

Neil Buckland - Concerto for Harpsichord or Piano and Orchestra

(includes *Lamentings Heard in the Air* for harpsichord or piano and orchestra)

I started writing this concerto for harpsichord or piano with the harpsichord in mind, and there are passages in it that clearly reflect my enjoyment of baroque harpsichord music. While I was working on it, however, I found that some passages sounded very effective on piano, and, remembering how enjoyable harpsichord music can also be when played with clarity and vitality on the piano, I wondered if it might be possible to write a concerto that suited both instruments.

Then, with much of the music already written, I discovered a recording of Poulenc's harpsichord concerto (*Concert Champêtre*) played on piano: a different work, it seemed, but equally valid, perhaps not quite as crisp or witty, but with some expressive elements of the music, such as the harmonies, more evident than they often are when played on harpsichord.

Poulenc puts the piano as a secondary option in his concerto, but I have made the harpsichord and piano equal alternatives in this work. There are a few differences in the music they play – some fuller chords for harpsichord, some crescendoes for piano that are not possible on harpsichord, a prolonged break for the piano during the orchestral opening of the slow movement where the harpsichord plays "continuo" – but their parts are otherwise identical. They play the same notes, but their different tone qualities and expressive ranges give the music a different character, and this opens up extra interpretative and imaginative possibilities, both for players and listeners.

The musical style, as in most of my works, is lyrical and tonal, with influences from folk and world music as well as baroque and other early music.

There are three movements. The first is lively and predominantly cheerful, and makes much use of asymmetrical metres such as are sometimes found in Greek and other eastern European traditional music. These give the movement a strong rhythmic impetus, with a prominent part for marimba (often in dialogue with the harpsichord or piano) adding a bit of extra rhythmic spice and colour.

The slow movement is subtitled *Lamentings Heard in the Air* (a quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) and is elegiac in tone. This movement can also stand alone as a separate piece, under that title.

The finale is in ritornello form, a form commonly used for fast movements in baroque concertos: an orchestral passage, the "ritornello", is followed by a solo passage in the same key, the ritornello returns two or three times in different keys followed by different solo passages, then the opening ritornello returns in the home key to wind up proceedings. Here I've added an extra element to the plan, a slow, hymn-like passage that follows each solo, finally joining with and serving as a harmonic foundation for the other material in an extended, exultant concluding ritornello.

Neil Buckland

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