

To Bee Tuan, Daphne & Chung Shi.

*Drumming on the leaves,
drumming on the river
drumming on the metal roof—
I am the cloud
sweeping across the bay,
I am the wind.*

In the Oriental Museum at Durham, there is a beautiful pewter rain drum from Thailand. On several occasions, I've happily imagined what this drum and its fellows (for, originally, it would have been one of a set) could have sounded like when played by the rain in the course of one of the quieter monsoon storms. While I was teaching at Durham University, this moved me to compose a framework for improvisation with my students. I always intended to come back to some of these ideas and through compose them within a tighter framework. Many years later, I was reminded of the rain drum piece while composing the percussion parts which structure the choruses in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*. By happy chance, the invitation from Synergy to compose a work for four percussion players coincided with my resolve to finally realise the idea.

Each player has three medium-sized, open tabors which are played with hands or wooden sticks. The drums should not suggest a definite pitch, but apart from this they can be of the players' choice as long as they are individually characteristic, and at the same time capable of blending with one another. There are many beautiful ethnic drums which come into this category. In the last bars of the piece, players 1, 2 & 3 need to create quiet, distant trills. According to the actual drums used, these could be played with light sticks, fingers or wire brushes etc.

The drummers should place themselves far apart—possibly surrounding the audience—as long as they are able to maintain synchronicity with one another.

The piece is structured as an elaborately worked-out fugue, hence the subtitle, *Ricercar*. At its heart is the fugue subject and the rhythmic transformations (modulations) which shape its course. The semiquavers remain constant throughout the work until the last two bars. A feeling for the metre is essential in order that the accents are heard as syncopations.

Rain drums was commissioned by Synergy with the assistance of funds provided by Australia Council.

Duration 11'15".