

Reviews of Judith Hall playing "blessed days of blue" by Jonathan Lloyd

"The fine flautist Judith Hall - for whom it was written - was the soloist in the Lloyd piece, an extended work which exploited the full gamut of the instrument's tonal and technical potential; the flute playing was elegant, accomplished and assured, right from the impressive opening cadenza to its wistful ending.

The orchestral score, too, was full of fascinatingly new sounds, the strings being flavoured by the addition of harp, mandolin and guitar; the composer, who was present, and who was called to the platform, must have been much encouraged by the genuine warmth of the applause, both for his music and for the excellence of Judith Hall's performance" THE MALVERN GAZETTE

"The music of Jonathan Lloyd defies conventional categories of complexity and simplicity; he is one of the few postmodernists for whom musical logic and audible clarity go hand in hand. Like his symphonies, his recent flute concerto, *blessed days of blue*, derives its abundance of effect from an economy of gesture, and balances playful with serious drama. The work is the third of four works composed for the flautist Judith Hall, who gave a memorable world première with the English Symphony Orchestra, who commissioned it, under the baton of William Boughton, on 20 April at Malvern Boys College.

The concerto, a single expansive movement of some 20 minutes, was inspired by the memory of Lloyd's former teacher John Lambert and its title is taken from a line by Samuel Beckett: 'On him will rain again as in the blessed days of blue the passing cloud'. Certainly there is a sense of programmatic imagery in the work's final section. Characteristic of Lloyd's style is the almost leitmotivic pervasiveness of three terse gestures which, if at first banal, appear in transformations which surprise and delight, and articulate a larger dramatic shape. With its varied instrumentation, which contrasts plucked strings (mandolin, guitar and harp) with a 23-piece string orchestra, textures and colour, if at times sparse, are always exotic and unusual. Constant shifts of timbral focus generate a volatile aural perspective, in which moments of tension and epiphanic beauty emerge and recede.

Initial crystalline octave patterns played by harp are enriched with the solo flute's aura of mystique as it weaves microtonal melismas and sustained note-bending, a cross-cultural echo underlined by percussive drumming of mandolin and guitar marked 'quasi tabla'. The third motive, reminiscent of a classical decorative turn, is introduced by mandolin and guitar, delicately etched against harp octaves and the tabla rhythms in lower strings. In the solo flute's lyrical expansion of the motives, the melisma is transformed into an incisive darting gesture while strings thicken and divide towards the first climax, and one of the most striking sonorities of the work: a veiled cascade of dovetailed falling motives, a Purcellian string-fantasia texture of Tippettian harmony. This slows to stasis, before momentum brusquely resumes, towards a second galvanic climax. Here the resolution is unexpected, and as the sun emerges from behind a cloud, so does a delicate blues phrase in the guitar. Even if naive pictorialism may be inferred from the blues, the 'raining' pizzicato scales in multiple divided strings, and the 'blessed' solo flute sustained over the strings, the effect is both witty and ravishing. Yet musical energy resumes in the flute's virtuoso acceleration towards an emphatic climax, with tremolando strings, by now 23 individual parts, from which the guitar 'blues' emerges again, enhanced by the mandolin's glissando thirds. The work's playful expressivity is summed up: "in the final gesture, the flute's melisma suspended in silence, a blues chord in the mandolin echoing wittily, poetically, in the air." TEMPO