



Brian Ferneyhough

Cassandra's Dream Song (1970)

Solo Flute

Duration: 10 minutes

First performance: March 1974, Royan Festival, Pierre-Yves Artaud

When composing this short work for solo flute during the early months of 1970, one of my main preoccupations was a personal clarification of the extremely ambiguous relationship then existing between notation and interpretation in contemporary musical practice. I set out to compose a work whose realisation might, so to speak, be seen as a commentary on the act of interpretation itself, achieved without any resort to extra-musical (quasi-theatrical) elements.

In the pursuit of this aim, I defined two completely autonomous processes: (1) a series of highly structured, slowly evolving and expanding commentaries on and around a single pitch (A natural); (2) a group of six fragments, highly contrasted and non-linear in character, to be interpolated between the seven elements of the first category but, in contrast to the latter, in an order selected by the performer. The resultant intersection and sometimes forceful collision of two distinct types of material and formal principle can only be reconciled by the mediatory influence of the individual performer.

A second conflictual level is implied by the relationship between the notation (considered as sonic abstraction) and its actual realisation during any given performance. To this end, the degree of difficulty of execution is integrated into the expressive ambience of the work to an unusually high degree, so that the final sounding result is not precisely definable in advance, arising as it does from the intent of the performer to realise as many of the highly-specific notated actions as possible. Thus, the audible difficulty of execution emerges as an integral structural component of the work's identity; the reaction between the instrument, thrust to the limits of its own inherent nature, and the performer has been conceived so as to give rise to a new synthesis in which the traditional concept of "interpretation" has simultaneously been negated and transcended.

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