



JOHN BEVAN BAKER

Songs of Courtship and other works

HEBRIDES ENSEMBLE CONSORT OF VOICES

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JOHN BEVAN BAKER (1926-1994)

Songs of Courtship (1988)

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|---|---|
| 1 <i>Out in the bushlands</i> 1.53 | 8 <i>A moon rising</i> 1.46 |
| 2 <i>In the lowlands</i> 1.22 | 9 <i>Outside the Eastern Gate</i> 1.15 |
| 3 <i>Plop fall the plums</i> 0.51 | 10 <i>If along the highroad</i> 0.50 |
| 4 <i>A very handsome gentleman</i> 1.26 | 11 <i>By the willows of the Eastern Gate</i> 1.09 |
| 5 <i>Of fair girls the loveliest</i> 1.12 | 12 <i>I brought my great carriage</i> 1.26 |
| 6 <i>The cock has crowed</i> 1.10 | 13 <i>Wedding Song: My lord is all aglow</i> 1.04 |
| 7 <i>Shu is away</i> 1.09 | |

14 *Duo* (1981) 8.33

Suite for Piano (1962/1972):

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|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 15 <i>March</i> 1.24 | 17 <i>Intermezzo</i> 1.50 | 19 <i>Finale</i> 1.17 |
| 16 <i>Jig</i> 1.32 | 18 <i>Berceuse</i> 2.24 | |

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- 20 *Spring* (1983) 3.09
21 *Triptych* (1980) 8.18
22 *A Song for Kate* (1988) 2.59
23 *Eclogue* (1994) 8.16
24 *Rorate Coeli Desuper* (1988) 9.51

Recorded at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, 3~5 October 2004.
Produced by Andrew Keener. Engineered by Philip Hobbs.
Post-Production by Julia Thomas at Finesplice Ltd
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Design by the Art Surgery

It is a great privilege to have this opportunity to pen a few words about John Bevan Baker and his work. He himself once said "some composers blaze trails, others go along behind clearing the path and trying to encourage that direction: I'm one of those composers."

One can understand his feelings, but I would like, gently, to disagree. Bevan Baker's creative peak came at a time when composers at the borders of tonality and beyond, writing for specialist professional performers, were perceived as the only trail-blazers, and received most of the critical attention.

Less publicised, but equally, and perhaps even, *sub specie aeternitatis*, more importantly, there are composers who make new music within and for the wider professional and amateur world in places sometimes far from those cities where professional orchestras and opera houses flourish.

In this respect, Bevan Baker's work for his Black Isle school, chorus and festival were as pioneering and ground-breaking as anyone's. I suspect that a production of a new opera (*The Seer*) in Dingwall, by a person who loves the area, on a subject familiar to all Highland Scots and very relevant to us all today, could affect more people deeply and have more musical and human resonance than one performed in the more anonymous surroundings of a metropolis, despite the latter being copiously reviewed in the national newspapers.

This is beautifully crafted, transparently honest music, of great warmth and melodic fecundity, and I am delighted it is receiving wider attention.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies
Master of the Queen's Music
24 May 2006

SONGS OF COURTSHIP (1992)

For four part choir and pianoforte duet

Songs of Courtship were set to music by Bevan Baker in 1992 for the Black Isle Singers. The poems, written by Mao Shih in the 7th century BC, were translated from the Ancient Chinese in 1946 by Arthur Waley. The composer loved them and maintained that they had “a simple directness which could have been written yesterday”. He wrote them as a contrasting, companion piece to the Brahms *Lieberslieder Waltzern* in a programme first performed by the Black Isle Singers in May 1992 in Fortrose Academy. The courtship songs, richly imaginative, vary greatly in metre and in their treatment of the enigmatic oriental lyrics, some being lightfooted, some more robust, always rhythmically challenging. The “Wedding Song” is a triumphant, rejoicing finale.

DUO (1981)

For oboe and ‘cello

Duo was written for Douglas Boyd and William Conway, and was first performed in London in November 1981.

The main outline of the work consists of two lively, rhythmic sections set between three slow rhapsodic ones. The whole piece is centred around the note “A” and wanders off in various directions, always returning to it again. The opening section is free and leads into an *Allegro scherzando*. Next comes an oboe solo with “*quasi guitarra*” plucked chords underneath on the ‘cello, who then takes over with a solo cadenza. This leads into a gutsy *Allegro vivace*, followed by the final section, which dissolves gradually, becoming ever more calm and remote.

SUITE FOR PIANO (1962/1972)

March – Jig – Intermezzo – Berceuse – Finale

The composer wrote: This suite could well be subtitled “Children’s Games”, as each of the five short movements is a thumbnail sketch of my own young family at

play. An opening *March* (Rachel) which stumbles out of step at times, is followed by *Jig* (Kate), a lively twirling dance with inevitable falls and bumps. The third movement *Intermezzo* (Sarah) is a more restful game for two, in which the two voices, though usually in different keys, complement each other with only one moment of real discord. After *Berceuse* (Janet), the regular bedtime story ritual, the suite ends with *Finale* (Peter), an extrovert clownlike dance.

Dedicated to June.

SPRING (1983)

For solo violin

Spring was written as a birthday present for Sarah Bevan Baker, the composer’s eldest daughter. The inspiration for the piece was a poem of the same name by Thomas Nashe:

*Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year’s pleasant king
Then blooms each thing, them maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing -
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*

The short piece is in Sonata-Rondo form. The themes develop from the bird-calls in the poem, the cuckoo being clearly audible at the end. The piece is free and light in spirit with the markings *allegretto, delicatissimo, a piacere. Rather freely.*

TRIPTYCH (1980)

For ‘cello and piano

The name *Triptych* describes a set of three panels, each painted with a distinct subject, but hinged together and capable of being folded. The use of the title here implies three musical movements of varied character which are played without a break. They are based on the same two thematic ideas, which are ornamented, truncated, reversed and varied in many ways. The first section is a vigorous and rhythmic *allegro energico* which opens with the important chromatic four-note motif which is used throughout the piece in various forms. This gives way to a dreamy

central section, based on a simple melodic elaboration of the second theme, rich in melody and colour. This is followed by an *allegro vivace* which sparkles and drives to a thrilling climax with the inverted opening four-note motif bringing the piece to a close.

Triptych was written for William Conway. It was first performed in 1980 by William Conway and Ian Gaukroger in Fortrose Academy, for the Black Isle Arts Society.

A SONG FOR KATE (1988)

For string ensemble

A Song for Kate was written in 1988 in celebration of the birth of Kate, the composer's first grandchild. Malcolm Layfield, who played in its first private performance, subsequently suggested to Bevan Baker to expand the idea to embrace the seven ages of man as in Jaques' speech in "As You Like It". *Berceuse* thus became the first movement of the Ages of Man to be publicly performed by the Goldberg Ensemble in Manchester, in September 1990. "The infant in *Berceuse* is not "mewling and puking", but falling peacefully asleep... The whole work is light and tuneful in style, and though perhaps no more profound than Jaques' cynical speech, presents a more hopeful, positive view of life."

ECLOGUE (1994)

For ensemble

Eclogue was commissioned by the Hebrides Ensemble in 1994. Sadly the composer died before finishing the piece. Although it had almost been completed, the family is deeply grateful to Nigel Osborne for his skilful help in preparing the work for performance; first played by the Hebrides Ensemble in Glasgow in February 1995.

Nigel Osborne writes: "*Eclogue* is a work of breadth, depth and implication far beyond its modest scale. It is in a sense an evocative rhapsody, where contrasting ideas and textures follow each other in a spontaneous way, as if by accident the composer had let spill into the score a random handful of snapshots from his musical album."

There are short character studies, sudden ecstatic dialogues, strong climaxes and a strange impressionistic half-light which glows silently in some space beyond the notes and the page.

At the same time, it is a severe work, most of the material is generated from the opening oboe melody. The apparently free-floating sequence of musical textures is in fact a systematic study of solos, duets, trios and quartets, moving through heterophony, canon, homophony, and a general counterpoint. It is a work where everything is essential in every way. In a musical world of "isms" and fashionable manner, it is a piece which concerns itself with the integrity of the musical idea and the authenticity of invention. Although the spirit of the work may have a British "pastoral" resonance, its landscapes have less to do with Constable than with Cézanne.

It is, in its small way, a major work, and a moving final statement of a composer of enormous talent and musicianship who chose the path of modesty and truth.

Nigel Osborne continues: "I was honoured to be asked to cast an eye over the final drafts of this piece. As far as I could see, it was more or less ready and complete. The small amount of reconstruction I essayed toward the end of the work is drawn directly from sketches and other compositional material."

RORATE COELI DESUPER (1988)

For soprano, alto, tenor, bass, strings, organ, trumpet and tubular bells

This is a setting of the poem by the 15th century Scottish poet William Dunbar, which Bevan Baker wrote in memory of his mother.

"I must have read Dunbar as a young man living in England. My mother was a Scot and my thoughts were always turning north... As soon as I read it, it made an impact on me. Someone once talked about the effect of certain poems which you sit and read alone and when you finish you wonder where on earth the orchestra and choir you've been hearing came from! That's how Dunbar's lines struck me."

Originally the composer set the poem for choir and organ in 1979 while living in Glasgow, but it was never performed. Re-appraising it 9 years later, and usually

critical of his own work, it still had his approval. In its new setting for choir, organ, strings, trumpet and tubular bells – which gives it a mediaeval flavour – the Black Isle Singers performed it in 1988. The piece opens with a Latin chant taken up by ‘cello and bass; the cantata builds to a climax of resounding vocal and instrumental power. Sudden changes of tempi and rhythm, flourishes on the organ and trumpet, slashing string chords and peals of tubular bells, along with demanding vocal leaps match the colourful text of Dunbar. It has none of the modern (German or Dickensian) attributes of Christmas. It breathes rather the intoxication of universal spring, and summons all nature to salute “the cleir sone quhome no clud devouris”. It is strongly reminiscent of the composer’s feelings for all of creation.

Rorate Coeli Desuper

by William Dunbar (c.1460~1530)

Rorate coeli desuper,
Heavens distil your balmy showers,
For now is risen the bright day star
From the rose Mary, flower of flowers;
The clear sun whom no cloud devours,
Surmounting Pheobus in the east,
Is come of his heavenly towers
Et nobis Puer natus est.

Archangels, angels, and dominations,
Thrones, potentates, and martyrs seir,
And all ye heavenly operations,
Star, planet, fimament and sphere,
Fire, earth, air and water clear,
To him give loving most and least,
That come in to so meek manner
Et nobis Puer natus est.

Sinners, be glad and penance do,
And thank your maker heartfully,
For he that you might not come to,
To you is come full humbly;
Your souls with his blood to buy
And loose you of the fiend’s arrest,
And only of his own mercy
Pro nobis Puer natus est.

All clergy do to him incline
And bow unto that bairn benign
And do your observance divine
To him that is of kings King;
Encense his altar, read and sing
In holy kirk, with mind digest,
Him honouring above all things,
Qui nobis Puer natus est.

Celestial fowls in the air,
Sing with your notes upon height,
In firths and in forests fair
Be mirthful now at all your might,
For passed is your dull night,
Aurora has the cloud pierced,
The sun is risen with gladsome light,
Et nobis Puer natus est.

Now spring up, flowers, from the root,
Revert you upward naturally,
In honour of the blessed fruit
That rose up from the rose Mary;

Lay out your leaves lustily,
From dead take life now at the last
In worship of that Prince worthy
Qui nobis Puer natus est.

Sing heaven imperial most of height,
Regions of air make harmony;
All fish in flood and fowl in flight
Be mirthful and make melody.
All Gloria in excelsis cry,
Heaven, earth, sea, man, bird, and beast;
He that is crowned above the sky
Pro nobis Puer natus est.

HEBRIDES ENSEMBLE

William Conway - conductor (*Songs; Rorate*);
- cello (*Duo; Triptych; Eclogue*)

violin I: Lesley Hatfield (<i>Eclogue</i>)	cello II: Su-a Lee (<i>Rorate</i>)
Sarah Bevan Baker (<i>Spring</i>)	piano: Graeme McNaught
violin II: Carole Howat	piano II: Stuart Hope (<i>Songs</i>)
Claire Docherty	organ: Stuart Hope (<i>Rorate</i>)
viola: Scott Dickinson	double bass: Nick Bayley
Kathryn Jourdan	percussion: Matthew Studdert-Kennedy
oboe: Douglas Boyd	bassoon: Ursula Leveaux
trumpet: Peter Franks	

Hebrides Ensemble has built a reputation as Scotland’s foremost chamber group, touring frequently throughout Scotland, appearing at international music festivals and broadcasting regularly on BBC Radio 3.

The Ensemble has commissioned and premiered new works by more than forty composers including Nigel Osborne, Sally Beamish, Stuart MacRae and Gordon McPherson and performs a celebrated series of concerts each year at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

The 2005/06 season includes the Ensemble's second Scottish Arts Council Tune Up Tour and a major new mixed media commission, "Shoreline...Stories of Love and War" from composer Nigel Osborne and film maker / animator Rachel Bevan Baker in collaboration with Opera Circus and Scottish Dance Theatre.

Hebrides Ensemble received high critical acclaim for their outstanding performance of the music of Elliott Carter at the 2005 Edinburgh International Festival.

CONSORT OF VOICES

soprano:	Eileen Burke Susie Burnet Gillian Casson Rosemary Sweetnam	alto:	Sandra Anderson Laura Malcolm Linda Ruxton Nicky Wood
tenor:	David Ferrier Simon Flower George McNeil David Rhodes	bass:	David Ireland Sandy Matheson Jonathan Pears James Waters

Based in Edinburgh and founded in 1991, the Consort of Voices specialises in performances of a *cappella* music and small-scale choral repertoire from the 15th century to the present day. The group performs regularly throughout Scotland and made its English debut at the Ryedale Festival in Yorkshire in 1996 under the direction of William Conway.

The Consort has been closely associated for many years with the music of John Bevan Baker, and participated in the first performances of his chamber opera *The Seer*. They first performed *Songs of Courtship* and *Hymn for the Nativity* at a memorial concert for the composer at the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh, in 1995.



WILLIAM CONWAY

Artistic Director, Hebrides Ensemble

William Conway was born in Glasgow and studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the Royal College of Music and later with Ralph Kirshbaum.

As principal cellist of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, he has performed throughout the world with conductors such as Guilini, Karajan, Solti, Maazel, Haitink, Harmoncourt and Boulez. Appearances as soloist with the orchestra include radio and television performances with Claudio Abbado.

For ten years William was also principal cellist of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, performing regularly as soloist and director. Together, they gave the first performances of cello concertos by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Hafliði Hallgrímsson.

He enjoys a diverse chamber music career, a particular highlight being playing a Bach cello suite in performance with dancer Rudolf Nureyev at the Edinburgh International Festival.

In 1994 William was a prizewinner at the Leeds Conductors Competition and has since appeared as conductor throughout Britain, mainland Europe, America, Philippines, Japan and Australia. He will be music director of Haddo House Opera starting this year.

As co-founder and Artistic Director of the Scottish based Hebrides Ensemble, William continues his strong commitment to performing contemporary music. In 1996 he received an award from the Scottish Society of Composers for his outstanding contribution to new music.

He plays a 'cello from 1695 by Giovanni Tononi of Bologna.

For further details of John Bevan Baker's music please visit www.johnbevanbaker.co.uk