



# Jonathan Dove

## *Stargazer*

Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra

*Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra*

In 1999, Ian Bousfield invited me to write him a trombone concerto. He felt that modern composers tended to ‘typecast’ the trombone as ‘Big Bad Wolf’ or ‘Clown’, and he was interested in a work with a more lyrical approach. I could not have written a pyrotechnic showpiece, but I was attracted to the idea of creating a miniature ‘opera’ for the trombone.

The image that started to develop in my mind was of the trombonist as a man with a telescope, a Stargazer, searching the night sky. The orchestra would represent the constellations he observed, and he would respond to what he saw.

As I was writing, the nursery melody *Twinkle, twinkle, little star* kept coming into my mind. I resisted at first, not least because I did not want to compete with the famous sets of variations by Mozart and Dohnányi. But the tune insisted, and eventually took over, so that the whole piece became a fantasia on it. It is never plainly stated at the speed you would expect to hear it sung, but its contour is clearly audible throughout.

When I was about half-way through the composition, Ian left the LSO to become principal trombone of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. This changed the plans for the première, which has waited until tonight.

*Stargazer* is in one continuous movement, but falls into six sections:

### **I. Searching the Night Sky**

*Stargazer* asks questions of the stars: “How old are you? Can you see me? Is there something you want to tell me?” The stars continue on their way. *Stargazer* calls to them. At first there is no answer – then, faintly at first, the stars begin to respond.



## **II. Constellations**

Stargazer calls out to different groups of stars (different sections of the orchestra) and they answer.

## **III. Arcturus & Canis chasing Ursa Major & Minor with Lyra**

Chilly arctic wind, suggested by the name of the Herdsman (Arcturus, who gave his name to the Arctic) chasing both bears (Ursa Major and Minor – Polaris, the Pole Star, is in Ursa Minor). Canis, the dog, joins the chase, and Stargazer sees Lyra (which includes Vega, the harp star – this used to mark the North Pole).

## **IV. Gemini**

Brotherly love; duality; the coexistence of the mortal and immortal sides of man. Castor and Pollux spent alternate nights in Hades and on Olympus. In Rome they stood for Life and Death.

## **V. Orion, Pegasus**

Orion, the hunter, a giant famous for his beauty. Blinded by Oenopion (with whose daughter he was in love), he regained his sight by travelling east and gazing into the sunrise.

Pegasus, snowy white, with a mane of gold, the winged horse was the favourite of the muses as his hoof-marks caused their fountain of inspiration to start flowing.

## **VI. The Milky Way**

Seen by many cultures as the pathway along which the dead return to their true home in the immortal stars. Each star is a departed hero or loved one.