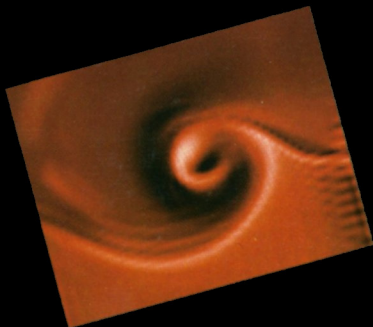


RICHARD EMSLEY

flowforms



METIER

## Music, Time and Timelessness

Is timelessness possible - or even, for that matter, intelligible? Time, both as one of the dimensions in which events are necessarily located and as the sense of passing ineluctably from past through present and into future, would appear to be a basic requirement, whether this be with regard to our 'inner' awareness or to the existence of what we take to be 'outer' reality. Imagine the most rudimentary form of awareness: *something* must be going on, and to go *on* requires time. Consider matter at its most rudimentary, that is, as the motion of subatomic particles: motion too requires time.

Nonetheless claims have been made for the reality of timelessness, and not only as a matter of religious belief, but as a logical possibility or even necessity: Kant, a highly influential thinker in this regard, considered space and time not to have independent existence but to be features of our own human sensibility, thus having no application in a subject-less view of the cosmos; and Einstein held that tensed time - time passing through a series of 'nows' - was not generally true, but 'true' only for an experiencing subject.

For scientists and philosophers such timelessness remains an abstraction within the domain of conceptual thought: since its rational status hinges upon its lying outside subject-dependent time, we can by definition have no direct experience of it. Music on the other hand, while admittedly having its material existence well and truly *in* time, and while certainly not making truth-claims after the fashion of science or philosophy, affords us a non-conceptual *experience* - bodily, sensual, emotional, imaginative, irrational - a frequent feature of which is precisely a 'sensing' of the timeless.

Any claim on behalf of music for some special contact with noumenal reality would indeed be extreme, and has only occasionally been made on rational grounds (by, for one, Schopenhauer). But, less extravagantly, we could at least acknowledge music's transcendence of prosaic, everyday time - time as experienced from the point of view of a single subject - in its unique ability briefly to recast the listener as a 'virtual' subject privileged with *multiple* points of view: it is typically those moments in music when a seemingly paradoxical combination of temporal 'opposites' occurs - persistence and change, movement and stillness - that a cancellation of single linear time is achieved.

## **Helter-Skelter (1981)**

Viewed close up the musical texture is a labyrinth of interwoven sound. But on standing back and viewing from a distance (listening 'long-term') a clear pattern emerges: each of the three instrumental parts is simply a series of long phrases, followed by a pause. This is no concerted effort however: the parts do not interact to produce a single narrative thread, but follow their own paths independently, their phrases de-synchronized, their mutual relationship one of cool indifference.

## **Flow Form (1987)**

A fluid, glistening material is contained within a rigid formal scheme. The scheme is: four equally-sized 'blocks' of sound separated by long pauses, each of these blocks consisting of three sub-sections, the latter all about 30 seconds long. At each division of this form the material's liquidity sees it 'overflow' into the next 'container'.

## **for piano 3 (1997)**

The coda of *Flow Form* provided the starting point for the later 'for piano' series. The hesitant, hyper-sensitive, fragile textures of these pieces open a space in which arbitrarily occurring points of musical 'ambiguity' are left to hang in the air, uncensored.

## **...from swerve of shore to bend of bay... (1985)**

The title's image of timelessly breaking waves is not the only thing borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: the form of that book collapses epic time into immediate time by having its hero dream the whole history of the world in a single night's sleep. This piece, as do other works of mine, explores precisely this kind of temporal double focus. But just as we frequently model time in spatial terms, so here time's manifold spans find a metaphor in over-spilling, internally rich 'waves' of sound.

## **finnissys fifty (1996)**

Not to be outdone by Joyce's punning title, mine refers both to the number of notes in the piece and to the occasion for which it was written.

## **for guitar 1 (1998)**

Written between pieces in the 'for piano' series, this piece has the guitar emulate the piano's pedal-down-throughout *lasciate vibrare*. As a solution to the problem of sounds stopping whenever the performer's fingers are lifted from a fret, all the sounds of the piece are produced as natural harmonics, these being sounds which ring on when the left hand is removed. As a natural extension of these sounds' deviation from equal-tempered tuning, three of the guitar's strings are microtonally de-tuned.

## **for piano 2 (1997)**

The quiet textures typical of the 'for piano' series are here alternated with loud aggregates which move steadily from unpredictability towards ossification.

## **The Juniper Tree (1981)**

Based on one of the goriest of the Grimm's fairy tales and originally written as music theatre for a shadow puppet play, this work aims at simultaneous awareness of a hyper-detailed surface with a monolithic architecture of overall stillness. If the piece *were* a building it would probably be accused of 'horizontalism' – in a deliberate homogeneity of structuring, everything from the material of the individual instruments and voice to large-scale form is generated in terms of 'parallel lines', that is, as infinitely flowing, concurrent streams of sound.

© 2002 Richard Emsley

## **The Music of Richard Emsley**

Much music could be said to 'state', to 'affirm', to provide bold utterances that reflect the supposed strength of personality of the composer, waving their sword in the direction of the riff-raff around them. Richard Emsley's work is quite unlike this; his music exists and interacts rather than affirms, more concerned with the creation of aesthetic and acoustic spaces than with some swaggering statement of presence. It is also a music that is both hyper-real and unreal: hyper-real in its expansion of types of connotative and even emotive gestures far beyond the context from which they might have previously emerged, unreal in the sense that it creates a form of listening experience consciously 'outside' the realms of everyday existence, in a way which I would describe as transcendental rather than escapist.

A musical culture such as that of Britain is remarkable both for the diversity of invention contained within, but also for the abject refusal to accept those parts of itself that fail to conform to easily digestible categories. Emsley's work does not easily fit into any pigeonhole, and he stands as one of the numerous remarkable composers working outside of the mainstream in Britain today. He has throughout his compositional career sought alternatives to the goal-oriented and manipulative tendencies that have characterized much music of recent centuries, seeking instead ways of creating sonic experiences in time which invite, but do not force, a listener to enter into contemplative modes of hearing and thinking. These modes serve to heighten and refine consciousness, rather than dull it through reiteration of the familiar.

The music on this disc is highly diverse, and represents a reasonably broad cross-section

of Emsley's work. Listeners should be struck by the immense stylistic divergence between the aloof world, always at a distance exceeding that of possible apprehension, of *Helter-Skelter*, and the charged, primeval force of *The Juniper Tree*, despite the fact that both pieces were written in the same year. Yet there are deeper similarities between these two supposedly dissimilar works: both show little in the way of motivic or thematic working and their implied dialectics; instead they present a type of continually mutating substance.

In the case of *The Juniper Tree*, this substance is almost plasmatic, and Emsley's ability to sustain tension, coherence and interest over its 20-odd minute span is remarkable. This work was written at the high-point of the pioneering London new music ensemble Suoraan, which Emsley co-founded and directed with composer James Clarke. This ensemble's path-breaking achievements centered around the super-human instrumental and vocal abilities of its members: flautist Nancy Ruffer, oboist Christopher Redgate, percussionist John Harrod, pianist Michael Finnissy and vocalist Josephine Nendick, all of whom significantly expanded the boundaries of instrumental technique and expression in a way which opened up many new possibilities for composers. The extended high-octane level of *The Juniper Tree* in some ways resembles other works of the period, such as Richard Barrett's *Coigium*, Michael Finnissy's Piano Concerto No. 4 and the works of Hans-Joachim Hespos, not to mention the oboe writing of Heinz Holliger, which Redgate pioneered in the UK.

A pivotal work, from which this disc takes its title, is the piano piece *Flow Form*, which represents within Emsley's output both the end of one period and beginning of another. In this piece, the type of intensely linear and omni-directional writing, with connotations of non-Western musics (in part related to Emsley's study of Zen), which are to be found somewhat in *Helter-Skelter*, are presented in the form of an extended piece entirely on a single line. This type of monophonic piano idiom had some precedents (for example in Finnissy's *English Country-Tunes*) but rarely in anything like this manner. The sparseness of the writing serves to focus the listener's attention more acutely on the finest details of pitch, rhythm and accentuation, revealing a plethora of intimacy and subtlety.

After *Flow Form*, Emsley had a near decade-long compositional hiatus, during which period he spent much time thinking through the implications of the much sparser writing of this work, the contradictions between his sense of composition as a process of discovery and the requirement for finished, closed-off, pieces, and the work of composers for whom he felt some affinity or admiration, such as Feldman, Nono and Scelsi. After years of compositional experimentation, it was with another piano piece, *finnissys fifty*, written for the 50th birthday of Michael Finnissy, that Emsley returned to the writing of completed

works. Since then there have been a wide range of other piano pieces, including *for piano* 2 & 3, which exemplify his new pared-down and ultra-refined idiom. Lines or pairs of lines are used to create forms of extended aphorism; a piece has a unity of purpose rather than a clear direction, and could be said to be a statement rather than a process. But Emsley also describes a quality of 'narrative' in the music:

*we use the word lyrical to suggest singing, but the term goes back to the Greeks' lyrical poetry, in which a story was told, without direct speech, but in song to the accompaniment of the lyre - a combination of narrative and music. In my pieces a sense of "line" may emerge additionally from there being a sense of "telling a story".*

The static nature and idiomatic unity of all of these pieces focusses one's attention on the minutest harmonic, rhythmic, registral and gestural details, and the inner qualities of individual notes, which in themselves are not at all static. The pieces clearly demarcate the space in which they operate, distinct from conventional musical expectations, perhaps 'on the other side of the mirror'. Some of the pieces are written in the form of a single line, though the wide tessitura creates a type of counterpoint between different groups of pitches in particular registers. 'Expressive' markings are wide and varied, ranging from the familiar *lyrico* and *cantabile* to *meccanico* or *dolce senza espressione*.

Since *finnissys fifty*, Emsley has continued with a long series of piano pieces (at present ranging up to *for piano* 18), which continue to expand and incorporate new ideas (for example a disjunction between physical action and seeming sonic result in *for piano* 10, so as to foreground the sound of the piano's mechanism). This body of work stands as an important achievement, I believe, whose conscious use of self-imposed constraints never ceases to heighten the music's urgency and depth.

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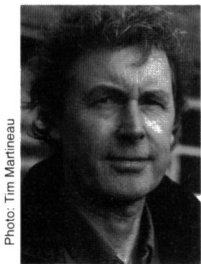


Photo: Tim Martineau

**Richard Emsley** was born in Goole, Yorkshire in 1951. He studied music at University College Cardiff, under Arnold Whittall; was a regular member of Peter Maxwell Davies' composition classes at the Dartington Summer School of Music; and, as a student, co-founded the Cardiff Composers' Ensemble. He later co-founded and co-directed, with composer James Clarke, the ground-breaking London new music ensemble Suoraan.

Emsley's works, largely for soloist or small ensemble, have been performed extensively in Britain, and more recently in Europe, Asia and the USA, and have been broadcast in Britain and Germany. He has fulfilled commissions for, among others, The Fires of London and the Inner London Education Authority, and has lectured on his work as a member of the Composers' Forum at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. Articles on his music have been published by Keith Potter (in *Classical Music*) and Richard Barrett (in *Tempo*).

In 1997 Emsley embarked on a (continuing) project of pieces for solo piano. These have been performed at festivals including Evenings of New Music Bratislava, Music Summit Cologne, ...antasten... Internationales Pianoforum Heilbronn, Mostly Modern Dublin and the 1999 and 2001 ISCM World Music Days by numerous pianists. <http://www.richardemsley.com>

**Bridget Carey** studied at the Royal Academy of Music and the University of London. Since 1987 she has developed a considerable reputation in the field of contemporary music, playing and recording regularly with many of London's ensembles. She appears on numerous Metier CDs both as soloist and as a member of the Kreutzer Quartet.

**Guy Cowley**, born in 1971, was an exhibitor at the Royal College of Music Junior Department where he studied clarinet with David Hamilton and Alexander Allen. He continued his studies at the RCM, as a scholar and major prize winner, with John McCaw, followed by Michael Collins, also E flat Clarinet with Richard West. Two Martin Musical Scholarships enabled him to study Classical Clarinet with Michael Harris.

Guy has an active interest in recent music, performing at many festivals including Aldeburgh, Soundpool, York, Sonorities, Bath and BBC Radio Three's 'Sounding the Century'. He has also worked with the London Sinfonietta, Nash Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Lontano, Reservoir and Topologies. Guy is a soloist on a CD of early works by Maxwell Davies (MSV CD92055).

**Clare Lesser** studied with Linda Hirst and Annette Meriweather. She has performed in Britain and Europe, specialising in twentieth-century and contemporary European repertoire. Future projects include a recording of Wolfgang Rihm song cycles with pianist David Lesser (MSV CD92068), and premieres of new pieces by Péter Koszeghy (in Berlin), Jan Van Landeghem, David Lesser and Iain Matheson. She is also currently undertaking post-graduate research on B.A. Zimmermann's opera *Die Soldaten*.

**Ian Pace's** international reputation as a pianist, particularly of new music, has taken him to most major festivals: Agora, Aldeburgh, Archipel, Ars Musica, Berlin Biennale, Cheltenham, Geneva, Graz, Huddersfield, IRCAM, MusiCA Strasbourg, MusikProtocol, Warsaw Autumn, Wien Modern. He has given world premieres of well over 100 solo works by composers including Julian Anderson, Richard Barrett, James Dillon, Pascal Dusapin, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy, Christopher Fox, Volker Heyn, Gerhard Stäbler, Jay Allan Yim and Walter Zimmermann. He also performs most of the standard piano literature, combining a study of performance practice issues and aesthetics with a modernist perspective to produce radical and searching interpretations. <http://www.ianpace.com>

**Christopher Redgate** studied at Chetham's School of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, where he won a number of prizes for chamber and solo performance and represented the college in a number of concerto performances. After leaving the Academy he won several major international prizes, developing an international reputation as an interpreter of contemporary music. He has also taught at the International New Music Course in Darmstadt.

His special interest has been in expanding the bounds of 'traditional' oboe technique, an exploration that includes 19th-century virtuosic music as well as many experiments in extended techniques. A number of composers have written works for him, including Michael Finnissy (recorded on MSV CD92050), James Clarke and Roger Redgate.

**Nancy Ruffer** was born in Detroit, received a Masters from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and received a Fulbright-Hays Scholarship in 1976 to study at the Royal Academy of Music. She has remained in London working as a freelance flautist specialising in contemporary music. Composers who have

written for her include Michael Finnissy, Chris Dench, John White and Christopher Fox. In 1984 she was awarded the Kranichsteiner Prize for Performance at Darmstadt, and she has recently been elected as an Associate of The Royal Academy of Music. Nancy is principal flute of the ensembles Music Projects/London, Matrix, the Almeida Ensemble, Topologies and Apartment House, as well as performing with ensembles of the Royal National Theatre. As well as recording regularly for the BBC and performing widely throughout the world, she has also recorded a solo CD on Metier, due end 2002 (MSV CD92063).

**Betsy Taylor** graduated from the RNCM in 1994, having won several prizes and been a finalist in the Pierre Fournier Award, at the Wigmore Hall. In 1996 she was awarded her debut BBC Radio 3 recital as a finalist in the network's Young Artists Forum series.

Betsy has been Principal Cello for the Brunel Ensemble and a frequent soloist in the UK and the USA. In January 2000 she became Assistant Principal Cello of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and has since toured to the Slovak Republic, Austria, Croatia and Spain. She has appeared as Principal Cello with the RSNO, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, London Soloists Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. She recently took up a staff post at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. She plays a 1770 Joseph Hill cello.

The guitarist **Alan Thomas** was born in Atlanta, and completed his studies at Indiana University and the University of California at San Diego. Now based in London, he is much in demand as a recitalist and concerto soloist in music ranging from the Renaissance to the present day, but has been particularly dedicated to contemporary music and the exploration of new sonic resources of the guitar. He has given world premieres of over forty works, and in 1997 became the only guitarist ever to win first prize in the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition. Alan has performed extensively throughout the UK, Europe, USA and Asia, and has been a featured soloist at many leading international festivals. Alan also appears as soloist on a CD of music by Alwynne Pritchard (MSV CD92040).

**Mikel Toms** read music at Oxford University, where he was President of the first Oxford Contemporary Music Festival, conducting a complete performance of Messiaen's *Des Canyons Aux Étoiles* at the age of 20. Since 1993, Mikel has been Artistic Director of the ensemble Reservoir with whom he has performed, recorded and broadcast a wide range of contemporary repertoire, including UK premieres of works by Iannis Xenakis, Frank Zappa, Vinko Globokar and Richard Barrett.

Mikel has conducted many leading orchestras and ensembles including the Ensemble Modern, Elision, Topologies, Ensemble Corrente, Apartment House, the Kazakhstan State Symphony Orchestra, the Oxford Contemporary Music Festival Ensemble and the Grup Instrumental de Valencia. He has also recently directed Topologies on a CD of music by Michael Finnissy for Metier (MSV CD92050). Mikel has broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Italian, German, Spanish, Kazakh and Irish radio and has appeared at festivals in Berlin, Darmstadt, Innsbruck, Huddersfield, Belfast, Sligo, Almaty and Valencia.

Born in Yorkshire, **Julian Warburton** studied percussion at Huddersfield University with Chris Bradley. After graduating with first class honours he continued his studies with David Corkhill, Michael Skinner and Richard Benjafield at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. In 1996 he was selected for representation by YCAT, the first percussionist in YCAT's history. As a recitalist, Julian has played at the Proms, Huddersfield and Flanders festivals, at the Wigmore Hall, and throughout the world, from Brazil to India. As an ensemble member, he has played with the London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Endymion, Nash, Topologies and the Composers Ensemble. He broadcasts widely and has recorded works by Finnissy and Fitch for Metier in addition to the present disc.





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# flowforms

music by

## RICHARD EMSLEY

performed by

## TOPOLOGIES



- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 1. | <b>Helter-Skelter</b>  | 13:06 |
|    | <i>Nancy Ruffier flute Julian Warburton vibraphone Ian Pace piano Mikel Toms conductor</i>   |       |
| 2. | <b>Flow Form</b>   | 6:33  |
|    | <i>Ian Pace piano</i>  |       |
| 3. | <b>for piano 3</b>   | 3:12  |
|    | <i>Ian Pace piano</i>  |       |
| 4. | <b>...from swerve of shore to bend of bay...</b>   | 12:26 |
|    | <i>Nancy Ruffier alto flute / piccolo Guy Cowley E flat and bass clarinets Julian Warburton percussion<br/>Ian Pace piano Bridget Carey viola Betsy Taylor cello Mikel Toms conductor</i>        |       |
| 5. | <b>finnissys fifty</b>   | 1:48  |
|    | <i>Ian Pace piano</i>  |       |
| 6. | <b>for guitar 1</b>  | 7:09  |
|    | <i>Alan Thomas guitar</i>  |       |
| 7. | <b>for piano 2</b>   | 8:26  |
|    | <i>Ian Pace piano</i>  |       |
| 8. | <b>The Juniper Tree</b>  | 22:43 |
|    | <i>Clare Lesser soprano Nancy Ruffier flute / piccolo / alto flute Christopher Redgate oboe / oboe d'amore / cor anglais<br/>Julian Warburton percussion Ian Pace piano Mikel Toms conductor</i> |       |

**Total Time 75:29**



This recording was made in the Big School, Christ's Hospital, Horsham on 29 May 2000 ( tracks 2, 3, 5 & 7),  
29 August 2000 (track 6), 22 October 2000 (track 1), 23 October 2000 (track 4),  
and in Vestry Hall, London on 10 December 2000 (track 8)  
Recording Producer / Balance Engineer / Digital Editor: David Lefeber  
Booklet design and layout: David Lefeber Cover design: Richard Emsley and John Johnson  
<http://www.metierrecords.co.uk>

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MSV CD92044

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