

Fame, Gold and Shadow Suite: Preface

The 8th century Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* depicts a world in which human nature, full (as ever) of pride, greed and brutality, was nevertheless still capable of honour, nobility, and genuine heroism. The vivid, evocative poetry and mythic power of *Beowulf* are beautifully conveyed in David R. Evans' *Fame, Gold and Shadow*, with the original text and parallel translations in calligraphy, evocative illustrations and an authoritative commentary¹. The opening music of this Suite was written for a projected recorded version of *Fame, Gold and Shadow*. When the project did not eventuate, at David's suggestion I expanded the original sketches into the present suite of five movements. The music was composed in 1992-3 and revised in 2005.

The Suite is not strictly programmatic and can be performed as independent instrumental music. It is ideally performed, however, in conjunction with spoken readings from the text of *Beowulf*, the movements of the Suite alternating with readings from related sections of the text. My setting for soprano and harp of *Beowulf* lines 2247–2266, *The Lay of the Last Survivor* (available separately from www.bucklandmusic.com.au), is in the same musical style as the Suite and could also be included in the program. A suggested format for a full performance of the *Fame, Gold and Shadow* Suite together with *The Lay of the Last Survivor* and readings from *Beowulf* is as follows:

Spoken introduction (giving background, setting the scene, introducing characters, explaining unusual words)

1. Prelude (score p.1)

Beowulf lines² 64-163, 189-228, 301-311, 320-441, 456, 473-498, 653-674, 688-696a, 702b-703, 710-835

2. Grendel (score p.10)

Beowulf lines 836-845, 852-873a, 924-955, 990-995, (996-1007a,) 1007b-1065, 1687a, 1724b-1784

3. Hall-Joy (score p.21)

INTERVAL (optional)

Beowulf lines 1799-1806, 1813-1890a, 1896-1913, (1963-1966,) 2200-2231a, 2281b-2286, (2231b-2246)

The Lay of the Last Survivor (if not included, lines 2231b-2281a can either all be omitted or all spoken)

Beowulf lines (2267-2281a,) 2287-2353a, 2401-2424, (2510-2537,) 2538-2610, 2625b-2630, 2661-2723

4. The Dragon (score p.30)

Beowulf lines 2724-2772, 2783-2820, (2821-2845a,) 2862, 2892-2910a, 3007b-3050, 3076-3182(end)

5. Threnody (score p.40)

The readings are my suggestions and could of course be abbreviated or expanded. Single movements or segments of the above program may also be performed separately, with or without the associated readings.

Musical punctuation of readings

When the music is performed with readings from the text of *Beowulf*, the readings can, if desired, be punctuated at suitable

¹ Dr Evans' book remains unpublished. The manuscript is displayed at Chaucer on Bridge St Gallery, Uralla, NSW, Australia. For further information and samples of his illustrations and calligraphy see

http://www.evansgalleryuralla.com/Chaucer_on_bridge_street-Beowulf.htm. The title is used with permission.

For more on *Beowulf* see

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/beowulf>, or <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/b/beowulf/poem-summary>,

or one of the many published editions.

² Line numbers are as given in Seamus Heaney's translation (Norton). Unfortunately David Evans did not translate the complete text of *Beowulf*. Recommended complete translations include Heaney, Donaldson (Norton) and Liuzzo (Broadview). Note that line numbers differ slightly in some editions, and some do not provide line numbers at all.

points (e.g. chapter or section breaks) by the harpist/lutenist playing (solo) selected chords or brief phrases from the Suite. Suggested phrases: *Grendel*: bars 29-30 and/or 39-40; bars 162-169; *The Dragon*: bars 9-14 (and 15-22); bars 180-184; bars 188-191 (and 192-195); bars 212-216.

Instrumentation

Soprano Recorder

Harp *or* Lute (see notes below)

Organ *or* String Trio (violin, viola and cello, *or* treble, tenor and bass viols)

Percussion (nakers, low-pitched drum)(see notes below)

The part for **harp or lute** may be played on any kind of harp (modern, historical or folk; gut- or metal-strung), or a lute of any type. Performance on a psaltery or other historical plucked string instrument of similar sound may also be possible. Modern guitar is not suitable. The range is D to b[♯] (D2 – B5); the part can, however, be played on instruments with a smaller range (e.g. medieval or Celtic harp) by omitting lower notes, provided the bass notes of chords are not changed (i.e. a chord written as Dada'd' would be played as da'd' on a small medieval harp lacking the low D, even if the a was within the instrument's range). The minimum range is g or a to b[♯]. (Note that if my setting of *The Lay of the Last Survivor* is to be included in the program, it is written for a harp with a range of D to b[♯] (D2 – B♭5); it could conceivably be transcribed for lute but is not playable on any instrument with a smaller range than this.)

The part for **organ or string trio** may be played on any kind of pipe organ (not electronic organ) with at least two manuals (with or without pedals); or by a string trio, consisting of either violin, viola and cello or treble, tenor and bass viols. String parts are available on request.

In the event of the availability of both organ and strings, the instrumentation of this part may be varied from movement to movement, or within a single movement, at the discretion of the performers.

The **percussion** part requires: (i) a pair of nakers (small medieval kettledrums) or small drums of similar sound, the lower one tunable to a and b, and the higher to e'; or, if tunable drums are unavailable, a pair of untuned drums of contrasting pitches in similar ranges; (ii) (in the 5th movement, *Threnody*, only) a drum of lower pitch than the nakers. If tunable to a definite pitch, it should sound D below the bass staff; if of indefinite pitch, it should sound approximately in the same range; either is acceptable.

Neil Buckland
Sydney, 2005

Duration of Suite: approx. 27 minutes

Prelude: 5'30, *Grendel*: 6'45, *Hall-Joy*: 3'45, *The Dragon*: 6'15, *Threnody*: 4'15 or 5'00

Duration of *The Lay of the Last Survivor* (sung setting): 10'30

Duration of readings from *Beowulf*: this obviously depends on how quickly or slowly the reader reads the text. I suggest allowing 5-6 mins per 100 lines. Seamus Heaney reads his translation at about 5'45 per 100 lines (excerpts can be heard on <http://www.wvnorton.com/college/english/nael/NOA/audio.htm>). If all the lines listed above are read at Heaney's pace, the approx. total time for readings will be 75 mins. This does not include any spoken introduction. The total time may of course be reduced or increased by omitting or adding lines, changing the reading pace, adding musical punctuations as mentioned above, etc.