

ONDINE

JULIAN ANDERSON

HEAVEN IS SHY OF EARTH
THE COMEDY OF CHANGE

SUSAN BICKLEY
LONDON SINFONIETTA
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & CHORUS
OLIVER KNUSSEN

Julian Anderson



JULIAN ANDERSON (b. 1967)

	The Comedy of Change (2009)	23:48
	for chamber ensemble of 12 players	
1	I.	2:11
2	II. –	2:47
3	III.	1:55
4	IV. –	2:31
5	V.	3:39
6	VI.	5:30
7	VII.	5:15
	 Heaven is Shy of Earth (2006/2009–10)	 38:32
	for mezzo-soprano, chorus & orchestra	
8	Intrada	3:10
9	Kyrie	5:07
10	Gloria (with Bird)	6:59
11	Quam dilecta tabernacula tua	5:08
12	Sanctus	8:06
13	Agnus Dei	10:02

London Sinfonietta (1–7)

Susan Bickley, mezzo-soprano (9–13)

BBC Symphony Chorus (9, 10, 12, 13)

BBC Symphony Orchestra (8–13)

Oliver Knussen, conductor

When Julian Anderson was commissioned to write a substantial work for solo mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra for the 2006 BBC Proms, the stage was set for a large-scale summation of his recent musical concerns. Anderson would be able to revisit the communal expressive ideal of several recent works for unaccompanied choir in the context of his by now well-established orchestral style, with its characteristic integration of lyrical simplicity and joyous complexity. The solo female voice, meanwhile, suggested a new and often dramatic presence – an individual consciousness at the heart of one of Anderson's typical evocations of the natural world.

Clearly, the choice of texts would be a central decision. Anderson had set poems by Emily Dickinson before, and now found in her visionary eccentricity a compelling expression of nature's abundance as a kind of secular miracle. His first thought was to fashion a number of Dickinson's poems into a six-movement shape that would parallel the Ordinary of the Mass without using any of its actual words. And yet the Latin text appealed, too, not least because its familiarity meant that his intentional divergences from it would register more clearly. This is what happens in the structure at which he finally arrived: the Mass texts appear in order, but two of them are interrupted by Dickinson poems. The insertions nudge the whole structure away from denominational Christianity, and bring the liturgy out into the natural world as a sort of secular Eucharist – a celebration and sanctification of nature itself.

Viewed from slightly over a decade on, the piece seems summative still – but now points forward as well as back. One of its movements was not yet included in that 2006 Proms premiere: Anderson found that the successful realisation of what he had imagined for this movement presented certain technical challenges that were only solved with the composition of his orchestral work *Fantasias* (2007–9). By the time the complete *Heaven is Shy of Earth* was heard in November 2010, he was at work on his first opera *Thebans* (completed in 2014), with another lone female figure at its centre. (Anderson and his

librettist Frank McGuinness went so far as to remove all the other female characters from Sophocles' play *Antigone*, their adaptation of which forms Act II of the opera, in order to set in relief its eponymous protagonist.) And between the completion of *Fantasias* and of the additional movement of the oratorio Anderson also composed *The Comedy of Change*, an instrumental work for twelve players with its own inherent drama: it was intended to function as both a free-standing concert piece and the score of a ballet choreographed by Mark Baldwin of Rambert Dance Company (Anderson's fourth work for dance, and his third with Baldwin).

Both the musical and the choreographic conception were designed to pay tribute to Charles Darwin and to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of his book *The Origin of Species*. Anderson was thus concerned with both the inevitable and the unpredictable aspects of change; with – in his own words – 'the way daily needs (for food, for shelter, for procreation) can provoke changes in both behaviour and physical appearance', and in particular with 'the extreme and strange lengths, apparently beyond all purely "evolutionary" needs, to which some animals will go to attract attention'. Hence the title: 'the word "comedy" is to be understood in all its senses, including the old Elizabethan one of a series of misunderstandings with a happy outcome'.

Like *Heaven is Shy of Earth* – and in a departure from Anderson's usual practice hitherto – the work is in several movements. Yet these two 'nature pieces' differ intriguingly. Where the oratorio constantly fills the choral/orchestral space with all manner of sonic activity, *The Comedy of Change* appears to be built on a ground of silence. This enables the powerful sense of a vast and diverse nature evolving from humble, almost imperceptible beginnings as the opening movement accelerates towards a typically jubilant polyphonic dance. Subsequent movements might be heard, the composer acknowledges, as snapshots – of the lumbering giant tortoises Darwin himself saw on his arrival in the Galapagos Islands, for example, or of the movements and songs of

birds. 'But in general,' writes Anderson, 'I preferred not to be too literal or illustrative: I hope the musical harmonies, textures, rhythms and melodies will be sufficiently vivid to suggest to listeners their own images; or else be heard as the abstract music they essentially are.'

Abstract, but intensely evocative. The same might be said of the purely instrumental opening movement of *Heaven is Shy of Earth*, in which a solo flugelhorn melody is surrounded and decorated – at first gently and then with increasingly ecstatic animation – by small groups of instruments drawn from the large orchestra used in the rest of the piece. The melody was written for the wedding of two friends of the composer, Ian and Laetitia Frost (to whom *Heaven is Shy of Earth* is dedicated), and its simple melodic patterns – reminiscent of folk music or plainchant – exemplify how, even on a technical level, Anderson's music has always drawn inspiration from the world outside the concert hall. Some of the accompanying instruments here use a special tuning, developed by Anderson in previous orchestral works: this, too, recalls the melodic inflections of folk music, but it also makes possible the use of chords and timbral effects derived from the harmonic series, in an evocation of natural resonance which again places Anderson's composed music on a continuum with the sounds and songs of the world outdoors.

In the 'Kyrie' the mezzo-soprano soloist is lyrically plaintive, an individual voice contrasted with the collective pleading of the chorus, while the orchestra takes wing at the centre of the movement in a dance-like interlude of animated complexity. In 'Gloria (with Bird)' the orchestra is more consistently independent, embracing a variety and abundance which ranges from the gossamer-light, extremely rapid quasi-canonic figuration of the opening to textures modelled on the composer's private audio recordings of church bells (even down to the gusts of wind around the church). This is the first movement in which we hear words by Dickinson, and the soloist here might well be taken to personify the poet herself. At times the chorus echoes or amplifies her words, and at one key moment

offers 'Nature is harmony' in response to the soloist's 'Nature is melody', felicitously encapsulating another aspect of the relationship between soloist and chorus by way of an alternative reading Anderson chose to preserve from Dickinson's manuscript. But for the most part the chorus represents the more conventionally religious impulses of the Latin text, and the movement's final minutes are a striking dramatisation of the conflict between an intensely pursued lyrical vision and a collective adoration verging on hysteria.

The text of the fourth movement is taken from the Psalms – it is a text previously set by Brahms and Messiaen – but its subject matter parallels Dickinson's, and here, without the chorus, the alternately lyrical and imperious soloist continues to suggest an individual consciousness confiding to us. Similarly, when the soloist returns midway through the 'Sanctus', picking up the second Dickinson poem from where it was interrupted at the climax of the 'Gloria', she sings with a visionary alertness which then turns inward, giving the line 'Heaven is shy of earth' the sort of gentle, bluesy ecstasy with which Anderson often invests such intimate moments.

We are at the heart of the work now. Under the choir's repeated intonations of the word 'Sanctus', the 'outdoor' tunings first heard in the 'Intrada' begin to be heard again in the orchestra, bringing a new colour to the sound and conveying the sense almost of a benediction through harmony itself. These rainbow harmonies continue into the 'Agnus Dei', alternating and finally fusing with the rapt polyphony of the chorus as the work comes full circle: the flugelhorn briefly rejoins the orchestra, the solo mezzo-soprano dissolves into the choir and the whole ensemble comes to rest on a chord of purest natural resonance.

John Fallas

I was lucky to know Oliver Knussen for 37 years, from 1981 until his death. For more than half that time he conducted my music, with total expertise and implicit understanding. By the time of these performances, his familiarity with my work was unrivalled. As a fellow composer he understood the inner workings of the music, so that what you hear is exactly what I heard in my head when composing it ... only better. Such collaborations – especially involving the eminent groups on this album, the BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus and London Sinfonietta – are very rare. I can never be sufficiently grateful to all the performers and especially to Oliver Knussen for the care, brilliance and devotion to which these fine recordings bear memorable witness.

Julian Anderson

11 July 2018



Susan Bickley is one of the most accomplished mezzo-sopranos of her generation, with a wide repertory encompassing the Baroque, the great 19th and 20th century dramatic roles, as well as contemporary repertoire. In May 2011 she received the prestigious Singer Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, the highest recognition for live classical music in the UK.

Highlights of the 2017–18 season include Eduige in Handel's *Rodelinda* for English National Opera under Christian Curnyn, Auntie in Britten's *Peter Grimes* with Edward Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra at the Edinburgh Festival, Eurycleia in John Fulljames' production of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* for the Royal Opera at the Roundhouse, and Carmen in David Sawer's world premiere *The Skating Rink* for Garsington Opera.

Recent operatic highlights include Matron in Shostakovich's *The Nose* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Paulina in Ryan Wigglesworth's world premiere *The Winter's Tale* for English National Opera, and Genevieve in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* for Garsington Opera. Bickley has performed with Opera North as Kostelnicka in Janáček's *Jenufa*, as well as Waltraute *Götterdämmerung* and Fricka *Die Walküre* in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*; she also returned to Welsh National Opera to sing Marcellina *The Marriage of Figaro*, a role she reprised in summer 2016 at Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

The **London Sinfonietta** is one of the world's leading contemporary music ensembles. Formed in 1968, the commitment to making new music has seen the orchestra commission over 400 works and premiere many hundreds more. Our ethos today is to constantly experiment with the art form, working with the best composers and performers and collaborating with artists from alternative genres and disciplines. We are committed to challenging perceptions, provoking new possibilities and stretching our audiences' imaginations, often working closely with them as creators, performers and curators of the events we stage.

Resident at Southbank Centre and Artistic Associate at Kings Place, with a busy touring schedule across the UK and abroad, the London Sinfonietta's core eighteen Principal Players are some of the finest musicians in the world.

Holding a leading position in education work, we believe that arts participation is transformational to individuals and communities, and that new music is relevant to all our lives. This belief is enacted through primary and secondary school concerts across the UK, interactive family events, and the annual London Sinfonietta Academy; an unparalleled opportunity for young performers and conductors to train with our Principal Players.

The London Sinfonietta has also broken new ground by creating Steve Reich's Clapping Music app for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch, a participatory rhythm game that has been downloaded over 200,000 times worldwide.

www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk

The **BBC Symphony Orchestra** has been at the heart of British musical life since it was founded in 1930. It provides the backbone of the BBC Proms, performing around a dozen concerts at the festival each year. The BBC SO has a strong commitment to 20th century and contemporary music, with recent and upcoming performances including commissions and premieres from Anna Clyne, Brett Dean, Philip Cashian, George Walker and Raymond Yiu.

It performs an annual season of concerts at the Barbican, where it is Associate Orchestra. The 2017–18 season includes Sakari Oramo's Sibelius symphony series, Total Immersion composer days devoted to Esa-Pekka Salonen, Julian Anderson and Leonard Bernstein, a concert staging of Jake Heggie's opera *Dead Man Walking* and an evening with American writer Armistead Maupin.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra also works regularly with Semyon Bychkov, who holds the Günter Wand Conducting Chair, and Conductor Laureate Sir Andrew Davis. It regularly performs with the **BBC Symphony Chorus** and together they won the 2015 Gramophone Best Choral Disc Award for their recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Central to the orchestra's life are studio recordings for BBC Radio 3 at its Maida Vale home, some of which are free for the public to attend, and the BBC SO also performs throughout the world. The vast majority of concerts are broadcast on BBC Radio 3, streamed online and available for 30 days after broadcast via the Radio 3 website.

The BBC SO is committed to innovative education work: ongoing projects include the BBC's *Ten Pieces*, the BBC SO *Journey Through Music* (with pre-concert workshops and discounted tickets for families) and the BBC SO Family Orchestra and Chorus.

www.bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra

Oliver Knussen (1952–2018)

One of the most influential composer-conductors of his generation, Oliver Knussen was born in Glasgow in 1952 and grew up near London (where his father was principal Double Bass of the London Symphony Orchestra), later moving to Suffolk where he lived for the remainder of his life.

The recipient of many honours and awards, including the Nemmers Prize in 2006 and the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor Award in 2009, he served as Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival (1983–98), Head of Contemporary Music at the Tanglewood Music Center (1986–93), Principal Guest Conductor of the Hague Residentie Orchestra (1993–97), Music Director of the London Sinfonietta (1998–2002), Artist-in-Association with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (2009–14) and with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (2006–18), and Richard Rodney Bennett Professor at the Royal Academy of Music (2014–18). He was appointed CBE in 1994 and received the Queen's Medal for Music 2015.

Together with Colin Matthews he founded the Composition and Performance courses at the Britten-Pears School in 1992. In recent years he was invited for residencies at the Royal Academy of Music, the Eastman School of Music, New England Conservatory, and the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Among his best-known works are the operas *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, written in collaboration with Maurice Sendak, as well as three symphonies, concertos for horn and violin, and many smaller-scale instrumental and vocal works including *Ophelia Dances*, *Coursing*, *Songs without Voices*, *Two Organa* and *Requiem: Songs for Sue*.

His 60th birthday was celebrated with special events in Aldeburgh, Amsterdam, Birmingham, London and Tanglewood, and in 2016 his work was the subject of a retrospective Composer Festival given by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. He recorded some 60 CDs for various labels.

HEAVEN IS SHY OF EARTH

9. Kyrie

Chorus

Kyrie eleison.

[Lord have mercy.

Mezzo-soprano

... eleison.

... have mercy.

Christe eleison.

Christ have mercy.

Chorus

Christe eleison.

Mezzo-soprano

Christe eleison.

Chorus

Kyrie eleison.

Lord have mercy.

Mezzo-soprano

... eleison.

... have mercy.]

10. Gloria (with Bird)

Chorus

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.

[Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise you. We bless you.
We worship you. We glorify you.
We give you thanks for your great glory.

Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.

Lord God, heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.
Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.]

Mezzo-soprano

'Nature' is what we see –
The Hill – the Afternoon –
Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –
Nay – Nature is Heaven –

Chorus

Heaven –

Mezzo-soprano

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei ...

[Lord God, Lamb of God ...]

Chorus

Nature is what we hear –

Mezzo-soprano

The Bobolink – the Sea –

Chorus
Thunder –

Mezzo-soprano
the Cricket –
Nay – Nature is Melody* –

Chorus
Nature is Harmony* –

Chorus
Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, [For only you are Holy, only you are Lord,
tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe. only you are Most High, Jesus Christ.]

Mezzo-soprano
Out of sight? What of that?
See the Bird – reach it!
Curve by Curve – Sweep by Sweep –
Round the Steep Air –
Danger! What is that to Her?
Better 'tis to fail – there –
Than debate – here –

Chorus
Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. [With the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.
Amen. Amen.]

Gloria, Gloria, Gloria ... Glory, glory, glory ...]

[* Dickinson's manuscript has both words, with no decision as to which alternative to use. I have set them both.]

11. Quam dilecta tabernacula tua

Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine!
Concupiscit et defecit anima mea in atria Domini.
Cor meum et caro mea exultavit in Deum vivum.
Etenim passer sibi domum et turtur nidum sibi,
Ubi ponat pullos suos: altaria tua, Domine
Rex meus et Deus meus.
Domine exaudi orationem meam.

[How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a
nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at thy altars,
O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.
O Lord of hosts, hear my prayer.]

12. Sanctus

Mezzo-soprano

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Sanctus ...

[Holy, holy, holy,
Holy ...

Chorus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth:
pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of Sabaoth.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.]

Mezzo-soprano

Blue is Blue – the World through –
Amber – Amber – Dew – Dew –
Seek – Friend – and see –
Heaven is shy of Earth –

Chorus
Heaven ...

Blue is Blue – the World through –
Amber – Amber – Dew – Dew –
Seek – Friend – and see –
Heaven is shy of Earth –

Mezzo-soprano
That's all, that's all, that's all –

Chorus
That's all, that's all, that's all –
Bashful Heaven – thy Lovers small –
Hide – too – from thee –

Mezzo-soprano
Sanctus ...

[Holy ...

Chorus
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.

Holy, holy, holy.]

13. Agnus Dei

Chorus

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

[Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Mezzo-soprano

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi ...

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world ...

Chorus

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi ...

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world ...

Mezzo-soprano & chorus

... dona nobis pacem.

... grant us peace.

Chorus

Amen.

Amen.]

Texts selected by the composer from the Ordinary of the Latin Mass, Vulgate Psalm 83,
and from two poems by Emily Dickinson (no. 668 & no. 703)

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Heaven is Shy of Earth

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Producer: Ann McKay (BBC)

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The Comedy of Change

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(oil on canvas, 1860; Cleveland Museum of Art/Bridgeman Images),
one of the composer's inspirations for *Heaven is Shy of Earth*

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Oliver Knussen





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[62'21] • English notes, and sung text with English translation,
enclosed

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