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JONATHAN HARVEY - Biographical Notes

It is no accident that Jonathan Harvey should be particularly esteemed for his work with electronic means: nearly all his works, and not only the electronic ones, are attempts to catch hold of the numinous, to reach what is immaterial through what is material, to engage in a spiritual ascent, or dive, that the movement from instrumental sound (familiar, earthbound, precisely located in space) to electronic sound (unknown, unbounded) can readily represent in metaphor. But heaven can also be tasted in his music through thrusts towards the extremities of pitch (if Harvey is most characteristically a composer of the high treble, there is his tuba concerto **Lightness and Weight** to show him working with equal power at the other end of the spectrum), or through rapid rhythmic vibration, or through ecstatic dance, or through the slow melodies that wind themselves through symmetrical harmonies in a weightless beauty.

These are the techniques and qualities he has explored with full confidence since 1969-70, when he was a Harkness Fellow at Princeton University. By that time, though, he was already an experienced composer. Born in Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, on 3 May 1939, he was a chorister at St Michael's College, Tenbury (1948-52), proceeding to Repton (1952-7) and then to St John's College, Cambridge; he also studied privately, on Britten's advice, with Erwin Stein and Hans Keller, so gaining an early acquaintance with the school of Schoenberg. Much of his early music has been withdrawn: perhaps its principal function was to allow Harvey to establish the musical and metaphysical subject matter he would bring into a firmer synthesis in the music produced after his contact at Princeton with Babbitt. The explicit influence of Babbitt was brief, but Harvey emerged from it seemingly surer of his musical aims, especially with regard to form and harmony: from Schenkerian analysis he gained insights into the ways in which large forms might be created, and at the same time he realised that symmetrical harmony, where harmonic intervals are mirrored about a mid-point, might provide the way towards a non-tonal cohesiveness, towards a music that could be continuous without being driven, a music that could float.

Also important to this music have been the examples provided by Stockhausen and Boulez. His study **The Music of Stockhausen** (Faber & Faber, 1975) gives some indication of what he learned from Stockhausen's extensions of serial ordering, and from the creation of whole works from melodic formulae, as in the German composer's **Mantra** and **Inori**. The closer connection with Boulez developed a little later, facilitated by personal contact during his visits to IRCAM to compose the tape piece **Mortuos plango, vivos voco** (1980) and **Bhakti** for instrumental ensemble and tape (1982). The former, computer-engineered from recordings of his chorister son and of the great bell of Winchester Cathedral, has been widely praised as one of the outstanding achievements in electronic music, while **Bhakti** derives from the vision of interpenetrating real and imaginary worlds that also lies behind the **Inner Light** trilogy of 1973-7 and **Madonna of Winter and Spring** that has made Harvey one of the most successful orchestral composers of the present time, creating such large-spanned and brilliant scores as the symphonic poem **Persephone Dream** (1972), **Whom Ye Adore** (1981) and **Easter Orisons** for chamber orchestra (1983).

However, the approach to the transcendental does not necessarily require large resources, and Harvey's chamber works are equally fine, equally convinced, equally unlike anything else: they include most notably his String Quartet (1977), as well as solo flights for flute, clarinet, trumpet, violin and cello. He has also produced a large and varied output of choral works, often in a modal style and suited to church performance: the biggest of them is his Easter opera **Passion and Resurrection** (1981), the subject of a television film though there are also anthems and motets, as well as works that, like **The Path of Devotion** (1983) and **Forms of Emptiness** (1986), look to spiritual expressions in the wider world, and within the nature of music.

c Paul Griffiths