

Julia Usher

**Brush Strokes**

for  
Clarinet Solo



**Primavera**

# About 'Brush Strokes' : Programme Notes

This series of pen sketches for clarinet was written to accompany an exhibition of paintings by Catherine Barnes, to be performed by the clarinetist Kate Gordon, who worked with me in developing some of the special techniques.

There are five sketches, and the titles come from different aspects of Chinese Calligraphy.

## 1. *Vital Breath*

ch'i - "air" -

The natural life force which controls and balances energy. This vital breath must be present in painting or writing, so that the art is a living, not a dead thing.

## 2. *Ax Chops and Wedges*

The calligrapher must learn a repertoire of technical brush strokes as physical and precise as any choreographer's language. The choice of stroke is then the means by which the calligrapher may express and embody his feelings, or his artistic inspiration. Here, the strokes are incisive and attacking, like the blade of a sword.

## 3. *Bent Ribbon Strokes*

Flexible and sinuous lines grew from the shadings found in Chinese landscape paintings depicting rocky outcrops.

## 4. *The Great Calm*

The calligrapher must attune himself to a state of perfect balance between inner and outer self before starting to write; in order to attain perfect freedom and control of his movements and what he wants to express. This is described as 'the great calm descending'. The clarinetist too must find an inner calm control of breath in this movement.

## 5. *Grass Style*

After the calligrapher has mastered the traditional form of characters by copying perfect models of others, it will be possible to develop a free and energetic personal style unique to that artist- in which the underlying structure of each character can be expressed in a flurry of cursive strokes suggesting dance-like vigorous movement.

Both calligrapher and clarinetist can apply flair, and flourish and freedom- but only when they have mastered the pure underlying forms.

## *Julia Usher, Composer*

has been keenly involved in writing theatre pieces which involve a mixture of arts: dancing, music, acting, lighting, sculpture. *The Orford Merman* (1988), was a medieval fable about intolerance, which Michael Finnissy conducted at the Greenwich and Arundel Festivals. *Unfinished Business* (1991) involved a dancer, live electronics and sound sculpture by Derek Shiel (Arts Council Electronic Music Bursary.) In *Hope's Perpetual Breath* (1993) (Purcell Room/ Inter Artes), she first explored a Chinese theme, which gave rise to her present interest in Chinese Calligraphy. She has written many other chamber works which have been performed and broadcast, such as *Sacred Conversations* (1993, Arts Council Commission for Sounds Positive.)

In 1998 her orchestral piece *Genetic Code* was performed in computer realisation for the opening of the Old Labs performing arts space at Newnham College Cambridge; and her trumpet fanfare *Sennet for the Sennet* at the celebration of 50 years of Women's Degrees.

In 1998 two large-scale settings of poems by Walt Whitman were performed: *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*, and *Vocalism*. Since 1996 she has continued her interest in painting through a collaboration with the artist Derek Shiel, *SoundPaint*: (installation at Guildford Festival, March 1998)

Julia Usher also works as a professional music therapist, and is married with two sons.

# 1. Vital Breath

A Tempo: Andantino

(Multiphonic)

\*  
breathy

Clarinet  
in B $\flat$

Musical staff for Clarinet in B $\flat$ . The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The time signature is 5/4. The music consists of several measures with dynamic markings: *mp*, *p*, *p*, *pp*, *ppppp*, and *mp*. There are also some breath marks above the staff.

Musical staff for Clarinet (Cl.). The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The time signature is 5/4. The music includes a *rall* marking and a *5* fingering. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, and *mf*. There is a *ten* marking above a note.

Musical staff for Clarinet (Cl.). The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The time signature is 5/4. The music includes a *port* marking and a *10* fingering. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *ppppp*, and *mp*. There is a *tender* marking above a note.

Musical staff for Clarinet (Cl.). The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The time signature is 3/4. The music includes a *15* fingering and a *spacious* marking. Dynamic markings include *ppppp*, *p*, and *pp*.

Multiph

Move it on

Cl. Musical notation for the first system, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features a multiphonic chord marked with an asterisk and a circled 'C'. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The first measure is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "(No RK)". The second measure is marked *mf*, the third *sfz*, and the fourth *sfz*. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter).

Free

Cl. Musical notation for the second system, starting with a treble clef and a 9/4 time signature. It begins with a fingering diagram for the right hand (RH) showing a scale from C5 to G5. The first measure is marked *p*. The second measure is marked *mf*, the third *mf*, and the fourth *ppp*. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter).

as fast and mysterious as is comfortable;  
half-voiced

Cl. Musical notation for the third system, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features a half-voiced scale with a *ppp* dynamic. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter).

sigh, breathy

Cl. Musical notation for the fourth system, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features a scale with a *p* dynamic and a *pp* dynamic. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter).

# 2. Ax Chops and Wedges

Moderato  
Free

Clarinet  
in B $\flat$

Musical staff 1: Clarinet in B $\flat$ , measures 1-4. Dynamics: *mf*

Musical staff 2: Cl., measures 5-8. Dynamics: *mf*

Musical staff 3: Cl., measures 9-12. Dynamics: *ff*, *f*, *sfz*

Musical staff 4: Cl., measures 13-16. Dynamics: *mf*, *f*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *ff*

Musical staff 5: Cl., measures 17-20. Dynamics: *mf*, *p*, *f*

Musical staff 6: Cl., measures 21-24. Dynamics: *pp*, *f*, chop, *f*, *ffz*, *ff*

*throw-away*

### Tempo Primo

Cl. *f* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* 20

Cl. *mf* *p* *f* *ten* *wide vibr* *ten* 25

Cl. *sfz* *mp* *mp* *mp* *ffz* *ffz* 30 5

Cl. *chop* 5 5 5 5 5 35

### Tempo Primo

Cl. 10 6 *rit*

Cl. *whimsical* *alt. fing. etc* *alt. fing. etc*