

A Little Concerto for Clarinet and String Trio

A Little Concerto is in one continuous movement lasting a quarter of an hour. It was commissioned by Whitgift School, Croydon, for first performance on July 6, 2001, by Sacha Esterson with members of the London Mozart Players.

Knowing that I was writing for a gifted young clarinetist, I let the piece explore exuberant virtuosity. The solo part is introspective as well as exuberant; the volatile moods of adolescence are reflected in the rapid changes of character in the piece. The music is as often lyrical and searching, as it is forthright and assertive. The role of the string trio is to share and support the soloist's line, creating a broad frame of reference for it, both literal (harmonic and metric) and metaphorical.

The first half of the work is a kind of four movement form: a forthright, measured opening (1), a very fast second section (2), an expressive slow movement (3), and then a clarinet solo (4). A transition leads to an intensified and varied journey through the four movements: very fast (2), forthright (1), slow (3), which elides with the clarinet solo (4) to create a coda. The coda is an even more concise pass through the music's ideas, which are but glimpsed before the piece cadences in a very quiet transformation of the opening.

Despite the contrasts of tempo and melodic shape that delineate the music, it is very much a single train of thought. The octaves of the opening, and the single pitches, sustained and decorated, recur throughout the piece in many guises. The successive passes through the material suggest a spiralling form overall.

If there is a metaphor for the piece, it is that of the journey into the complex world of young adulthood. The quiet music which illumines the way and concludes the piece is a sign of the confidence which carries a student musician forward.

Nicola LeFanu