

Katharine Norman



Philip Mead - piano

Transparent things

METIER

1 Transparent things

Cold Light, 6.a.m.

Still, Clear (for VRM)

Frozen Edge

Long Causeway

(performed without a break)

2 Bells and Gargoyles (soundscape)**3 Trying to translate****4 High Force****5 In the stream** (soundscape)**6 Fuga Interna (I-Opposed Sonorities)**

Although I spend much of my time working with computers, using them as an instrument to sculpt timbres and forms from the huge variety of sound around us, the piano was my first instrument, and still seems to offer boundless possibilities. Perhaps the solo piano piece and the digital soundscape share an ability to convey an unflinching intensity, an intimacy that draws the listener 'inside' the timbres of sounds, and the nuances of experience.

The four pieces which make up the work *Transparent things* each explore the idea of looking through a surface towards something less tangible, and more resonant. The title comes from a novel by Nabokov, and in particular a passage where he talks of the way objects - stones, heaths, ground - each have their own history, and offer more than their outward appearance. This and my long walks on and around Stanage Edge, in the Peak District of Derbyshire, inspired me to write pieces that come from memories of specific times and places, without being overtly programmatic. They are about the feeling of time and place, and the stillness of just being - perhaps they are a musical analogy for that growing clarity of mind than can arise during a solitary walk, when there is time to reflect, to remember and to get thoughts and dreams into focus.

Bells and Gargoyles is also about walking alone in the same area, but this time in a disturbing, slightly gothic nightscape, where the air seems full of chattering spirits, and outer reality becomes confused with imagined worlds. There is an ancient church, at the top of a steep hill. Strange gargoyles jut out from the roof, infiltrating the night with their mysterious, disturbing presence, and bells mark the passing of time. Most of the sounds are from recordings collected late on a stormy night in the Derbyshire village of Hathersage (which Charlotte Bronte incorporated in *Jane Eyre* as 'Morton').

Trying to translate is the only piece here that combines solo piano with electronic forces - both live and recorded tape. There are no piano sounds on the tape part; instead the piano sound is processed live, at times becoming detuned and somewhat similar to the timbres of Gaelic psalm-singing. Piano and tape inhabit the same world, but differently. The tape explores some speech which is itself about issues of translation; a speaker describes the problems of translating from Gaelic to English, and also the way that Gaelic music, in particular psalm-singing, has declined over the past century. I was struck by the beauty of her voice, and the emotion behind her meaning. I also share her sorrow that these old ways of making and sharing music about, and for, everyday life seem to be disappearing, and we are perhaps no longer able to translate their relevance and deceptive simplicity into the music that we write today.

High Force is the name of a waterfall in County Durham, surrounded by impressive pine trees and dark, rock walls, that have an almost cathedral-like presence. The water falls straight down, headlong for about 70 feet, and lands in a turbulent, surging pool, coloured by the surrounding peat and granite. It is difficult not to become mesmerized by the great mass of water which seems at once changeless and constantly changing. After a while the granite and the water seem to merge as one. I tried to express this sensation of relentlessness and turbulent motion, and the erosion of one, apparently unyielding, element by another, more fluid, idea.

In the stream was composed immediately after *High Force*, and is very much a continuation of the same concerns. The piece opens with a long sequence of

loud thuds - made from a cross-synthesized mix of vocal syllables and water sounds - that gradually dissipate and make way for a more flowing texture in which the sounds of water are tuned to clear pitches. The piece ends with an extended passage in which the patterns of water are integrated with longer vowel sounds. There are no synthetic sounds, but the fragmentary sources are processed a great deal, and are virtually always intertwined or presented simultaneously.

Fuga Interna (I - Opposed Sonorities) is the first in a series of pieces that explore listening as internal flight. Each piece is inspired by Bach's fugue in B minor from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. *Fuga interna*, or 'internal flight', could also be translated as 'interior escape' or 'inner fugue'. This piece is really my attempt to convey what it feels like, for me, to play and listen to this wonderful fugue and, like the other pieces in this series, it obsesses over specific moments in the original work - some are recognizable, some are hidden inside the sound.

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Transparent things (1995) was commissioned for Stephen Gutman, with funds provided by a Holst Award. It was first performed at Sheffield University.

Bells and Gargoyles (1996) was created in my home studio, on a NeXT computer with a bit of Macintosh mixing. Both this piece and *In the Stream* used Cmix, a software package written by Paul Lansky.

Trying to translate (1992) was commissioned by the Montague/Mead duo with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and was first performed, by them, at the ICA, London. The speech is from a Radio 3 *Soundings* documentary and is used by kind permission of the BBC.

High Force (1988, revised 1997) was commissioned by Steven Neugarten and first performed at the first British Contemporary Piano Competition (set up and directed by Philip Mead). A special thanks to Barnes Music Engraving who set the score.

In the stream (1990) was created on Winnie, a Microvax computer, at Princeton University. Long may she rest in peace.

Fuga Interna (I-Opposed sonorities) (1997) was commissioned by Stephen Gutman, with Arts Council funding, for The Debussy Studies Project and first performed at the Purcell Room, London.

Katharine Norman studied at the universities of Bristol and Princeton, the latter with Paul Lansky in computer music and composition, and completed her Ph.D. in composition in 1993. She is currently a senior lecturer at Goldsmiths College, University of London, where she is Director of the Stanley Glasser Electronic Music Studios.

She composes instrumental music, music combining instruments or voices and tape, and purely electronic work. Her music, for both tape and instruments and for purely digital media, frequently makes use of 'documentary sound' – conversation, city sounds, birds – in a way that perhaps invites new appreciation of the 'real world', and the concert hall.

Recent works include *Trilling Wire*, for clarinet and tape, widely performed and reaching the finals of the Russolo International Composition Competition; *Icarus*, a Sonic Arts Network commission for voices and tape, selected for performance at the 1995 World Music Days; *Transparent things*, a Holst Award commission for pianist Stephen Gutman; *Leonardo's Lists*, for the Bristol-based multimedia ensemble, Elektrodome; *Fuga Interna (II - Sequence)* for the Dublin-based ensemble, Concorde and *[b] contained* for the Galway Arts Festival.

Her cd of electroacoustic music and soundscape composition, *London*, is available on the NMC label. Other music is recorded on the Innova, Empreintes Digitales and Discus labels.

Further information on Katharine Norman's music, as well as scores and information on recordings, can be obtained from the British Music Information Centre.
<http://www.bmic.co.uk/newvoices/>

Her audiovisual work 'Making Place' which is a supplement to the Metier album 'Miniaturised Concertos' (MSV 77205) is available as a digital download at :
<https://divineartrecords.com/recording/miniaturised-concertos/>

Philip Mead studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music and became an international prizewinner in contemporary piano music. He has since given recitals all over the world and performed with many orchestras including the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Proms, the American Symphony Orchestra at the Lincoln Center, New York, and the Aarhus Symphony in Denmark.

A frequent broadcaster on BBC Radio Three, in 1996 he had his own series called *Keystrokes*. He has recently been involved in CD projects to record works of Jonathan Harvey and the complete solo piano works of Charles Ives.

He has commissioned over fifty new works, many for the medium of piano and electronics. During the last two years he has become very interested in the medium of piano and brass and has commissioned leading composers to write for various combinations of their forces.

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.



Also by Philip Mead:

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Transparent things

music for piano, tape and electronics by

Katharine Norman

Philip Mead - piano

1	Transparent things (1995)	19:16
2	Bells and Gargoyles (1996)	14:35
3	Trying to translate (1992)	14:42
4	High Force (1988, revised 1997)	12:02
5	In the stream (1990)	13:04
6	Fuga Interna (I-Opposed sonorities) (1997)	5:57
	Total	79:39

This recording was made in the studio of Goldsmiths College, London on 15-16 July 2000.

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