

Reflections after the first rehearsal leading up to the confirmation event (with Julie's marginal notes included)

It the 21st May and I'm sitting here at my desk – it's a quarter to three in the afternoon. I'm about to do some editing of the score of My Sister's Tears and it seems most appropriate in the process that I've been going through at looking at the work from its original thought and creation all the way through, that I should reflect what happened in the very first rehearsal of the work this morning.

There are a few things that stand out given the first rehearsal. One is a simple technical thing -, that a number of players did have trouble with the key that it was in despite the fact that they are more advanced players and more comparable and adept, but there were those that did have trouble with the key - particularly the brass players I noticed had trouble with the key not so much wrong fingerings, but just not being aware of the key they were in so used to not playing in such a sharp key. Some of the saxophones wailed a little at times I think but mainly, particularly, the trumpets were obviously a problem. A couple of editing problems and that sits in comfortably with the consideration of the technical things.

The next thing that stands out is a technical thing to an extent as well. There is one chordal structure that I just am very unhappy with so I've actually, in this editing, even before I've gone on the tape, I've gone in an edited that chord - it was just after section F – I'll find it and refer back to the original manuscript – anybody stupid enough that would want to - it is 6 bars after F and the bar before G, the chord on the first beat of the 6th bar and in fact the chord on the 3rd beat of the 2nd bar before G - I just don't like that chordal progression so I'm going to go with unisons on there and then move into the A major chord and then onto the F# major chord in one instance and into a D major chord in the other.

So that is another technical consideration. Are there any others that come to mind? I don't think so.....I just didn't like that harmonic structure – well I can go back further and I can say that the phrase that happens three bars after B is maybe a little quaint – the chordal structure that leads into there – but it is almost Methodist-hymn like. So I'm comfortable with how that sits and what follows after that, the then resolution of that chord to produce a perfect cadence in the dominant is comfortable as well.

I like, or really like, or am comfortable or whatever the rest of the things. As far as instrumentation goes I'm very, very pleased with the outcome. I think that the sounds that I wanted are 99 per cent here. The sound of the bowed vibraphone to begin gives it a gorgeous, not mystical, but ethereal – no that is a hackneyed word as well – I think it is a transparent sound – a shimmering sound but it is transparent - there is a lovely sheen to the sound that is quite transparent which I am very pleased with and of course that opening idea comes back in the middle of the piece at K and then comes back and gets overlaid – bits of it get overlaid at the end - without the vibraphone so much but lots of melismatic woodwinds which are lovely. It speaks again at E – I really like it – I love the

bassoon that plays the solo - I love the rushing of the woodwinds - I am very pleased with that.

Now to go to more personal things and less tangible things. Two reactions which I found quite heartening and both unexpected. The first one was the students' reaction. A couple of boof-heads in the band you'd expect to react as they would – especially the lads because I think young men are embarrassed by any sense of emotion and so I was not surprised that there was some inconsistency in the way they might have reacted. But in the main, the ensemble reacted wonderfully in their endeavour to realize the piece. Sight reading - so the first thing is that they are frightened and somewhat taken aback by the situation. Second thing, the key. Third thing especially for the woodwinds seeing the opening with all the blackness of the demisemiquavers – that's again a preconditioned response – if it is black it is hard, if it is hard I'm going to make a fool of myself so I'll pull back. But they gave it a good go and it was lovely to see when they would play and it wouldn't work quite as well as they would like they were disappointed and I think it is because I told them a couple of weeks ago what the piece was but today I didn't say anything – we just played it and I think that they were trying to play as well as they could because they knew what the piece meant and I'll tell them more on Monday and I'll actually design a survey for them to complete as well.

But yes it was lovely to have their reaction to that and following that was the reaction of Julie that she liked what she had heard – and she is quite a severe critic and almost needs to be convinced of a new work a couple of times or more before she'll say whether she likes it or not and generally she comes to like my music - but she was taken by it. It would be easy, and I think somewhat dismissive to say that she was taken by it because it was about Heather and because of the emotional connection with me I think more that she was taken by it because it was unexpected, it was a way of speaking which was somewhat unexpected from me. (NO, I WOULDN'T AGREE WITH THAT – THIS PIECE, THOUGH DIFFERENT TO YOUR OTHERS HAS A DISTINCT HULTGREN TAG – SO VERY 'BRIGHT SUNLIT MORNING' – ABSOLUTELY EMOTIVE, AN ALONENESS IN THE SOUND, MAYBE A QUIET PEACE THROUGHOUT. MAYBE THE TWO PIECES EVOKED SIMILAR EMOTIONS FROM YOU. AT THE TIME, SEPT 11 WAS AN ENORMOUS PERSONAL TRAGEDY. SIMILARLY, NOVEMBER 5TH AN ENORMOUS PERSONAL TRAGEDY - this is Julie's interpolation here – my transcription wizard!).

So that is the position I find myself in with regard to this piece at the present. I guess I should say some of my personal feelings as well. I reflected on them just a little bit before. I sense it tells the story comfortably the way I want, and this is a degree of objectivity, this is the conductor role that I am speaking from now, the music does dance at the beginning, it shimmers, it's light, it's not the Muse of the Dance or Terpsichore or anything like that, but it floats and it shimmers and it is like my little sister was when she was a little girl – just a cute gorgeous little thing who had a degree of pretence that went through her life but it is just a lovely innocent opening and that is exactly what it should be.

The hymns and chorales that go through are reflective of my nature and reflective of my mother who was so incredibly close to Heather, and her ever growing belief in God. I think also the comfortable triadic thing, the gentle lower tenor baritone sound of the melodic line, I think it is in a comfortable range to be appreciated by the listener and so underneath it, when you orchestrate chords that go underneath it and the way you use the different timbres that you can use there you can produce a deeply textured richness in the sound and the ensemble – lovely bass players, tubas and double basses and good bassoons and good baritone saxes and bass clarinet and euphoniums and trombones and the richness of the sound that can come is just terrific.

One personal reflection that comes back to the composer, right at the end between L and N there are chords that are spoken over and over and it is almost the reverse of Wagner's Rhine Journey. It is a D major chord reiterated over and over whereas his was a C major over and over to begin with and mine's got to end with. But there's.... and one could almost say, an emptiness in the last note because it is obvious on D. I almost think – because it goes to nothing – I almost think that if I harmonized that I would be being quite foolish - it wouldn't tell the truth.

Final note. I think that the work is more uplifting than one would have expected given the narrative that it speaks. It is going to be difficult once I get into rehearsing it on Monday a little more once I've got a little more control of the notes how I'll respond. That will be something else I can respond to in this sort of way.