

One of the principal source sounds for this work - balloons from children's parties - gave rise to a train of thought which, after linking 'toy' balloons to 'hot air' balloons, went on to draw in numerous other concepts of air (breath, utterance, natural phenomena) and heat (energy, action, danger).

As work on the sound material progressed, other notions of air became important: motion through space; a certain fleeting quality; and air as the principal medium for the transmission of sound itself. The manner in which this happens (each air molecule vibrating about its current position and passing its energy on to its neighbour in alternating patterns of compression and rarefaction) became a model for the structure of the piece itself - a free association of sounds and references, each linking with and influencing its neighbour. Gradually, the referential, mimetic and environmental aspects of the piece revealed another, altogether more worrying image: that of the inflated balloon as a metaphor of the fragility of that very environment, of the Earth itself - capable of being manipulated, but not infinitely so.

But beware! Danger! I run the risk of becoming too pompous, too 'inflated' with the importance of my theme. We should not forget that, in colloquial English, if what someone says is 'hot air', it means it lacks real substance, is rubbish, meaningless, bluff, all talk and no action, empty words...

*Hot Air* was commissioned by the Groupe de Recherches Musicales and sound material was developed using the GRM's Syter and GRM Tools systems; later stages in the compositional process took place in the composer's private studio and in the Electroacoustic Music Studios of The University of Birmingham. It will shortly appear on the *empreintes DIGITALes* CD label.

JH