



# *Echo's Dream*

Music of Symon Clarke

Members of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra

Mikel Toms, Conductor



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### ■ **VEILED NIGHTINGALE** 2017

The music is based around the introduction to the fourth movement of Beethoven's *String Quartet Op 18 No 6*, which he entitled 'La Malinconia'. My own title is derived from John Keat's *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode to Melancholy*. Keats was a contemporary of Beethoven.

I have taken the basic harmonic structure of Beethoven's introduction and woven material around it as well as dismantling and extending the harmony around new material. Occasionally a solo trumpet attempts to distill progress into a single line but finally gives up right at the end of the piece.

#### *Ode to a Nightingale IV*

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Called him soft names in many a muséd rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such ecstasy!

—John Keats, 1819

#### *Ode to Melancholy III*

She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding Adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:  
Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine . . .

—John Keats, 1819





■ **THE MEMORY OF ATOMS** 2021

The three movements of this piece all explore the same material. There are several persistent melodic fragments, with their associated harmonic surroundings, that are juxtaposed in various combinations and occasionally developed into slightly longer phrases.

The middle movement manages to elongate some of this material into interwoven phrases on the flute and clarinet decorated by the other instruments. These lines give way to metrical phrases on the piano, based on the same material but, after several exchanges, the whole ensemble fails to agree on a way forward together. The final movement reverts to the interruptive progress of the first movement but with some explosive repercussions that eventually breakdown.

The harmonic material in the music throughout is in a constant state of resonance, where harmonies are left ringing and overlapping as the melodic material is explored and developed. The atomistic nature of the musical phrases and fragments are rarely resolved to become continually stable and the impact of one gesture frequently overlaps and resonates into the next where it might be perceived as a kind of memory.

■ **ECHO'S DREAM** 2017

This piece is built from a series of chords that gradually take shape from the base notes heard at the outset. At the same time, fragments of melodic material also emerge and the music builds to several climactic points before the material is explored further. The evolution of the music always retains echos of previous sections so that progress becomes circular and eventually dissolves into repeating fragments that struggle to find a way out of the circle.

In the myth of *Echo and Narcissus* (according to Ovid) Echo is condemned only to repeat the last words she hears. Eventually she loses her corporeal self and only her voice remains.

### ■ **NGLÈWÈR** 2020

The title *Nglèwèr* is a Javanese word that usually translates as ‘hanging’ or ‘suspended’. The style of female singing in traditional Javanese music and particularly that of a solo voice, often involves the vocal line extending phrases beyond the points of repose observed by the instrumentalists. The vocal line is therefore sometimes described as *nglèwèr* or ‘suspended’.

This notion of suspension is a formative feature of this piece. The effect of suspension is off-set against a constantly recycled baseline. The music is structured around this perpetually repeating line which is mostly heard in low registers but occasionally rises much higher; it is always present in the texture, like a *passacaglia*. The repeating line is heard at the opening as a six bar pizzicato line on the double bass. The Javanese also construct their traditional gamelan music in similar ways by using a cyclic process,

where a single line repeats and around which all the music is created.

All the melodic musical material in this piece is derived initially from the opening pizzicato baseline and the music progresses as an ever-evolving exploration of the harmony latent in the baseline and melodic material derived from it. The melodic material is constantly ‘suspended’ over and around this repeating (base) line and rarely finishes at points of repose where one cycle ends and another repeat begins. Eventually a point of stasis is reached and a single short phrase is left to repeat unaccompanied.

This piece is a kind of homage to the Javanese gamelan and represents for me a memorial to the times I have spent working with, composing for and listening to, the gamelan.

— Symon Clarke





### **Symon Clarke, Composer**

As a student, Symon Clarke (b. 1957) composed music for string orchestra, quartets for the Medici String Quartet, and a large-scale orchestral work to a commission from the Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra, entitled *The Place of the Solitaires*, which was performed to critical acclaim at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon in 1980.

He won first prize in the Greater London Arts Association's Young Composers Competition in 1981 with a piece for clarinet and piano. The success of these works led to further commissions and performances, including *Ouvrage en Mosaïque* for solo piano (Andrew Ball), *Perihelion* for Lontano, *Cepheid Variables* for Divertimenti, *Metoikos* for the Gabrielli Brass Ensemble (featuring soloists Mary King and Jane Manning), and *String Quartet No 1* for the Brindisi String Quartet.

During the 1990s, Clarke concentrated on studying, playing, and composing for the Javanese gamelan, working with several performing ensembles as composer, conductor, and performer. He has composed many innovative and successful pieces for these unique instruments, attracting wide critical acclaim, including the song cycle *The Dissolving Tree* (with Mary King), performed at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, and *The Magic Mirror*, performed in many places, including the BBC Broadcasting House in Manchester, the Purcell Room in London, and elsewhere in Germany and Holland.

He composed a ballet for the Colourscape Festival combining “Western” flute and electroacoustic sounds with the gamelan and also made successful arrangements for gamelan of two classic American compositions: *The Unanswered Question* by Charles Ives and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* by John Adams. The latter has been performed

and broadcast in versions for both Javanese and Balinese gamelan in concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Maida Vale), the London Symphony Orchestra (The Barbican and LSO St. Lukes), and the Philippines Philharmonic Orchestra (Petronas Concert Hall, Kuala Lumpur).

In the late 1990s, he composed two pieces for the Dutch group Ensemble Multifoon, using gamelan instruments in Western tuning: *Earth Songs* with mezzo-soprano Kristina Fuchs and clarinet and *Echo’s Bones* featuring violin and clarinet.

Several pieces for the South Bank Gamelan Players and Alpha Beta Gamelan (*Bonang Spiritual*, *Fugitive Pieces*, and *Bone Shadows*) have been performed to great acclaim at the Rhythm Sticks Festival at London’s South Bank Centre, the Bridgewater Hall and BBC Broadcasting House in Manchester, and on tour in Holland, France (Cité de la Musique de Paris), and Germany. Two further works, *Landscape with*

*Haiku* and *Strange Attractor*, were recorded and released by Alpha Beta Gamelan on CD in 1998.

Since 2001, Clarke has returned to composing for “Western” instruments, and recent works include *Midnight Verses*, a duo for clarinet and marimba for the virtuoso Tara Bouman and percussionist Stephan Froylyks, which has been played several times to acclaim in Germany and Holland. A percussion quartet, entitled *Endgame*, was premiered in Germany by Klangwerk Münster in 2005.

A song cycle, *Time’s Eye*, setting texts by Paul Celan and Samuel Beckett for soprano and three instruments, was performed by the Concorde Ensemble with Tine Verbeke in the Samuel Beckett Festival in Dublin in 2006.

His large-scale orchestral work *Statue Circle* was performed by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by James MacMillan in 2006 and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 the following year. The quintet *Dimensions of the Present*

*Moment* was performed by the Chromatico Ensemble in the Notting Hill Festival in 2009.

*Nine Sonnets in Memory of John Clare* for violin and piano was performed by Beth Spendlove and Nigel Clayton in Colchester in 2014, and *String Quartet No. 3* was performed by the Kingfisher Quartet the same year. The Kingfisher Ensemble also gave the first performance of *Threnodia* in Wissett, Suffolk, at a concert to mark the anniversary of the start of the First World War.

The large-scale orchestral work *Three Orbits* was performed and recorded by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra under Mikel Toms and was released in 2015.

A major piece for chamber orchestra, *Pour Finir Encore* (highly recommended in the International Uuno Klami Composition Competition in Finland and shortlisted by Sound and Music in 2009), has also been recorded by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra under Mikel Toms and was

released in 2016. The disc also includes premiere recordings of *Galileo's Dream* (octet), *Dead Voices* (twelve solo strings), and *Silentium* (full orchestra).

He has recently composed a series of duos for stringed instruments and . . . *if not, winter . . .* (viola/cello) was premiered at the William Alwyn Festival in 2015. This work, and the other three works in the series, *Shadow Songs* (violin/cello), *In the Circle of the White Moon* (two violins), and *The Brightness of Shadows* (violin/viola), were played and recorded alongside *Threnodia* and *Dimensions of the Present Moment* by players from the Brno Philharmonic; the CD was released in 2017.

Clarke's disc of three song cycles, written between 2003 and 2017 with Natalie Raybould (soprano) and players from the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra under Mikel Toms was released in 2020 and includes *Secret Diversion*, *Time's Eye* and *Requiem*.

Music for the gamelan still continues to exert an interest and the Royal College of Music commissioned a virtuoso piece for their percussion students resulting in *Oracle of the Sunrise* which was performed in 2017. *Three Exits* for solo flute and a small gamelan ensemble was performed in 2019 by Isabelle Carré with the Hammer and Bronze Ensemble in Oxford and the Barbican, London.

A new concerto for violoncello and orchestra, for Alexander Baillie, is due to be performed and recorded in 2024.

His music has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in Music of our Time, Hear and Now, Late Junction and World Music Week, on RTI in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe and Asia.

[www.symonclarke.co.uk](http://www.symonclarke.co.uk)





## **Mikel Toms, Conductor**

British conductor Mikel Toms has worked with many orchestras and ensembles, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Chamber Orchestra, the Oslo Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra, the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Prague Sinfonia, the Kazakhstan State Symphony Orchestra, the Uralsk Philharmonic Orchestra, the Czech Film Orchestra, and Elision (Australia's national contemporary music ensemble). He is currently Resident Conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of India.



He has recorded over thirty CDs for many labels, including Sony BMG (the world-premiere recording of Philip Glass's *Saxophone Concerto*), Decca, Métier, Quartz, and Ablaze Records. He was also the founder of the independent CD label Quartz and is the director of a successful film and music production company (First Creative), working mainly in the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. He recently appeared in the three-part BBC FOUR television series *Romance and Revolution—Musical Masters of the 19th Century*.

He has conducted for BBC Radio 3's *Hear and Now* program; has broadcast on Italian, German, Spanish, and Irish radio; and has appeared at festivals in London, Bath, Cheltenham, Huddersfield, Belfast, Darmstadt, Innsbruck, Sligo, Almaty, Valencia, Dortmund, and Berlin.

Mikel read music at Oxford University, where he conducted a complete performance of *Messiaen's Des Canyons Aux Étoiles* at the age of twenty. He studied with Peter Eötvös as a member of the International Eötvös Institute Foundation and at the Darmstadt Internationales Ferienkurse, where he won the Stipendium Prize for performance. In 1996, he was selected to conduct the Ensemble Modern in a performance of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Mixtur*, in collaboration with the composer.

From 1993 to 2001, Mikel was artistic director of the contemporary music chamber orchestra Reservoir. He is closely associated with the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, with whom he has made many recordings of contemporary and classical repertoire as well as a number of TV and film soundtracks.

He has recorded over eighty new works for orchestra and has collaborated with major composers, including Iannis Xenakis, James Dillon, Michael Finnissy, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Harrison Birtwistle.

Mikel is also well known as a writer and broadcaster about classical music. In addition to his well-known conducting blog, his writing has appeared in the *Times*, the *BBC Music Magazine*, and other publications.

From 1997 to 2000, Mikel was director of the British Youth Opera, the United Kingdom's opera training company.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.



## **Brno Philharmonic Orchestra**

The Brno Philharmonic (BPO) has an illustrious history of music making, its beginnings dating back to the 1870s, when its first predecessor, the amateur Czech Symphony Orchestra, was established under the auspices of Leoš Janáček and housed in the purpose-built Besední dům, the present orchestra's magnificent home. Formed in 1956 after the merger of the Radio Orchestra and the Brno Region Symphony Orchestra, the Brno Philharmonic has long been regarded as one of the best orchestras in this country.





The Brno Philharmonic has often been labeled as Janáček's orchestra, and rightly so. Brno, where the composer lived and worked, has always been a lively center for his music. Since its foundation in 1956, the ensemble has given well over three hundred performances of works by Janáček, at concerts both in the Czech Republic and abroad. It has also recorded Janáček's complete symphonic and cantata works.

The BPO has recorded extensively with Supraphon—a record company boasting a long and distinguished history, and which is nowadays the largest and most prestigious in the Czech Republic—and has also made a number of high-quality recordings with Sony Music, IMG Records, and BMG, as well as with a number of other well-known record labels. Most recently, the orchestra has recorded

with Music Sales, Classic FM and Sony BMG, Channel 4, Supraphon, the Royal National Theatre in London, Ablaze Records, and Universal. In 1956, when it was formed, the Brno Philharmonic began to collaborate with Czech Radio, and this relationship has continued up until the present day



# Echo's Dream: Music of Symon Clarke

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1	<i>Veiled Nightingale</i>	Members of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra	11:04
2–4	<i>The Memory of Atoms</i>	Members of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra	
	I. <i>The Memory of Atoms—I</i>		7:30
	II. <i>The Memory of Atoms—II</i>		7:10
	III. <i>The Memory of Atoms—III</i>		6:00
5	<i>Echo's Dream</i>	Members of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra	14:02
6	<i>Nglèwèr</i>	Members of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra	19:54

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**— Daniel Coombs**

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