
REVELATION

Symphony for Double Brass on a theme of Purcell

PHILIP WILBY

1995 marks the tercentenary of Purcell's death, and my new score *Revelation* has been written as a tribute to his music and the ornate and confident spirit of his age. There are five major sections:

1. Prologue
2. Variations on a ground bass I
3. Fugue
4. Variations on a ground bass II
5. Epilogue and Resurrection

The score uses many features of the baroque Concerto Grosso, and arranges players in two equal groups from which soloists emerge to play in a variety of virtuoso ensembles. It quotes freely from Purcell's own piece *Three Parts on a Ground* in which he has composed a brilliant sequence of variations over a repeating six-note bass figure. This original motif can be heard most clearly beneath the duet for Cornet 5 and Soprano at the beginning of the 2nd section.

There is, of course, a religious dimension to *Revelation* as the title suggests, and the score is prefaced by lines by the 17th century poet John Donne. His *Holy Sonnet* paraphrases the *Book of Revelation* in which the dead are raised at the sounds of the last trumpet. Donne's trumpets are themselves placed stereophonically "... At the round Earth's imagined corners" and it is this feature that today's players represent as they move around the performing area. Their final apocalyptic fanfares can be heard at the close of the score, as Purcell's music re-enters in a lasting tribute to England's first composer of genius.

Philip Wilby
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*At the Earth's imagined corners, blow
your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
from death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go.
All whom the flood did, and fire shall overthrow
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall Behold God, and never taste death's woe.*

John Donne
after *Revelation* Ch.11 v15

NOVELLO