

COMPOSER'S NOTE

At 8.00pm on the 22nd of October 1707, the *Association*, flagship of the Royal Navy, struck rocks off the Scilly Isles with the loss of the entire crew. Throughout the rest of the evening the remaining three ships in the fleet suffered the same fate. Only 26 of the original 1,647 crew members survived. This disaster was a direct result of an inability to calculate longitude, the most pressing scientific problem of the time. It pushed the longitude question to the forefront of the national consciousness and precipitated the Longitude Act. Parliament funded a prize of £20,000 to anyone whose method or device would solve the dilemma.

For carpenter and self-taught clockmaker John Harrison, this was the beginning of a 40 year obsession. To calculate longitude it is necessary to know the time aboard ship and at the home port or place of known longitude, at precisely the same moment. Harrison's dream was to build a clock so accurate that this calculation could be made, an audacious feat of engineering .

This work reflects on aspects of this epic tale, brilliantly brought to life in Dava Sobel's book *Longitude*. Much of the music is mechanistic in tone and is constructed along precise mathematical and metrical lines. The heart of the work however is human - the attraction of the £20,000 prize is often cited as Harrison's motivation. However, the realisation that countless lives depended on a solution was one which haunted Harrison. The emotional core of the music reflects on this, and in particular the evening of 22nd October 1707.

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