



# Brian Ferneyhough

## La Chute d'Icare (1988)

Solo Clarinet and Chamber Ensemble

Duration: 10 minutes 30 seconds

First performance: September 1988, Musica '88, Strasbourg, Armand Angster (cl), Nieuw Ensemble conducted by Ed Spanjaard

Commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation

The initial motivation for this *Little Serenade of Disappearance* was the celebrated painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Breughel. Apart from the bucolic fecundity of its luminous images, what impressed me most immediately was the touching incongruity obtaining between the title and the completely inconsequential role assigned to the event nominally depicted. As in many other paintings of the period, this latter serves as an excuse for a veritable maelstrom of images and references which have come to take on a life of their own.

What this piece attempts to suggest is, therefore, less a reflection on the heroic-tragic dimension of the underlying myth than a transcription of the strange sensation of "already having been" which is brilliantly evoked by Breughel in the view of a world serenely pursuing its own concerns, completely oblivious to the almost invisible tiny pair of legs waving pathetically out of the water, the only record of the apocalyptic event being a pair of feathers floating disconsolately down in the wake of their erstwhile owner.

Two aspects of this state of affairs are clearly reflected in the composition without any pretensions to illustrative function. (1) The musical material of the opening explodes into being already fully-formed, its generational processes behind it, fictive autobiography. (2) A gradual erosion of this clearly-delineated, repetitive substance leads to a series of tableaux which are only revealed through the gaps in the increasingly tattered initial material.

*La Chute d'Icare* for obligato clarinet and small ensemble was a commission of the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon and was premiered in the 1988 Strasbourg Festival by Armand Angster and Het Nieuw Ensemble, Amsterdam.

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