The Symphonic Poems

Dafydd Bullock



Produced and written in dialogue with A. I.

Volume 2

Contents

Introduction
Fy Ngwlad - My Country. ***5***

The Wider World of the Symphonic Poems **7**

Meinir Op. 61 **9**
Cilmeri Op. 69 **12**
Dolbadarn Op. 122 **16**
Y Chwarel - The Quarry Op. 123 **20**
Owain Glyndŵr Op. 125 **23**
Garth Celyn Op. 174 **27**
Talaith Op. 177 **30**
Caer Engan Op. 181 **33**
Tŵr Llywelyn Op. 239 **35**
WinterSea Op. 202 **37**
The Quickening Tide Op. 255 **41**

Fy Ngwlad – My Country: A Retrospective **45**

Moselherbst Op. 161 **47**
Bergkristall Op. 199 **51**
Sommerstein Op. 206 **54**
1666 Op. 227 **58**
Ritterburg am Rhein Op. 219 **62**
Nosso Lar Op. 243 **66**
Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal Op. 280 **70**
Genesis Op. 291 **74**

The Symphonic Poems: A Retrospective **79**

Dafydd Bullock **84**

Eleven Symphonic Poems: *Fy Ngwlad - My Country*

Introduction

The eleven symphonic poems gathered together under the title *Fy Ngwlad - My Country* form a musical portrait of Wales as imagined through its history, landscapes, legends and collective memory. The title deliberately acknowledges the great tradition of national musical portraiture, and particularly Smetana's *Má vlast*, but the conception here is distinctly Welsh and personal. These are not attempts to construct a continuous historical narrative, nor are they intended to represent an official or comprehensive musical picture of Wales. Instead, each work focuses upon a particular place, person, event or landscape which has acquired significance in the composer's imagination.

The cycle began with *Meinir*, inspired by the tragic legend of Rhys and Meinir, and proceeds through some of the most painful episodes and evocative locations in Welsh history. *Cilmeri* confronts the death of Llywelyn, Prince of Wales, in 1282; *Dolbadarn* looks towards the castle and landscape of Llanberis, close to the composer's birthplace; *Y Chwarel* remembers the slate-quarrying communities of North Wales and the human cost of an industry controlled by absentee owners; and *Owain Glyndŵr* evokes the great fifteenth-century resistance to English rule. *Garth Celyn* and *Talaith* return to the aftermath and consequences of the conquest, while *Caer Engan* reaches further back into the uncertain territory where Welsh landscape, Arthurian legend and history intersect. Finally, *Tŵr Llewelyn* returns once more to Garth Celyn and the memory of the Princes of Wales, but with a note of optimism rather than simple mourning.

History and politics are therefore impossible to separate from the cycle. The works repeatedly confront conquest, resistance, betrayal, dispossession and the persistence of Welsh identity. But *Fy Ngwlad* is not simply a political statement set to music. Its political feeling arises from attachment to place. Wales is experienced here not as an abstract nation but through castles, mountains, quarries, coastlines, legends and remembered people. The personal and the national continually overlap.

The inclusion of *WinterSea* and *The Quickening Tide* makes this especially clear. They move away from historical narrative altogether and towards the North Welsh landscape itself. *WinterSea*, inspired by Kathryn Gibson's photograph of a bleak and almost motionless winter seascape, discovers an entire musical world in stillness. *The Quickening Tide*, written far away in Austria but looking imaginatively towards the Irish Sea, transforms the golden light of sunset and the turning tide into a study of stasis gradually becoming movement. These works reveal that “My Country” need not mean only the events that happened there. It can mean the light, weather, sea and silence of the place itself.

The eleven poems consequently form something closer to a memory-map of Wales than a conventional national cycle. Some of the memories are heroic, some tragic, some bitter, some mysterious and some intensely personal. There is anger, certainly, but also affection, humour, melancholy and wonder. The landscape is never merely decorative: it carries history. A castle can embody resistance; a quarry can embody exploitation; a mountain can embody memory; a sea can embody distance and belonging.

The cycle also charts something of the composer's own relationship with Wales. The birthplace near Dolbadarn Castle, the family connections with the slate industry, the use of a Welsh Bardic identity, and the continuing imaginative return to North Wales from Luxembourg, Germany and Austria all contribute to a conception of "country" that is simultaneously geographical and inward. Wales is both somewhere remembered and somewhere carried within.

Thus *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* is ultimately a deeply personal act of remembrance. It looks backwards towards the people and events that shaped Welsh history, sideways towards the landscapes that preserve their memory, and forwards towards the survival of a distinct Welsh identity. The eleven works do not attempt to settle the arguments of history. Through landscape, history, legend and place, they maintain and celebrate memory.

The Wider World of the Symphonic Poems

If *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* forms the most clearly defined geographical and national group within these symphonic poems, the works that surround it reveal a much wider imaginative landscape. Here the composer turns away from a single country and towards a succession of places, histories, stories, images and ideas, often separated by centuries and thousands of miles. The subjects range from the intimate and personal to the historical and catastrophic, from Alpine landscapes and the rivers of Central Europe to the Irish Sea, from literature and painting to questions of death, creation and the nature of home.

What unites these works is not a single style or programme but a particular way of responding to an external stimulus. A mountain can become a state of consciousness, a photograph can become a meditation on stillness, a literary story can become an orchestral drama, while a historical event can be transformed into an atmosphere rather than a chronological narrative. The symphonic poem provides the freedom to move between these worlds without requiring them to conform to a common musical language.

The range is already apparent in *Bergkristall*, inspired by Adalbert Stifter's story of two children lost in the Austrian Alps on Christmas Eve. Here the music engages directly with narrative and character, with Konrad and Sanna given distinctive instrumental identities. The landscape is both beautiful and threatening, while the children's isolation creates an intimate human drama within the vastness of the mountains. In *Sommerstein*, by contrast, the mountain itself becomes the subject of perception: darkness, ascent, mist, revelation and the arrival of sunlight are transformed into a gradual musical process. *Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal* goes further still, turning the mountain into an imagined consciousness - she sleeps, dreams, knows and remembers. The physical landscape has become almost a person.

The river works offer another perspective. *Moselherbst* combines an autumnal portrait of the Mosel with the *Moselhymne* and an affectionate musical joke involving Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. Here landscape, cultural memory and humour coexist. *Ritterburg am Rhein* inhabits a more overtly Romantic world, with the knight looking down from his castle through the morning mist towards a violent world below. The Rhine becomes not merely a geographical subject but a setting for the contrast between brutality and idealisation.

The sea, too, produces very different musical responses. *WinterSea*, inspired by Kathryn Gibson's photograph of a bleak and static North Welsh seascape, is perhaps the most austere of these works, reducing the orchestra to strings and allowing almost imperceptible movement to emerge from apparent stasis. *The Quickening Tide*, although written in Austria, returns imaginatively to the Irish Sea and explores the opposite phenomenon: the moment when stillness begins to gather energy and the turning tide finally rushes back. One work freezes the sea in contemplation; the other discovers enormous movement concealed within stillness.

Other poems move beyond landscape altogether. *1666* looks backwards to the destruction of Dutch shipping and settlements by the English fleet at Vlieland and Terschelling, evoking distance, smoke, fire, menace and destruction rather than attempting to reconstruct the event literally. *Nosso Lar* moves into a profoundly different territory, contemplating the passage from death to life and the return to the home once left behind. The geographical journey of the composition itself — Canach, Salzburg, Hinterthal and back to Canach — acquires an almost circular significance.

Genesis reaches further still, responding directly to Roswitha Foch's painting and translating its visual conception into an orchestral process. Earth, Fire, Wind and Water become successive states of musical energy, while Goethe's *Im Anfang war die Tat* provides a philosophical point of departure. Here the symphonic poem is neither narrative nor landscape painting but an attempt to give sound to the act of creation itself.

Taken together, these works demonstrate how elastic the symphonic-poem form can be. There is no necessity for every piece to tell a story, nor for every piece to depict a landscape. Sometimes the stimulus is a person or a historical event; sometimes it is a photograph, a painting or a literary work; sometimes it is a physical experience; and sometimes it is an idea that has no obvious geographical location at all. The music can therefore move from realism to mythology, from observation to abstraction, from tragedy to humour and from the intensely personal to the almost cosmic.

The musical styles are equally varied. Some works depend upon sustained, atmospheric textures and the gradual alteration of colour; others are driven by rhythm and orchestral mass. Some make extensive use of individual instrumental voices, allowing the flute, oboe, horn or trumpet to assume almost human identities, while others depend upon the collective power of the orchestra. There are moments of great stillness and others of considerable violence, passages of lyricism beside sharply articulated rhythmic writing, and occasional quotations or musical allusions which introduce another layer of memory and wit.

Yet beneath this diversity there is a recognisable compositional instinct. Again and again, the music is interested in transformation. Darkness becomes light; mist becomes revelation; stillness becomes movement; matter becomes energy; history becomes memory; death becomes return. Even when the subject is static, as in *WinterSea*, the music searches for the hidden movement within it. Even when the subject is catastrophic, as in *1666*, the concern is not simply with the event but with how it might have been perceived and remembered.

This makes the symphonic poems particularly revealing when considered as a group. They show a composer for whom an external subject is rarely an excuse for musical illustration. Instead, the subject becomes a starting point from which a musical world can be discovered. The finished work may bear little resemblance to the literal object that inspired it, because what matters is not what the subject looks like, but what it makes the composer imagine.

That is perhaps the essential connection between these very different works. Whether standing before a mountain in Austria, looking across the Mosel or Rhine, contemplating a photograph of the Welsh sea, remembering a historical catastrophe, reading Stifter, responding to a painting, or imagining the passage from death to life, the composer repeatedly turns outward experience into inward musical experience.

The result is a body of symphonic poems whose diversity is itself one of its defining characteristics. *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* tells us where one important part of that imagination belongs. The works beyond it show just how far that imagination can travel.

Meinir Op. 61

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Meinir is based upon one of the most poignant legends associated with Nant Gwrtheyrn in North Wales. According to tradition, a bride would hide on the morning of her wedding, and when the wedding day of Rhys and Meinir arrived, everyone gathered at Clynnog Church except the bride herself. Meinir had disappeared into the surrounding hills.

Rhys and his friends searched for her, but their efforts were unsuccessful. As the days became weeks and the weeks became months, Rhys continued his desperate search until grief and uncertainty began to overwhelm him. One stormy night he sought shelter beneath his favourite oak tree. Suddenly, lightning struck the tree and split its trunk apart. Within the shattered tree Rhys discovered the skeleton of Meinir, still wearing her wedding dress.

The revelation was too much for him. Overcome with grief, Rhys collapsed and died beside the woman he had loved and searched for so long.

The legend contains a particularly powerful contrast between celebration and tragedy. The wedding dress, which should signify love, happiness and the beginning of a new life, becomes instead the final image of death and loss. The surrounding Welsh landscape is equally important: the hills in which Meinir disappears, the lonely heath over which Rhys wanders, the ancient oak and the violent storm all become part of the emotional drama.

The symphonic poem follows this journey from expectation through disappearance and obsessive searching to the terrible revelation beneath the oak. The storm provides the work's great dramatic climax, but the ultimate subject is not the storm itself. It is the enduring bond between two people whose love survives even the most devastating separation. The Welsh folksong *'Beth yw'r haf i mi ?' - What is summer to me (now that I have lost you?)* is quoted.

Meinir, Op. 61, was composed in Limpertsberg, Luxembourg, in 1992 and was awarded the Meirion Williams Prize at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 1993.

Discussion

Meinir, Op. 61, occupies a particularly revealing position within the *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* cycle. It demonstrates an early and highly personal engagement with the symphonic poem as a vehicle through which Welsh legend, landscape and emotional drama can be brought together. The legend of Rhys and Meinir is already complete in dramatic terms, but its transformation into music allows the story to acquire another dimension: the outward events become manifestations of an inner psychological journey.

At the centre of the work lies absence. Meinir's disappearance is deceptively simple as a narrative event, but musically it creates a fundamental imbalance. The anticipated wedding has no fulfilment; the community gathers, but the central figure is missing. From this point onwards the work is governed by the tension between what should have happened and what actually occurs. Rhys's search therefore becomes more than a physical quest. It is the progressive transformation of hope into obsession and, ultimately, despair.

The landscape is crucial to this process. Welsh landscape in *Meinir* is not merely descriptive scenery placed behind a story. The hills and heath through which Rhys searches become extensions of his emotional isolation. The natural world is simultaneously beautiful and indifferent, offering shelter while concealing the truth. This relationship between human emotion and landscape is deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition of the symphonic poem, yet in this case it acquires a specifically Welsh identity through the legend and its geographical setting.

The oak tree is perhaps the most significant musical and symbolic object in the work. It represents continuity, endurance and rootedness, but it also conceals the secret upon which the entire tragedy depends. Rhys's decision to shelter beneath it during the storm brings him into direct contact with the past that he has been unable to recover. The lightning strike is therefore not simply a spectacular event. It is an act of revelation. Nature itself tears open the barrier between Rhys and the truth.

The discovery of Meinir's skeleton wearing her wedding dress produces one of the most disturbing reversals in the story. The wedding dress is an object of anticipation, union and new life, yet within the oak it becomes a symbol of death and unfulfilled promise. This juxtaposition gives the legend its extraordinary emotional power, and it provides the music with a final transformation of meaning. What began as a story surrounding a wedding ends as a meditation upon love that has survived only in memory.

The storm consequently has both physical and psychological significance. It releases the dramatic energy that has accumulated during Rhys's search, but it also brings about the revelation that makes the continuation of his life impossible. The death of Rhys beside Meinir completes the work's emotional arc with a grim symmetry. Separation has finally been overcome, but only through death. The lovers are reunited at the precise moment when life itself has become impossible.

The importance of *Meinir* within the composer's development also lies in the way it treats Welsh subject matter without reducing it to nationalistic decoration. The work is not simply Welsh because its story comes from Welsh folklore. Its sense of place, its relationship with landscape and its emotional response to legend are integral to its conception. In this respect it establishes an important principle for the wider *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* cycle: the idea that Welsh identity can be explored through myth, memory and emotional experience rather than through quotation or overt musical symbolism alone.

Composed in Limpertsberg, Luxembourg, in 1992, *Meinir* also reflects the interesting duality inherent in the cycle's title. The country being evoked is Wales, while the music itself was created far from Wales. Distance therefore becomes part of the conception. Memory and imagination can recreate a homeland with a particular intensity precisely because the composer is physically removed from it. The legend of Meinir becomes, in this sense, both a Welsh story and an act of remembrance.

The award of the Meirion Williams Prize at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 1993 is consequently significant beyond its immediate recognition of the work. It confirms that *Meinir* successfully connects an individual musical voice with a deeply rooted strand of Welsh cultural memory. The symphonic poem stands at the meeting point of legend and personal expression, of landscape and psychology, and of the ancient story and the composer's own contemporary imagination. Its tragedy is therefore not simply the tragedy of Rhys and Meinir. It is a meditation upon love, loss, memory and the terrible persistence of hope.

Cilmeri Op. 69

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Cilmeri recalls the events of 11 December 1282, when Llywelyn, Prince of Wales, was betrayed, killed and butchered at Cilmeri by English invaders. In the history of Wales, the death of Llywelyn represents a moment of immense national tragedy, and it is remembered here as one of the darkest days in the country's history.

The music does not attempt to reconstruct the events literally. Instead, it seeks to evoke the emotional and historical weight of the moment. It begins quietly and in the lowest register of the orchestra, with the cello and contrabass gradually establishing a dark and unsettled atmosphere. The upper instruments are initially silent, creating a sense of emptiness and foreboding.

The music gradually gathers movement. Repeated figures appear in the strings, becoming increasingly insistent, and the orchestra slowly expands around them. What begins as a private and almost subterranean disturbance grows into something collective and threatening.

At the centre of the work a solitary horn appears. For a moment the enormous historical drama is reduced to a single voice standing alone. The respite is brief. Brass, timpani and bass drum enter with great force, and the music gathers itself into an increasingly violent orchestral climax.

The final stages of the central climax are deliberately overwhelming. The full orchestra is driven by repeated accented figures, while the percussion provides an almost relentless rhythmic foundation. The brass are required to project their sound with particular force, and the instruction *Schalltrichter hoch!* - bells raised - adds to the extraordinary physicality of the sound.

Then, as suddenly as it has accumulated, the violence begins to disappear. The orchestra falls back into a subdued texture, and the music returns to the dark sonorities of its opening. Near the end, the solitary horn is heard once more.

The work closes without triumph or consolation. The final quietness represents not peace but the emptiness left by catastrophe. The death of Llywelyn is not treated as the conclusion of a heroic episode but as an event whose consequences continue beyond the music itself.

Cilmeri, Op. 69, is the second work in the *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* Cycle of Symphonic Poems. The score is dedicated “for Amelia.” The score's final dating reads Luxembourg, February 1994.

Discussion

Cilmeri occupies a very different emotional territory from *Meinir*, despite belonging to the same cycle and having been written only a short time later. Its subject is not individual grief but historical catastrophe, and the musical language reflects that distinction. Where *Meinir* allows melody and folksong to provide a continuing thread of human tenderness, *Cilmeri* is constructed largely through rhythm, register, orchestral accumulation and the contrast between isolated voices and massed forces.

The opening is particularly significant. The score initially restricts musical activity almost entirely to the lower strings. The effect is unusually grave. The music seems to originate beneath the surface rather than above it, and the low register gives the opening a physical weight before any large orchestral statement has occurred.

The cello and contrabass figures are not presented as a conventional lyrical theme. Their material is fragmented, with triplet activity and changes of metre creating an unstable rhythmic environment. The instability is important because the work does not begin with a clearly defined historical "subject". It begins with a recitative-like disturbance, which gradually becomes organised. At bar 37, the section marked A introduces a more regular rhythmic texture in the strings. The music is now moving, but the movement has no obvious destination. This creates an important sense of gathering rather than conventional development.

The section marked B at bar 47 increases the density and force of this process. The woodwinds begin to participate more actively, while the strings retain the underlying rhythmic character. The musical argument is becoming increasingly collective. This movement from the individual to the collective is central to the work. At C, bar 69, the process is dramatically interrupted by a solo horn. The horn is not surrounded by a rich orchestral accompaniment; it is exposed. This creates a powerful opposition between one voice and the forces that will soon overwhelm it.

The horn is followed by some of the most brutal writing in the score. At bar 74 the brass and percussion enter with sharply accented and sustained sonorities, including *sfz* and *ff* indications. The bass drum and timpani add a physical dimension to the orchestral attack.

What is remarkable is that the work does not simply move into a conventional battle sequence. Instead, the repeated orchestral figures become increasingly obsessive. The music derives its violence from repetition and accumulation. The listener experiences an expanding force which seems increasingly difficult to resist. The crescendo beginning around bar 82 is particularly important in this respect. The whole orchestra is progressively drawn into the process, while the bass drum and timpani intensify the rhythmic pressure. The subsequent D section sustains this momentum rather than immediately releasing it.

At E, bar 99, the music enters its most concentrated orchestral phase. Here the repeated accented figures have become a kind of orchestral mechanism. The brass are projected with extraordinary force, while the percussion maintains the underlying energy. The instruction *Schalltrichter hoch!* is especially revealing. The physical orientation of the brass instruments becomes part of the expressive conception: the sound is intended to be projected outward with maximum impact.

There is consequently something almost architectural about the climax. It is constructed from layers of force rather than from the development of a long melodic subject. The orchestral mass becomes the protagonist.

This is where the title *Cilmeri* becomes particularly significant. The music does not portray Llywelyn as a conventional heroic figure standing triumphantly above his opponents. Instead, the solitary human presence suggested by the horn is placed in opposition to the enormous forces surrounding it. The tragedy arises precisely because the individual voice cannot prevail against the collective violence.

The subsequent retreat is therefore crucial. At bar 119 the music becomes quiet again, and the strings are marked *con sordino*. The contrast with the preceding orchestral violence is extreme. Yet the quietness does not feel like resolution. It feels like the aftermath of an event which cannot be undone. The final return to the lower strings reinforces this interpretation. The music has come full circle, but it is not the same circle. The opening suggested foreboding; the closing suggests desolation. The same fundamental register now carries the knowledge of what has happened.

The return of the horn near the end is perhaps the most eloquent structural gesture in the work. At bar 144 the horn is again heard in relative isolation. Its function has changed. Before the catastrophe it could be heard as a solitary human or heroic voice; afterwards it becomes something closer to a lament or remembrance. The ending at bar 148 is correspondingly restrained. There is no victorious statement, no restoration of the opening material into a consoling conclusion and no attempt to turn tragedy into triumph. The music simply ceases after the violence has exhausted itself.

This refusal of conventional consolation is one of the work's strongest qualities. *Cilmeri* is not a patriotic march disguised as a symphonic poem. Its nationalism, if that is the appropriate word, lies in its willingness to confront a historical wound without softening it. The title *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* acquires a darker meaning here than in *Meinir*: country is not merely homeland as landscape and memory but homeland as history, loss and collective identity.

The work is also important in the context of the cycle because it establishes a second way in which Welsh identity can enter the music. *Meinir* uses Welsh legend together with the actual melody of the folksong *Beth yw'r haf i mi?*. *Cilmeri*, by contrast, does not require a folksong. Its Welshness comes through historical subject matter and through the emotional response to a particular moment in the history of Wales.

There is therefore a useful contrast between the first two poems. *Meinir* turns inward, from legend towards personal grief; *Cilmeri* turns outward, from historical event towards collective catastrophe. Yet both works ultimately depend upon the same fundamental musical principle: the opposition between a vulnerable human presence and forces beyond its control.

In *Meinir*, that vulnerability is expressed through the lyrical world which is repeatedly threatened by obsessive rhythmic activity. In *Cilmeri*, it is embodied much more starkly in the solitary horn and the gradual engulfing of the orchestra by massive rhythmic forces. The two works consequently establish different facets of the same emerging symphonic language.

There is also something particularly effective about the brevity of *Cilmeri*. At 154 bars, it does not attempt to tell the whole history of Llywelyn or to provide a panoramic account of the conquest of Wales. It concentrates upon a single moment and its emotional consequences. The compression gives the climax greater inevitability and makes the final withdrawal more severe.

The final image is therefore not one of battle but of aftermath. The great orchestral forces have disappeared; the solitary voice remains. The music ends in the knowledge that something irretrievable has occurred. In that sense, *Cilmeri* is a work about the silence left by history. The opening silence precedes the catastrophe; the final silence follows it. Between those two silences stands the enormous central eruption of the orchestra. The whole symphonic poem can consequently be understood as a single arc from foreboding through violence to remembrance.

That seems to be the essential character of the piece. It is not simply “a symphonic poem about the death of Llywelyn”, but a compressed musical tragedy in which an isolated human voice is overwhelmed by an immense historical force, only to return as memory after the violence has passed.

Dolbadarn Op. 122

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Dolbadarn is an attempt to evoke Dolbadarn Castle in Llanberis, one of the last sites of Welsh resistance.

The music begins quietly, with muted strings and delicate piano figures establishing an atmosphere of stillness and contemplation. The landscape seems to emerge gradually, rather than being presented in a single dramatic gesture.

The tempo then increases sharply, and the strings begin to move with greater energy. The orchestra gradually expands, with harp, piano, woodwind and brass adding colour and weight to the increasingly active texture.

As the music develops, contrasting passages of movement and stillness alternate. Rhythmic figures become increasingly insistent and the full orchestra is eventually brought into play, while solo instrumental voices emerge at important points from the larger texture.

At the centre of the work the music turns towards a more lyrical character. The strings become *molto cantabile*, providing a broad contrast to the preceding rhythmic activity. The subsequent music again becomes more animated, before gradually moving towards another quiet lyrical episode.

A particularly intimate passage occurs near the end, where the second horn is marked *cantabile* above subdued orchestral writing. The music then returns to the tempo and atmosphere of the opening. The piano and muted strings once again evoke the stillness with which the work began.

The choice of Dolbadarn as a subject is deeply personal. The castle stands only a few hundred metres from the place where the composer was born, and **Dolbadarn** is the name he adopted as his Bardic name. The work is therefore not simply an evocation of a historic Welsh site, but a musical reflection upon a place intimately connected with his own sense of identity.

Composed in Buschdorf, Luxembourg and Fachwen, Wales, in 1999, *Dolbadarn*, Op. 122, is dedicated “for my Mother.”

Discussion

Of the first three works in the *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* cycle, *Dolbadarn* is perhaps the most explicitly concerned with the idea of landscape. *Meinir* uses a Welsh legend as the vehicle for a tragedy of love and loss; *Cilmeri* confronts a decisive historical catastrophe. *Dolbadarn*, by contrast, is concerned with a place - but a place in which landscape, history and personal memory are inseparable.

This distinction is reflected in the music. The work opens without any grand orchestral proclamation. Muted strings provide a subdued foundation while the piano introduces delicate figures almost in isolation. The choice of piano is significant. Rather than immediately presenting the orchestra as a monumental mass, the score begins with something intimate and finely articulated.

The opening pages develop this idea through gradual accumulation. The piano continues to provide much of the surface movement while the strings slowly become more active. The frequent changes of metre prevent the music from settling into a conventional periodic rhythm, and the overall impression is one of an environment continually shifting while remaining essentially still.

This is a particularly apt musical conception for an autumnal landscape. Autumn is neither the complete stillness of winter nor the exuberance of summer. It is a period of transition, and *Dolbadarn* is similarly characterised by constant movement between states. The music repeatedly emerges from stillness, gathers energy, reaches a point of intensity and then withdraws again.

The first great transformation comes at bar 23, where the tempo increases and the strings become *senza sordino*. The change in sonority is immediate. The muted, intimate opening is replaced by a more direct and resonant string sound. This is not merely an increase in speed; it is a change in the way the landscape is perceived. At B, bar 37, the music becomes still more emphatic. Brass and harp enter into the increasingly substantial orchestral texture, and the dynamics rise to *f*. The castle can now be imagined not merely as a distant object but as a substantial physical presence within the landscape.

The acceleration at C, bar 52, is still more striking. The tempo indicates *più mosso*, and the strings generate a persistent rhythmic movement while piano and clarinet add more prominent melodic material. The work has moved a considerable distance from its quiet opening. Yet the music does not simply continue towards a single climax. This is one of the most interesting features of the score. The increasingly active material is repeatedly interrupted, redirected or reduced. The work consequently behaves less like a conventional dramatic narrative and more like a succession of changing perceptions of the same place.

The central orchestral writing is particularly effective in this respect. At D, bar 64, the forces become more massive and emphatic, while later sections introduce solo trumpet voices from within the orchestral texture. These moments have a ceremonial quality without becoming straightforwardly heroic. This distinction matters because Dolbadarn is a site of resistance. The music acknowledges that historical dimension, but it does not turn the castle into a musical monument in the conventional patriotic sense. There is no triumphant conclusion in which history is simplified into victory. Instead, the historical presence of the castle exists within a much broader musical landscape.

The return to lyrical music at H, bar 143, makes this especially clear. The strings become *molto cantabile*, and the music seems to rediscover the contemplative quality of the opening after the preceding accumulation of activity. The landscape has outlasted the events which took place there.

From this point the work develops a remarkably broad symmetrical design. The later sections revisit the kinds of material already heard earlier: forceful orchestral writing, repeated rhythmic figures, quieter passages and lyrical instrumental voices. The sequence through J, K, L, M, N, O and P creates the impression of a return journey through the musical landscape.

This gives *Dolbadarn* a different kind of narrative from *Cilmeri*. There is no single historical event towards which the work must inexorably proceed. Instead, the music seems to circle around the place, seeing it from different perspectives. The formal recurrence therefore has something almost geographical about it: one returns to familiar ground, but never encounters it quite as before.

The late *cantabile* passage at bar 264 is especially revealing. The second horn is given a lyrical line, marked *cantabile*, while the rest of the orchestra remains subdued. The horn has already appeared elsewhere in more substantial orchestral contexts, but here it is stripped of much of that public or ceremonial character. It becomes an individual voice.

This gives the passage an almost personal quality, and it is tempting to hear it in relation to the autobiographical dimension of the work. Dolbadarn is not simply an historical location observed from outside. It is a place intimately connected with the composer's own identity: a few hundred metres from the place of birth and sufficiently important to become the adopted Bardic name.

The return to *Tempo primo* at bar 281 is therefore more than a formal recapitulation. The music has travelled through a considerable range of activity and intensity, yet it finally returns to the same tempo and basic atmosphere with which it began. That return is particularly important because it prevents the work from becoming a conventional dramatic arc. There is no permanent transformation of the opening material. Instead, the journey ultimately confirms the enduring identity of the place itself. The landscape remains.

The final pages reinforce this interpretation. The muted strings and piano again produce the subdued atmosphere of the beginning, and the work gradually retreats into *pp*. The ending feels less like a conclusion than like the disappearance of a view as the light changes. The autumnal character of the work can therefore be understood not simply as a matter of colour but as a principle of musical time. Autumn is a season of memory. The landscape remains physically present, but it carries traces of what has passed. In *Dolbadarn*, the castle similarly exists simultaneously as landscape, historical monument and personal memory.

This also places the work in a particularly interesting relationship with the two preceding poems. *Meinir* introduces Welsh traditional culture directly through the use of the folksong *Beth yw'r haf i mi?*; *Cilmeri* confronts Welsh historical memory through the death of Llywelyn; *Dolbadarn* turns towards the physical landscape in which that history is embodied. Together, the three works begin to establish a remarkably broad conception of *Fy Ngwlad*.

Country, in these works, is therefore not merely territory. It is story, song, history and place. In *Dolbadarn*, place is the central element, but it cannot be separated from the other three. The castle is a monument to Welsh resistance; the surrounding landscape carries centuries of memory; and the location has a personal significance because it belongs to the geography of the composer's own childhood and identity.

The dedication *"for my Mother"* adds yet another personal dimension. A work about a place so closely connected with the composer's origins becomes, through its dedication, also connected with family and memory. The personal and national therefore intersect naturally.

There is something fitting, too, about the work having been composed between Buschdorf in Luxembourg and Fachwen in Wales. The score's final page gives Luxembourg, September 20–21, 1999, as its concluding date. The work itself inhabits that same space between distance and homecoming. Its subject is a Welsh place, but its creation takes place between Wales and Luxembourg.

Ultimately, *Dolbadarn* is best understood not as a musical picture of a castle but as an act of remembrance. The castle provides the physical focus, but the music continually moves between the landscape as it appears now, the history contained within it and the personal associations which make it meaningful.

The final return to the opening atmosphere is therefore exactly right. After all the movement, the music comes back to the place from which it began. The castle remains; the landscape remains and the memory remains. In the quiet final pages, *Dolbadarn* becomes not simply a portrait of a Welsh stronghold, but a deeply personal musical statement about home.

Y Chwarel - The Quarry Op. 123

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Composed at Fachwen, Wales, in 1999, *Y Chwarel* was inspired by the Dinorwic Quarry near which the composer was born, where many members of his family worked. The work also grew from a photograph of a lone bugler at Penrhyn Quarry, from the bell of the Quarry Hospital, from the relentless rhythms of the quarry's water-driven machinery, and above all from the lives of the men who worked there.

The quarry was at once a source of livelihood, a place of danger and suffering, and an essential part of the community of Llanberis. Yet the wealth generated by the labour of generations belonged largely to owners from outside Wales. The abandoned quarry landscape that remains today is therefore also a monument to human labour and human loss.

The musical language of the work reflects these contrasts. Mechanical, repetitive figures evoke the ceaseless machinery of the quarry, while the bugle and more lyrical instrumental writing represent the individual human voice within that vast industrial world. The bell of the Quarry Hospital carries a darker significance, recalling injury, illness and death.

Running through the work are quotations from *In Memoriam*, a favourite Welsh hymn. These quotations transform the music from a depiction of an industrial landscape into an act of remembrance. *Y Chwarel* is dedicated *i'r Chwarelwyr Llanberis - to the quarrymen of Llanberis*.

Discussion

Y Chwarel occupies a particularly personal position within the *Fy Ngwlad* cycle. Unlike a historical subject viewed from a considerable distance, the quarry belongs directly to the composer's own landscape and family history. He was born near Dinorwic Quarry, and many of his relatives worked there. Consequently, the quarry is not simply an industrial monument or an impressive feature of the Welsh landscape: it is part of the history from which he comes.

Yet the work is not intended as a nostalgic evocation of the quarry. Dinorwic represents something much more complicated. It was a place of extraordinary energy and ingenuity, but also a place in which human lives were expended in the production of wealth. The men who worked the slate were exposed to exhausting labour and considerable danger, while the wealth of the industry ultimately accrued to owners who were not themselves part of the communities whose labour created it. The dedication, *i'r Chwarelwyr Llanberis* makes clear where the emotional allegiance of the work lies.

The musical conception arises from several apparently disparate images. One is the photograph of the solitary bugler at Penrhyn Quarry. Although the photograph does not depict Dinorwic itself, its image of a lone human figure against the immense industrial landscape provided a powerful starting point. The bugler suggests communication, warning, ceremony and remembrance simultaneously. He is an individual presence set against something vastly larger than himself.

The quarry's machinery provides the opposite pole. The score is filled with repeated rhythmic activity, often passed insistently through the strings and reinforced by the brass. The effect is not simply that of imitating machinery. Rather, repetition becomes a musical representation of a system which continues regardless of the individual. The industrial process has its own momentum. At one point the score explicitly drives the material forward through a *molto crescendo,* intensifying the sense of accumulated mechanical power.

This mechanical world is repeatedly contrasted with *cantabile* writing. The very opening establishes that duality: lyrical instrumental lines appear within an initially restrained texture, before the more forceful rhythmic character of the quarry increasingly asserts itself. The human voice is therefore present from the beginning, but it has to exist within the industrial environment rather than outside it.

This distinction matters. The quarry is not portrayed as an enemy imposed upon an otherwise idyllic community. It was the community's livelihood and, in many respects, its identity. The same machinery that represents oppression also represents employment, skill, ingenuity and the extraordinary physical achievement of the quarrymen. The music consequently avoids an easy opposition between nature and industry. Instead, it asks what happens to human beings when their lives become inseparable from an industrial system.

The brass plays an especially evocative role. The horns, trumpet, trombones and tuba give the music a weight and physical presence appropriate to the quarry, while the more exposed instrumental lines can suggest the individual voice emerging from within the mass. The solitary bugler of the originating photograph thus becomes almost an archetypal figure: one human being confronting an enormous landscape created by generations of human labour.

The bell of the Quarry Hospital introduces another dimension. A bell can be ceremonial, communal and reassuring, but in this context it also inevitably suggests injury and mortality. The hospital belonged to the same world as the quarry: it existed because the quarry community needed it. Its bell consequently becomes a sound of the human consequences of industrial labour.

This is where *In Memoriam* becomes central. The Welsh hymn is not merely an attractive melodic quotation inserted into the score for local colour. Its presence changes the moral and emotional perspective of the entire work. The relentless machinery is heard differently once the hymn appears within it. What might initially seem energetic or monumental acquires an element of tragedy. The quarry is no longer simply a place where work was done; it becomes a place in which generations of lives were spent.

The hymn also establishes a specifically Welsh act of remembrance. The quarrymen are not anonymous industrial workers in some abstract historical narrative. They belong to a particular community, language and culture. The Welsh hymn therefore gives musical voice to a community whose history might otherwise be reduced to statistics about slate production and industrial development.

There is a striking irony in the fate of the quarry itself. The industrial activity that once dominated the landscape has largely vanished, leaving behind an immense abandoned landscape. The machinery has fallen silent; the men have gone; the economic system that created the quarry has disappeared. Yet the physical landscape remains. *Y Chwarel* responds to that landscape by restoring the human presence which the abandoned workings can no longer provide.

In that sense the work is itself a memorial. The quarry may now be experienced as an industrial wasteland, but the music refuses to allow it to become an empty one. Beneath the stone, the machinery and the monumental scale of the landscape are the lives of the men who worked there. The quotation from *In Memoriam* makes that remembrance explicit, while the recurring conflict between mechanical rhythm and lyrical expression gives it its musical form.

There is therefore something unusually intimate about *Y Chwarel* within the *Fy Ngwlad* cycle. It is a portrait of Wales, but it is also a portrait of a particular Wales: the Wales of Llanberis, of Dinorwic, of slate, machinery, hospitals, bells and quarrymen. And because the quarry lies so close to the composer's own origins, the act of remembering these men is also, inevitably, an act of remembering his own family and the landscape from which he came.

Owain Glyndŵr Op. 125

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Owain Glyndŵr evokes the very last Prince of Wales, Owain Glyndŵr, who led the bitter resistance to English colonial oppression in the fifteenth century. He appeared, fought and disappeared into time, and may one day come again, fully armed, to save his country.

The music begins quietly, with the lowest strings alone, creating an atmosphere of darkness and expectancy. From this subdued opening the musical material gradually gathers strength, moving from tentative fragments towards increasingly forceful orchestral statements.

As the work develops, the strings acquire increasing rhythmic energy and the brass progressively enter the argument. At important moments, however, the massed orchestra gives way to individual instrumental voices, including a solo trumpet marked *cantabile*. The contrast suggests the individual hero standing within the larger forces of history.

The central part of the work becomes increasingly urgent. The strings establish a relentless rhythmic movement which is gradually taken up by the wider orchestra. The effect is one of gathering resistance and unstoppable momentum. After this sustained intensity the music eventually falls back into quieter, more spacious writing. And almost comes to a standstill, before the earlier rhythmic energy gradually begins to return.

The work does not end with a straightforward statement of victory. Instead, its final pages suggest that the struggle has not entirely disappeared. The music gathers once more, then withdraws into sustained sonorities, leaving open the possibility embodied in the legend of Glyndŵr's eventual return.

Composed in Buschdorf, Luxembourg, in 2000, *Owain Glyndŵr*, Op. 125, is dedicated to Dafydd Iwan. The score is dated Luxembourg, 29 January 2000.

Discussion

Among the eleven poems of the *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* cycle, *Owain Glyndŵr* is the work in which the idea of Welsh resistance becomes most directly embodied in musical movement. The historical figure provides the subject, but the deeper subject is persistence: the capacity of an idea, a people or a national memory to disappear beneath history and then re-emerge.

This is already suggested by the opening. The score begins with the lower strings, principally cello and double bass, while the rest of the orchestra remains silent. It is a remarkably understated way of beginning a work about a heroic warrior. There is no fanfare, no immediate brass proclamation and no attempt to establish Glyndŵr as a conventional military hero.

Instead, he seems to emerge from darkness. The low strings create a physical sense of depth, and the fragmented nature of their writing prevents the opening from settling into a stable melodic statement. The music feels as though it is searching for something. This is an especially appropriate conception for a figure who "appeared, fought and disappeared into time".

The disappearance is already contained within the musical language. At bar 23, marked A, the upper strings begin to take up the musical argument. The process is gradual rather than spectacular. Musical identity is being assembled before it is proclaimed.

By B, at bar 39, the material has become more emphatic. What was previously fragmented now begins to acquire determination. The work's heroism is consequently not introduced as a completed quality. It is something the music has to build. This is an important distinction. *Owain Glyndŵr* is not a musical statue of a national hero. It is a musical drama of resistance.

The subsequent sections intensify that resistance. At C, bar 57, the string writing becomes increasingly forceful, and the rhythmic gestures become more clearly articulated. The brass then begin to assume greater importance, particularly at D, where the orchestral sonority becomes massive and emphatic. Immediately afterwards, at E, the music offers a fascinating counter-image: a solo trumpet marked *cantabile*. The contrast between the massed orchestra and the solitary instrument is central to the poem's emotional language. The hero is both an individual and a symbol.

The solo voice can therefore be heard as Glyndŵr himself, but it can equally represent the individual Welsh voice within a much larger historical struggle. The music refuses to allow the hero to disappear completely into the orchestral mass. This becomes particularly powerful when the orchestral writing resumes its force. At F, bar 102, the music again becomes emphatic, and the individual voice is absorbed once more into the larger movement of events.

The work's great central transformation comes at bar 129 where the tempo suddenly accelerates and the strings launch into a continuous stream of rapid figures, and this activity persists for a considerable span. The effect is almost physical. The listener is no longer simply contemplating Glyndŵr; the music has entered his world of action. The relentless repetition is especially effective. It creates a sense of energy that appears larger than any single musical event. The music seems unable to stop because the resistance itself cannot stop.

As the upper instruments join the texture, the scale expands further. The transformation from the solitary lower strings of the opening to this enormous rhythmic machine is one of the clearest large-scale processes in the work. It is also significant that this central section does not immediately culminate in a conventional triumphant climax. The music continues to return to related rhythmic patterns, moving through successive stages of intensity. At I, bar 171, the full orchestra is engaged

in the argument. At J, bar 183, the energy returns yet again. The impression is of repeated struggle rather than one decisive battle. That makes the historical symbolism more convincing. Glyndŵr's rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful in conventional military and political terms, but the music does not treat that as the end of his significance. His disappearance from history is not the same thing as his disappearance from memory.

The quieter passages after the great central activity therefore become essential. At L, bar 195, the music retreats into a much more spacious texture. Later, around bar 211, individual instrumental voices emerge from sustained sonorities. The effect is almost elegiac, yet it is not simply an elegy because the music has not finished.

At N, bar 238, the tempo drops. This is one of the most remarkable moments in the structure. After the extraordinary speed and force of the preceding music, time seems almost to stop. One could hear this as the disappearance of Glyndŵr into history, but then the music begins again. The rhythmic material gradually returns, and by bar 247 the earlier movement has been re-established. This is where the programme description becomes especially relevant. Glyndŵr has "disappeared into time", but he has not been musically erased. The musical material itself refuses to remain buried.

The final stages continue this process. Familiar gestures return, but they no longer carry quite the same meaning as they did before the great central struggle. The music now carries memory. That structural recurrence is important. The work began with the individual emerging from darkness; it ends with the individual voice re-emerging after the great historical struggle.

The conclusion therefore deliberately avoids a straightforward victory. The final page does not provide a gigantic triumphant cadence proclaiming that Glyndŵr has returned. Instead, the music ends in sustained sonorities. This leaves the programme's final proposition unresolved — and that is precisely why it works. If Glyndŵr may one day return, then the music should not return him to us too completely. His absence is part of the legend.

There is consequently an unusually strong relationship between musical form and programme in this work. The hero appears in the opening; resistance gathers; the orchestra erupts into sustained action; the music subsides; and then the material returns. The structure itself enacts appearance, struggle, disappearance and possible return.

This gives *Owain Glyndŵr* a particular position within the *Fy Ngwlad* cycle. *Cilmeri* looked back at the death of Llywelyn as catastrophe; *Dolbadarn* contemplated a surviving place of Welsh resistance; *Y Chwarel* remembered the lives of ordinary Welsh workers. Here the focus returns to a named political leader, but the ultimate subject is again collective memory. Glyndŵr becomes larger than the historical man. He becomes an idea.

That is also why the dedication *i Dafydd Iwan*" is interesting within the context of the cycle. The score does not itself explain the dedication, but it is clear: Dafydd Iwan is widely regarded as another hero of the Welsh resistance. Its presence places the work within a wider Welsh cultural and political landscape without requiring the music to become documentary.

The strength of *Owain Glyndŵr* lies precisely in this combination of the personal, the historical and the legendary. The subject is an individual from the fifteenth century, but the music refuses to confine him to the fifteenth century. The repeated reappearance of the musical material keeps him alive within the present.

The music does not deny that disappearance., indeed it makes it audible. But it also demonstrates that disappearance from history is not necessarily disappearance from memory. The music can fall

silent, the orchestra can withdraw, and the historical figure can vanish - yet the possibility of return remains. In that sense, *Owain Glyndŵr* is not ultimately a work about a defeated rebellion. It is a work about the persistence of hope after defeat.

Garth Celyn Op. 174

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Garth Celyn is an attempt to evoke the panic and broken dreams of the period following the murder of Llywelyn, Prince of Wales, in December 1282. Garth Celyn, the royal home of the Princes, is in turmoil; yet amidst the destruction and uncertainty, impossible dreams of freedom persist.

The work is scored entirely for strings. It begins at speed, with restless repeated figures accumulating gradually through the lower strings and then spreading upwards. The music seems unable to settle, creating an atmosphere of agitation and panic.

From this turbulent opening emerge contrasting passages of sustained, lyrical writing. At several points the strings become *molto cantabile*, suggesting memories of a more stable world and dreams of a future which can no longer easily be imagined. These moments repeatedly give way to renewed agitation, so that the lyrical music becomes something fragile and precarious.

Later, the music falls almost to a whisper, reaching *ppp* before the restless movement begins again. Towards the end, the strings play *con sordino*, giving the music a veiled and distant character, before the mutes are removed and the lyrical voice returns.

The final pages do not offer resolution in any conventional sense. The music gradually settles into sustained sonorities, leaving the listener with the impression that although the political world of Garth Celyn has been shattered, the dream of freedom has not entirely disappeared.

Canach, Luxembourg, 2007

Discussion

Garth Celyn occupies an unusual position within the *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* cycle because its subject is not primarily an event but a psychological condition. The murder of Llywelyn has already happened. The battle is over. The Prince is dead. What remains is the terrible question of what happens afterwards.

An earlier programme note captured this in two phrases: “panic and broken dreams” and “impossible dreams of freedom persist.” Those two ideas provide almost the complete architecture of the music.

The first thing one notices is what the work does not contain. There is no military orchestra. No percussion, trumpets or trombones. The entire poem is entrusted to strings. This immediately moves the work away from historical illustration and towards psychological expression.

The opening is consequently remarkable. The cello and double bass begin the work with rapid repeated movement while the upper strings gradually enter. The dynamic instructions repeatedly call for a *poco a poco crescendo*. The sensation is one of mounting alarm. There is no melody in the conventional sense to reassure the listener. Instead, there is activity - nervous, repetitive and increasingly crowded. The music seems to be reacting before it has understood what has happened.

That is a particularly effective way of portraying the aftermath of catastrophe. At bar 18 the first substantial interruption occurs, followed by a general pause at bar 21. The silence is almost as expressive as the music. It is the moment when panic momentarily exhausts itself. Then the machinery starts again and At A, bar 22, the restless figuration returns. But the music has now acquired a structural memory. We have heard the panic once already, and its recurrence tells us that there is no simple escape from it.

Then comes B. The abrupt change around bar 34, from rapid figuration to sustained harmony, is one of the most important moments in the work. Suddenly the music stops running. What follows is not peace, rather profound shock. The sustained notes create an extraordinary sense of suspended time. The listener has been taken from frantic movement into a world where time seems almost to have stopped. In psychological terms, this is the moment after catastrophe when the mind begins to comprehend what has occurred.

Unexpectedly, the music begins to sing. At bar 48 the viola is marked *molto cantabile e crescendo*. This lyrical impulse is crucial because it prevents the work from becoming merely a study in despair. Something still wants to live. This is where the "dreams" enter, not represented by a separate theme which triumphs over the darkness but as fragile appearances within it. The lyrical passage is followed by renewed agitation at C, bar 60. The same pattern occurs again at D, where another extended *molto cantabile* passage appears. The strings stretch towards long melodic lines, creating an almost timeless world.

It is tempting to regard this as the representation of Wales itself - not necessarily Wales as geographical landscape, but Wales as imagined possibility. The music temporarily constructs a world in which continuity, freedom and identity might still exist. The listener knows that this world is impossible and from this comes its emotional power.

The transition into E at bar 111 then breaks the illusion. Triplet motion begins to disturb the sustained world, and rhythmic activity gradually takes control again. The work's form therefore

becomes almost cyclical but it is not a literal repetition. Each recurrence changes our understanding of what came before.

The quiet passage at F, beginning at bar 123 and falling to *ppp*, is particularly important. The panic has become quieter but not necessarily less intense. It has moved inward. The subsequent return of strong rhythmic writing around bar 128 is therefore experienced differently from the opening. At the beginning, the listener is entering an unknown crisis. Here, the listener already knows what the crisis means.

At G, around bar 138, the lyrical impulse returns once more, again marked *molto cantabile*. This repetition of the lyrical world is one of the work's most moving structural features. The dream refuses to die, yet it cannot become reality.

The extended sustained writing that follows creates a strange equilibrium between motion and stasis. The music seems to exist between two states: the past which has been destroyed and a future which cannot yet be realised. At H, the use of mutes deepens the sense of distance. The strings are still speaking, but their voices are veiled. Now this is no longer immediate panic but remembrance.

At I the mutes are removed. The violin is marked *sempre cantabile*. The lyrical voice returns one final time - arguably the most important moment of the entire work. If the final lyrical return were absent, the piece would simply describe the destruction of hope. Instead, the dream reappears after everything that has happened. It has survived the panic, the silence, the broken passages and even the veiled sound of the muted strings. There is, however, neither victory nor consolation.

The final bars are extraordinarily restrained. From bar 176 onwards, the music becomes increasingly spacious, with long sustained notes across the strings. There is no grand affirmation and no final dramatic gesture. That is a very effective ending for this subject. The dream of freedom is described in the programme as *impossible, a*nd the music does not contradict that. It does something subtler: it demonstrates that an impossible dream can nevertheless survive.

This gives *Garth Celyn* a particularly interesting relationship with *Cilmeri*. Both works originate in the catastrophe of December 1282, but their perspectives are radically different. *Cilmeri* confronts the historical wound itself; *Garth Celyn* looks into the consciousness of those left behind. In *Cilmeri*, the historical event is the centre. In *Garth Celyn*, the aftermath is the event.

That is why the reduced scoring works so well. The five string parts create a kind of collective consciousness. There is no external narrator telling us what to think. The strings themselves seem to breathe, panic, remember and dream. The result is one of the more inward-looking works in the cycle. Its Welshness does not depend upon quotation, patriotic melody or overt historical illustration. It lies in the emotional premise: a political world has been destroyed, yet the imaginative idea of freedom remains alive.

The final sustained sonorities therefore carry a double meaning. They can be heard as the exhausted silence after catastrophe, but also as the continuation of something which cannot quite be extinguished.

Talaith Op. 177

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Talaith takes its title from the golden band or crown of Wales, carried in triumph through the streets of London after its seizure following the English conquest of Wales in 1282. The image of the stolen crown contains an extraordinary contradiction: what had once represented the sovereignty of a nation has become an object of public celebration by those who have destroyed that sovereignty. The music therefore sets bitterness and gloating pageantry against memories of a lost freedom and the persistence of a distinctly Welsh and Celtic identity.

The work does not attempt to reconstruct a historical ceremony literally. Instead, the crown becomes a symbol around which contrasting states of mind revolve. Rhythmic movement, insistent ostinati, percussion and powerful brass writing suggest the outward spectacle of power, while more lyrical and sustained passages evoke memory, mourning and the continuing vision of a Wales that has not accepted its disappearance. The music repeatedly moves between these opposing worlds, so that triumph is never allowed to exist without its shadow.

The dedication extends the historical meditation into a more personal remembrance, commemorating Owain, Llywelyn, Gwenllian and Gwladys, the children associated with the lost royal generations of Gwynedd and Wales. Thus the golden crown is ultimately revealed as something more than a political object. It becomes a symbol of continuity: something may be stolen, displayed and possessed by another, yet the memory of what it represented cannot so easily be conquered.

Written in Canach, Luxembourg, 2007

Discussion

There is a particularly potent image at the centre of *Talaith*: a crown that has ceased to belong to the people whose sovereignty it embodied and has instead become an object of triumphal display by the power that defeated them. It is difficult to imagine a more concentrated metaphor for conquest. A crown normally signifies legitimacy, continuity and authority; here, its very presence in the hands of the conqueror becomes evidence of dispossession. The object survives, but the political world that gave it meaning has been destroyed.

That paradox is fundamental to the music. *Talaith* does not behave like a straightforward historical tableau in which one event follows another. Instead, it continually places opposed emotional and musical states against each other. The opening is strikingly restrained. At a moderate tempo, delicate upper-wind activity is suspended above long, quiet string sonorities, creating an atmosphere that seems almost to precede the historical event rather than announce it. The music is already haunted. It does not begin with the conqueror's trumpet; it begins with memory.

The subsequent emergence of increasingly active material makes the contrast all the more powerful. At the first principal structural division, the orchestral language becomes more articulated, and the work begins its long process of accumulation. The orchestra is large, but its size is not employed merely for colouristic splendour. The percussion battery — including side drum, tambourine, wood blocks and tubular bells — is part of the dramatic vocabulary, while the brass provides an unmistakable capacity for public, ceremonial sound. These are the instruments of spectacle, procession and authority.

Yet the music consistently undermines the security of that spectacle. Rhythmic figures recur insistently, often in the strings and percussion, creating a sense of mechanical forward motion. The effect can suggest the unstoppable machinery of political power: once set in motion, conquest proceeds with a terrible impersonality. Against this, the winds and brass periodically emerge with sharply defined gestures, while the strings accumulate increasingly dense layers of movement. The music therefore creates not simply a procession but a procession viewed from two perspectives: from within the triumphant public ceremony and from outside it, by those for whom the ceremony represents catastrophe.

The recurring lyrical episodes are consequently crucial. In the later part of the score, *molto cantabile* appears explicitly, and the sustained string writing provides an entirely different temporal experience from the rhythmic insistence that surrounds it. These passages seem to suspend historical time. The pageant may move forward, but memory does not move at the same speed. It remains fixed upon what has been lost.

This gives the work an interesting relationship with nationalism. *Talaith* is certainly patriotic, but it is not patriotic in the simple sense of presenting a catalogue of Welsh heroes and victories. Indeed, the central historical fact is defeat. The musical drama derives its force precisely from the refusal to disguise that defeat. Wales has lost its crown; the conqueror possesses the outward symbols of authority. What survives instead is memory, identity and the possibility of imagining freedom.

That distinction is important because it transforms the crown from an object into an idea. The physical *talaith* can be stolen. It can be carried away. It can be exhibited as evidence of conquest. But the concept of sovereignty represented by it is much more difficult to destroy. The music repeatedly enacts that distinction. Its forceful passages embody the physical reality of power; its lyrical passages embody the persistence of something that power cannot quite reach.

The dedication at the beginning of the score deepens this interpretation. *Talaith* is dedicated in memory of Owain, Llywelyn, Gwenllian and Gwladys, placing the work not merely in the realm of political history but within the human consequences of dynastic catastrophe. The crown therefore becomes inseparable from the people who wore it, inherited it, lost it and died within the historical world it represented. The symbolism becomes personal.

There is also something characteristic of the composer's larger approach to Welsh history here. Places, objects and legends are not treated as antiquarian subjects. They are vessels through which the present can encounter the emotional residue of the past. *Talaith* does not ask us simply to imagine what happened in 1282. It asks what it might mean for the memory of that event to persist centuries later.

The later music makes this particularly clear. Around bar 187, after the extensive rhythmic and orchestral development, a solo line marked *molto cantabile e crescendo* emerges. The choice of a solo voice at this point is significant. The great machinery of history has been reduced to the expression of an individual voice. What began as collective political catastrophe ends not with an overwhelming assertion of power but with something human and singing.

The final bars then withdraw into sustained sonority rather than supplying an uncomplicated triumphant conclusion. It is an ending that leaves the central contradiction unresolved — appropriately so. The crown has been stolen; the historical defeat cannot be undone. But neither has the dream represented by the crown disappeared.

And this is ultimately why *Talaith* works as a symphonic poem rather than merely as a piece of historical illustration. Its subject is not really the crown itself. It is **t**he difference between possessing a symbol and possessing what that symbol means. The conqueror can possess the gold. The streets of London can echo with the sounds of triumph. But the music insists that sovereignty, memory and identity are not objects that can simply be carried away. The golden band remains visible in the historical imagination, but the music places something deeper beside it: the persistent, singing memory of the country to which it once belonged.

Caer Engan Op. 181

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

The starting point for *Caer Engan* is a fiercely inspiring place in Gwynedd, associated by some with the origins and possible location of the Arthurian legend. Whether or not the historical Arthur ever stood upon this particular ground is ultimately less important than the extraordinary power of the landscape to generate stories, memories and legends.

The music attempts to evoke that power rather than to illustrate a particular episode from the Arthurian story. It begins with restless, rapidly moving figures in the strings, creating an impression of something elemental and ancient emerging from the landscape. As the music gathers strength, the orchestra gradually assumes a more monumental character before subsiding into a broader, more reflective central passage.

The original momentum then returns with renewed force. Towards the end, the music becomes increasingly massive, with sustained orchestral sonorities and shimmering harp î creating an atmosphere that is at once physical and mysterious. The climax is not intended as a representation of a battle or a heroic deed, but as the overwhelming presence of the place itself - a landscape sufficiently powerful to become the setting for legend.

The final pages withdraw from this great accumulation of sound. The last gestures belong to the harp and sustained strings, leaving the listener with the impression not of a story concluded but of a landscape remaining after the story has passed into memory.

The manuscript was completed at Sŵn y Llyn in Fachwen, Wales on March 29th, 2008.

Discussion

There is something appropriate about making a landscape the subject of a work concerned with Arthurian legend. Legends are rarely born from facts alone. They are born when facts, places and collective imagination become inseparable. A mountain, a lake, a ruined fortification or an isolated valley acquires a name, a story and eventually a mythology. In *Caer Engan*, the landscape is therefore not scenery behind the legend. It is a source from which the legend might have arisen.

The music captures this idea through its extraordinary concentration of physical energy. The opening is almost entirely concerned with motion. The strings generate rapidly repeating figures which seem to have no need of a conventional melody. They are rather like forces of nature: streams, wind, rock, movement across uneven ground. The music's primitive quality comes not from the use of deliberately archaic musical language but from its insistence upon elemental rhythmic activity.

This gives *Caer Engan* a particularly strong sense of place. There is little of the picturesque in it. Gwynedd is not presented as a postcard landscape. It is rugged, restless and potentially threatening. The music seems to inhabit the physicality of the terrain.

The first great structural interruption at bar 52 is therefore significant. The marking *Molto rit*. brings the initial surge to a halt. What follows at bar 54, *Meno Mosso*, is broader and more monumental. The change feels almost like a change of perspective: what had previously been experienced from within the landscape is now seen from a greater distance.

Here the Arthurian idea can enter the imagination without ever becoming explicit. The sustained brass sonorities, repeated orchestral gestures and broad harmonic movement suggest something ceremonial and legendary. There is a sense of human beings attempting to give form and meaning to the overwhelming landscape around them. The interesting question is raised: *what kind of place could make people imagine Arthur?*

That is why the return of the opening tempo at bar 184 has such force. The landscape has not changed. The legend has not resolved anything. The elemental energy is still there. The final quarter of the work then transforms this energy into something almost supernatural. At section P, beginning at bar 191, the orchestra expands into sustained, powerful sonorities while the harp introduces repeated *glissandi*. These *glissandi* are especially effective because they do not behave like conventional decorative harp writing. They become part of the atmosphere — flashes, currents, perhaps light upon water, perhaps something less tangible.

Sections Q, R, S, T and U intensify this effect. The music alternates between massive sustained orchestral blocks and increasingly active string writing, while the harp continues its characteristic glissando figures. The climax consequently seems to transcend human action. The orchestra becomes the landscape.

This is what makes the final pages so effective. After the enormous accumulated sonority, the music does not finish with a grandiose Arthurian apotheosis. Instead, it subsides into sustained strings and a final harp gesture.

Thus *Caer Engan* ultimately reverses the normal relationship between legend and landscape. We tend to imagine that legendary figures give places their significance: Arthur makes a hill or castle famous. Here the opposite possibility emerges - perhaps it is the place that creates the legend? The landscape is so powerful that human imagination cannot leave it alone.

Tŵr Llywelyn Op. 239

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Tŵr Llywelyn - Llywelyn's Tower is a symphonic poem evoking the history of Garth Celyn, the palace of the Princes of Wales before the English conquest of 1282. The work is dedicated to Kathryn Gibson, owner, custodian and dedicated historical researcher.

The music begins with restless, driving energy, the lower strings establishing an insistent rhythmic foundation from which the rest of the orchestra gradually emerges. The atmosphere is one of strength and determination, but also of gathering danger. Against this energetic background, contrasting lyrical and monumental passages suggest both the life of the Welsh princes and the forces that threatened their independence.

At the heart of the work appears the Welsh melody *Merch Ifanc o'n Ben Bore,* introduced at a moment when the relentless orchestral movement gives way to something more human and reflective. The melody becomes a symbol of continuity: whatever may happen to a country politically, its culture, its music and its identity can survive.

The music repeatedly returns to its vigorous rhythmic material, building towards increasingly powerful climaxes, but the lyrical idea continues to reassert itself. A later passage marked *molto cantabile* gives particular prominence to this singing quality, while a subsequent *con sordino* section creates a darker, more inward atmosphere before the music once again expands.

The final stages of the work gather together the contrasting elements of conflict, memory and song. The orchestra reaches a massive climax before withdrawing into the sustained sonorities with which the work concludes. The ending is therefore not one of defeat. Nor is it a simple celebration of victory. It is an affirmation of endurance.

Wales has suffered so much assault and indignity over the years, but still survives as a distinct Celtic civilisation. *Tŵr Llywelyn* is offered in that spirit of remembrance, resilience and hope.

Canach, Luxembourg, 2014

Discussion

Tŵr Llywelyn confronts one of the defining tragedies of Welsh history while ultimately refusing to make tragedy its final subject. Garth Celyn represents political independence, sovereignty and the world of the Welsh Princes of Wales; the defeat of hope and freedom in 1282 overwhelmed the country.

The opening of the work is consequently important. It does not begin with mourning. the music is already moving with considerable determination, the lowest strings establishing a persistent rhythmic pulse from the very beginning. This gives the opening a remarkable sense of physical existence. As the music develops, repeated rhythmic figures spread through the string body, while the winds and brass periodically interrupt or reinforce the movement. The orchestral language is direct and muscular. There is little sense of historical distance: the listener is placed inside a world of activity, tension and expectation.

This is what makes the appearance of *Merch Ifanc o'n Ben Bore* so significant. The melody is not merely a local-colour quotation. It introduces a completely different conception of historical time. The preceding music has been concerned with action; the song introduces memory.

And memory is precisely what survives conquest.

The work consequently becomes a meditation on the difference between political power and cultural survival. A palace can be destroyed. A dynasty can be overthrown. A country can lose its political independence. Yet a melody can pass from one generation to another. The quotation therefore carries considerably more weight than its musical dimensions might initially suggest.

The subsequent return to the vigorous orchestral material prevents the work from becoming sentimental. The song has not solved the historical problem. The struggle continues. Around bar 126, the orchestra once again becomes intensely active, with strong rhythmic articulation and powerful string writing.

The later *molto cantabile* passage is therefore especially poignant. It is as though the music has discovered that singing is itself an act of resistance. The lyrical voice does not eliminate the violence surrounding it; it persists within it.

This becomes still more apparent in the passage beginning at bar 184, where the strings are muted. The sound becomes veiled and inward, suggesting remembrance rather than immediate action. At bar 193, *sempre cantabile* accompanies the return to a more open texture. The music seems to move between grief and renewed vitality without ever settling permanently into either.

The final climax might therefore have been expected to provide an uncomplicated historical catharsis. Instead, it is followed by withdrawal and suspension. At bar 231 the orchestra reaches ff, creating one of the work's great accumulations of force. But the final pages do not leave us with destruction. They leave us with sound continuing.

That is, I think, the deepest meaning of *Tŵr Llywelyn*. The tower may be a symbol of something lost, but the work itself is an argument against the idea that loss is the end of history. The historical Garth Celyn belongs to the thirteenth century - with even earlier roots.. The melody belongs to a continuing Welsh culture. The symphonic poem belongs to 2014. And the final optimistic declaration looks beyond all three towards the future.

WinterSea Op. 202

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

WinterSea is a musical evocation of a bleak and almost motionless winter seascape in North Wales, inspired by a photograph taken by Kathryn Gibson, to whom the work is dedicated. There is no attempt to depict a storm or an active sea; instead, the music dwells upon that particular winter stillness in which sea, sky and land seem to have become almost indistinguishable.

The work is remarkably spare in its conception. It is written entirely for strings, with the players frequently muted, and begins at an extraordinarily slow tempo. Long sustained notes and gently repeated triplet figures move almost imperceptibly between the instruments, creating a sense of vastness and suspended time. The music seems less to move through the seascape than to inhabit it.

Gradually, the apparently static surface begins to reveal a subtle inner movement. The individual string parts enter and withdraw, sometimes in overlapping layers and sometimes leaving isolated notes suspended in silence. *Pizzicato* briefly interrupts the sustained texture before the flowing, bowed notes return. There is no conventional dramatic climax; the changing density and register of the strings provide the movement.

The final pages return to the spacious, sustained language of the opening. By the close, the music has become almost weightless, the last notes held in suspension before the silence. *WinterSea* thus attempts to capture not the sea in motion but the extraordinary stillness of the winter sea: cold, distant, austere and yet quietly alive. The music was composed in Canach, Luxembourg, in January 2012

Discussion

WinterSea is one of the most austere of these symphonic poems, and its austerity is precisely what makes it so evocative. The starting point is a photograph: Kathryn Gibson's image of a bleak and static winter seascape in North Wales. A photograph freezes the world, and Bullock responds by doing something almost paradoxical: he creates music that seems determined, for as long as possible, not to move.

The result is a fascinating meditation on stillness. The sea is present, but it is not a sea of crashing waves or dramatic weather. It is the winter sea seen when movement has become almost imperceptible. The seascape has been stripped of colour and activity, and the music correspondingly strips away almost everything that might suggest conventional orchestral drama.

The instrumentation itself is revealing. The score is entirely for strings: violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello and double bass. That decision gives the work an unusual unity. Strings can sustain sound almost indefinitely, and Bullock exploits this capacity to extraordinary effect. The opening tempo is very slow and marked *sempre* mp, with muted strings entering gradually into long, overlapping lines. At such a tempo, conventional musical expectations begin to disappear. We stop waiting for the next event and start listening to the changing quality of the sound itself.

This is the musical equivalent of staring at the sea. The opening page is particularly beautiful in this respect. The first violin is initially silent while the lower string voices establish a quiet harmonic environment; then it enters into the texture. Triplet figures begin to circulate through the violins and viola, while the cello provides long notes beneath them. Nothing is hurried. The individual changes are almost too slow to be perceived as gestures.

The sea consequently becomes less a subject than a condition. The muted strings are fundamental to this sensation. The *con sordino* instruction appears repeatedly throughout the score, producing a softened, veiled sonority. This is particularly apt for a winter seascape. The music has been deprived of brilliance. Even when the pitch material moves into higher registers, the muted sound prevents it from becoming luminous in the conventional sense.

The resulting sound is cold without being lifeless. This distinction matters. A bleak seascape can easily become emotionally empty in music, but *WinterSea* never quite crosses that boundary. The repeated triplet figures provide an underlying pulse, however slow, and these figures are passed between the instruments in constantly changing combinations. The sea may appear static, but something is always moving. This is the first of the work's central paradoxes: apparent stillness conceals continuous motion.

The triplets are particularly effective because they do not function as melody in the usual sense. They are more like currents. Individual notes rise and fall within recurring patterns, but the patterns themselves create an impression of something moving beneath a static surface. The technique is simple, but its psychological effect is considerable.

The harmonic language contributes to the same ambiguity. The score repeatedly allows notes to overlap across changing harmonies, so that one sonority seems to dissolve into the next rather than being replaced abruptly. This makes the music feel almost geological. The listener cannot always identify the precise moment at which one harmonic state has ended and another begun. Again, the music behaves like the seascape. A winter sea does not announce its changes. The light alters; the horizon shifts; the water darkens; the clouds move almost imperceptibly. *WinterSea* works on the same scale.

The music continues this process, with the strings passing between sustained notes and triplet figures while the cello and double bass provide a slow-moving foundation. The register is carefully controlled, and there is little sense of foreground and background in the conventional orchestral sense. Instead, different layers of the string sound seem to exist at different distances.

This creates a remarkable sense of space despite the limited instrumentation. Indeed, the absence of winds and brass arguably makes the seascape feel larger. Nothing tells us where the edges of the sound are. The strings simply continue, suspended within an acoustic space which seems much larger than the ensemble itself.

There are moments when the texture becomes more fragmented. At bar 68, the cellos play *pizzicato* - but only for three bars. This tiny alteration is disproportionately noticeable because the prevailing sound world has been so continuous. A plucked note is suddenly a physical event, almost like stones falling into still water. Yet Bullock does not develop this into a dramatic episode. The *pizzicato* disappears and the sustained texture returns. The interruption therefore reinforces rather than destroys the prevailing stillness. The listener becomes even more conscious of how little is happening.

This is one of the work's most sophisticated qualities: nothing needs to happen in order for time to pass. In conventional symphonic writing, development is often associated with transformation, conflict and resolution. Here development occurs through tiny changes in density, register, articulation and instrumental combination. The music develops by looking more closely.

The photograph that inspired the piece is therefore an unusually appropriate source. A photograph freezes a moment, but a photograph can also invite prolonged contemplation. Bullock's music supplies the temporal equivalent of that contemplation. Instead of seeing a single frozen image, we spend several minutes listening to it. The result is not a musical narrative but a musical gaze.

The work's title, *WinterSea*, is equally economical. It does not specify a particular beach, headland or village. Nor does it tell us what the weather is doing. It simply gives us season and element. The listener supplies the rest. Yet the geographical identity of the sea matters. This is North Wales, not an abstract northern seascape. The austerity of the music belongs naturally to the Welsh coast: the grey winter light, the exposed landscapes, the immense horizon and the feeling that the sea is simultaneously near and immeasurably distant.

There is also something particularly Welsh about the refusal of the seascape to become picturesque. The sea is not romanticised into a beautiful spectacle. It is allowed to be bleak, and that bleakness becomes strangely beautiful through the music.

The emotional effect of *WinterSea* is therefore not straightforward melancholy. There is sadness in it, certainly, but there is also acceptance. The music does not fight the winter or attempt to brighten it. It simply observes. The very slowness of the piece encourages a form of contemplation in which bleakness becomes a kind of tranquillity.

This is particularly apparent in the closing section. The score continues its long-breathed string writing through the final pages, with the voices gradually becoming more widely spaced and the harmonic motion increasingly suspended. The music seems to retreat from the listener rather than conclude. The final silence therefore feels entirely natural. The music has not reached an answer because the seascape itself contains no question requiring an answer. It simply exists. The work ends because the frame of the composition ends, while the sea continues beyond it.

This gives *WinterSea* an unusual place among the symphonic poems. Many of the surrounding works depend upon historical narrative, myth, dramatic action or a clearly defined transformation. Here the subject is almost the opposite: **t**he refusal of the seascape to provide drama.

Yet Bullock discovers drama in that refusal. The tension comes from waiting. The listener is continually aware that the music could accelerate, that the harmony could break open, that the orchestra could suddenly become enormous. It never does. The restraint becomes the drama.

That restraint is especially remarkable given the composer's larger orchestral language elsewhere. The choice to write this work entirely for strings, and at such an extraordinarily slow tempo, represents a deliberate narrowing of expressive means. The resulting sound world is consequently not a reduced version of a large orchestral conception but something specifically created for this subject.

The dedication to Kathryn Gibson is also significant. The work began with her photograph, and the score itself places “for Kathryn Gibson” immediately beneath the title. The musical composition can therefore be understood as a response to another artist's response to seascape. The photograph freezes the sea visually; the music freezes it psychologically. That makes *WinterSea* a quiet dialogue between visual and musical art.

The most striking thing, finally, is how little Bullock needs in order to create such a strong sense of place. Five string parts, muted sonorities, a slow tempo, recurring triplets, long notes and silence are enough. There is no attempt to overwhelm the listener with orchestral colour. Instead, the music asks the listener to look, or rather listen, slowly.

This may be the essential achievement of *WinterSea*. It transforms a static photograph into an experience of time without sacrificing the photograph's stillness. The music moves, but so slowly that movement itself becomes almost indistinguishable from stasis. The sea appears motionless, yet the current continues beneath it. The seascape appears empty, yet the music is full of tiny changes.

The Quickening Tide Op. 255

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

The Quickening Tide evokes the liquid, golden light of sunset over the Irish Sea, when the world seems briefly to become still. The tide has turned but has not yet begun its return; for a moment the sea appears to wait, suspended between one movement and the next. Beneath this apparent stasis, however, there is an irresistible energy gathering, until the tide finally quickens and returns in a great rush.

The work begins with a remarkably spare orchestral texture. The strings sustain long, overlapping lines at mp and p, while the harp remains silent. The effect is one of immense stillness, with the slowly changing harmonies suggesting the reflected light of the setting sun rather than any literal movement of the sea. The Welsh epigraph at the head of the score - *"A'r heulwen marwydos goleuni i fynegi bod ny yn agos"* - further establishes the atmosphere of sunlight and approaching presence.

Gradually the still surface begins to stir. New rhythmic activity enters the strings, initially almost imperceptibly, before the music gathers momentum. The formal sections marked A, B, C, D, E and F trace this transformation, with the tempo eventually accelerating incrementally. What began as stasis becomes increasingly animated, as though the enormous body of the sea has finally begun to move.

The central acceleration is particularly striking. Rapid repeated-note and triplet figures spread through the strings, while increasingly forceful accents and *pizzicato* attacks create the sensation of water gathering speed. The music moves from contemplation into physical momentum, culminating in the final section where the full orchestral sonority reaches ff and the tide seems finally to break into its returning rush.

Yet the ending is not simply a violent climax. After the final surge, the orchestra sustains a broad soundscape, allowing the energy to remain suspended in the air and sea. The work thus closes at the precise point where stillness and movement meet: the tide has quickened, but the sea itself remains eternal.

Hinterthal, Austria, 6 August 2016

Discussion

There is a particular kind of seascape experience that is difficult to capture in music because almost nothing appears to happen. The sun is setting, the sea is apparently still, the tide has turned, and for a brief period the entire seascape seems to suspend itself between two states. Yet anyone standing beside the sea knows that this stillness is deceptive. The tide is not stopped. It is gathering itself. *The Quickening Tide* takes precisely this paradox as its subject: stasis containing movement, and stillness containing enormous energy.

The programme is wonderfully concise: "*The liquid, golden light as the sun sets over the Irish Sea. Stasis, stillness, the turning tide waits before returning in a rush.*" The crucial word is "waits". The tide is already in motion, but its movement is temporarily imperceptible. Bullock therefore has to create music in which something is happening beneath the surface without immediately revealing what that something is. He does so with extraordinary economy.

The opening is almost entirely by the strings. There is no percussion to establish a pulse, no brass proclamation, no woodwind melody announcing the seascape, and initially no harp. Instead, the violins, viola, cello and double bass create a succession of long, overlapping sounds. The notes change, but the music does not appear to travel anywhere. This is not merely slow music. It is music without apparent destination.

The distinction matters. A slow melody normally implies that it is going somewhere, however leisurely. Here the sustained string writing gives the impression that time itself has temporarily lost its urgency. The listener is invited to contemplate rather than anticipate. It is the musical equivalent of watching the surface of the sea while waiting for something to happen.

The opening sonority also has a distinctly luminous quality. The soft dynamics and sustained upper strings create an impression of light reflected from water, while the lower strings provide sufficient depth to prevent the sound from becoming ethereal. There is something tactile about the harmony: this is light upon a physical surface.

The Welsh epigraph above the title adds another layer. The words refer to sunlight and the expression of an approaching presence, and their inclusion places the work within a specifically Welsh imaginative landscape even though the immediate subject is the Irish Sea. The sea separates Wales and Ireland geographically, but culturally and emotionally it has long been a space of connection. In *The Quickening Tide*, the Irish Sea is therefore not simply a distant marine landscape; it is part of the composer's own world.

The first transformation is almost imperceptible. By bar 39 the orchestral texture begins to acquire greater movement, with individual string lines becoming more differentiated. The listener may not immediately recognise this as acceleration because the basic atmosphere remains one of suspension. Yet the internal motion has changed. This is the first important structural principle of the work: movement begins before speed.

By section B, the music has begun to develop a more recognisable rhythmic identity. The strings introduce repeated triplet figures, while the sustained notes remain above and around them. The result is a fascinating combination of surface and depth. The long notes continue to suggest the apparently motionless sea, while the repeated figures underneath suggest the current beginning to gather. Here the metaphor becomes particularly precise. The sea can look almost stationary while an immense volume of water is already moving beneath its surface. Bullock translates that physical phenomenon into orchestral texture: one layer remains still while another begins to accelerate.

The dynamic markings remain relatively restrained at first, and this is crucial. Had the music become loud immediately, the listener would simply hear a conventional build-up. Instead, the gathering momentum occurs while the atmosphere remains subdued. The result is psychological rather than theatrical.

Then, at section C, the tempo changes. The transformation is unmistakable. What had been implied now becomes physical. The repeated triplets proliferate through the strings, and the music acquires a kinetic energy that was entirely absent from the opening. This is the moment when the title *The Quickening Tide* becomes literal in musical terms. The music itself has quickened.

Yet the underlying idea remains the same. The tide has not suddenly appeared; it has finally revealed the movement that was already present. The earlier stasis was therefore not a separate musical world but the first phase of the same process. The writing at this point is particularly characteristic of Bullock's approach to symphonic poetry. He does not rely on obvious imitation of waves. There are no conventional “sea” arpeggios designed merely to sound watery. Instead, he makes the structure of the music behave like the sea. Repetition becomes current, accumulation becomes tide, acceleration becomes return.

The transition into section D intensifies this process. The tempo increases and the strings become increasingly dominated by rapid repeated figures and strong accents. The orchestral writing has become physically energetic, almost relentless. The transformation from the opening is extraordinary. At the beginning, the individual notes seem to have almost no urgency. Here, individual notes have ceased to matter at all. What matters is the flow of thousands of impulses. The listener no longer hears separate events but a collective movement.

This is one of the reasons the string writing is so effective. Strings are capable of sustaining long lines and of producing extraordinarily rapid repeated figures without a complete change of instrumental identity. The same family that created the motionless opening now creates the rushing tide. The musical material has not needed to be abandoned; it has simply changed its rate of movement. The effect is almost organic. One does not feel that a new piece has begun at section D. One feels that the original piece has accelerated beyond recognition.

The subsequent return to slower material is equally important. Section E brings the music back from its most extreme velocity, and the orchestral texture again becomes more spacious. This creates a moment of extraordinary ambiguity. Has the tide actually completed its return, or has the sea simply gathered itself again? Bullock avoids giving the work a simplistic trajectory from stillness to climax. Instead, the tide breathes. It gathers, rushes, recedes and gathers again.

That cyclical conception is essential because the sea cannot have a final climax. One tide does not constitute the end of the sea. The musical form must therefore suggest a process that can continue beyond the limits of the composition.

The later section is especially striking because the orchestra again begins to increase in intensity before the tempo reaches its greatest value. The score moves through mf, f and fff, before a new tempo is established at bar 122. Here the accumulated energy finally becomes overwhelming.

The final acceleration is not merely faster than what has preceded it. It feels qualitatively different. The repeated figures have become so rapid that the music acquires the physical sensation of rushing water. The tide is no longer something contemplated from the shore. The listener is inside its movement.

And yet Bullock does something subtle immediately afterwards. At bar 122 the dynamics suddenly collapse to mp, and the music returns to the sustained, spacious character of the opening. This is

perhaps the most revealing gesture in the entire work. After all that energy, the sea is still there. The great rush has not destroyed the underlying stillness. It has passed through it.

The final pages then build once more towards a last, powerful orchestral statement. Section F begins around bar 145, and the music eventually reaches ff at bar 160. The ending therefore contains both extremes of the work: the almost motionless opening and the overwhelming physical energy of the final tide.

The final sustained sounds are particularly effective because they do not sound like an ordinary closing cadence. The sea has not “ended”; rather, the musical image has reached the point at which the tide's movement can be allowed to continue beyond the score. The final notes are a momentary frame around something perpetual. This makes the work's title more profound than it first appears. *The Quickening Tide* does not mean simply “the fast tide”. The word quickening implies awakening, animation and the acquisition of life. Something that seemed still begins to live.

The setting of composition is significant. *The Quickening Tide* was written in Hinterthal, Austria, on August 6th 2016, far from the Irish Sea it evokes. That distance makes the work less a transcription of immediate visual experience and more an act of recollection or imaginative reconstruction. The Irish Sea exists here as an internal environment. This may explain the work's unusual concentration. It does not attempt to catalogue the sea - waves, gulls, wind, rocks, ships, beaches. Almost everything external has been stripped away. What remains is light and movement.

The golden light belongs to the eye; the tide belongs to the body. One is visual, one physical. Bullock unites them through orchestral texture. The sustained strings create the luminous surface, while the rhythmic figures eventually create the physical motion underneath it. The whole work can therefore be understood as the gradual revelation of something that was present from the beginning but invisible.

There is also a striking relationship between the work's formal design and the natural phenomenon it describes. The sections A through F are not conventional movements but stages of transformation. They allow the music to move from one state to another while retaining a sense of continuity. The listener is never quite certain where the next acceleration will come from, just as one watching the sea cannot always predict precisely when the returning tide will begin to move with greater force.

The work's emotional centre is consequently not the final rush itself. It is the moment immediately before it. That is the moment when the sea appears to hold its breath. The sunset gives the seascape an almost unreal beauty, but the beauty is intensified by the knowledge that it is temporary. The golden light will disappear. The tide will return. Stillness will become movement. Everything is poised between permanence and change.

Bullock's music captures that condition without sentimentality. The opening is beautiful, but it is not complacent. The later turbulence is powerful, but it is not simply violent. Both states belong to the same natural process. In the end, *The Quickening Tide* is a remarkably concentrated meditation on change concealed within stillness. It begins with a sea that appears motionless and ends with an immense surge of movement, but the real subject lies between those extremes: the gradual awakening of energy, the moment when stillness becomes current and current becomes tide.

Fy Ngwlad - My Country

A Retrospective

Looking back across the completed eleven-work cycle, what is striking is how much its meaning has changed simply through the accumulation of the pieces. Individual works can initially appear to have very specific subjects — a legend, a prince, a castle, a quarry, a mountain, a sea — but together they reveal a much broader conception of what a country is and how a composer remembers it.

The cycle begins with *Meinir*, and that is an unexpectedly revealing place to begin. The first subject is not a king, a battle or a political event, but a legend of love, loss and death rooted in a particular Welsh landscape. The tragic story of Rhys and Meinir establishes something which remains throughout the cycle: Wales is remembered through stories attached to places. The landscape is never neutral. It contains ghosts.

With *Cilmeri*, the personal and legendary give way to history in its most traumatic form. The death of Llywelyn becomes a defining moment of national catastrophe, and the starkness of the original description — "the blackest day in the history of Wales" — is reflected in the uncompromising nature of the subject. From there, *Dolbadarn* brings the history back to the composer's own birthplace. The castle is no longer simply a historical monument; it is part of a landscape intimately connected with his childhood and identity. The fact that Dolbadarn supplied the composer's Bardic name makes the work almost autobiographical.

Y Chwarel takes this process further. Here history is not the history of princes but of ordinary working people. The quarry becomes an instrument of memory: machinery, the hospital bell, the lone bugler and the slate landscape evoke a community in which generations of families worked and suffered. The quotation from *In Memoriam* gives the work an explicitly commemorative dimension. The ruined industrial landscape becomes another kind of historical monument.

With *Owain Glyndŵr*, the cycle returns to heroic resistance, but the historical perspective has widened. Llywelyn's defeat in 1282 and Glyndŵr's later rebellion become separated by more than a century, yet both embody the same persistent idea: the refusal of Welsh identity to disappear. *Garth Celyn* then examines the emotional aftermath of conquest, imagining panic, broken dreams and the persistence of impossible hopes. The cycle's politics are therefore not merely retrospective. They concern the psychological consequences of defeat.

Talaith introduces another dimension. The stolen crown of Wales, paraded through London, transforms political domination into spectacle. The contrast between bitterness and gloating pageantry, between lost freedom and surviving Celtic inspiration, is almost theatrical. Here the conqueror's triumph becomes part of the conquered nation's memory. The object itself becomes a symbol of what has been taken — and of what remains remembered.

Caer Engan then moves into a more uncertain realm, where history, mythology and landscape begin to dissolve into one another. The possibility that this fiercely inspiring place in Gwynedd lies behind the Arthurian tradition is perhaps less a matter of absolute historical certainty than of imaginative resonance. That uncertainty is important. A country is made not only from things we know happened, but from the things generations have imagined might have happened.

Tŵr Llewelyn brings the historical thread back to Garth Celyn, but its emotional direction is different. The work remembers the palace of the Princes and the devastation of conquest, yet ends with an appeal to optimism and the survival of Wales as a distinct Celtic civilisation. It is almost as

though the cycle's historical argument has reached its turning point: memory of defeat need not result in permanent mourning.

Then come the two works which, retrospectively, make the whole cycle considerably richer: *WinterSea* and *The Quickening Tide*.

WinterSea reveals that *My Country* is not ultimately about Welsh politics at all. Or rather, politics is only one part of what "country" means. The work looks at a bleak winter sea and discovers that identity can reside in an atmosphere as much as in a historical event. The music is stripped down to strings, muted and extraordinarily slow, and the absence of conventional drama becomes itself a form of contemplation. Wales survives here not through heroic action but through the quiet persistence of its landscape.

The Quickening Tide takes the idea further. The Irish Sea becomes a meeting point between Wales and the wider world, and the apparently static surface of the water contains an enormous gathering energy. The work's movement from stillness towards the rushing tide provides an almost perfect metaphor for the cycle as a whole. What seems static may be alive beneath the surface. What appears to belong to the past may still possess the power to move the present.

Seen in this light, the eleven works form an unexpectedly coherent trajectory. The cycle begins with a story of a vanished bride and ends not with a historical hero but with the sea in motion. Between them lie princes, castles, quarries, rebels, crowns, legends and mountains. The subjects range enormously, yet the underlying concern remains remarkably constant: what survives?

Llywelyn died, but the memory of Llywelyn survives. Garth Celyn is occupied, but the idea of Garth Celyn survives. The crown is stolen, but its significance survives. The quarry becomes an industrial wasteland, but the lives of those who worked there survive in memory. Ancient legends lose their certainty, but the landscapes that generated them remain. Even the winter sea, apparently frozen into stillness, contains movement.

That is why the political dimension of *Fy Ngwlad* should neither be exaggerated nor apologised for. The politics are integral to the emotional landscape of the music because they arise from a particular historical experience of belonging to a country whose existence has repeatedly been challenged. But the cycle ultimately transcends political argument. Its deeper subject is continuity.

The title *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* is therefore more intimate than *Wales*. "My Country" implies possession, but also responsibility and affection. It is the country of the composer rather than an attempt to define the country for everyone. That distinction allows the cycle to contain both the fiercely political and the intensely private.

Perhaps this is where the comparison with Smetana becomes most illuminating. *Má vlast* is a great musical act of national remembrance, but Bullock's cycle is less a panoramic survey than a collection of intensely concentrated encounters. Each poem looks closely at one fragment of the country until the fragment becomes emblematic of the whole.

The cycle's ultimate message seems less to be "remember what was lost" than "remember what remains." History has inflicted enormous damage; the music does not pretend otherwise. But the landscape remains, memory remains, identity remains, and — like the tide at the end of the cycle — something continues to move beneath the surface. That makes *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* not simply a cycle about the past. It is a cycle about survival.

Moselherbst Op. 161a

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Moselherbst is a darkly autumnal portrait of the Mosel, written in Canach, Luxembourg, in 2006. The music reflects the changing season in sombre colours, with the river and surrounding landscape suggested through flowing melodic lines and increasingly dramatic orchestral textures.

At the heart of the work are two very different musical references. The first is the *Moselhymne,* Georg Schmitt's *Im weiten deutschen Lande*, whose melody emerges within the music as an affectionate evocation of the river and its cultural identity. The second is a brief quotation from Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. This is, deliberately, a joke: Wagner's music belongs to the Rhine, whereas here it has been transported to the Mosel. The incongruity is heightened by the fact that the quotation appears in an otherwise serious and atmospheric evocation of the autumn landscape.

The Wagnerian intrusion gives the work a touch of humour, while the appearance of Schmitt's melody brings the music back to the Mosel itself. Thus the piece moves between darkness and warmth, grandeur and intimacy, the familiar and the unexpected.

Moselherbst is ultimately both a landscape and a musical memory: the Mosel seen in autumn, coloured not only by the season but by the songs and musical associations that have become part of the river's identity.

Discussion

Moselherbst is intriguing. The title is deceptively simple: *Mosel Autumn*. It might suggest a conventional musical landscape, a picturesque evocation of vineyards, coloured leaves and the quietening of the river after summer. Yet the score reveals something considerably darker and more complex. This is not an autumn postcard. It is an autumn of memory, shadow and slightly intoxicated nostalgia, in which the landscape of the Mosel becomes inseparable from its musical and cultural history.

Written in Canach, Luxembourg, in 2006, the work is strikingly local in conception. The Mosel is not treated as an anonymous European river but as a familiar presence, and the music gradually reveals a network of associations: the autumnal landscape itself, the *Moselhymne* of Georg Schmitt, and, wonderfully, an entirely unexpected intrusion from Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. The joke is particularly good because Wagner's music belongs to the Rhine, whereas Bullock has deliberately transplanted it to the Mosel. The river has acquired its own little Wagnerian mythology.

The opening establishes the character with remarkable economy. The music begins quietly, with a steady timpani pulse underneath sustained and cantabile lines in the horns and strings. The first page is already unusual: the changing metre includes a brief 5/4 interruption, while the harmony and orchestration remain subdued. There is no triumphant announcement of the landscape. Instead, the river seems already to be present, flowing beneath a surface of autumnal stillness.

The horn writing is especially important. Its *cantabile* character gives the opening a human warmth, while the strings provide a darker foundation. This is music which seems to look at the Mosel rather than merely describe it. The river is experienced through memory: familiar, beautiful, but already coloured by the knowledge that summer has passed.

That melancholy becomes one of the work's defining characteristics. Autumn is, after all, a season of contradiction. The landscape may be at its most richly coloured, yet that richness is precisely the sign of decline. The vineyards are full, the leaves brilliant, the river beautiful — but everything is moving towards winter. Bullock captures this ambiguity by continually placing lyrical material against heavier, more sombre orchestral foundations.

The orchestra itself is unusually well suited to this. The forces include paired flutes, oboe, three clarinets, bassoon, two trumpets, horns, timpani, percussion and xylophone, together with full strings. Yet the large orchestra is not initially deployed for spectacle. Instead, individual instruments emerge from a relatively dark texture, almost as though particular memories are being recalled from the landscape.

The music periodically gathers considerable force. The quiet, sustained writing gives way to passages of much greater rhythmic activity, with the percussion and xylophone adding a hard-edged, almost skeletal quality. This is one of the most effective aspects of the score: the autumnal atmosphere is not created simply through slow tempi and minor-key melancholy. It is created through contrast. Moments of agitation interrupt the contemplation, just as gusts of wind disturb an otherwise still autumn afternoon.

Wagner! The quotation from *Das Rheingold* is more than a musical in-joke. It is an example of Bullock's characteristic willingness to allow different cultural worlds to collide inside a landscape. Wagner's great river drama concerns the Rhine, and its musical language carries enormous symbolic baggage: mythology, power, gold, gods and the beginnings of the *Ring*. To insert a recognisable *Rheingold* quotation into a work about the Mosel is therefore deliciously disproportionate.

The joke works precisely because the Mosel is **not** the Rhine. It is as though, for a moment, the Mosel is pretending to be something grander and more mythological than itself. The little river has suddenly acquired Wagnerian ambitions. But there is also an affectionate cultural truth behind the humour: the Mosel exists within the same landscape of German Romantic river imagery that produced the mythology of the Rhine. Bullock therefore does not simply parody Wagner. He allows the Rhine and Mosel to overlap imaginatively, then lets the listener recognise the incongruity.

This gives *Moselherbst* a quality of gentle self-mockery which prevents the melancholy from becoming sentimental. The music can be genuinely dark, but it knows that a composer contemplating the Mosel in autumn is liable to become rather poetic about it. Wagner's sudden appearance punctures that solemnity.

The second major cultural reference is considerably more intimate: Georg Schmitt's *"Im weiten deutschen Lande",* the famous *Mosellied*. This is not an obscure musical quotation. Schmitt's song has been closely associated with the Mosel for generations; it is indeed commonly described as the Moselhymne.

Bullock's treatment of it is particularly effective because the quotation arrives late, after the listener has already been immersed in his own musical image of the river. When Schmitt's melody finally emerges, it feels almost like recognition. The landscape suddenly acquires a voice from outside the work itself. The placement is significant. The music is not simply beginning with the *Moselhymne* as a programme label might imply. Instead, Bullock has allowed the listener to experience the Mosel first, and only then introduces the melody that culturally *belongs* to it. The quotation becomes a memory within a memory.

The score makes the procedure explicit: "Georg Schmitt: *Im weiten deutschen Lande: Refrain*." At this point the work becomes almost a musical act of local remembrance. The river is no longer just landscape. It is song. There is an especially nice irony here when one remembers the character of Schmitt's melody. The *Mosellied* is associated with the flowing movement of the river and with the sentimental celebration of its vineyards, towns and landscape. Bullock's surrounding music, however, has been darker and more ambivalent. The old melody therefore arrives almost as a remembered ideal: the Mosel as people have sung about it, set against the more complicated Mosel that Bullock has actually imagined.

The result is not quotation for quotation's sake. It creates a dialogue between personal observation and collective memory. The Wagner quotation and the Schmitt quotation consequently perform opposite but complementary functions. Wagner represents the grand external mythology imposed upon a river: the Rhine becomes the setting for gods and primordial drama. Schmitt represents the intimate local mythology of the Mosel: a melody which has become part of the cultural identity of the river itself. Between the two lies Bullock's own Mosel — darker, autumnal, personal and slightly amused by both traditions.

This is perhaps the most interesting thing about the work. It is neither purely programmatic nor purely abstract. Its programme is geographical, but the geography becomes a means of exploring musical memory. A river is not simply water and landscape. It carries songs, legends, associations and the music of other composers who have imagined rivers before us.

The autumnal character also makes the use of the Schmitt melody particularly poignant. The *Mosellied* traditionally celebrates the river in affectionate, almost timeless terms. Bullock's *Herbst* changes the temporal perspective. His Mosel is not eternal summer. The season has turned. The very act of quoting a familiar hymn therefore becomes an act of recollection: *this is the river we know, but this is the river now*.

The work's rhythmic language contributes strongly to this sense of instability. The score moves between regular pulses and more restless passages, with sudden increases in activity and changes of texture. There are passages in which repeated figures create almost obsessive forward motion, followed by broad, suspended writing. The effect resembles the changing surface of the river itself - sometimes smooth, sometimes broken, sometimes accelerated by wind or weather.

The later music becomes increasingly monumental. What began as a restrained autumnal meditation eventually acquires much greater orchestral weight. By the closing pages the entire orchestra is involved, with sustained ff passages, *tremolando* and long-held harmonies. The final page is especially striking: virtually the whole orchestra is sustained at ff, with the harmony held in great blocks of sound before the final silence.

This ending is important because it refuses to evaporate into picturesque tranquillity. The Mosel does not simply disappear into a sunset. Instead, the work ends with a kind of autumnal affirmation. The river and landscape remain, but they have acquired the weight of everything that has been heard before: the dark opening, the rhythmic disturbances, the Wagnerian intrusion, and finally Schmitt's remembered Mosel melody.

The irony is that the title *Moselherbst* promises something small, local and seasonal, while the musical world ultimately becomes quite large. Yet the enlargement never loses its point of departure. Wagner may briefly turn the Mosel into the Rhine, but Schmitt brings it back home. That may be the real joke at the heart of the work. The Mosel does not need the Rhine's mythology. It has its own.

Bullock's achievement is to allow the river to exist simultaneously as place, memory, song and musical joke. The dark autumnal atmosphere gives the work emotional depth; the Schmitt quotation gives it cultural rootedness; and the Wagner quotation gives it wit. The three together make *Moselherbst* something rather more interesting than a landscape piece. It becomes a portrait of a particular river seen through the accumulated layers of music that have come to inhabit it.

There is also something very characteristically Bullockian in the affectionate irreverence of the conception. The composer is capable of writing sincerely about landscape without feeling obliged to treat his own subject with solemn reverence. A Wagner quotation can suddenly wink at the listener; a local hymn can emerge from the orchestral texture like a remembered voice; and beneath both lies the simple image with which the work began: the Mosel in autumn, darkening towards evening.

Bergkristall Op. 199

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Bergkristall is based on the moving story by Adalbert Stifter of two children who become lost in the Austrian Alps after visiting their grandmother on Christmas Eve.

Konrad and his little sister Sanna leave their remote mountain village for the valley beyond. The weather is fine and the journey is familiar. On their return, however, heavy snow suddenly descends and they lose their way. They wander higher and higher into the mountains until they are forced to take refuge for the night in an ice cave. There they experience a strange and almost mystical world of cold, darkness and crystalline beauty. On Christmas Day, the whole village sets out to search for them, and the children are eventually rescued.

The music follows the journey without attempting a literal illustration of every event. The two children are represented by contrasting instrumental voices. Konrad is associated with the confident sound of the clarinet, while Sanna is represented by the more questioning voices of flute, oboe and cor anglais. Their musical dialogue accompanies the changing landscape as the familiar journey gradually becomes uncertain and threatening.

The flowing string figures of the opening suggest the children setting out on their journey. As the weather deteriorates, the music becomes increasingly unsettled, with repeated rhythmic figures creating a sense of movement without direction. The arrival in the ice cave brings a different world altogether. Sustained orchestral writing, harp, celesta, glockenspiel and gong create an atmosphere of frozen stillness and crystalline mystery.

Yet the mountain is never presented simply as an enemy. Its beauty and its danger are inseparable. The children are lost within something vastly greater than themselves, and their experience becomes both frightening and wondrous.

The music eventually returns to a more human and lyrical world. After the terror and isolation of the night, the children are found and brought home, but the memory of their extraordinary experience remains.

Bergkristall was written in the Austrian Alps, at Hinterthal, in 2011.

Discussion

There is a genre of stories in which the landscape gradually takes possession of the narrative. At first it is merely where the characters happen to be. Then it becomes an obstacle. Eventually it becomes something larger and stranger: an independent presence against which the human beings must measure themselves. That is the transformation which takes place in *Bergkristall*.

The story is deceptively simple. Two children walk home from their grandmother's house. They know the route. They have made the journey before. Then the weather changes, and the ordinary world disappears. What had been familiar becomes disorientating; what had been beautiful becomes dangerous. The children's physical journey consequently becomes a psychological journey from security into the unknown and eventually back into safety.

The music captures this transformation with considerable economy. The opening tempo establishes a moderate, purposeful movement. The rapid string writing gives the impression of continuous travel. It is not yet sinister. Indeed, the very regularity of the movement suggests that the children know where they are going.

Against this background, the wind instruments gradually acquire individual identities. The idea of giving Konrad the clarinet and Sanna the flute, oboe and cor anglais is particularly effective because the contrast is not simply between two registers or timbres. It is psychological. Konrad's musical voice can move forward with confidence; Sanna's can question, respond and search. This is one of the strongest aspects of the work because it means that the narrative does not have to be continually "illustrated". The listener can experience the children's changing emotional states through the changing balance of instrumental voices.

As the music develops, the persistent string motion begins to acquire another significance. What initially represented travelling now suggests uncertainty. Movement continues, but direction has become questionable. The children are still moving; they simply no longer know where they are going. This is where the orchestral texture becomes particularly important. The score repeatedly introduces sharp accents and interruptions into the flowing material, while the winds emerge from and retreat into the surrounding texture. The landscape seems increasingly to resist being understood.

The central experience of the ice cave then changes the nature of the music altogether. There is a temptation in a story such as this to make the cave frightening in an obvious way. *Bergkristall* does something more interesting. The cave is frightening precisely because it is beautiful. The crystalline sonorities associated with harp, celesta and glockenspiel suggest ice and reflected light, while the sustained strings and winds create an almost suspended sense of time. The children have entered a world where ordinary distinctions — day and night, direction and destination, safety and danger — temporarily cease to function.

The title is therefore more than descriptive. *Bergkristall*, "mountain crystal", evokes the strange duality at the centre of the experience. Crystal is hard, cold and potentially dangerous, but it is also extraordinarily beautiful. The mountain embodies exactly the same contradiction.

The musical treatment of the children within this landscape is consequently crucial. Their voices do not disappear, but they become smaller. The confident clarinet and the questioning upper winds continue to exist within a much larger orchestral environment. Human beings are present, but the mountain has become the dominant force.

This gives the work something of the character of the sublime. The sublime is not simply beauty. It is the experience of encountering something so vast or powerful that our ordinary sense of scale is disturbed. Two children alone in an Alpine snowstorm are an almost perfect embodiment of that idea.

The music eventually begins to restore the human scale. The repeated *cantabile* indications become increasingly important. After the crystalline stillness and uncertainty, melody becomes a form of reassurance. The children's voices can once again be heard as human voices rather than fragments inside an immense landscape.

What is especially good about the story — and about the musical treatment — is that the rescue does not erase the experience. The children return to the village, but they have seen something that the people who searched for them have not. For one night they have crossed the boundary between the familiar human world and the overwhelming world of the mountains. The final pages consequently resist the temptation to turn the rescue into a simplistic triumph. The orchestral writing becomes increasingly settled. The great drama has passed, but the mountain remains present in memory.

The manuscript's final inscription, *"Bergklang, Hinterthal, 1st November 2011,"* is almost poetically appropriate. The work about a mountain was itself written in the mountains. The geographical distance between composer and subject has consequently collapsed.

There is also a lovely seasonal dimension to the story. Christmas is not merely a date in the plot. The children disappear on Christmas Eve and are found on Christmas Day. Darkness and rescue, fear and homecoming, isolation and community are therefore framed by the Christian symbolism of night giving way to light. But the work does not need to make that symbolism explicit. The emotional trajectory is sufficient.

And so *Bergkristall* marks a very natural beginning to the much more diverse group of symphonic poems that follows *Fy Ngwlad*. The Welsh cycle looked outward at a country — its history, landscape, legends and politics. Here the landscape becomes something almost metaphysical. The question is no longer "What does this country mean?" but "What happens to human beings when they encounter something vastly greater than themselves?" The children are lost and found again on Christmas Day. For one night, they have belonged to the mountain.

Sommerstein Op. 206

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Sommerstein evokes an ascent before dawn towards the summit of the small but imposing peak above Maria Alm in Austria. The journey begins in darkness. As the climber rises, the darkness gradually begins to clear, but the mountain itself remains uncertain: a shape appears through the mist, disguised by haze and only slowly revealing its true form. With the arrival of the sun comes not merely light, but power, warmth and perspective.

The music mirrors this progression with remarkable economy. The opening is almost entirely veiled. The strings, muted and very soft, sustain long, overlapping lines while the rest of the orchestra remains silent. The effect is one of darkness without drama: a world not yet illuminated, with the slow movement of the inner strings suggesting the physical effort of the ascent.

Gradually the texture becomes more active. Rapid repeated figures appear in the violins and viola, while the lower strings begin to participate more strongly. The mountain seems to be approaching rather than the climber merely approaching the mountain. At the same time, the harp introduces increasingly expansive gestures, creating the impression of mist shifting and momentarily revealing glimpses of what lies ahead.

Then, as the summit becomes clearer, the brass begins to assume a more significant role. Horns and trumpets, initially almost absent from the landscape, emerge as voices from below. Their sound has a distinctly pastoral and Alpine character, and eventually they present the traditional melody referred to in the programme: *Weisenblasen* - a private musical exchange between the trumpet and horn, as though two musicians somewhere far below are playing to themselves. The melody is not presented as a grand proclamation. Instead, it seems to belong naturally to the mountain landscape.

The final stages of the work return to extraordinary quietness. After the expansive central events, the orchestra gradually withdraws until the music is once again reduced to delicate, widely spaced sonorities. The closing pages are marked ppp, with the upper winds and strings sustaining long notes while the harp and timpani make only the faintest contribution. The mountain remains, now fully seen but no longer needing to be described.

Hinterthal, Austria, 28–29 October 2012

Discussion

Sommerstein is not an invented landscape. It is rooted in a very specific physical experience: an ascent before dawn towards an actual mountain above Maria Alm. Indeed the composer made this ascent several times, so it is rooted in reality. Yet the music does not attempt to illustrate every stage of a climb literally. Instead, Bullock extracts from the experience a sequence of perceptions - darkness, uncertainty, effort, revelation, warmth and distance - and transforms these into musical processes.

The opening is strikingly restrained. The music is scored for a full orchestra yet the first pages scarcely resemble a full orchestral work. The winds and brass are silent while muted violins gradually establish a soft, sustained texture. The music begins at the edge of audibility, with the strings marked *pp* and *con sordino*. This is an unusually effective way of representing darkness. Bullock does not use ominous harmony or theatrical low-register effects to tell us that it is night. Instead, he removes almost everything from the soundscape. What remains is the faintest movement of the strings, and this immediately creates the sensation of being somewhere in a vast landscape before sunrise.

The first pages also establish one of the work's principal musical ideas: movement without arrival. The string parts are active, but their activity is contained within repeated, gently circulating figures. The climber is moving upwards, but the summit has not yet been reached. The musical surface is therefore constantly alive while remaining spatially static. The effect becomes even clearer as the piece develops. The repeated string figurations grow denser, spreading between first and second violins and viola, while the lower strings gradually acquire greater rhythmic definition. The music seems to acquire physical weight. What was initially an almost weightless darkness becomes the sound of exertion.

This is not simply a crescendo in the conventional sense. The orchestral growth corresponds to a change in perception. In darkness, the mountain is sensed rather than seen. As dawn approaches, shapes become distinguishable. The music accordingly becomes more articulated.

The first major transformation occurs when the orchestral texture suddenly expands. Around the central part of the work, the woodwind begins to participate in sustained harmonic formations, while the strings remain in motion beneath them. The score's dynamics move between pp, mp, mf and f, giving the impression of something gradually taking shape.

The mountain is still disguised by mist. That distinction is important because the programme does not describe a simple sunrise. It describes a mountain *seen through haze*. Bullock's orchestration reflects this ambiguity particularly well. Even when the music becomes fuller, the mountain does not immediately acquire a sharply defined musical identity. Long sustained notes coexist with rapidly moving figures, producing an image that is simultaneously substantial and elusive.

The harp is central to this effect. Its gestures frequently rise and fall in sweeping figures, sometimes appearing almost as isolated flashes of movement within the otherwise sustained texture. They feel less like conventional accompaniment than glimpses - brief moments when something hidden becomes visible.

The use of silence is equally important. Bullock repeatedly allows entire sections of the orchestra to disappear. This gives the listener a sense of enormous physical space. There is no crowded orchestral landscape; instead, isolated sounds appear against silence, much as isolated visual forms emerge from mountain mist.

One of the most beautiful passages comes around the transition marked **E**. The woodwind sustains quiet, widely spaced sonorities while the harp introduces flowing figures. At the same time the strings return to delicate triplet motion. The horn is marked *solo*. This is the moment at which the human presence within the landscape becomes unmistakable.

The horn and trumpet eventually take on their special role. They are not treated as heroic instruments announcing the summit. Instead, they sound like musicians somewhere within the landscape - precisely as the programme describes them - *playing a traditional melody "for themselves*. The distinction is wonderfully evocative. Their music seems independent of the climber's journey. When the melody becomes established, the orchestral writing changes character. The earlier misty textures give way to clearer melodic and harmonic statements. The horn and trumpet converse in long phrases while the strings provide a measured accompaniment. Two brass parts are especially conspicuous, carrying complementary melodic lines above the continuing triplet activity of the strings.

This is perhaps the point at which the summit has become visible. Bullock does not make the traditional melody into a triumphant climax. That would have contradicted the curious intimacy of the programme. The two instruments seem to be unaware of the listener. Their melody has the quality of a local sound heard from a distance - something that belongs to the place and continues whether or not anyone is listening. The surrounding orchestration reinforces this impression. The brass phrases are supported by sustained woodwind and string sonorities, while the harp continues its characteristic flowing movement. The music subsequently gathers greater strength. Later the full orchestra produces powerful f and ff passages. The horn and trumpet material is broadened and reinforced, while timpani and lower instruments give the music a much greater physical presence.

This is the point at which the programme's reference to the sun *"giving power, warmth and perspective"* becomes especially persuasive. The music does not simply become louder. Its register opens, its harmonic space becomes more expansive, and its orchestral forces become more fully integrated. The summit is no longer a mysterious shape in the haze; it has acquired scale. There is also a paradox here. The sun gives perspective. Musically, this means that what was previously perceived from close quarters is suddenly understood as part of a much larger landscape. The climber is no longer simply struggling upwards through darkness. From the summit, the whole world below becomes visible.

Bullock's use of the brass is crucial to this enlargement. The horn and trumpet have moved from distant, almost private voices to substantial participants in the orchestral argument. Their traditional melody has effectively been transformed by its surroundings. What began as an intimate Alpine song becomes part of a much larger musical landscape.

Then, rather than ending in permanent triumph, the music begins to retreat. This is an important structural decision. After the mountain has been revealed, there is nothing left to climb towards. The narrative has reached its point of fulfilment, so the music can afford to become still again. The late pages progressively strip away the accumulated orchestral weight. The orchestra is reduced once more to an exceptionally delicate texture. The violins return to *con sordino* and pp, recalling the muted atmosphere of the opening. The work is thus not merely ending; it is **r**eturning to its original state of contemplation. The opening darkness was darkness before revelation. The closing quietness is quietness after revelation. They may sound superficially related, but psychologically they are completely different. At the beginning, the mountain cannot yet be seen. At the end, it has been seen and absorbed.

The final page makes this particularly clear. The music is marked *ppp*, with sustained notes in the upper winds and strings and only sparse contributions from timpani and harp. There is no grand

final cadence and no theatrical assertion of victory. This ending is one of the work's great strengths. A conventional Romantic mountain piece might conclude with a huge orchestral affirmation. Bullock instead recognises that the most profound part of the experience may come after the excitement of arrival - the moment when one simply stands and looks.

The title *Sommerstein* itself acquires greater meaning in this context. The mountain is not personified, nor is it turned into a symbol with a fixed meaning. It remains a physical object: imposing, mysterious, and ultimately still. What changes is the observer's relationship to it. The music therefore traces a distinctly human journey. At first there is uncertainty: one moves through darkness without knowing precisely what lies ahead. Then perception gradually develops. Shapes emerge. A mountain becomes visible. Human sounds from below become audible. The sun arrives. Suddenly the landscape has scale and meaning.

The traditional melody played by horn and trumpet is especially touching because it prevents the work from becoming solely a story about the individual climber. There are other lives within the landscape. Somewhere below, people are making music simply because they wish to make music. The mountain exists independently of the ascent, and the music acknowledges that.

There is also something deeply Austrian in the conception, although Bullock avoids picturesque cliché. The horns, the traditional melody, the mountain landscape and the dawn light naturally evoke the Alpine world, but the score never becomes a postcard. Its most important subject is perception rather than scenery. In that respect *Sommerstein* belongs to the broader Romantic tradition of landscape music while remaining distinctly personal. The mountain is both external and internal. It is something physically encountered, but it also becomes a vehicle for a transformation in consciousness.

The result is a symphonic poem of considerable visual clarity without ever becoming literal. We can imagine the ascent, the mist and the emerging peak because the musical processes themselves behave like them. At the beginning, we hear almost nothing and see almost nothing. By the centre, the mountain has become a substantial presence and the human voices of horn and trumpet inhabit the landscape. At the end, everything is quiet again — but now the listener has seen the summit. *Sommerstein* is therefore less a musical picture of a mountain than a meditation on the moment of seeing: the transformation of an indistinct shape into a recognisable world, and of physical effort into perspective.

1666 Op. 227

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

1666 is an unusually atmospheric work because its perspective is not that of the participants in the historical event, but of those who watched it from a distance. The subject is the destruction of the Dutch merchant fleet in the Vlie in August 1666, when an English fleet under Rear Admiral Sir Robert Holmes attacked the ships sheltering between Vlieland and Terschelling. Rather than attempting to recreate a naval battle, the music evokes what might have been experienced by observers on Vlieland: distance and mist, the first appearance of smoke, the growing presence of fire, the realisation of destruction and, finally, the silence of the aftermath.

The music develops gradually from an atmosphere of uncertainty into increasing rhythmic urgency and orchestral violence. Strings, winds, brass and percussion combine to create a sense of menace gathering beyond the horizon, until the distant disturbance becomes an overwhelming force. Yet there is no sense of heroic victory; the destruction is presented as a catastrophe observed from afar, with the sea and landscape remaining impassive witnesses.

Towards the end, the music becomes increasingly quiet and the perspective once again recedes. A quotation from the seventeenth-century Dutch hymn by Valerius, *Wilt heden nu treden voor God den Heere*, introduces the voice of the period itself, its words of faith and victory acquiring an ambiguous significance after the devastation that has just been heard. The work finally dissolves into a subdued and almost spectral aftermath.

Dedicated to Jan Houter (Jan van Vlieland).

Vlieland, Luxembourg and Hinterthal, Austria, 2014

Discussion

An unusually powerful idea at the heart of *1666*: the idea of witnessing destruction from a distance. The work does not place us aboard one of the English ships or among the Dutch merchantmen. Nor does it attempt to reconstruct the battle as a sequence of military actions. Instead, its imagined viewpoint is the island of Vlieland, where people could look out towards the Vlie and gradually become aware that something terrible was happening beyond the immediate landscape. Smoke appeared on the horizon; then more smoke; eventually the meaning of what was being seen became unmistakable. The music therefore concerns not only destruction itself but the psychological process by which an observer comes to understand destruction.

This is already established by the character of the opening. The score begins very quietly rather than with the obvious military apparatus that the subject might suggest. The orchestra is large, including substantial brass and percussion, but much of this potential power is initially held in reserve. The effect is one of distance and uncertainty. The listener is looking outward rather than being placed directly inside the action, and this gives the first part of the work an atmosphere of apprehension rather than immediate violence.

The repeated figures that gradually emerge are central to the work's psychology. At first they are difficult to interpret. They may suggest the movement of ships or water, the disturbance of the sea or the distant activity of human beings, but they possess an increasing insistence which eventually makes them feel threatening. When the tempo increases the atmosphere is transformed. What had previously been ambiguous now begins to acquire a clear direction, and the music seems to move from observation towards alarm.

The orchestration reinforces this progression. The presence of snare drum, tubular bells and xylophone alongside timpani gives the score an unusually hard-edged percussion palette. These instruments could easily have produced conventional battle music, but in this context they have a more disturbing function. The snare drum can suggest the organised nature of the attacking force, while the bells and xylophone introduce sounds that are brittle and exposed rather than simply grand. The effect is of a world becoming increasingly unnatural, with human violence invading what had initially been a quiet maritime landscape.

The great strength of the work is that it does not confuse scale with proximity. The destruction is enormous, but the listener remains psychologically at a distance. This makes the appearance of smoke and fire more frightening than a literal depiction of cannon fire might have been. Something is happening across the water which cannot yet be fully seen, and the imagination is therefore required to complete the picture. The music repeatedly gives the impression of activity occurring beyond the immediate frame, allowing the listener to occupy the same uncertain position as the inhabitants of Vlieland.

As the work progresses, however, that distance becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. The repeated string figures grow more intense, the winds and brass begin to contribute greater weight, and the percussion increasingly reinforces the rhythmic energy. By the time the central section is reached, the music has moved decisively from apprehension into catastrophe. At bar 127 the metre changes to 3/4, and the orchestra becomes dramatically more massive and concentrated. The musical surface is now crowded with activity, and the sense of a distant disturbance has been replaced by the overwhelming reality of destruction.

Yet even here the music avoids conventional heroism. There is no musical equivalent of an English victory march, despite the historical fact that the action was a major English military success. The

orchestral force is instead almost anonymous. The listener hears the machinery of destruction rather than celebrates the people operating it. This makes the central climax much more disturbing because the music does not permit the event to become an uncomplicated narrative of victory. It remains an act of enormous violence observed from outside.

The destruction is therefore represented less as a battle than as an elemental transformation of the environment. The sea, the islands, the ships and the sky become part of a single sound-world. The repeated rhythmic activity of the strings has something almost mechanical about it, while the brass and percussion supply increasingly massive blocks of sound. The distinction between natural energy and human violence becomes blurred, and the effect is that of an event which has acquired its own momentum and can no longer be controlled by the individuals who initiated it.

The return to the original tempo after the great central climax is consequently one of the most important moments in the structure. The catastrophe has passed its most violent point, and the music suddenly has to exist in its aftermath. The change is not a conventional relaxation after a climax; it is the return of the observer to the landscape. What is left when the ships have burned and the violence has moved away? The answer is silence, distance and memory.

The subsequent reduction of dynamic level is especially effective. The score moves into extremely quiet territory, with long passages of *ppp* and still more subdued dynamics. The orchestra that had previously seemed almost overwhelming becomes sparse and remote. This creates the impression that the physical event has ended while its psychological consequences remain. The smoke may have cleared, but the observer has not forgotten what was seen.

This is where the Valerius hymn acquires its full significance. The quotation from *Wilt heden nu treden voor God den Heere* belongs to the historical period itself and therefore does not function as a modern moral commentary added from outside. Its language of divine intervention and the striking down of the enemy belongs to the religious and political consciousness of the seventeenth century. Heard after the destruction, however, it acquires a remarkable ambiguity. A military victory can be celebrated by one side while being experienced as catastrophe by the other, and the hymn allows both the religious certainty of the period and the terrible human consequences of the event to remain present.

The music's treatment of the hymn is crucial because it does not turn it into a triumphant chorale. Instead, the final section is characterised by extraordinary restraint. The orchestration becomes increasingly quiet, and the use of muted instruments contributes to a sense of distance and withdrawal. The hymn seems to arrive not as a public proclamation but as something remembered across centuries, almost as though its words were still drifting across the water after the event itself had disappeared.

The final pages therefore change the nature of the work retrospectively. What initially appeared to be a depiction of a historical catastrophe becomes an exploration of how catastrophe enters memory. The observer has seen something that cannot be unseen. The ships have gone, the smoke has dispersed and the attacking fleet has moved on, but the event remains in the consciousness of those who witnessed it and in the historical memory of those who came afterwards.

There is also a significant moral ambiguity here which I think strengthens rather than weakens the work. *1666* does not tell us what to think about the historical participants. It does not turn the Dutch into saints or the English into caricatures. Instead, it places us in the position of an observer confronted with the spectacle of human beings destroying other human beings. The distance of Vlieland makes the event more universal because the listener is not required to identify completely with either side.

The geographical dimension is equally important. Vlieland is not simply the address of the dedicatee, Jan Houter; it is the imaginative centre of the work. The island determines the perspective, and the perspective determines the musical language. Had the work been written from the viewpoint of the attacking fleet, its music might naturally have been more aggressive and declarative. By choosing the island as the vantage point, you have created a work about seeing history happen rather than about participating in it.

This makes *1666* an interesting companion to *Bergkristall*. Both works are concerned with human beings confronting forces larger than themselves, but the forces are radically different. In *Bergkristall*, the children encounter the overwhelming power and beauty of nature and ultimately survive it. In *1666*, nature becomes the setting within which human beings themselves unleash overwhelming destructive power. The mountain is indifferent; the fleet is not. One is elemental, the other deliberate.

The two works also share a fascination with distance and altered perception. In *Bergkristall*, snow transforms a familiar landscape until the children no longer recognise it. In *1666*, mist, smoke and distance transform the familiar maritime horizon into something ominous and unknowable. In both cases, the landscape changes not because it has physically ceased to exist but because the human beings within it can no longer perceive it in the same way.

There is something particularly appropriate, therefore, about the fact that the work ends so quietly. The score reaches a vast orchestral climax, but the final pages are reduced to very soft dynamics and muted instrumental writing. The destruction does not receive the last word. The last word belongs to memory.

That makes *1666* ultimately less a piece about naval warfare than a piece about the view from the shore. The observer cannot intervene, cannot know everything that is happening, and cannot control the forces being unleashed. All that remains is to watch, to understand and eventually to remember. The final hymn places that memory within the historical consciousness of the time, while the quiet ending places it within our own. The result is a symphonic poem in which the most important event is not actually the battle itself. It is the moment when distant smoke becomes understood as fire, when spectacle becomes catastrophe, and when catastrophe finally becomes history.

Ritterburg am Rhein Op. 241

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Ritterburg am Rhein - Rhine Castle - evokes a solitary knight looking down from high above the Rhine valley. Far below him lies a world of brutality and violence, while around him the early autumn morning mist slowly lifts to reveal the shining vision of his castle. The work is therefore concerned with the contrast between the harshness of human existence and the idealised world represented by the castle: a place of security, beauty and perhaps unattainable dreams.

The music begins quietly, with the harp and lower strings creating a continuous, mist-like movement beneath sustained orchestral sonorities. Gradually the texture becomes more animated and the orchestral forces gather strength. The castle itself seems to emerge progressively from the surrounding haze, its image becoming clearer and more imposing as the music develops.

The work repeatedly contrasts turbulent, strongly rhythmic passages with quieter and more contemplative episodes. Brass and percussion bring the violence of the world below into sharp relief, while the harp and strings provide a more elusive and dreamlike dimension. The music ultimately gathers into a powerful orchestral climax before subsiding, leaving the castle and its vision suspended between reality and imagination.

The score is dedicated to Ulrike Wiedenbach, and was composed in Canach, Luxembourg, in 2014.

Discussion

There is a romantic contradiction at the centre of *Ritterburg am Rhein*. The title immediately evokes the great tradition of the Rhine castle: the medieval fortress perched high above the river, surrounded by mist, history and legend. Yet Bullock's conception is not principally concerned with the castle as an archaeological object. The castle becomes a vision, and the knight who contemplates it becomes a figure suspended between two worlds: the violent reality beneath him and the idealised refuge above.

The programme is beautifully economical. *"Far above the brutality and violence below him, a Knight contemplates the shining vision of his castle as it slowly emerges from the early autumn morning mist."* The entire musical drama is contained within that image. There is a world below, full of brutality; there is a figure above it, contemplating; and there is a castle which does not simply stand there but emerges. The central action is therefore not battle, conquest or destruction, but revelation.

The opening of the score immediately supports this idea. The music is initially anything but straightforward. The harp sets up flowing triplet figures while the lower strings move in sustained and gently undulating patterns. The effect is almost atmospheric: one has the impression of mist moving across a landscape before the objects within it have become fully visible.This is an important distinction. Bullock does not begin with the castle. He begins with obscurity.

The orchestra is large enough to evoke the full grandeur of the Rhine landscape, with flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, harp and strings. Yet much of the opening is remarkably restrained. The larger forces remain largely latent while the harp and strings establish the atmosphere.

The waiting is gradually disturbed by increasing movement. The score repeatedly marks *poco a poco cresc*., and the accumulation is not merely a conventional crescendo towards a climax. It has a narrative purpose: something is coming into view. The castle is not suddenly revealed by a theatrical curtain rising; its appearance is gradual, almost imperceptible, just as a real castle might emerge from the mist as the morning develops.

This makes the harp particularly important. Its continuous figurations create a kind of atmospheric veil through which the more substantial orchestral material can appear. The harp does not simply provide decorative colour. It becomes the musical equivalent of the mist itself, constantly moving while remaining essentially transparent. The strings beneath it give the mist a physical landscape through which it can move.

Against this fluid background, the horns have a more monumental function. Their sustained notes suggest distance and elevation, and the instrument's historical association with hunting calls, heraldry and the medieval world inevitably contributes to the atmosphere of the knight and his castle. The horn does not have to announce a literal medieval character; its sound carries the suggestion of an older, more ceremonial world.

The contrast with the music of violence is consequently very marked. At several points the texture becomes considerably more forceful, with brass, timpani and snare drum contributing to a harder, more martial sonority. This is where the programme becomes psychologically interesting. The violence does not necessarily belong to the knight himself. It is the world from which he has withdrawn, and the music repeatedly brings that world back into his consciousness. The castle may be high above it, but it is not beyond its reach.

The work therefore avoids the simplistic opposition between “bad world below” and “good castle above”. The castle is a vision, and visions are fragile. The very fact that the knight has to contemplate it suggests that it is something desired rather than simply possessed. The music's repeated movement between turbulence and stillness gives the impression that the ideal world is continually threatened by the reality beneath it.

The rhythmic language reinforces this psychological tension. The quieter music tends to flow in repeated figurations, while the more violent episodes are articulated through sharply defined attacks and increasingly dense orchestral activity. The difference is not simply one of volume. The two worlds behave differently. The mist flows; violence strikes.

The middle of the work is especially striking in this respect. At bar 81 the music becomes extraordinarily quiet. This produces a curious sense of suspended tension: the surface is almost silent, but the underlying movement has not stopped. The violence has retreated, but it has not disappeared. Such passages are central to the work's character. Bullock's landscape music is rarely simply static. Even when the music seems to be looking quietly at a scene, there is generally something moving beneath the surface. Here the mist itself becomes an image for memory and uncertainty. The knight sees the castle, but what he sees is partly created by the atmosphere surrounding it.

As the work progresses, the orchestration becomes increasingly layered. The harp continues to provide fluid motion while the strings divide into different rhythmic and harmonic roles. At bar 97 the strings are marked *con sordino*, producing a veiled sonority that is particularly appropriate to the programme. It is almost as though the castle has become visible but remains slightly unreal, still belonging partly to the mist from which it emerged. The muted strings also contribute to a sense of historical distance. They soften the orchestral sound without removing its substance, allowing the music to suggest something remembered rather than something physically present. This is an important quality in a work about a medieval castle: the castle exists in the present, but its cultural meaning is inevitably saturated with the past.

At the same time, Bullock resists turning the piece into a conventional medieval pastiche. There are no obvious attempts to imitate period music. Instead, the medieval world is evoked through orchestral colour, register, gesture and atmosphere. The castle is not reconstructed musically; it is imagined.

The earlier violence and the later vision now seem to have become inseparable. The castle has emerged, but it emerges into a world which is still violent. The ideal cannot simply erase reality. This gives the climactic moments a more ambiguous emotional character than one might initially expect. They are certainly powerful, but power here does not automatically mean triumph. The knight's vision may be shining, yet the world below remains present. The music seems to recognise that beauty and brutality can coexist within the same landscape.

There is a fascinating visual quality to the orchestral writing at this point. The brass and strings establish large blocks of sound while the harp continues its characteristic movement, so that the music seems simultaneously monumental and fluid. The castle is solid; the mist is not. One remains fixed while the other continually changes around it.

The final stages of the work continue this process of alternation. The orchestra repeatedly withdraws and regathers its strength, with substantial passages of sustained sonority separated by moments of greater transparency. The final pages again bring together the flowing figures of the harp and strings with strong orchestral punctuation. The conclusion therefore does not simply shut the door on the vision. It leaves the image suspended.

This is perhaps the most convincing aspect of the whole conception. A less subtle treatment might have ended with the castle in triumphant full orchestral splendour, implying that the knight has escaped the violence below and found his ideal refuge. Bullock instead allows the ending to retain uncertainty. The castle has been revealed, but the mist has not ceased to exist.

The work can consequently be understood on several levels. At its most immediate, it is a Rhine landscape: a castle above the river, an autumn morning and mist lifting from the valley. At a historical level, it evokes the medieval world of knights, fortresses and violence. At a psychological level, however, the castle becomes an image of idealisation - the beautiful world one constructs in opposition to an imperfect reality.

That psychological reading also makes the solitary knight rather more interesting than a conventional heroic figure. He is not charging into battle. He is looking. His action is contemplation. He stands above the violence and imagines something better. There is therefore a quiet melancholy behind the grandeur of *Ritterburg am Rhein*. The castle may be magnificent, but the knight's need to contemplate it suggests that magnificence alone cannot protect him from the world below. The music continually reminds us that the distance between reality and ideal is not necessarily very great.

The geographical specificity of the Rhine is important too. The Rhine has accumulated centuries of artistic mythology, from medieval legends to Romantic poetry and music. A *Ritterburg am Rhein* almost inevitably carries echoes of that tradition, but Bullock does not need to quote it explicitly. The very image of the castle above the river is already culturally charged. His contribution is to make the landscape inward-looking: the Rhine becomes not merely scenery but a mirror of the knight's state of mind.

Ultimately, *Ritterburg am Rhein* is a work about looking upwards. The world below is brutal, noisy and dangerous; above it stands the imagined castle, gradually becoming visible through the mist. The music does not deny the violence. Indeed, it gives that violence considerable force. But neither does it surrender to it.

Instead, the work holds the two worlds together: brutality below, beauty above; history beneath, dream above; solid stone surrounded by moving mist. The castle is both real and imagined, both a physical place and an ideal. And when the final sounds fade, what remains is not simply the image of a medieval fortress on the Rhine, but the more universal human impulse to look beyond the world as it is and imagine the world as it might be.

Nosso Lar Op. 243

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Nosso Lar - "Our Home" - is a symphonic poem about the passage from death to life, conceived as a return to the home we once left. The title is deliberately open-ended: the "home" of the work is not necessarily a physical place, but something remembered, anticipated or recovered beyond the boundaries of ordinary existence.

The music begins with a powerful, almost overwhelming orchestral statement, from which a long process of transformation unfolds. Massive sustained sonorities gradually give way to greater transparency, with individual instrumental voices emerging from the orchestral texture. The solo oboe has a particularly intimate presence, while later the horn appears in isolation against an increasingly spacious musical landscape. The score's use of tubular bells at the opening adds a ritual and ceremonial dimension to the work.

As the work progresses, the music repeatedly moves between weight and weightlessness, density and silence. Long sustained string harmonies provide a sense of continuity while the orchestral texture gradually becomes quieter and more fragmented, eventually reaching extraordinarily soft dynamics. The final pages do not offer a conventional triumphant conclusion, but instead allow the music to settle into a state of profound stillness.

Nosso Lar is therefore less a depiction of death or an imagined afterlife than an evocation of transition: departure, passage and return. Its journey is ultimately circular. We leave home, enter the unknown, and discover that the unknown may itself be another form of home.

Canach, Luxembourg - Salzburg, Hinterthal, Austria, Allerheiligen 2014

Discussion

An unusual stillness lies at the heart of *Nosso Lar*. Its subtitle, *"Our Home … From Death to Life,"* proposes one of the most profound journeys that music can attempt, yet the work does not respond with a conventional narrative of death followed by resurrection. Instead, it creates a musical space in which the distinction between departure and return gradually becomes blurred. What does it mean to return home when the home in question is no longer a geographical place? What does it mean to leave one existence and enter another? These questions hover behind the music without ever needing to be stated.

The Portuguese title is crucial. *Nosso Lar* means "Our Home", and the possessive pronoun gives the work an intimacy that would be absent from a more abstract title such as *Afterlife* or *Resurrection*. This is not simply a journey towards somewhere unknown. It is a return to somewhere that is, in some sense, already ours. The subtitle's progression, *"From Death to Life"*, consequently has a double direction: it describes a movement forward, but also a return.

Musically, Bullock begins at almost the opposite point from where the work eventually arrives. The opening is formidable. Virtually the entire orchestra is engaged, with strings and winds sustaining massive sonorities while timpani reinforce the opening gesture. The effect is not merely loud; it is solid. The music seems to have enormous physical weight.

That is a fascinating choice for a work concerned with death. One might expect emptiness, silence or fragmentation. Instead, Bullock gives us mass. Death here is not initially portrayed as nothingness but as something overwhelmingly present. The musical body is almost too large to move.

The tubular bells add another dimension to this opening. Their sound has an unmistakably ritual character, and their presence within the massive orchestral sonority gives the beginning something ceremonial. The bells can suggest a threshold, a rite of passage, or simply the solemnity of what is taking place. Their resonance continues beyond the precise moment of their attack, making them particularly apt for a work in which one state of being is supposed to pass into another.

Yet the work does not remain trapped within this initial mass. Gradually, the orchestral texture becomes more transparent. Individual instruments begin to emerge from the sustained background, and the solo oboe in particular acquires an expressive role. Its appearances create an unmistakably individual voice within the larger orchestral world.

This contrast between the individual and the collective is one of the most moving aspects of the piece. The great opening sonority represents something universal: an existence in which the individual is submerged within an immense totality. The solo oboe, by contrast, sounds like consciousness itself — a single voice discovering that it still exists.

The strings provide the essential continuity. Throughout much of the work, they sustain long notes and slowly changing harmonic fields. Their function is less melodic than environmental: they create the space through which the individual instrumental voices move. At several points the texture becomes almost motionless, but it is never dead. The sustained lines breathe, shift and reorient themselves. This is where the title becomes musically persuasive. If the work is about returning home, then the music needs to establish a sense of continuity beneath transformation. The harmonic world may change, the instrumental colours may change, the dynamics may collapse - but something remains. The listener is carried from one state to another by an underlying continuity rather than by a succession of disconnected episodes.

The structural divisions marked A to G reinforce this sense of a journey. They do not function as conventional movements but as stages within a single unfolding process. The early sections are dominated by dense orchestral sonority, while later sections increasingly favour transparency and isolated instrumental lines. By the middle of the work, the strings can sustain broad, repeated harmonic shapes while the oboe speaks above them, creating the impression of time suspended.

The music's repeated long-note figures are particularly significant. They create an impression of enormous duration, as though ordinary human time has ceased to apply. A repeated pulse at the beginning suggests measurable physical time; the later sustained notes seem to belong to a different kind of time altogether. This is one of the ways in which the score communicates its subject without needing literal representation.

The solo horn later takes on a similarly evocative role. At section F its quiet entrance occurs against an extraordinarily reduced texture. The horn's natural association with distance and space makes it particularly effective here. It seems to call from somewhere beyond the immediate musical world, but unlike a heroic horn call it is intimate and subdued.

The progression towards silence is therefore more important than any single melodic event. The dynamics become progressively softer. This is not a retreat caused by exhaustion. It feels more like a shedding of material. The enormous physical presence of the opening is gradually relinquished.

And yet Bullock does not simply allow the music to disappear. The final pages restore a degree of activity, but the character has been transformed. The music is no longer burdened by the mass of the opening. Individual lines are clearer, the orchestral texture more transparent, and the long sustained notes have acquired a different emotional meaning. The final section again brings the oboe and strings together, before the music moves towards its ultimate suspended state.

The work's final silence does not feel like death. Silence at the beginning would have meant absence; silence at the end means completion. The distinction is subtle but fundamental. The work begins with too much sound, as though existence itself were an overwhelming physical fact. It ends by allowing sound to become almost nothing, yet this nothingness now feels inhabited.

The journey has therefore reversed the listener's expectations. We begin with apparent certainty and end with mystery. We begin with a massive physical world and end with something almost weightless. We begin with death as an overwhelming presence and end with life understood as something that can exist beyond physical weight.

There is also a particularly personal dimension to the geographical inscription at the end of the score: Canach, Salzburg, Hinterthal and Canach, Allerheiligen 2014. The work began and ended in Canach, passing through Salzburg and Hinterthal in between. Even without imposing a programme upon those places, the itinerary itself forms a small physical circle. Departure, journey and return are inscribed into the circumstances of composition. That circularity is perhaps the most revealing aspect of *Nosso Lar*. The work does not ultimately travel from one place to another. It travels home.

This makes it quite different from a conventional symphonic poem in which an external story is translated into orchestral events. There is no sequence of literal scenes to follow. Instead, Bullock takes an idea that is essentially metaphysical and finds an orchestral equivalent for it: density becomes transparency, individuality emerges from collective sound, time becomes suspended, and finally the distinction between sound and silence becomes almost impossible to maintain.

The work's emotional power comes precisely from this refusal to explain. *"From Death to Life"* is not interpreted for us. We are not told what lies beyond death, nor what "home" ultimately means. The music simply creates the sensation of passing through a threshold. Perhaps that is why the

opening's extraordinary weight is necessary. Before the music can become weightless, it must first know what weight is. Before the individual can find the larger home, it must first experience separation. Before silence can become peace, it must first be distinguished from absence.

Nosso Lar is consequently a work about return rather than escape. Death is not presented as a final severing but as part of a larger cycle, and life is not simply a continuation of physical existence but a re-entry into a more encompassing reality. The final sustained sounds do not proclaim an answer. They leave the listener at the threshold, where the distinction between ending and beginning has become wonderfully uncertain. The last impression is therefore neither tragic nor conventionally triumphant. It is something quieter: the sense that the journey has reached the place it was always moving towards. Home.

Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal Op. 280

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal - The Sleeping Maiden of Hinterthal - is an evocation of the great mountain that dominates the landscape around Hinterthal in Austria. *She sleeps, dreams, knows, remembers …..*

The music begins quietly, with a solitary flute above sustained strings, as though the mountain were already breathing before the listener becomes aware of her presence. Gradually the other instruments enter, each contributing its own voice, and the apparently motionless landscape begins to acquire an inner life.

The work moves between states of stillness and movement. Sometimes the music is almost completely suspended, with long-held sonorities suggesting the sleeping mountain; elsewhere, repeated figures in the strings create a sense of activity beneath the surface, as though dreams were passing through her consciousness. From time to time the orchestra expands into powerful and monumental passages, revealing the physical grandeur of the mountain before returning again to quieter, more inward states.

The human voices of the winds become increasingly important as the work develops, appearing individually and then in conversation with one another. The mountain seems to dream, but she also seems to remember. The music therefore moves between the immense physical presence of the landscape and something more mysterious and personal, as though the mountain were itself a living witness to everything that has taken place around it.

Towards the end, the music gradually slows and withdraws. The final pages return to the quiet, sustained atmosphere of the opening, with the flute once again emerging above the orchestra. The Sleeping Maiden does not awaken; she simply returns more deeply into her dream.

Dedicated to Roswitha Foch in Maria Alm - Hinterthal, September, 2018.

Discussion

Something is inherently imaginative about giving a mountain a human identity. Mountains appear permanent to us because our own lives are so short, and this apparent permanence inevitably encourages mythology. A mountain seems to have been there before us and to remain after us. It watches without participating. It sees generations come and go. It therefore becomes very easy to imagine that it remembers.

That is the imaginative territory of *Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal*. The five words of the original programme note — *she sleeps, dreams, knows, remembers* — are almost enough to define the entire work, but the score reveals that these are not five descriptions of the same state. They are five different kinds of musical existence.

The opening is deliberately intimate. The score begins with a solo flute singing above an otherwise almost empty orchestral texture. The first violin soon joins with a similarly sustained phrase, and the effect is one of extreme spaciousness. There is no attempt to make the mountain impressive immediately. Instead, the listener is invited to become aware of something that is already there. This is an important distinction. The mountain does not "arrive" in the music. It is already present.

The flute's opening line has a particularly appropriate character. Its melody rises and falls gently, with long-held notes and expressive shaping, while the violin answers in equally spacious phrases. There is a human quality to the sound, but the surrounding silence makes the human voice seem tiny in comparison with the implied scale of the landscape.

The lower strings and bassoon begin to enter around bar 17, providing a deeper foundation. The effect is almost physiological. The mountain is acquiring a body, and the sustained lower sonorities can be heard as something like a slow breathing beneath the surface. By bar 25, the winds begin to exchange solo phrases. Flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon each have their own moments of prominence, while the strings provide a broad harmonic field. This is one of the most persuasive aspects of the work because the mountain's identity does not depend upon one grand theme. It emerges from the accumulation of many small voices.

At section A, beginning at bar 50, the character changes dramatically. The violins and viola begin repeated figures at mf, while the rest of the orchestra largely falls silent. The mountain is still asleep, but now there is movement within the sleep. This is where the distinction between sleep and dreaming becomes musically meaningful. Sleep is static; dreams are active. The repeated string patterns create a current of thought beneath the sustained world of the opening. The music is moving without necessarily going anywhere.

The subsequent development repeatedly alternates between these conditions. At bar 73 the orchestra becomes more powerful, with sustained notes and increasing dynamic intensity. The timpani eventually contributes a physical pulse, and the mountain suddenly seems enormous. The dream has become something closer to an awakening of physical consciousness. The mountain does not wake up - the music returns to stillness.

At bar 79 the lower strings play *pizzicato* while the upper strings sustain longer notes. This is a fascinating texture because it combines the physical and the ephemeral. There is something grounded and tactile beneath something floating and dreamlike.

Then the music becomes spacious once more. This repeated movement between activity and suspension is the real formal principle of the work. It is not a narrative of events but a series of changing states of consciousness.

The great climax at bar 105 provides the most dramatic revelation of the mountain's physical identity. This is the moment when the listener is reminded that beneath the dreamlike personification lies an enormous physical object: rock, earth and mountain. The juxtaposition is crucial. The mountain can be imagined as a maiden precisely because it is physically immense and apparently immovable. Human consciousness is projected upon something that seems to possess none of it. The music exploits that contradiction by alternating delicate human voices with overwhelming orchestral mass.

The section following the climax is therefore more important than the climax itself. The music returns to sustained sonorities, with the timpani providing a subdued pulse. The mountain has not been transformed by the experience. It simply continues to exist.This is where the word “knows” becomes particularly suggestive. To know something for a human being implies acquiring information through experience. To a mountain, knowledge would have to mean something completely different: the accumulation of time itself. The mountain “knows” because it has endured.

The music's repeated returns reinforce precisely this idea. Events occur within the work, but the underlying presence remains. Rhythmic episodes come and go. Climaxes rise and fall. Voices appear and disappear. The mountain remains underneath them all.

The later sections become increasingly contrapuntal. At bar 155, solo oboe, clarinet and horn lines emerge above the active strings, producing an unusually rich web of independent voices. By bar 156 this becomes even more developed, with the wind instruments and strings participating in a kind of collective conversation. This could easily have become busy or merely decorative, but in the context of the programme it has another significance. The mountain seems to be remembering. The individual lines feel like fragments of experience, appearing, overlapping and disappearing again. Memory is rarely linear; it is associative and layered.

The music begins to slow down. The effect is like consciousness gradually sinking back into sleep. At bar 167 the return to *A tempo* at mp does not signify renewed activity so much as a return to the fundamental state of the work. The final section is therefore not a conventional coda. It is a return to the beginning, but with everything that has happened still contained within it.

At bar 178 the winds again appear as individual voices above a restrained orchestral texture. The effect is remarkably close to the opening, but it is not identical. The listener now knows what lies beneath the quiet surface. Finally the flute returns for its last solo line. The long-held orchestral notes beneath it create a sense of enormous stillness. The flute's final phrase does not sound like a farewell. It sounds like a thought continuing after the listener has ceased to hear it.

This is why the original programme note is so effective. *“She sleeps, dreams, knows, remembers …..”* is not an explanation of the music; it is an invitation into its imaginative world. There is also something deeply appropriate about the work having been completed in Hinterthal itself on 16 September 2018. The mountain is not an imaginary Alpine symbol detached from experience. It belongs to the actual landscape in which the composer was living and working. The work therefore occupies the boundary between observation and personification: the real mountain remains real, but music allows it to acquire an interior life.

Perhaps that is the most beautiful thing about *Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal*. It does not ask us to believe literally that the mountain is a sleeping maiden. It asks us to entertain the possibility just for the duration of the music.

Genesis Op. 291

Symphonic Poem

Programme Note

Genesis is a Symphonic Poem directly inspired by the magnificent painting *Genesis* by Roswitha Foch, who lives and works in Maria Alm, Austria.

The work opens with Goethe's words from *Faust*: *"Im Anfang war die Tat"* — "In the beginning was the deed." From this idea comes a musical journey through the four fundamental elements of Creation: *Earth, Fire, Wind* and *Water.*

Earth begins with weight and physical force. Deep strings, brass and percussion create a massive, primordial sound-world in which rhythmic energy seems to bring matter into existence. The music is grounded, powerful and elemental, as though the foundations of the world were being formed before our ears.

From Earth comes Fire. The music becomes more volatile and animated, with rapidly moving figures passing between the winds and strings. Trumpet calls announce the stages of Creation, and the orchestral texture seems continually to ignite and renew itself. Fire is transformation: matter is no longer simply present but is being changed.

The music then rises into Wind. The great weight of the orchestra recedes, leaving lighter sonorities and flowing lines suspended in space. The upper winds become particularly prominent, while the strings provide a delicate current beneath them. Here movement is freed from physical weight; sound circulates, rises and disappears like air itself.

Finally comes Water. The harp introduces a flowing, undulating quality, and the music becomes fluid rather than merely mobile. Long phrases and constantly changing textures suggest water in its many forms — gentle, reflective and seemingly weightless, yet capable of gathering immense power. As the section develops, the elemental energies begin to return, and the music gathers the four forces of Creation into a single continuing process.

Thus *Genesis* is not simply a sequence of four musical portraits. *Earth, Fire, Wind* and *Water* become stages in one act of creation: *matter, transformation, movement* and *life*. The trumpet calls that announce their appearance suggest something ceremonial and timeless, as though the orchestra itself were proclaiming the successive acts through which the world comes into being.

Hinterthal, Austria, August 2019.

Discussion

Genesis is one of those works in which the subject is so large that the temptation might be to make the music equally large from the outset. Creation, after all, invites the full orchestra, the enormous climax, the sense of cosmic spectacle. What is more interesting about this work is that, although it certainly possesses moments of considerable orchestral power, its underlying conception is more disciplined. The music is concerned not simply with the grandeur of Creation but with the process of becoming, and this is why the brief quotation from Goethe, *Im Anfang war die Tat*, is such an important clue. The beginning is not an idea waiting to be contemplated; it is an action. Something happens, and from that action a world begins to exist. The score places the word Earth immediately beside Goethe's quotation at the beginning, establishing the fundamental premise from the first bar.

The opening consequently has a strongly physical character with an extraordinary concentration of rhythmic and harmonic weight. The lower regions of the orchestra and the brass and percussion contributing to a sense of mass. There is little sense of picturesque landscape here. Earth is not yet the green world of mountains and forests; it is substance, density and gravity. The repeated orchestral figures seem to establish matter through insistence, as though the music has to make its own physical existence before anything else can happen.

The sheer density of the first section is important because it gives the later transformations something against which to react. The *Earth* music is repeatedly articulated by strongly accented figures, with the strings operating in vigorous repeated patterns while the orchestral forces accumulate around them. The music does not seem to be describing something already created. It seems to be creating itself. The distinction is subtle but fundamental: the orchestra is not an observer of Creation but its agent.

This is where the opening Goethe quotation becomes more than an epigraph. *Im Anfang war die Tat* proposes action as the first principle, and Bullock's musical response is correspondingly kinetic. There is an almost sculptural quality to the opening, as if the orchestra were repeatedly striking and shaping raw material. The repeated-note and repeated-rhythm figures have a physical insistence which makes the first section feel closer to geological activity than to conventional symphonic melody.

The first great transformation comes with *Fire*, explicitly marked at bar 52. The musical world changes, but it does not discard the energy of Earth. Instead, the energy becomes more volatile. The repeated figures become more mobile, the articulation sharper and the orchestral activity more fragmented. The music has acquired a capacity to leap from one point to another, and this is precisely the musical quality required by Fire. Fire is not merely hotter Earth. It is Earth transformed.

The trumpet calls associated with the successive stages of Creation become especially significant here. They give the elemental progression a ceremonial and almost liturgical character, but their real function is structural. They announce transformation. Each element arrives as though called into existence, and the trumpet's declarative quality contrasts with the more organic activity of the strings and winds. The orchestra is simultaneously depicting Creation and proclaiming it.

The Fire music also demonstrates one of the strengths of the work as a symphonic poem: the elements are not represented through simplistic sound effects. There is no need for the orchestra literally to imitate flames. Instead, Fire is expressed through musical behaviour - volatility, rapid exchange, repeated ignition of small motifs and the continual generation of new energy. The score becomes a metaphorical language rather than a catalogue of effects.

The music then reaches *Wind,* marked explicitly at bar 74. The contrast is striking. The dense physicality of the opening gives way to a more spacious texture, with the winds assuming greater prominence and long-held orchestral sonorities creating a sense of breadth. The dynamic level is initially restrained, with mp and pp indications, and the musical surface is much less congested.

This is perhaps the most revealing of the elemental transformations because Wind introduces a new concept: movement without mass. Earth is heavy; Fire changes matter through violent energy; Wind moves freely through space. The music consequently becomes less grounded. Lines seem to float, appear and disappear, while the strings provide an almost invisible current underneath the more exposed wind writing.

The long Wind section is also where *Genesis* becomes most contemplative. The music has moved away from the relentless activity of the opening and acquired a sense of suspension. Yet it never becomes completely static. Even in the quieter passages there is an underlying rhythmic life, so that the impression is not of silence but of air continually moving around us. That balance between stillness and movement is particularly important to the work's conception of Creation. Nothing is ever completely still. Even when the orchestra appears to suspend itself in long-held sonorities, there remains an underlying impulse which will eventually generate the next transformation. Creation is therefore presented not as a succession of disconnected miracles but as a continuous chain of energy.

The music eventually reaches *Water,* marked at bar 154. Here the harp becomes especially significant, and the musical texture acquires a flowing character. Water is the most naturally lyrical of the four elements because its essential property is continuity. It does not merely move; it connects.

The Water section consequently brings together qualities which have been developing throughout the work. The flowing patterns of the harp and strings have something of the mobility of Wind, but they also possess the physical presence of Earth. The music can be gentle and reflective, but it can also gather considerable momentum. Water therefore becomes the element in which the preceding opposites begin to coexist. This is important because the four elements are not ultimately four separate musical tableaux. Each one leaves something behind for the next. Earth establishes substance and weight; Fire introduces transformation; Wind releases energy into space; Water brings movement into a continuous and organic flow. The work's structure therefore resembles a chain of metamorphoses rather than a suite of descriptive episodes.

The return of substantial orchestral force towards the end confirms this. After the relative spaciousness of Wind and the flowing textures of Water, the orchestra once again becomes dense and powerful. The music reaches another major accumulation of energy, with strong dynamics and increasingly massive orchestral writing. The elemental process is beginning to fold back upon itself.

The final stages are consequently not a fifth element or an epilogue. They are a synthesis. Material from the earlier sections is reabsorbed into a larger orchestral organism, and the music seems to suggest that the world has now acquired the complexity that makes creation meaningful. Earth is no longer merely matter, Fire is no longer merely destructive energy, Wind is no longer simply air and Water is no longer merely flow. They have become interdependent forces.

As a response to a painting this is very appropriate. A painting necessarily presents Creation as a visual image, a single field in which different elements can coexist simultaneously. Music has to discover another way of doing this because it exists in time. Bullock's solution is to let the elements emerge successively and then gradually overlap conceptually. What the painting can show simultaneously, the symphonic poem can make us experience as transformation.

This also explains why the work's orchestral palette is so important. The score employs a large orchestra, including four wind families, a full brass section, timpani, bass drum, tam-tam, harp and strings. Such forces could easily encourage an indiscriminate wall of sound, but the work instead uses changes in instrumental participation to differentiate the elemental states. The orchestra is large because Creation is large, but the music is continually changing which parts of that orchestra are active and which are silent.

Silence, indeed, becomes almost as important as sound. The score repeatedly allows entire instrumental families to withdraw while another group carries the musical argument. This creates a sense that the elements are not simply represented by timbre but by orchestral ecology. Something comes forward because something else recedes. Creation becomes an interaction. The trumpet calls then acquire a second meaning. At first they seem to announce the elements individually, but retrospectively they can be heard as marking stages in a single process. They are like signals from outside ordinary human time, telling us that one phase of existence has become another. Their ceremonial character gives the work an almost ritual quality without tying it to one particular religious interpretation.

The religious dimension nevertheless remains unavoidable, and intriguingly the music does not resolve it into a single doctrine. The title *Genesis* naturally recalls the Biblical account of Creation, while Goethe's *Faust* introduces a philosophical and literary counterpoint. The quotation *Im Anfang war die Tat* comes from a character wrestling with the meaning of the Biblical opening, and Bullock's choice therefore introduces a productive tension between **c**reation as divine mystery and creation as active transformation. The music itself seems comfortable with both possibilities. It can sound ceremonial and monumental, but it is equally fascinated by physical process. The world comes into being through energy, movement and transformation, and the orchestra becomes the medium through which that process can be experienced.

The relationship with Roswitha Foch's painting is consequently more than a matter of inspiration. It becomes a dialogue between two artistic conceptions of Creation. The painting provides an image; the music provides duration. The painting allows the eye to contemplate; the symphonic poem allows the ear to witness becoming. One is necessarily still, the other necessarily moving, yet both can address the same fundamental mystery.

There is also a pleasing personal continuity in the fact that the work was created in Hinterthal in August 2019, within the same Austrian environment that had already inspired *Bergkristall*, *Sommerstein* and *Die schlafende Jungfrau von Hinterthal*. Yet *Genesis* is markedly different from those earlier mountain works. In *Bergkristall*, nature overwhelms two children; in *Die schlafende Jungfrau*, nature is imagined as possessing consciousness and memory; in *Genesis*, nature is no longer merely the subject but part of the primordial act through which the world comes into existence.

That makes *Genesis* a fitting work with which to broaden the symphonic-poem sequence beyond geographical and historical subjects. It retains the fascination with landscape that runs so strongly through the earlier pieces, but moves from a particular landscape to the elemental principles underlying all landscapes. Hinterthal provides the place of composition, while the subject itself reaches beyond any particular country.

Ultimately, the success of *Genesis* lies in the fact that it does not attempt to tell us what Creation means. It allows us to hear what Creation does. Earth acquires substance; Fire transforms it; Wind releases it; Water carries it onwards. The four elements become four forms of musical energy, and the orchestra becomes the place in which they encounter one another. That brings us back to Goethe's deceptively simple words: *Im Anfang war die Tat*. At the beginning was the deed. In

Bullock's *Genesis*, that deed is not represented as a single thunderous gesture from which a finished universe instantly appears. It is an ongoing process of becoming, and the music's real subject is the extraordinary moment when matter begins to move, movement begins to transform, and transformation begins to become a world.

The Symphonic Poems: A Retrospective

Style, Technique and the Transformation of Experience into Music

Taken as a whole, the symphonic poems reveal perhaps more clearly than any other group of works the breadth of the composer's imaginative response to the world around him. Their subjects are extraordinarily diverse: Welsh history and legend, mountains and seas, rivers and castles, literature and painting, historical catastrophe, spiritual speculation and intensely personal experience. There is no single stylistic surface that could adequately describe them, and indeed there is no apparent desire that there should be one. The unity of the collection lies elsewhere: in the repeated transformation of an external stimulus into an internally coherent musical experience.

This is an important distinction. A symphonic poem can easily become merely illustrative, with the music functioning as a soundtrack to an already established story. These works generally seek something more elusive. The external subject is the point of departure, but the finished composition is rarely concerned simply with reproducing what the listener might see or read. A mountain becomes an experience of ascent and revelation; a sea becomes a study in stasis and movement; a historical catastrophe becomes an exercise in witnessing and memory; a painting becomes an orchestral act of creation. The subject provides the imaginative spark, but the music develops its own logic.

Perhaps the most characteristic technique throughout the collection is therefore transformation. Musical processes repeatedly embody the processes suggested by the subject. In *Sommerstein*, darkness gradually becomes light, uncertainty becomes recognition, and the mountain emerges from mist as the musical texture itself becomes clearer and more expansive. In *The Quickening Tide*, apparently static material gradually acquires rhythmic energy until the returning tide finally rushes forward. *WinterSea* reverses the principle, finding movement within almost complete stillness and demonstrating that a work need not become progressively more active in order to possess a strong internal development. In *Nosso Lar*, massive orchestral sonorities gradually become transparent and finally almost weightless, suggesting a passage from one state of existence to another.

This concern with transformation also explains why the works rarely depend upon literal musical illustration. There may be no need to imitate waves when the musical behaviour itself can become tidal. There is no need to make the orchestra sound like a mountain when the gradual expansion of register, harmony and orchestral colour can recreate the experience of climbing towards a summit. The most successful passages therefore operate on two levels simultaneously: they can suggest the external image while remaining convincing as abstract musical development.

The orchestra is consequently treated as a palette of expressive identities. Individual instruments frequently become almost characters within the music. In *Bergkristall*, Konrad is represented by the confident clarinets while Sanna is given the questioning voices of flute, oboe and English horn. The distinction is not merely descriptive; it allows the children's relationship to the surrounding landscape to become part of the musical texture. In *Sommerstein*, horn and trumpet emerge from the mountain landscape with their traditional melody, sounding almost as though musicians somewhere below are playing for themselves. In *Nosso Lar*, the solo oboe and later the horn acquire an intimate, human presence within a much larger orchestral environment.

At other times the opposite approach is taken. Rather than assigning identities to individual instruments, the entire ensemble becomes the subject. *WinterSea* is the clearest example. By limiting the composition to strings, Bullock removes the possibility of conventional orchestral

spectacle and forces the listener to attend to minute alterations of texture, register, articulation and harmony. The orchestra becomes a single organism, capable of sustaining a landscape in which almost nothing appears to happen.

The use of extreme dynamics is closely related to this orchestral thinking. These works are capable of enormous sonority, but they are equally willing to retreat towards the threshold of audibility. *Nosso Lar* moves from massive orchestral force towards extraordinarily soft passages; *WinterSea* lives for much of its existence within a quiet, muted world; *Sommerstein* begins and ends in delicacy despite the substantial forces available to it. Such contrasts are not simply matters of expressive volume. They are structural devices through which the meaning of the music changes.

Silence is particularly important. A quiet ending in these works rarely feels like an arbitrary withdrawal after the "real" music has finished. Often it represents a change of state. The silence at the end of *WinterSea* belongs to the same landscape as its opening, but the listener has spent time contemplating that landscape and therefore hears the silence differently. In *Nosso Lar*, the reduction of orchestral weight suggests arrival rather than extinction. In *Sommerstein*, the summit has been reached and there is consequently no need for a final assertion of victory. The mountain remains after the music has stopped.

This willingness to allow music to dissolve rather than conclude is one of the most distinctive features of the group. The traditional symphonic demand for a decisive final cadence is often replaced by something more ambiguous. The work reaches its destination, but the world represented by the work continues beyond it. A sea cannot end because a piece of music has ended; a mountain does not disappear when the last orchestral chord fades; a historical event cannot be resolved by a cadence.

The harmonic and rhythmic language is equally flexible. Changing metres, repeated rhythmic figures, sustained notes, layered ostinati, sudden changes of texture and contrasting rates of movement recur throughout the collection, but they are employed according to the demands of each individual subject. Rhythm can represent physical movement, as in *The Quickening Tide*, or become almost imperceptible, as in *WinterSea*. Sustained harmony can create the atmosphere of mist or distance, while sharply articulated rhythmic writing can introduce menace or violence, as in *1666*.

This is particularly evident in the treatment of historical subjects. *1666* does not attempt to reconstruct a naval battle through conventional martial music. Its perspective is that of the observer on Vlieland, watching events unfold across the water. The music therefore progresses from distance and uncertainty towards menace, smoke, fire and destruction, before withdrawing into the silence of aftermath. The musical technique is determined by the psychological viewpoint rather than by the superficial subject of warfare.

The same principle operates differently in the Welsh historical poems. *Cilmeri*, *Owain Glyndŵr*, *Garth Celyn* and *Talaith* are necessarily concerned with history and political memory, but they are not history lessons in orchestral form. The music engages with emotional consequences: betrayal, resistance, loss, humiliation, longing and the persistence of identity. In *Y Chwarel*, historical memory moves away from princes and battles towards the lives of working people, and the quotation from the hymn *In Memoriam* becomes a vehicle of remembrance. History is therefore repeatedly transformed into human experience.

Quotation itself is an important part of the composer's technique, but it is never employed in only one way. A borrowed melody can function as cultural memory, as in the Moselhymne in *Moselherbst*; as historical testimony, as in the Valerius hymn in *1666*; as commemoration, as in *Y Chwarel*; or as affectionate humour, as in the Wagner quotation from *Das Rheingold* in *Moselherbst*. The last is especially revealing because it demonstrates that musical quotation need

not make a work more solemn. Wagner's Rhine has wandered onto the Mosel, and the geographical incongruity becomes part of the composition's personality.

This capacity for humour is worth emphasising because it prevents the symphonic poems from becoming uniformly portentous. The subjects frequently involve tragedy, history or profound ideas, but the composer does not seem to believe that serious subjects demand unrelieved solemnity. The Wagner joke is a small but telling example of a wider willingness to allow affection, irony and self-awareness into the musical language.

The relationship between Romanticism and modern technique is another defining characteristic. Many of the subjects belong naturally to the Romantic imagination: misty castles, Alpine mountains, legends, sunsets, seas, lost princes and mysterious landscapes. Yet the music is not simply an attempt to recreate nineteenth-century Romanticism. The orchestral vocabulary is contemporary in its freedom of texture, metre, repetition and instrumental combination. Romantic subject matter is allowed to coexist with modern compositional procedures.

This is perhaps why the works do not fall easily into stylistic categories. *Ritterburg am Rhein* can inhabit the world of the Romantic Rhine castle without becoming a pastiche of nineteenth-century programme music. *Bergkristall* can respond to Stifter without becoming a literary tone poem in the conventional sense. *Genesis* can engage with a monumental painting and elemental creation without requiring an established “creation music” vocabulary. The external references are absorbed into a musical language that remains recognisably the composer's own.

The most striking stylistic consistency therefore lies not in surface sound but in method. The composer seems to ask, consciously or otherwise: what is the essential experience contained within this subject, and what musical process could embody it? That question produces very different answers because the subjects themselves are different.

Sometimes the answer is a characteristically melodic one. Sometimes it is timbral. Sometimes it is rhythmic. Sometimes it is almost entirely structural. Sometimes the most appropriate musical response is to do very little at all.

This explains the extraordinary contrast between *WinterSea* and *Genesis*. One reduces the orchestra to muted strings and moves at an almost frozen tempo; the other responds to a vision of Creation through the elemental forces of the full orchestra. Yet both are pursuing the same fundamental objective: finding a musical equivalent for an experience that began outside the music.

There is also a recurrent fascination with thresholds. Dawn and dusk appear repeatedly, as do mist, emergence, disappearance, arrival and departure. *Sommerstein* moves from night towards sunrise. *The Quickening Tide* exists between ebb and flood. *WinterSea* inhabits the boundary between sea and sky. *Nosso Lar* explicitly crosses from death to life. *Bergkristall* places its children between safety and danger, home and wilderness. Even *1666* is concerned with the moment when distant activity becomes recognised as catastrophe.

These are not merely convenient programme devices. They correspond to a deep musical preference for states of transition. The most interesting moment is often neither the beginning nor the end but the point at which one condition is becoming another.

This may also explain the importance of mist throughout the collection. Mist obscures distinctions. A mountain becomes a shape; a castle becomes a vision; the distant destruction at Vlieland becomes initially indistinguishable from ordinary movement on the sea. Musically, mist permits harmony, rhythm and orchestral colour to remain ambiguous. The listener knows that something is present without yet knowing precisely what it is.

The works repeatedly exploit this ambiguity before allowing some form of revelation. The castle emerges from mist; the mountain becomes visible; the tide reveals its hidden energy; the historical event becomes comprehensible; the individual voice emerges from the orchestral mass. Revelation is therefore not simply a programme event. It is a compositional strategy.

The personal dimension of the symphonic poems should not be overlooked. Even when the subject appears remote - seventeenth-century Holland, Arthurian legend or an Alpine literary tale - the choice of subject tells us something about the composer's imaginative geography. Wales, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria recur as physical and emotional reference points, and the works frequently move between them. The places of composition themselves become part of the story: a Welsh sea imagined in Austria, a Dutch catastrophe remembered far from the Netherlands, a Welsh historical landscape revisited from Luxembourg.

Distance, in these circumstances, can actually intensify memory.

This is particularly apparent in the Welsh cycle. *Fy Ngwlad – My Country* provides the most concentrated expression of national memory, but its emotional force depends partly upon the fact that Wales is being remembered from elsewhere. The country becomes something carried within the composer rather than something requiring physical presence. The wider symphonic poems demonstrate that this is not unique to Wales: place is repeatedly transformed into inner landscape.

The result is a body of works in which geography becomes psychology.

A mountain is not merely a mountain. It becomes effort, uncertainty and revelation. A castle is not merely architecture. It becomes aspiration and refuge. A sea is not merely water. It becomes stillness, distance, continuity or overwhelming energy. A quarry is not merely an industrial site. It becomes the memory of generations. A historical event is not merely something that happened. It becomes the experience of witnessing, suffering or remembering.

This is perhaps the most important aesthetic conclusion to emerge from the collection. The symphonic poems are not primarily about their subjects. They are about what those subjects make possible in music.

That is why the collection can accommodate such enormous diversity without losing its identity. The composer does not impose the same musical solution upon every subject. Instead, the subject changes the music. The method remains constant while the result is continually transformed.

In that sense, the symphonic poems offer a particularly revealing view of Bullock's compositional personality. They show a composer who is comfortable with grand orchestral gesture but equally fascinated by extreme quietness; who can engage sincerely with history while allowing humour to intrude; who can write directly about landscape while also turning landscape into metaphysical metaphor; who uses quotation both affectionately and structurally; and who is prepared to allow a work to end in uncertainty rather than forcing every musical journey into a conventional resolution.

Above all, they reveal a composer for whom experience is the raw material of composition. The experience may be historical, geographical, visual, literary, spiritual or intensely personal. What matters is that it provokes an imaginative response strong enough to generate its own musical world.

The symphonic poem, in these works, is therefore less a genre than a freedom: the freedom to follow an idea wherever it leads. One work may require a full orchestra moving towards overwhelming force; another may require only muted strings barely moving at all. One may need a quotation from Wagner; another a seventeenth-century hymn; another a traditional melody; another

no external musical reference whatsoever. One may end in a blaze of sound; another may simply disappear. There is no contradiction in this diversity - it is the whole point.

Taken together, these works demonstrate that stylistic identity need not mean stylistic uniformity. The recognisable voice lies in the way of thinking: the instinct to find the musical process hidden inside the subject, to allow orchestral colour to carry meaning, to transform rather than merely illustrate, and to leave enough ambiguity for the listener's own imagination to participate.

The symphonic poems thus become a kind of musical travelogue through the composer's inner and outer worlds. Wales is there, certainly, with its history, legends, mountains, quarries and seas. But so are Austria, Luxembourg, the Rhine, the Mosel, the Waddenzee, literature, painting, mythology and metaphysical speculation. The geography is wide because the imagination is wide.

And perhaps the final paradox is that, despite this extraordinary variety, the works repeatedly return to the same fundamental idea: something is always in the process of becoming. Darkness becomes light. Mist becomes landscape. Stillness becomes movement. Violence becomes memory. Death becomes life. A photograph becomes music. A place becomes remembrance. An experience becomes art. The symphonic poems begin with things encountered in the world and they end by revealing the worlds that those things have created in music.

Dafydd Bullock

Dafydd Bullock was born in 1953 in Llanberis, Gwynedd, Cymru (Wales). A composer, conductor, arranger and teacher, he graduated in Music (University of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music, 1971 - 1976) where he studied with George Hadjinikos, and took a Master's Degree in International Relations (University of Sussex, 1981 - 1983). In 1993 and 1994 he won first prizes at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and in 1995 he was honoured in Wales by admission to the highest Order of the Gorsedd of Bards. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2005.

His compositions include 42 Symphonies, 19 Symphonic Poems, 2 Operas, 2 Requiems, 2 Mass settings, a Missa Brevis, an Oratorio, 44 String Quartets, 9 Trios and other chamber music and many songs and pieces for piano. He has written scores for 2 films.

Works have been published in the British Isles by Cwmni Gwynn, Curiad and Bardic Edition, in Belgium by Alain Van Kerckhoven Editeur, in the USA and in Luxembourg by Luxembourg Music Publishers, Music Enterprise and Double You. He has made 42 CDs to date, with SAIN (Wales), AVK (Belgium) and LakeSound. His music has been performed and broadcast in many countries, including Japan, China, Brazil and Colombia as well as widely within Europe.

Dafydd Bullock has a particular relationship with Prague: his Second Symphony was given its world premiere by Musici de Praga during the 1996 Prague Spring Festival and the Third Symphony, again in Prague, on St. Valentine's Day, 1997. The third and fourth String Quartets were also recorded in Prague (Becher Quartet) as were the complete works for Cello and Piano (Jindrich Ptacek) and five Trios. Virtuosi di Basso, the twelve solo celli of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra have recorded and performed music especially written for them. In 2008 and 2009 he premiered his Requiem for Jan Palach in Luxembourg and in Prague.

Website:
http://www.bullockmusic.info

Recordings::
http://soundcloud.com/dafydd-bullock

Downloads: https://dafyddbullock.bandcamp.com/

Scores:
http://stores.lulu.com/dolbadarn

Volume 2

Produced and written in dialogue with A. I.
First Edition, Senheim Germany, August 24th 2026

Copyright D. Bullock 2026. All Rights Reserved.