigo!
The sky is sad and beautiful like an immense altar.

The violin quivers like a tormented heart,
A tender heart, that hates the vast, black void!
The sky is sad and beautiful like an immense altar;
The sun has drowned in its blood that congeals...

A tender heart that hates the vast, black void
Gathers up every shred of the luminous past!
The sun has drowned in its blood that congeals...
Your memory in me glitters like a monstrel!

Cantilena (2001) for oboe and string quartet is another Nash Ensemble commission given its first performance at the Oliver Knussen's 50th birthday concert at the London Purcell Room in March 2002. Its virtually continuous and often high-lying oboe line seems to replicate an actor's delivery: first in monologue, then in animated conversation, and finally in defiant independence. The writing for string quartet commences with sustained accompanying chords, develops occasional contrapuntal interplay with the oboe, accelerates and then winds down with what feels like 'golden-section' precision.

Barry Witherden 2005

opera *Greek* was premièred, and the following year *Three Screaming Popes* secured his reputation, but arguably the most important factor in his development was his appointment as composer-in-association with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 1990. This provided him with a luxury that few composers have: the opportunity to "workshop" new compositions.

This "workshopping", developing new compositions in association with performers, is something Turnage still values. Some works on this CD have benefited from that practice. *This Silence*, first written in summer 1992, was extensively revised after it was played through by the Sharoun Ensemble, for whom it was commissioned, under the direction of Turnage's friend and fellow-composer, Brett Dean. *Two Baudelaire Songs* was still developing during the recording session for this CD. At its première at the Wigmore Hall just three days earlier, as part of The Nash Ensemble's 40th Anniversary season, a number of alterations had been made in the instrumental balance, together with some toning down of the dynamics. At the recording those amendments were carefully re-assessed, Turnage listening attentively to the views of the musicians and producer and agreeing some further changes, always ensuring that the voice emerges from within the instrumental texture rather than dominating the sound picture. The excellent young soprano, Sally Matthews was also still evolving her interpretation, and despite the short interval since the concert première her performance had already gained in confidence and depth, becoming yet warmer and more flowing.

As recently as January 2003 Turnage was saying he found chamber works difficult to write. Nonetheless, this collection demonstrates that his writing for small ensembles is every bit as impressive as his large-scale works. The seven compositions on this album are mature, assured, well-wrought and affecting pieces.

This Silence (1992-3) was inspired by Jon Silkin's poem "Death of a Son", which includes the line 'But this was silence'. Scored for just eight players (clarinet, horn, bassoon and string quintet), the skill and intensity of the writing gives the impression of a larger group. The power of the ensemble sound as the first movement, "Dance", builds towards its hectic climax, is remarkable,

and Turnage achieves some marvellous textures with the wind instruments early in the piece. The second movement, “Dirge”, sets the opening stanza of Henry King’s “The Exequy” and concludes with some reflective variations. A short echo of the manic music of the first movement prefaces a peaceful conclusion.

True Life Stories (1995-9), a sequence of piano meditations, was premièred in Washington in January 2000 by Leif Ove Andsnes. *Elegy for Andy* is a free transcription of material drawn from the sixth movement of *Blood on the Floor* (1993-6) and tenderly remembers Turnage’s brother, who died young in tragic circumstances. It ultimately derives from a melody Turnage played at his brother’s funeral. The beautiful final movement revisits a 1996 tribute to the distinguished Japanese composer Takemitsu (1930-96) which Turnage had withdrawn in its original form. The second and fourth movements are dedicated to Turnage’s sons, ‘William’s Pavane’ invoking the melancholy Tudor dance form, and the third piece to his then publisher, Sally Groves. All the pieces are notable for the subtle coloration of the chords and the unassuming flair with which Turnage transforms the simple dignity of his themes.

In contrast, **Slide Stride** (2002) is as spikily boisterous as you could wish. Turnage has said “I don’t like virtuosity for the sake of it, but after writing *True Life Stories* I realized that players like a challenge, so I thought I’d set myself a technical exercise and write a piece that’s technically hard to play as opposed to musically hard to grasp.” Not least of the technical challenges was the problem of balancing the piano and string quartet in the frequent raucous passages. The “stride” of the title is a reference to the Harlem Stride school of jazz piano principally developed by James P. Johnson and refined by Fats Waller and Duke Ellington, most clearly evoked in the strong, wide-ranging left-hand figures. *Slide Stride* was commissioned by The Nash Ensemble (first performance January 2003) and is dedicated to Richard Rodney Bennett, another composer adept at incorporating “non-classical” elements in his music.

Two Baudelaire Songs (2004). It is not difficult to draw parallels between the shocking images of decay, atrophy and disintegration in many of Baudelaire’s poems and some of the themes, including drug abuse, which Turnage has unflinchingly examined in a number of his works, not

least *Blood On the Floor*. These settings of two poems from the controversial *Fleurs du Mal* occasionally reveal distinct echoes of Expressionism and the decadent stage of Romanticism, though Turnage handles these elements with a lighter, less over-ripe touch than his early 20th-century forbears. In “Harmonie du Soir” (Evening Harmony) Baudelaire creates an atmosphere thick with sickly perfumes and tormented music, lit by a sunset like congealed blood. Turnage comments on this vision with edgy motifs, querulous textures and disquieting tonalities, eventually lapsing into a resigned nostalgia. “Invitation au Voyage” holds out the (no doubt illusory) prospect of a voluptuous realm where “all is order and beauty / Luxury, peace, and pleasure.” Embedded in the beguiling harmonies and enchanting melodies, some astringent clarinet timbres insinuate suspicions of something with a nasty sting lurking in the exotic blossoms, and even some apparently carefree figures for the piano cannot prevent the final slide into unease.

Scored for an effective combination of solo viola with piano, cor anglais, clarinet, horn, violin, cello, bass and harp, **Eulogy** is a stunningly accomplished piece of work, sounding utterly modern yet fitting comfortably (if one can ever accuse Turnage’s music of being comfortable) into the tradition. Studded with Turnage trademarks of structure, texture and mood, and full of delicious details – my favourite is a series of piano chords about three-quarters of the way through which remind me of the utterly magical introduction to Stan Tracey’s 1964 “Starless and Bible Black” – it’s emotionally compelling and technically enthralling in every aspect, from the overall trajectory to the minutiae of the interaction between the ensemble instruments and the featured viola. It was premièred by The Nash Ensemble in July 2003.

Two Vocalises (2000-2) comprises short, intimate pieces based on a style of music in which vocal delivery is the model. In Maclaren’s Farewell the cello’s lilting melody is supported by undulating piano chords, until a brief passage of pizzicato with sharp responses from the piano suggests an exchange of immediately-regretted bitter words before the final leave-taking, whilst the second piece has the feel of a heart-to-heart in which a new understanding is reached. Though minor in scale, these vocalises are characteristically intense and emotional.