

## NIGEL CLARKE

In 1993, Nigel Clarke and I were working on the sketches for *Pernambuco*. The piece had grown from the initial blank page with which he had confronted me, and we were 'test-driving' various ways of using the instrument. He was puzzling out how to integrate or discard the extended techniques and extreme colours that he had developed for the work.

This is Nigel's favourite way of working; to confront his interpreters with ideas and fragments, to see how far the performer is willing to "push the envelope"; and he is more persistent with it, almost as an article of faith, than any other composer that I have encountered.

I was frustrated at my inability to immediately execute the dense chordal harmony that Nigel had presented me and stamped on the wooden floor of the room in which we were working in self-disgust. "How did you do that? How much of that can you do while you play? How can we make it louder-faster-more exciting? Can you stamp one rhythm and play another...?" Thus was the climax of this piece born.

Through this empirical method Clarke gets under the expressive skin of the instrument and player. He knows that if he can infiltrate the performing aesthetic of his collaborators, then he will have freedom to alter the perception of the instrument itself, and thus remould the whole package, performer and player into his ideal. The resulting works are always perfectly conceived for the instrument, without ever feeling that a musical goal has been smudged in the quest for technical expedience. This is, of course, very close to Hindemith's compositional technique. That composer experimented extensively with deriving passage-work from the convenient 'fall of the hand'. A glance over any of the chamber works written in the 1920's reveals this. Take for example, the especially brilliant solo writing in the finale of the "Fünf Stücke" for string orchestra written for the "Ploner Musiktage" concerts in 1924. The very stuff of much of Clarke's music, harmonically and melodically, is drawn from the hand-configurations, turns of phrase, colours, that the intended performer finds natural. Unlike Hindemith, this language is not related to the feel of the instrument for a composer performing his own music.

Talking with Nigel Clarke, one soon discovers that he identifies strongly with the virtuoso performer; his voice almost seems liberated by the transcendental technical approach. In fact he has said that he wonders if it is possible to express himself freely at all unless he is able to write for the instruments at the very precipice of technical collapse, and for interpreters who are happy to explore a certain emotional and expressive danger. This can cut two ways, as is intriguingly revealed in the language of *Premonitions*. This is the only work on this disc written for Nigel's original instrument, the trumpet. It is perhaps the most withdrawn, half-lit work recorded here; "...ancestral voices prophesying war", it

may be, but very much in the distance. A tremendous depth and range of expression is exploited by exploring the instrument's fragility and colouristic ambiguity in certain registers and articulations. This is very much held within limits; much said by silence and hesitation. In complete contrast, the white heat of *Solstice* seems to arrive at its expressive goals through what are apparently the opposite technical means; blistering runs, piled up dissonances, with the athleticism of the pianist at full stretch, but similarly revealing of this composer's particular lyricism. This restraint is complemented by the structural restraints that Clarke imposes on himself in his piece of scientific augury, *Spectroscope*. The succinctness and near classical shaping of this work lend it an extraordinary grace, which belies the many technical innovations.

This identification with the spirit of the performer can reveal itself in a charming, ingenuous way. Because of the extreme clarity of his harmony, a wrong note will show, and the performer is not, for instance, at liberty to submerge notes into a complex expressionist swirl. Such music is not improved by a welter of quarter-tones and random scurrying that some composers seem to be trying to access through extreme textual density and technical gaucheries. Clarke's approach is interestingly empowered. His response to a performer in this situation is to insist that they accept the "wrong" note that they are playing; I have seen him confront a player's resistance to the preservation of their own lacunae by changing the note in the score. He knows that the integrity of his language will only be enhanced if the performer is playing the notes that they feel; even if this involves a flexible approach to the text.

This approach may have its origins in the complex relationship that Clarke's music has with the aleatoric techniques of Lutoslawski and Penderecki, particularly the "box" system. Many of his earlier ensemble works, used this technique extensively; notably *Parnassus*, where the thirteen violently independent string lines manoeuvred into a kind of counterpoint using this system. Like many composers, he has gradually moved away from this method, but its legacy remains in his treatment of multiple lines. The two duo works on this collection give a number of clues to the remarkable degree of control that the understanding of this system has given this composer. The result is that the vertically coordinated passages in say *Chinese Puzzles* are full of the swagger and apparent freedom that the players would have had if they were playing floating "box"-notated figuration, but with the added edge of required co-ordination. This reciprocated by a certain tension in the free, 'senza misura' lines of, say, *Lindisfarme Stone*; any players working on the explosive floating passages in this piece soon come to an awareness that, yes, they do have liberty to play their lines independently of each other, but that there is most definitely an ideal version, which they have some how to divine. This ideal version is certainly not

represented by the vertical alignment of the music in the score, but rather implied contextually.

These factors are lent another layer of sophistication by Clarke's provocatively inconsistent use of titles. Are they keys to the works? Just to run through them, we have Lindisfarme Stone, alluding to the atmosphere of a Norse attack on the holy island in the Dark ages; Echo and Narcissus a representation of the Ovid Metamorphosis; Spectroscope, referring to the device for examining spectra revealed by different elements; Solstice, somehow hinting at some ritualistic associations of the title; Premonitions, a title which begs the question 'of what?': Pernambuco, which alludes to the 'primal violin' through the name of the source hardwood used to make violin bows, and finally, Chinese Puzzles. This last title is at once the most prone to mis-reading; it refers to the interlocking pieces of a three dimensional conundrum. This would seem to be the source for the structure of the piece, but gives no indication or clue to the savagery therein. In stark contrast, Lindisfarne Stone is actively helpful, for both listener and performer, in suggesting a performance style aimed at reproducing a certain dramatic context.

Perhaps there is a Magritte-esque game going on here. Do these titles misinform, enlighten, or merely manipulate the anticipation of the audience and interpreter. There can be no question that any player playing *Lindisfarme Stone* will be encouraged by its title to exaggerate the pictorial nature of the "frozen" coda by the implication of the title. However, one might ask who or what is to be learnt from the title *Spectroscope*? This tells the performer nothing about the execution of the work, and the listener nothing about what to listen for. It is, however, a window onto the composer's compositional process, perhaps the most intimate clue Clarke gives us as to his private working method.

The constant adjustment of "point of view" that we can observe in the titling of the works, can also be seen as paradigmatic of a similar variation in the music's nature, from Polemic, Prophecy, Monologue, Dialogue, Soliloquy, Dramatic Scene, from pure, abstract, writing to quasi-cinematic levels of depiction and representation. The music is enlivened by this constant shift of the mode of address; the listener is constantly left unsure of their level of intimacy or alienation from the message, which consequently can shock as much by its uncompromising directness as by its obliqueness.

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Nigel Clarke studied composition with Paul Patterson at the Royal Academy of Music, where he won many awards including the Queen's Commendation for Excellence, the Academy's top award. On completion of his studies, he spent a year as "Young Composer in Residence' at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts writing music for the dance and drama departments.

Back in the UK, Nigel has held a range of appointments including Associate Composer to YCAT (Young Concert Artists' Trust) from 1990 – 1992, Composition and Contemporary Music Tutor at the Royal Academy of Music from 1993 – 1996 and the post of Composer-in-Residence to the world-renowned Black Dyke Mills Band from 1994 to the present date. This latter association has led to a number of radio broadcasts. In 1996 he was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM). Nigel currently teaches composition at the London College of Music and Media.

In 1997 the US Cultural Attaché nominated Nigel for the International Visitor Programme sponsored by the United States Information Agency. Nigel toured the country experiencing different aspects of US culture including jazz, classical and Native American music. This tour culminated in a performance of his work "Samurai" by the 'Presidents Own' United States Marine Band conducted by Col. Timothy Foley.

Nigel Clarke's music is performed extensively both nationally and internationally, including concerts and broadcasts. In 1998 Nigel collaborated with Michael Csányi-Wills in composing the soundtrack to the film "Jinnah" released in August 1999.

Neil Heyde is the cellist of the Kreutzer Quartet and a lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, where his work focuses on the interface between performance, composition and analysis. As a soloist and chamber musician he has appeared throughout Europe, broadcasting for the BBC, WDR, ORF, Radio France, Netherlands Radio and many other networks. New Music is central to his work, and while he has commissioned and premiered many solo and chamber pieces he is also dedicated to performing and recording neglected areas of the repertoire. Important recent projects have been Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study II* for solo cello and electronics (1973-76) and the complete quartets of Michael Finnissy (MSV CD92011) and Roberto Gerhard (MSV CD92032) (both recorded for the first time). As a musicologist he has edited Faber's series of 19th century music for stringed instruments and piano, and he is currently completing an analytical study of Debussy's sonatas.

Tamami Honma was laureate of three international competitions prior to her arrival in the UK in 1996. She studied intensively with Byron Janis for four years in New York City at the Manhattan School of Music, and most recently graduated with LRAM and M Mus at the Royal Academy of Music. She has recorded solo and chamber works for commercial release. She is currently a Foundation Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music and began the Piano Literature Course there.

Tamami enjoys daring programming for her concerts, and has received awards such as the William Sterndale Bennett prize for her interpretation of Bach's Goldberg Variations. In the UK her music engagements have taken her to venues such as the Pump Room in Bath, Madingly Hall, Cambridge, and London's South Bank Centre as part of the 1999 Park Lane Group Composers' Symposium. Forthcoming engagements this year include Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, a piano duo tour of northern Europe, recitals in the US. Israel, and various concerts in Britain.

Philip Mead studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music in London, receiving numerous prizes and awards in addition to a distinction in his final performance examination. In 1978 he was a prize winner at the Gaudeamus Competition for Interpreters of Contemporary Music (Holland) and since then has become one of this country's leading contemporary music specialists. He has performed virtually the entire solo piano music of Messiaen at London's South Bank, given premieres of works by George Crumb and Stockhausen as well as many young composers. He has commissioned over forty new works, most recently from Jonathan Harvey, and has given many broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. He recently had his own BBC series called Keystrokes exploring some unlikely combinations in 20th-century piano music.

In the United States, he has been the Carlo Menotti Artist in Residence at the University of South Carolina, the Dee Fellow at the University of Utah and Pianist in Residence at the University of Texas. He has also been Pianist in Residence at several International Computer Music Conferences - Glasgow (1990), Tokyo (1993) and Aarhus in Denmark (1994) where he performed three contemporary concertos with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra.

1996 saw solo engagements in London, with a live broadcast at the BBC's Charles lives Festival at the Barbican and on the BBC's *Hear and Now* programme; further engagements at Salle Olivier Messiaen for French Radio; and in Berlin at the Academie Der Kunst. During the summer of 1996 he was resident at the Vitasaari Festival Festival in Finland, gave a live broadcast recital in the BBC Proms lunchtime series, joined the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Davis for a performance of lives' Fourth Symphony and later performed Cowell's Piano Concerto with the American Symphony Orchestra at the Lincoln Center. New York.

In recent years he has become particularly associated with the medium of piano and electronics and as one half of the group Montague/Mead Piano Plus has toured many countries, a fifth American tour having been undertaken in September 1996.

Philip Mead is Founder and Artistic Director of the British Contemporary Piano Competition, head of the Contemporary Piano Department at the London College of Music and Media, and a Director of the Society for the Promotion of New Music.

Peter Sheppard Skaerved has been closely associated with the music of Nigel Clarke for over a decadea collaboration that has resulted in "Parmassus" and "Permambuco". He has performed and lectured on 
Clarke's music in Europe and Asia. He is the dedicatee of over 200 works from other composers, including 
Michael Finnissy, Hans Werner Henze, David Matthews, Joerg Widmann, Elliott Schwartz, Dmitri 
Smirnov, Pavel Novak, John Woolrich and Sadie Harrison. He has appeared as soloist in Japan, Korea, 
Taiwan, the Ukraine, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey, Lebanon, Cyprus, Russia, Denmark, Belguim, 
Holland, France, Spain, Austria, Italy, the USA, Poland, playing a vast range of works from Bach to 
Helmut Lachenmann. Peter is also the leader of the Kreutzer Quartet and Ensemble Triolog, Munich. He 
is a professor and lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, and head of strings at the London College of 
Music and Media.

Janne Thomsen is described as a player of "limitless virtuosity" by the Allgemeine Zeitung, Mainz (Oct. 1997). She has appeared at many of the leading venues, including the Gasteig (Munich), Wigmore Hall (London), Tivoli (Copenhagen), Kioi Hall (Tokyo) and Salle Gaveau (Paris). In 1986 she became the Danish "Young Musician of the Year", the first of a whole string of successes at major competitions; others include 1st Prize in the Bayreuth "Pacem in Terris" Competition and the Valentino Bucchi Competition in

Janne has also been awarded the Danish Holstebro Prize, the Swiss Perrenoud Prize, the Jakob Gade Award and the Czech Music Foundation Prize. Her studies were undertaken at the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musicue in Paris.

Solo and chamber music appearances include the festivals of Aix en Provence in Montepulciano, Printemps des Arts in Monte Carlo, Dohnau-Altmühl, Nuovi Spazi Musicali in Rome, Sandor Vegh Festival, Canne Midem 97' and Montpellier Radio France, to name but a few. Janne has collaborated with, among others, the Salzburg Camerata, Danish Symphony Orchestra, Sumi Jo, Peter Schreier, Inga Nielsen, Maurice Bourgue and Hans Werner Henze. Janne's many recordings include the complete Mozart flute quartets and concert by Reinecke, Honegage and Nielsen.

James Watson, after studying at the Royal Academy of Music, was appointed Principal Trumpet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra by Rudolf Kemp. He held the same position with the London Sinfonietta and the Nash Ensemble. After five years with thr RPO he left to concentrate on playing solo and chamber music, notably leading the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. From 1983 to 1990 James was the Principal Trumpeter at the Royal Opera House. Covent Garden.

He returned to brass bands in 1987, more particularly to the Desford Colliery Brass Band - with whom he had played principal cornet during his early teens - and led them during four visits to the National Championships between 1987 and 1991. He then joined Black Dyke Mills Band, winning the Open in 1992 and 1995, achiving second place in 1993 and 1994 and winning the National Championships in April 1995. To date, James has commissioned five works for brass band from Nigel Clarke.

James is Professor of Trumpet and Head of Brass Ensembles at the Royal Academy of Music and in 1989 the Academy honoured him with a fellowship. More recently he has became an Honorary Fellow of the London College of Music and Media. He now divides his time between his very busy playing schedule, teaching, and his work with brass bands. He also plays with the London Symphony Orchestra and its Brass Ensemble.

In September 1996 he was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the National Youth Brass Band of Wales. In the same year he was also awarded the lles Medal by the Worshipful Company of Musicians

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- 2 Echo and Narcissus (1985) Flute: Janne Thomsen
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- - Cello: Neil Hevde 3 Recitativo
    - 4. Con Fuoco

  - 5. Largo
  - 6. Allegro Spiritoso
- Solstice (1991) Piano: Philip Mead
- Premonitions (1989)
  - Trumpet: James Watson
    - 8 Andante
    - 9. Adagio
    - 10. Allegro
- Pernambuco (1994) 11 Violin: Peter Sheppard Skærved
- Chinese Puzzles (1994)

Flute: Janne Thomsen / Piano: Tamami Honma



This recording was made in the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Loughton, Essex on 29 & 30 April 1998 (tracks 2, 3-6, 8-10 & 11), and the Conway Hall, London (tracks 1, 7 & 12) on 1 May 1998.

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