

EDWARD COWIE (b.1943)

1	Clarinet Concerto No. 2 (1979-80)	22:14
	Alan Hacker, clarinet	

2 Concerto for Orchestra (1981-82) 22:23

Total playing time 44:38

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA conducted by HOWARD WILLIAMS

Both works are published by United Music Publishing Ltd Recorded at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool on 2 November 1983 (Concerto for Orchestra) and on 29 January 1984 (Clarinet Concerto No. 2) Recording Engineer: "Mr Bear" (Mike Clements) Producer: Andrew Keener

Cover image: "Ocean Harmony" by Heather Cowie Originally released on LP by Hyperion (A 66120) Remastered 2020 by Paul Baily (ReSound UK)

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34 YEARS ON...

In 1984 I found myself the lucky recipient of the first Granada Composer-Conductor Award with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. It was a grand opportunity not only to work intimately with a great orchestra, but also to have a gigantic sound-colour-pallete to experiment with! I'll never forget the warmth and generous support of that orchestra and its administration. At the age of 41 as I was then, it'd be natural to assume that I knew how to write for a large symphony orchestra. But then, as now, opportunities to hear a new work performed by one were not frequent.

The early 80s saw a crisis in my music. Trained by a great teacher and composer, Alexander Goehr (to whom the Concerto for Orchestra is dedicated), I was thoroughly grounded (I should say 'aground'), in twelve-tone music and the propensity for structural complexity that seemed to be the 'right' pre-requisites to be a paid-up member of what was then called the avant garde. But by 1981, I was feeling that the 'price' was too high. Prior to that time, I wavered between an instinctual feel for making new music and one filtered through thought-inducted systems. Somehow, I felt, my most self-conscious music was a betrayal of the musical dreams and fancies I had about a music that I knew had to be inspired by the forces of nature.

It so happens that between 1976 and 1984, I had taken to sailing in a big way. Living as I was then, in south Cumbria, I also had plenty of access to the ocean; estuaries; rivers and lakes. Water became an ever-enlarging domain for sensual responses to nature-inaction. Sailing is perhaps one of the few earth-bound activities where you can see, feel and hear nature in its most diverse 'moods' and states: with the possible exception of tornados and hurricanes! In any case, I certainly experienced the ocean off and around the Western Isles of Scotland in all its encyclopaedic extremes of calm, order and tempestuous chaos.

In 1983, I first approached Barrie Gavin, an eminent arts documentary film-maker, with an idea I had to make a film about Leonardo da Vinci. This would look at the multiple facets of Leonardo's interests and activities – or at least four of the main ones – and try to illustrate what a prophet he was in his own time. This would include contemporary film of modern machinery, missile-launches and submarines juxtaposed with Leonardo's

original sketches and drawings of such things. It took almost 3 years to get the film made by BBC2 TV, but as it was progressing, I decided to couple my ongoing experiences with the open sea with **studies in the movement of water** – just as Leonardo had done.

But I'd also come directly into contact with the John Ruskin of the Lake District. Famous for his prodigious and often brilliant writings on the visual arts, *Modern Painters* especially, Ruskin lived for a while in a big house he bought close to Coniston Water. The English Lakes were to be an inspiration to several great painters — none greater than JMW Turner — and writers: Wordsworth especially. I visited that great and often ominous lake many times, observing and drawing and notating its constantly shifting and mutating atmospheres. It wasn't hard to feel the kind of emotional dramas that the mentally-ill Ruskin did. Wind, clouds, and rain can hurl you down into a spiral of fear and anxiety and yet just as suddenly change to opalescent sunshine and mirror-calms that lift, soothe and pacify.

How do I feel, hearing these works again more than 30 years after they were recorded?

Several things of course. The first is how wonderfully they are played. I remember the conductor, Howard Williams, coming to stay with me in my then home in south Cumbria and taking him walks along the edge of Morecambe Bay — even being able to witness one of the famous (and dangerous) tidal bores that surge into the Bay from the Irish Sea beyond. This was unprecedented for me: a busy and highly gifted conductor coming to visit me and sharing the actual experiences of the natural events that had shaped the 2 works he was going to record. I feel sure that this first-hand experience of my inspirational habitats together with hours spent with me in my studio looking-at and talking about my visual/sonic processes gave him an extra 'charge' in communicating to the orchestra what I intended the effect of the music to be.

Those were times when symphony orchestras were still voicing their alarm, dismay, confusion and sometimes disgust and anger at the kind of 'new music' they were being expected to perform! My relationship with the RLPO was friendly and close right from the start. Their 'corporate imagination' was infectious and produced spectacular results like the ones on this recording. But I'd also like to remember and homage the fantastic and sometimes fantastical Alan Hacker, the soloist in the Clarinet Concerto.

I met Alan when I was 19 years old and still a University student and without any of the 'plumage' of a real composer. Hacker was **the** by-word for contemporary clarinet playing. He was a fanatic for finding new ways to play the instrument and that included new ways of breathing (he learned entirely new techniques after a blood clot left him paralysed from the waist down), and new fingerings and lip-techniques to generate things like chords or very high notes. Alan may have been the first clarinettist to go into the upper-atmospheres! I can't resist sharing a little, but I imagine typical, Alan Hacker anecdote. Here's the brief Hacker/Cowie vignette!

...phone rings at 1220 at night....the composer is in bed and was asleep...

EC: Hello?

AH: Hi Ed! Alan here. Listen I'm very excited.

EC: ...deep sigh...

AH: I just got back from my Turkey trip and I was in a market in Istanbul and found this amazing glass clarinet mouthpiece. (sounds of an incredible nasal series of squeaks, chords, glissandos and other 'special' effects!)......what do you think?

EC: Unbelievable Alan!.....long pause....more deep breathing....

AH: Right, I'll let you get back to your work then....see you.....(phone disconnects)

At the time of the première of the concerto in 1981 with the then BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra, several other great players took it up, but I have to say that I still feel Alan (for whom I wrote the concerto specially and the work is dedicated to him), played it with a totally unique sense of colour and purpose. I'm sorry it's taken so long to bring out on CD and digital formats, but I thank Hyperion for releasing it to Stephen Sutton of Métier / Divine Art. Stephen's ongoing commitment to my music means that I can look forward to a lot more of my music being out there.

But to have these two 'water-studies' released like this is nothing short of pure pleasure. My feelings about the music here are that by the time they were completed, I had fully realised where my inspirational roots and routes lay ... Nature is my Creative Crucible.

Edward Cowie South Cumbria, UK March 2020.



Edward Cowie working on the Concerto for Orchestra, 1982 Sketch by John Eveleigh

The Composer

'Considered by many to be the greatest living composer directly inspired by the Natural World'

Edward Cowie's first Prom commission was Leviathan — a large scale orchestral work premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1975. It marked the first major event in a career that was to gain him national and international recognition for a new kind of 'voice' in the music world. Its title, arising from a conjunction between the mighty whale and a book by Hobbs with the same name can be seen as a signal of a composer whose imagination is deeply embedded in and inspired by the forces of nature. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, a stream of works inspired by wild places on this planet flowed into being, works like his sumptuous Gesangbuch (1975/6), (just released on Signum Classics), the American Symphony (1984), Mount Keira Duets (1985), and his powerful Choral Symphony, 'Symphonies of Rain, Steam and Speed'. This immersion in the study of nature was born of a childhood spent in rural Suffolk and the Cotswolds and continues to form the core of his fertile imagination today.

But two further strands underpin and inspire Cowie's musical practice and ideas. His undergraduate studies in Physics and practical studies in Painting have been integrated into a kind of 'fusion-world' of ideas where science, the visual arts and music coalesce in a kind of creative continuum. In recent years, he has increasingly worked towards his music by means of 'field studies', theoretical research and painting-drawing. Studies and collaborations with leading physicists, for example, have not only seen exhibitions of his pre-compositional drawings, but have added a body of new music that directly translates scriptific theory and experiment into music. His monumental solo piano series Rutherford's Lights was inspired by a study of the relationships between theories of light and colour, and his more recent Particle Partita for solo violin — with a sonic time-line of the history of particle physics.

These 'fusions' of disciplines, the bridges between study and practice are an essential part of the composer's quest for new ways of forming. Parallels can be found between the linear and pointillist textures, forms, and motifs in his music with the writings and paintings of Klee and Kandinsky. During his period as first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers (2002-5), Cowie produced a string of large and small-scale pieces that moved through landscapes and natural habitats all over the world. Gaia, INhabitAT, Lyre Bird Motet, and Bell Bird Motet are classic examples of a music that engages all of the senses with a profound respect for the power that nature has to move us.

Cowie was the first Granada Composer/Conductor with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra between 1982/4. This led to many conducting dates with other orchestras including the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra; the BBC Singers, ABC symphony orchestras of Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and Tasmania and the Seymour Group and the Australia Ensemble. He was the first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers between 2003/5 and first Artist in Residence with The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for the same period. His work for television has included a major film on Edward Lear for Granada TV and his acclaimed BBC2 TV film Leonardo of 1986. He has also written and presented major radio series commissioned by ABC FM Australia as well as for BBC Radio 3 and 4.

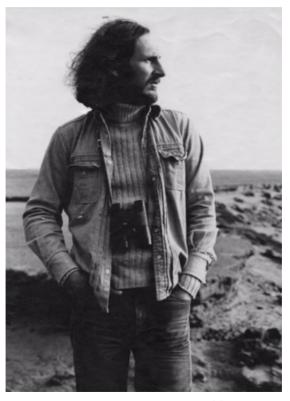
Major public lectures include the Gertrude Langer Memorial Lectures in Australia, and the Kate Springett Memorial Lecture in London as well as a Ruskin Lecture at Oxford. He has been invited to give keynote lectures and recitals all over the world. As a visual artist he has had over 40 one-man shows in important galleries in the UK, Germany, USA, Australia and New Zealand and his paintings and drawings are in public and private collections in 19 countries.

Other musical honours have included a Gulbenkian Award to study at The Royal Ballet; The Radcliffe International Composer's Prize and a Chopin Fellowship to study with Lutoslawski in Poland. Cowie acknowledges Alexander Goehr as a major influence (as Cowie's professor and teacher) on his life and work- an acknowledgement that continues in a warm and ongoing friendship.

As an academic, Cowie has held major professorships in two Australian and one British University as well as Visiting Professorships in Germany and the USA. He has two doctorates- a PhD which includes studies in physics, mathematics, music and fine arts and was awarded the first Doctorate in Music (DMus) from the University of Southampton for his work as a composer. He was awarded a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for inspirational visits to Africa and California, both leading to major compositional outcomes concerned with bringing music to the world that 'warns of the dangers to the wild and living world through the continuing destruction of it at the hands of humanity'.

Cowie's reputation continues to grow world-wide, and new CDs emerge with high praise and appreciation. His collaborations with major soloists and chamber groups are also enlarging and deepening. He still regards the human voice and the chamber-music mediums as the 'the most fabulously rich and varied palette of possibility in the expression of emotion and sensation'.

He lives and works – harder than ever – in south Cumbria with his visual artist wife, Heather Cowie.



The composer at Morecambe Bay in 1985 $_{\textit{photo}} \circledcirc \textit{BBC}$

A short note from the conductor

My memories of the recording of the Concerto for Orchestra in particular are very happy ones. Thanks to thorough preparation, the Proms performance had gone particularly well and we were in a good position to lay it down on disc. Two crucial musicians had to be replaced, though; if I remember rightly, Peter Donohoe had played the piano part at the prom but was unavailable for the recording, for which I think the part was brilliantly taken over by Martin Roscoe. The principal oboist was also unavailable and so I suggested Quentin Poole, with whom I'd been working often in London. Quentin made a distinguished contribution to the recording.

Howard Williams



At the recording session for the Clarinet Concerto photo © Schott & Co

Edward Cowie's music on Métier



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The composer at his home in Cumbria