

About the title: During the composition of this music, I became engrossed in Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*, a pretty fair and well-documented record of the English convict system and its place in the founding of the colony. There I came across the story of Alexander Maconochie. Amongst the sometimes careless, sometimes deliberate brutality of the System, his contribution as commandant of Norfolk Island, between two of its blackest periods, stands out as a brief flickering of what we would like to call humanity. The System got rid of him and his attempt at penal reform before any lasting damage could be done to it, but in a short time he did manage to create a space in which some of his charges were able to rediscover their dignity and spirit. The account of one day in particular stood out in my mind- soon after his arrival, Maconochie declared a holiday to celebrate the Queen's birthday. From dawn till sunset the prisoners were free to be alone, to be with friends, to roam the island, swim, eat and drink (food and rum provided at the commandant's expense), sing, dance, act plays- people who only weeks before would have been given the lash for singing, whose food was thrown to them as to pigs-. There's no "programmatic" significance to any of this music, not even *Von himmel hoch*, it's just that the characters of the Norfolk Island colony on that day began to inhabit "my" dance as though they had always been there- the people, the creatures of the island as well as its trees, shrubs, rocks, hills, bays,- all dancing their way from dawn till dusk on the day Maconochie opened the great gates of the prison compounds.

To the players: This is essentially inconsequential music- it's not going anywhere, nothing becomes something else: everything *is* everything else, the hymn has always been there (nothing "religious" this, but a wild tune played by the breeze on the beach at evening): so there are no transitions, no mergings, no nice rallentandi or crescendi etc. The unity of the piece is best achieved if each individual section, phrase, segment, is played with a feeling for its own shape, its own texture. Make the most of contrast. Leap across dynamic changes, cut through phrases. The metric characterisation is fundamental as are the pulse relationships- in fact there is only one pulse in the whole piece with many rhythmical variations flowing through it. When long durations are contrasted with short durations, feel the semiquavers inside the semibreves- and, if you can, feel the semibreves around the quavers.