

Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012) String Quartet no 3 (1995)

Jonathan Harvey was born in Warwickshire, but lived for much of his life in Lewes, and was for many years Professor of Music at Sussex University. His father was an amateur musician and an accomplished, self-taught composer who profoundly influenced his son's development. As a music scholar at St John's College, Cambridge Harvey quickly fell out with his composition teacher Patrick Hadley over "unprepared dissonances", and on the advice of Benjamin Britten studied privately with Erwin Stein (a pupil of Schoenberg) and Hans Keller. They gave him a solid grounding in classical forms, where music develops from moment to moment, each episode perceived against the background of what has preceded it. His next mentors, in the early 1970s, Milton Babbitt (at Princeton) and Pierre Boulez (at IRCAM in Paris) expounded 'High Modernism'; here, by contrast, time is a space in which forms can be constructed regardless of time's necessary direction in performance. These structures can be difficult for the time-bound listener to grasp. However, the computing facilities at Princeton and IRCAM also allowed Harvey to manipulate the structure of individual sounds and to transform (or 'morph') one sound into another. He found fulfilling expression in this 'Spectralism' of the transcendental and spiritual issues that emerged from his deep interest in Buddhism and in the writings of Rudolf Steiner.

In a fruitful collaboration with the Arditti Quartet, Harvey wrote four string quartets in 1977, 1988, 1995 and 2004 (with live electronics) respectively and a string trio in 2004. In today's third quartet, as Arnold Whittall points out in his book on Harvey, the players produce transformations of sounds similar to those that might otherwise be achieved electronically: *"an immense variety of special playing techniques... inflect basic sounds through different tunings, harmonics, types of vibrato and playing positions, and even orchestrate the breathing of the players at one point."*

Jonathan Harvey himself wrote of it:

"In Quartet no. 3 there is a dialectic between a surface texture which is fleeting and fragmented and an underlying structure which is very strictly repetitive. A number of 'themes' (ten, or twenty when they combine to make 'doubles') are constantly juxtaposed in different ways; they are only developed at a few special moments. But each of these 'themes' is somewhat insubstantial. It is as if the normal solid string tone is put under a microscope, or a solid beam of light is diffracted by a prism and scattered. Often the material moves into the borderlands of silence, only half-heard. There are themes, for instance, on bounced bow glissandi, harmonic trills, *'col legno battuto'* [struck with the wood of the bow] and (the nearest to solid pitch) an octave G constantly inflected with microtones, this latter theme deriving from an improvisation I recorded with the cellist Francis-Marie Uitti on the CD 'Imaginings'.

The form could be described thus:

- Exposition of most of the themes, with silences
- Repeat of exposition over tritone pedal in the cello, becoming increasingly developmental
- Climax
- Two new themes combine with the old themes (double-stop glissandi theme and pizzicato theme)
- Dance-like conclusion with the *col legno battuto* theme dominant."