

Programme note:

*The Crimson Bird* was commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, through the Elgar Bursary. To write once again for the BBCSO was a marvellous opportunity. I decided to compose a *concertante* work for soprano and orchestra; it grew out of my long involvement with opera (I have written eight) and I composed it for a soprano I admire greatly - Rachel Nicholls.

My initial ideas stemmed from Euripides *The Trojan Women*, which I had explored in my short orchestral *Threnody* (Dublin, 2015). I soon decided that I needed a newly written text, and I approached the poet John Fuller, with whom I have collaborated on a number of works, most recently our opera *Dream Hunter*. From his poem *Siege*, I have drawn the text for this orchestral piece. I have set the four poems in a continuous orchestral movement lasting about 23 minutes. The full text is below, but here is a resumé:

1:

A young mother at dawn. Nursing her baby, she gazes at the surrounding landscape. She rejoices in its fertility, but she also fears dispossession. The orchestration is light, the soprano part lyrical.

2:

Her son has grown up and left home; his mother fears for him.

Conflict comes to her country. Her city is besieged and bombarded; she is inside. The music is fast and assertive, for the soprano with the full orchestra.

3:

Conflict and siege: the mother is outside the city. What part is her son playing? A 'hero' or a 'murderer'? A dramatic soprano part, over the full orchestra.

4:

Pietà: her son is dead. She can only pray for an end to the continuing conflict:

*There is no end to a siege when both sides are besieged*

*There is no end to the suffering of each*

A passacaglia for the full orchestra, with the soprano etching a lyrical line.

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