

empty sky, mootwingee

for flute, tenor trombone, cello
two percussion players (vibraphone, marimba and glockenspiel)
two pianos

Commissioned by FLEDERMAN with funds
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Mootwingee- an outcrop of rocky hills in the plains of western New South Wales. In its gorges lie the only permanent water holes in one of the hottest and driest areas in the state. It was, and I trust still is, a site sacred to aborigines. In October 1984, when I first came to know the place, it was enjoying a period of brilliant flowering, following on from recent heavy rains. It was also a period of intense activity among the birds of the area, and their songs echoing through the hills; in the hour before sunrise brought to life one of the most beautiful soundscapes I have ever heard- corellas, galahs, rufous whistlers, grey shrike thrushes, grey butcherbirds, magpies, and all dominated by the pipings and fanfares of the spiny-cheeked honeyeaters.

This piece of music is not intended to be either descriptive or evocative of the place; it was simply conceived there in its stillness. The "empty sky" is nothing but an added resonance to the title.

A very quiet ring of chords played by piano 2 precedes the first of three arches of a long slow tune which is shared between the instruments of the ensemble. Between the first and second arch is a brief episode played by piano 2 and the marimba. After the second arch piano 2 returns to the opening ring of chords and all the other instruments- except piano 1- explore their own areas of the episode. The entry of piano 1 brings the ensemble together again for the final arch of melody.

The piece is just over 20 minutes long. It is dedicated to the memory of my mother who died suddenly and peacefully as I began to work on it.