

GEORGE BENJAMIN

A MIND OF WINTER

A setting of Wallace Stevens' poem 'The Snow Man'
for soprano and orchestra

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FABER *f* MUSIC

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First published in 1982 by Faber Music Ltd
3 Queen Square London WC1N 3AU
Music drawn by Christopher Hinkins
Cover design by M&S Tucker
Printed in England
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ISBN 0 571 51162 7

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A Mind of Winter was written for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra
and the 1981 Aldeburgh Festival. It was first performed by
Teresa Cahill, soprano, and The Scottish Chamber Orchestra
conducted by Jerzy Maksymiuk on 26 June 1981 at The Maltings, Snape,
as part of the 34th Aldeburgh Festival.

A Mind of Winter is recorded by Penelope Walmsley-Clark,
soprano, and the London Sinfonietta conducted by the composer
on Nimbus CD NI 5075

Duration: 9 minutes

Orchestral parts are available on hire from the publishers

PROGRAMME NOTE

A Mind of Winter is a setting of 'The Snow Man' by the American poet Wallace Stevens. A contemporary of Eliot and Pound, he lived most of his life in New England, and it is only in recent years that his true stature as a poet has been widely acclaimed.

Two things immediately appealed to me about 'The Snow Man' – the abundance of beautiful winter imagery within its compact frame, and the deep ambiguity of its meaning. In this setting, the frozen, snow-covered terrain is depicted by an immobile four-part A minor chord on muted strings; suspended cymbals and multidivided string glissandi portray icy gusts of wind. Various individual aspects of the scene are suggested by other instruments – a solo oboe, woodwind in groups of two or three players, two lyrical horns. At the centre of the landscape stands the solitary Snow Man – a muted piccolo trumpet – around whom the soprano weaves slow, angular phrases whilst beholding 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is'.

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The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,
Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place
For the listener who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

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ORCHESTRA

2 Piccolos (doubling 2 flutes)

Oboe

Cor anglais (doubling oboe 2)

2 Clarinets in Bb

2 Bassoons

2 Horns in F

2 Trumpets

1: piccolo trumpet in D (with harmon mute)

2: trumpet in C (with straight mute)

Percussion (one player)

3 suspended cymbals

1: small ordinary cymbal

2: medium sizzle cymbal (nailed)

3: medium-large ordinary cymbal

2 triangles (small & very small)

1 small side drum

Strings: 6 6 4 4 2

N.B. Both doublebasses with 5 strings, not C extensions

♯ = 1/4 tone sharp

♭ = 1/4 tone flat

All transposing instruments are written in C

NOTES ON PERFORMANCE

A clear vocal sonority, without too much vibrato, is preferred. The singer must pay special attention to the dynamics.

In the multidivided glissando writing for the strings, either *sul ponticello* and *non vibrato* (e.g. page 1) or in harmonics (e.g. page 11) there should be a downbow on the highest point of each crescendo (see examples on pages 1 and 3).

In some passages where the length of the notated diminuendos in the cymbal part exceeds the natural resonating time of the cymbals (e.g. page 3), subtle, imperceptible strokes should be added to sustain a progressive diminuendo (to silence) over the full notated duration. This will sometimes be found to be unnecessary, and must in any case not be applied to the final entries after figure Q.

A MIND OF WINTER

GEORGE BENJAMIN

Icy and Mysterious (Slow, but always flexible) ♩ = c.66

4/4 (SILENCE) 2/4

with very soft sticks
pppp
possibile *mp*

4/4 (SILENCE) 2/4

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pppp* *gliss.* *p* *mf* *pp*

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pppp* *gliss.* *mf*

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pppp* *gliss.* *mf*

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pp* *gliss.* *mf* *p*

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pp* *gliss.* *mf* *p*

sul pont., non vib. *V* *pp* *gliss.* *mf* *p*

con sord. *ppp*

sempre poco vib., bow freely *ppp* con sord.

(senza sord.) *ppp*

sempre poco vib., bow freely (senza sord.) *ppp*

1 2
Piccolos

Oboe

Cor Anglais

1 2
Clarinets

1 2
Bassoons

1 2
Horns

Piccolo Trumpet
Trumpet

1 2 3
Suspended Cymbals

Voice

1 2
Ist Violins

3 4
2nd Violins

1 2
Violas

3 4

1 2
Cellos

3 4

1 2
Double Basses

Picc. 1 2

2/4 3/4 4/4

Cym. 1 2 3

pppp

2/4 3/4 4/4

Vln. I 1 2 3 4 5 6

(sul pont., non vib.) V pppp

Vln. II 1 2 3 4 5 6

(sul pont., non vib.) V pppp

(sul pont., non vib.) pppp

Vla. (con sord.) 1 2 3 4

p ma sonore

Vc. 1 2 3 4

p ma sonore

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A

Picc. 1
2

(Soli) *pppp* *f* *p* *mf*

pppp *f* *p* *mf*

3/4 4/4

Cym. 1
2
3

mf *poco a poco*

Vln. I 1
2
3
4
5
6

(sul pont., non vib.) *ppp* *f* *sim.*

(sul pont., non vib.) *pppp* *f* *sim.*

f *sim.*

3/4 4/4

Vln. II 1
2
3
4
5
6

f *sim.*

f *sim.*

p *f* *sim.*

Vla. (con sord.) 1
2
3
4

p sempre

Vc. 1
2
3
4

p sempre

* Cymbals: see notes on performance.

Picc. 1 *p* *f* 5 7 *pp*

Picc. 2 *p* *f* 5 7 *pp*

Ob. Solo *pp* espressivo *f* *pppp* *gliss.* *f*

2/4 4/4

Cym. 1 2 3 *pppp* non cresc. poco a poco

Vln. I 1 2 3 4 *pppp* sempre sul pont., non vib. *pppp*

Vln. I 5 6 sempre sul pont., non vib. *pppp*

Vln. II 1 2 sempre sul pont., non vib. *pppp* *mf*

Vln. II 3 4 sempre sul pont., non vib. *pppp*

Vln. II 5 6 sempre sul pont., non vib. *pppp*

Vla. (con sord.) 1 2 3 4

Vc. 1 2 3 4

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B

Picc. 1 2
f *pppp* *mf* *molto* *ppp*

Ob.
mf *staccatiss.* *ff* *pp* *pp*

C.A.
Soli leggiero *mf legato, espress.* *mf* *p*

Bsn. 1 2
mf legato, espress. *mf* *p*

Cym. 1 2 3
p *mp* *pppp*

Vin. I 1 2 3 4 5 6
con sord., arco nat. e vib. *pppp* *p legato* *pp*
con sord., arco nat. *p legato* *pp*
con sord., arco nat. *p legato* *pp*
con sord., arco nat. *p legato* *pp*
mf *molto* *mf* *molto* *mf* *molto*

Vin. II 1 2 3 4 5 6
p *mf* *pp* *mf* *molto*

Vla. (con sord.) 1 2 3 4

Vc. 1 2 3 4

Tranquillo
C ♩ = 48

Picc. 1
 2
 Ob.
 C.A.
 Bsn. 1
 2
 Trpt. 1
 Cym. 1
 2
 3
 Vln. I 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 Vln. II 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 Vla. (con sord.) 1
 2
 3
 4
 Vc. 1
 2
 3
 4

Dynamics: *pppp*, *mf*, *pp*, *f*, *p*, *dim.*, *pp*, *mp*, *p marcato sempre*, *pp*, *mf*, *pppp*, *mf*, *poco*.
 Performance instructions: *Solo*, *con sord.**, *via sord.*, *(sul pont., non vib.)*.
 Time signatures: 3/4, 2/4, 3/4.

* Trpt. 1: Harmon mute (with stem in 'out' position) throughout the piece.