

Composer's Note

In Tempore Stellae, Symphony No 1

Andrew Schultz

In Tempore Stellae is in three movements - the first, 'Ground of Heaven' draws on texts from *The Book of Job*, Ovid's account of creation in the *Metamorphoses*, Charles Messier's numbered list of nebulous and celestial objects (published in 1771) and their common names in contemporary use. The Ovid text emerges out of a cloud of astronomical and numerical mysteries in the work's opening and the impersonal tone and vast richness of the Ovid text is interrupted by the personal and painful existential world of Job.

The second movement, 'Earth Cantos', is made up of three, linked duets for the solo sopranos surrounded by a haze of female voices. The first canto is based on a Geisha song about night and ascent; the second sets part of David Malouf's superbly playful and erotic "Crab Feast"; the third is based on a Chinese text which again plays on images of food and sex. The cantos are linked by very brief incantatory passages, drawn partly from Job, about the struggle to make ("clods of earth cohere").

In the third movement, 'Mysteries of Flight', the millennial question of the choir's opening passage and the terrible and solitary fear embodied in the work's closing passage for sopranos and off-stage trumpets (again from Job) flank an excerpt from Hart Crane's text, "Cape Hatteras". In language of incredible visceral energy and momentum Crane depicts the Wright brothers maiden flight from the beach at Cape Hatteras with its twin promises of flight and destruction, exhilaration and despair.

The sound world of the Symphony has, the choir at its centre with massive choral attacks supported by the brass; slow sustained passages amidst a haze of strings and voices; inexorable, deep, quiet throbbing sounds; whispered and muttered vocal undercurrents often supported by orchestral percussion (especially cymbals and Chinese gongs); and rhythmic pulsing textures that stretch out from a central note. The sopranos are most often heard in duet - their parts overlapping and intertwined as if in constant sung and whispered dialogue with each other, the choir and the listener.

The idea for *In Tempore Stellae* first came during a visit to York Minster in 1986 and especially from the astronomical clock in the North transept. The clock is a memorial to locally based aviators of the Commonwealth who died in the second world war. Its complex design shows an aviator's view of the northern night sky and presents the passing of time calculated from the stars so that seasons and years seem small and hours and minutes minuscule by comparison. The implications are stark: the duality of the inspiring vastness of space and time against the frail but grim determination of human aspirations. So it was a strange synchronicity that found me walking around York Minster in August 1998 having just finished the last movement of *In Tempore Stellae* and with the words and music of the movement still jostling in my mind.

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