Jolyon Laycock

An Entangled Bank

A setting for 8 part choir *a capella* of the closing paragraph of "On the Origin of Species" Charles Darwin (1859)

An Entangled Bank - Programme note:

An Entangled Bank is part of "The Creation Project", a planned collection of settings for choir, instrumental ensemble and orchestra of texts that trace the story of scientific and cosmological discoveries of the past 600 years selected from the visionary writings of men and women of science who contributed to the advance of knowledge and understanding.

The Creation Project was prompted by my growing sense of incongruity when taking part in performances of Haydn's *Creation*. Much as I admire Haydn's great oratorio from a musical point of view, I can no longer take seriously a work which celebrates the now discredited biblical version of the creation of the world in seven days by an all-knowing and all-powerful god.

Haydn of course knew no better. The Creation was published and first performed in 1798 at a time when the true age of the Earth was unknown and it was still possible to accept the biblical time-scale. Yet doubts were already beginning to arise and only a year after the work's publication the English geologist William Smith published his first geological map of Somerset. This was followed in 1815 by his geological map of the whole of England, Wales and Scotland, often called "the map that changed the world". Smith's hypothesis concerning the process of deposition of rock strata over many thousands of years of geological time seriously challenged the traditional estimate of 4004BC for the date of the creation based on a form of dead reckoning deduced from the biblical narrative and put forward in 1664 by Bishop James Ussher in *Annales Veteris Testamenti*. Until Smith came along even Newton's Principia Mathematica which, in 1687, had described so accurately the mechanics of the heliocentric universe, contained nothing that would have contradicted Ussher's biblical time scale. We can therefore readily accept that Haydn would have believed implicitly in the biblical account of the creation, regarding it as the word of God communicated to man by divine inspiration.

Haydn's "Creation", based on extracts from the Book of Genesis, the Psalms and extracts from Milton's "Paradise Lost", was a celebration of the world as the composer knew it within the limitations of scientific and cosmological knowledge of his time. It is a joyful expression of awe and wonder in the face of its manifest beauty. We now know that the universe is vastly greater in extent and longevity, and contains many more remarkable and beautiful phenomena than Haydn or Milton could possibly have imagined. Therefore our awe and wonder should surely increase in proportion, even though it no longer seems possible to direct our admiration at a self-aware creator who has the capacity to receive and reward our praise and adoration.

Darwin's great work On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life, published in 1859, would not have been possible without the foundations of geological theory as laid down by the pioneering work of William Smith and others. Smith paved the way for Darwin's theory by showing that the earth had existed for at least several hundred million years, enough time for natural selection to take place. We now know that the history of life extends back billions of years.

The text for An Entangled Bank is taken from the final paragraph of Darwin's book as it appears in the first edition. His concluding paragraph is a remarkably concise summary of the theory of evolution. It contains a passionate and visionary statement deliberately avoiding any reference to the intervention of a divine creator: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one;" In later editions he was persuaded under pressure to modify the sentence by a small but significant insertion "...having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one;"

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Music: Jolyon Laycock Text: Charles Darwin

Notes:

Sections in free time bars 14 & 15:

The overall durations of these passages are at the conductors discretion.

Musical material in boxes is to be repeated freely until a signal to stop is given by the conductor. Individual singers should not try to keep in time with each other during these passages.

Sections in free time at bars 20, 22 and 25:

The conductor should give the signal to stop when all singers have reached the final sustained note. Individual singers should not try to keep in time with each other during these passages.

Ouasi recitative bars 48-52:

The musical impression is of a chaos of voices rising to a climax at the start of bar 52. Individual voices repeat material in boxes without trying to keep in time with each other. Overall duration of bars 48-51 is at the conductor's discretion.

Bar 51 in particular may be extended to a greater extent than the preceding bars.

The duration of bar 52 is determined by a single performance of the material in soprano I. The whole passage is unified by sustained notes which emerge from the texture as a widely spaced

chord.

Breath at bar 65:

An extended exhalation of breath by all singers with rise and fall of dynamic.

Section in free time bar 78:

This passage may be extended at the discretion of the conductor.

After the initial antiphonal statement at bar 77, individual singers use the 4 notes given as material for free improvisation on the vowel "O" interspersed with occasional repetitions of the word "evolved", dieing away to silence.

An Entangled Bank was written for New Bristol Voices, conductor Steven Kings.

Jolyon Laycock Woollard, January 2013

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An Entangled Bank - text

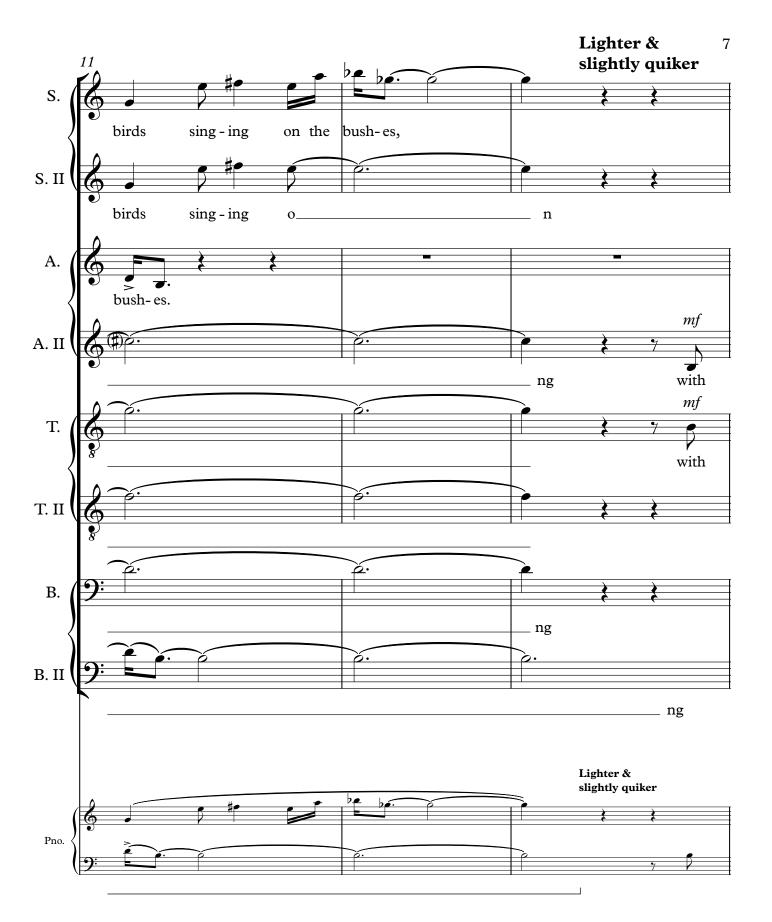
It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life and, as a consequence, to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

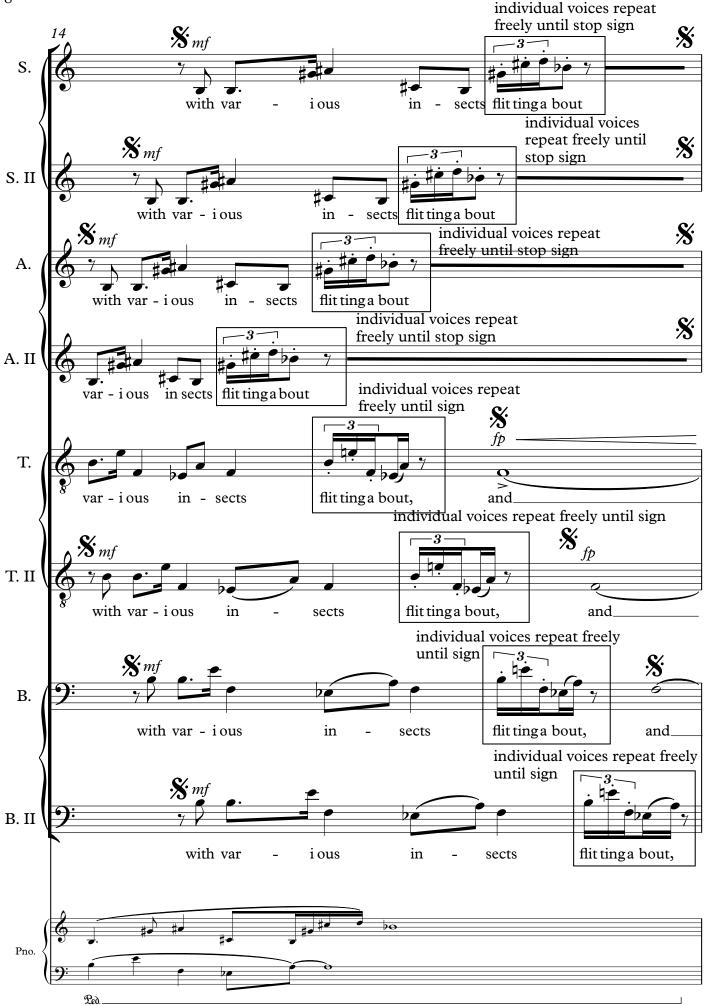
Concluding remarks from "Recapitulation and Conclusion" Chapter XIV of "The Origin of Species" – Charles Darwin (1859)

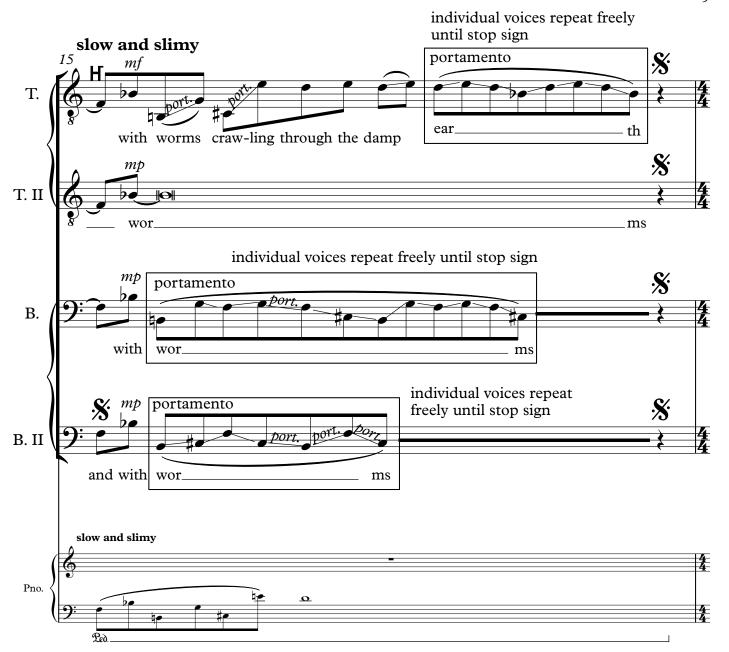
An Entangled Bank













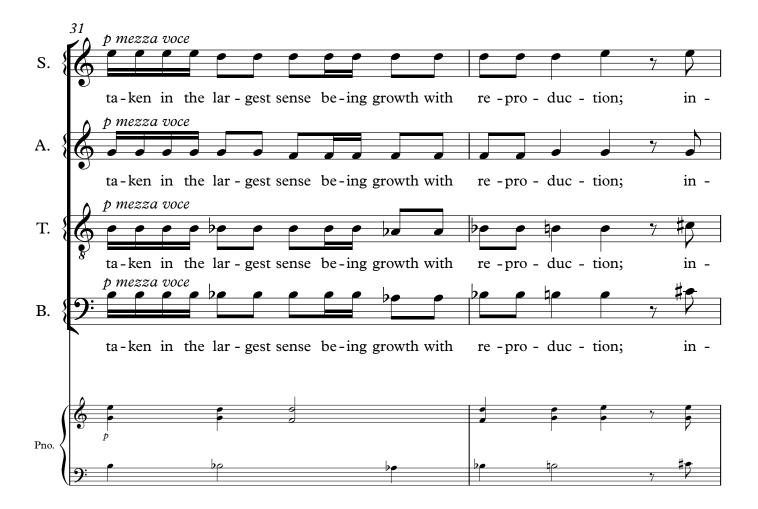










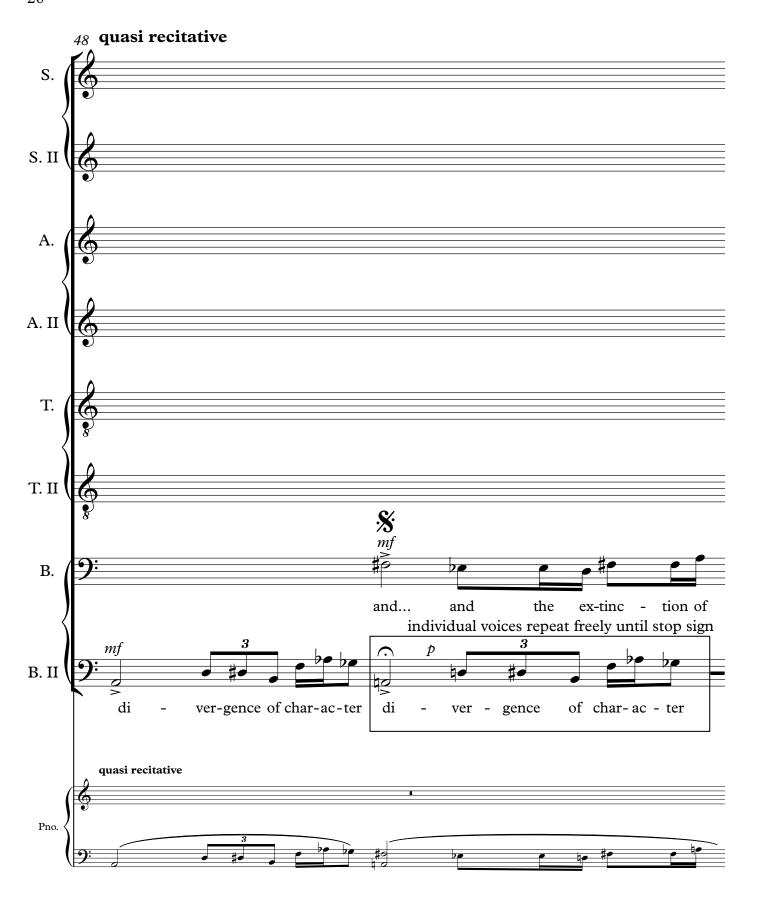


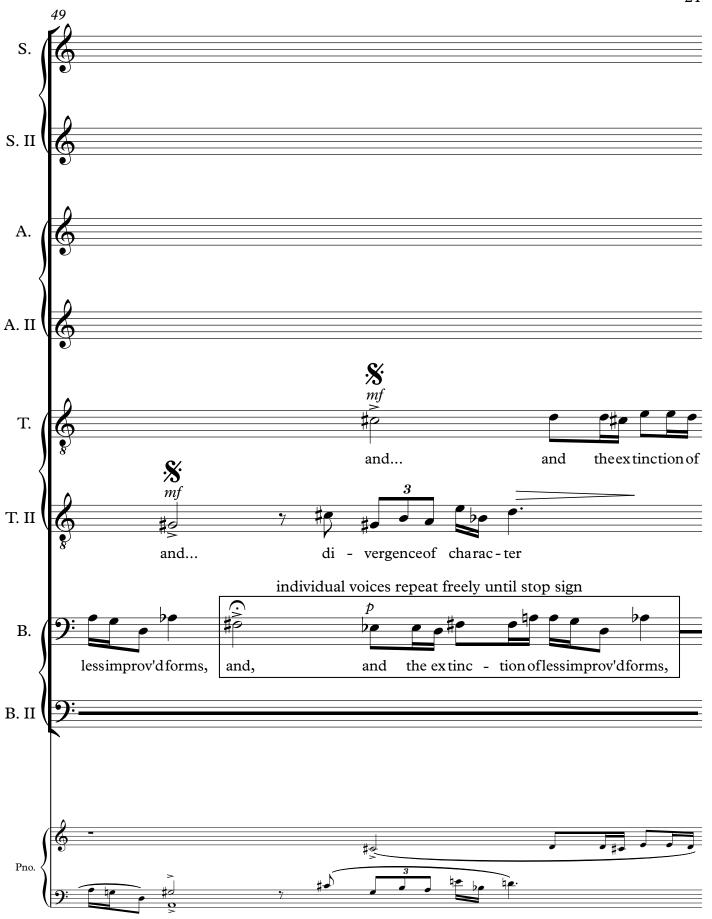


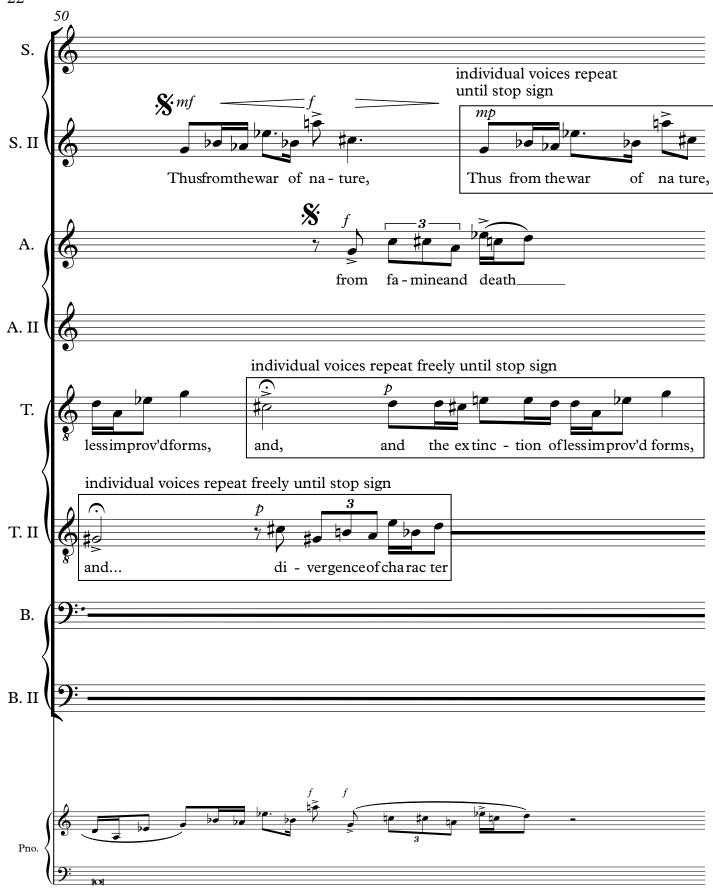




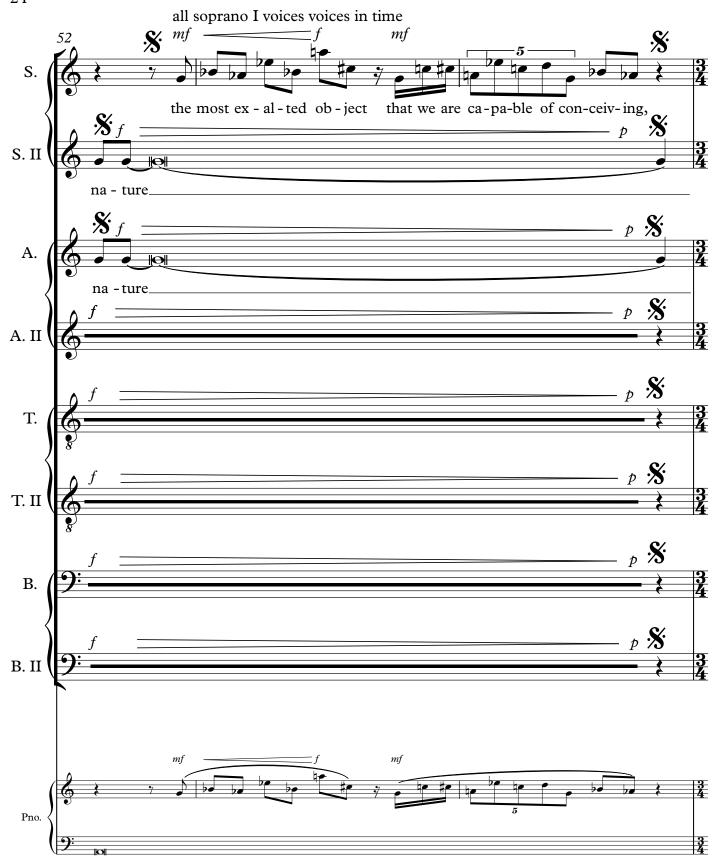








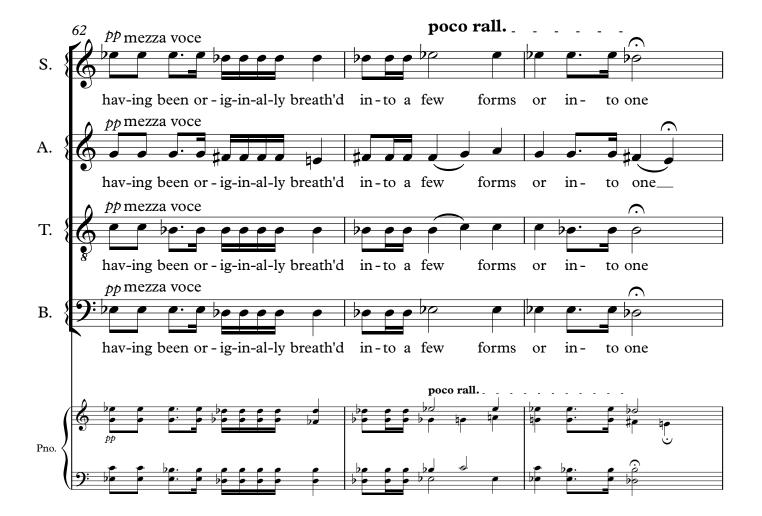










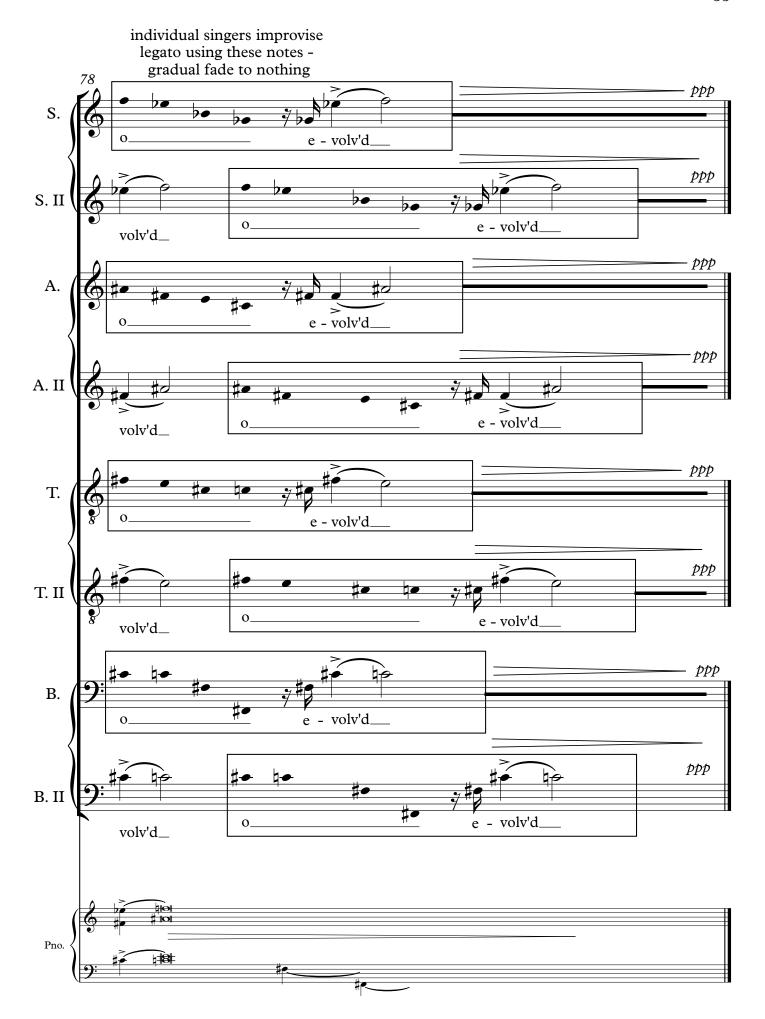












Music by Jolyon Laycock

Four Times Four for 16 actors/dancers/singers with electronics (1971)

Locations I, II, III, and IV - sound sculptures (1970 rev. 1973)

Lattice - for 12 solo strings and electronics (1972 - Commissioned by the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham)

Pluramusic - electronic sound installation (1972-1977)

This Could Happen to You - participatory audio-visual installation (1974-1976)

Tyrannos - 12 audio-visual cycles on the myth of Oedipus (unfinished) - Earth Cycle, Moon Cycle, Uranus Cycle, Pluto Cycle, and Equinox Cycle first performed 1977

Bladud - a wordscape with music - commissioned by Bathampton Primary School (1985)

Woden's Dyke - music-theatre for school and community performance based on the story of the Anglo-Saxon chieftain Ceawlin of Wessex. Commissioned by Wansdyke Arts Council (1987).

Hetty Pegler - music theatre piece commissioned by Prema Arts Centre, Uley, Gloucestershire (1988) *High Wood* - solo oboe (1988)

In Bruton Town - Fantasia of a Somerset folk song for string orchestra (1988)

Seven Stars - Community opera based on Thomas Clarkson's investigations into the Bristol slave trade in 1787. Bristol City Commission.(1994)

A Dream of Flying - for clarinet, horn, bassoon, string trio, double bass and piano (1995).

Eadgar Cyning - settings for soloists, choir and orchestra in the original language of three poems from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle about the coronation and death of King Edgar at Bath. (1996).

Un Tiento Rasguado (homage to Joaquin Rodrigo) junior competition test piece for the Bath International Guitar Festival 1996.

Sinfonietta for String Orchestra (1998) - revised and re-issued as Tetraktis (2014)

Mengjiang Weeping at the Wall - Music-theatre piece for soprano, choir, small ensemble, Chinese instruments and junior school children; Commissioned by the Corsham Festival (2002).

Die! A-One Sparrow for piano duet (2002)

Among Seven Hills Sinfonia Concertante for piano and orchestra (2009)

12 Landscape Studies for piano (1996-2010)

12 River Preludes for piano (2011)

6 Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay for mezzo soprano and piano (2011)

3 Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins for tenor or high baritone and piano (2012)

String Quartet (2012)

An Entangled Bank - A setting for 8 part a cappella choir of the final paragraph of The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin (2013).

Cantilena for solo cello and open score ensemble (2013)

Clarion Call for solo bass clarinet and open score ensemble (2014)

Dark Seas - 5 poems of Philip Larkin for coloratura soprano, clarinet and piano (2014)

The Swan - after Camille Saint-Saëns for cello and two pianos (2014)

Orbium Cælestium - Cantata for mixed chorus, soloists and orchestra on a text by Nicholaus Copernicus

Trilithon for orchestra (begun 1968 – completed & revised 2015)

The Persistence of Memory - sonata for violin and piano after Salvador Dali and Phiolip Larkin (2016)

Three Shakespeare Sonnets for tenor or high baritone and piano (2016)

Latham Variations for oboe and piano (2017)

Mountains of the Mind 12 poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins for tenor or high baritone and piano (2018)

Theoretical writings:

A Changing Role for the Composer in Society

A Study of the Historical Background and Current Methodologies of Creative Music-Making

Peter Lang, European Academic Publishers, Switzerland (2005) http://www.peterlang.com/all/index.cfm

All Interval Fractal Sets - a technical explanation - http://www.jolyonlaycock.uk/theoretical-writings

Poetry:

To Tolverne - a Riddle A poem inspired by the D-day museum at Tolverne, Cornwall (2001)

Berliner Schnauze A collection of poems in the form of an entertainment in words and music inspired by a visit to Berlin ten years after the fall of the Berlin wall (1999).

A Mendip Ploughing Match at Priddy and other Mendip poems

Estrildis operatic libretto in verse on a story from Geoffrey of Monmouth The History of the Kings of Britain.

Polonaise of Chopin declamation with piano accompaniment (2015)

For more details visit: http://www.jolyonlaycock.uk/