

Concerto for Alto Saxophone and String Orchestra (1989) Nicola LeFanu

My concerto is a single movement work lasting about twenty minutes. It has a characteristic and unusual sound world, arising from its virtuosity (the solo saxophone and the strings too) and also because it employs quarter tones throughout. The concerto is full of energy and colour; it is essentially a lyric piece, concerned with fantasy and reflection.

The work is shaped from a number of recurring ideas, making it a distant descendant of ritornello form. These ideas are juxtaposed and combined; they are never repeated exactly but always return in transformation. This can be easily heard in, for example, the reappearances of the vigorous music which is played by the strings in unison. The chromatic harmony of the concerto is anchored in an underlying modality which surfaces at the quiet centre of the work and is glimpsed again in the coda.

While I am composing a piece I can think only in terms of music, of sound; words or extra-musical ideas are meaningless. But when it is finished it may be helpful to try and find words. If I try and find images for this piece I think of the sea; turbulent, stormy, calm... I think of a soaring seabird, or a seashell turned over and over by the ceaseless waves, turned even by the gentlest wave on a starlit night.

The concerto was commissioned by the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. It is dedicated to its remarkable soloist, John Edward Kelly.

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