

Reviews

General:

“Especially original, though, was Hesketh’s control of the relaxation process, which leads to the final reprise-like section. Rather than dissolving completely, as one expects, the thinned-out woodwind motifs, especially on mellow bass clarinet and bassoon, revive and challenge expectation in their renewal of energy and restoration of the fuller density of the start. The very ending is magical: from the tingling percussion a sustained flute note emerges, dovetailed into violin, and is cut off by a single triangle ping. As a whole the piece communicated, moved and thrilled; and one sensed a composer who both has something to say and the means to say it.”

- TEMPO (Malcolm Miller)

“The young Liverpool-born composer (Kenneth Hesketh) has already made his mark in America and Germany, and on this evidence it is easy to see why.”

- DAILY TELEGRAPH (David Fanning)

“Hesketh has a fabulous ear for detail, the textures often contrapuntally dense and complex, yet with a transparency and clarity that draws you into his sound world.”

- SEEN & HEARD (Christopher Thomas)

Selected Reviews of specific works

GRAVEN IMAGE:

There was an electricity and panache to the first performance of Kenneth Hesketh’s Graven Image, a co-commission by the BBC and the RLPO, who performed it with flying colours at the Prom on 1 August under their exciting young conductor Vasily Petrenko. Hesketh’s stunningly-orchestrated and eloquently-shaped orchestral work formed a colourful overture to a riveting Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto (soloist Paul Lewis) and a fiery account of Rachmaninov’s Symphonic Dances. Hesketh, the RLPO’s composer in residence (2007-9), has a string of works lined up for the orchestra, and clearly revels in its sonorities, for the most striking aspect of Graven Image is its brilliant, indeed resplendent orchestration, combining echoes from the transparent opulence of Mahler and Henze, as well as the perfumed richness of French music, Berlioz, through Roussel and even Messaien. The programmatic title alludes to the medieval ‘momento mori’, with the ideas of time and mortality, and quotes from the Third-Century Roman ‘Epitaph of a cynic’ in its poetic preface. Yet it also works as a pure essay in sound.

Throughout we hear bell-like sounds, produced by high string harmonies, repeated high notes in woodwind or percussion – a large section comprising tubular bells, as well as vibraphone and xylophone. Such tintinnabulations, far from suggesting frozen time, seem rather to generate a high ostinato which has its own life, and persuades the listener to follow the energetic material in the middle layer of the texture, where melodic fragments wisp around with striking melodic doublings, such as the woodwind blends at the start. Yet the strength of the work is its energy and clarity, articulated through an unambiguous slow-fast-slow ternary form which drives through a series of large climaxes.

The first, in the slowly-evolving opening section, accumulates a full saturation of texture, while the biggest forms the culmination of the busier, quicksilver middle section, where Petrenko really intensified the build-up through to its thrilling peak. Especially original, though, was Hesketh’s control of the relaxation process, which leads to the final reprise-like section. Rather than dissolving completely, as one expects, the thinned-out woodwind motifs, especially on mellow bass clarinet and bassoon, revive and challenge expectation in their renewal of energy and restoration of the fuller density of the start. The very ending is magical: from the tingling percussion a sustained

flute note emerges, dovetailed into violin, and is cut off by a single triangle ping. As a whole the piece communicated, moved and thrilled; and one sensed a composer who both has something to say and the means to say it.

TEMPO 2009 (Malcolm Miller)

The concerto came between Kenneth Hesketh's *Graven Image* and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, works that share a strong undertow of fatalism. Not that they sounded remotely like one another. Hesketh's new piece, receiving its world premiere, called on large resources, the music at times radiates that hothouse atmosphere redolent of Skryabin's *Prometheus*. The harmonic language is fluid, and there is that sense of the music surging up from a seething cauldron, and at times erupting with sparks and bursts of instrumental colour. It was characteristic of Hesketh's keen ear, however, that the music, for all its complexity, sounded lucid.

Daily Telegraph

04/08/2008

BBC Proms 2008: caprice and cohesion

Geoffrey Norris

The programme opened with a world premiere – a soul-searching piece entitled *Graven Image* by Kenneth Hesketh, the Phil's composer in the house. Hesketh has been widely heard in Liverpool in recent years and this Proms debut and the piece, a fascinating kaleidoscope of colours and textures, received a warm welcome.

He talks of the piece being a "reminder of our mortality" – which it might have been – but there was constant movement and constant interest. He used the pallet of sounds provided by the RLPO to maximum effect. There was energy – to the point that, when the orchestra was called upon to perform flat out it felt like a coiled spring about to be let loose.

Liverpool Daily Post

Aug 2 2008

Gail Thomson

MUSIC OF A DISTANT DRUM:

...Kenneth Hesketh's *Music of a Distant Drum*: operatic with the human voice, a highly impressive baritone Rodney Clarke singing high tessitura vocal lines, were the most appealing items from this outstanding group of musicians.

23 February 2008

Sheffield Telegraph

Ensemble 10/ 10

City Hall Ballroom

Bernard Lee

LIKE THE SEA, LIKE TIME:

Yet again, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic attracted an almost full house for the world premiere of Kenneth Hesketh's shattering, monumental work *Like the Sea, Like Time*. Unusually for the present day, this work was commissioned using private funds, thanks to the generosity of the HB Bicket Charitable Trust. And that trust must have felt that it was money well spent, for it earned a warm response from the audience.

It was, however, an ambitious piece, and is one of four large-scale choral premieres scheduled for the Capital of Culture year. Not only was the RLPO hugely augmented, but the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir was also joined by the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Choir and the New London Chamber Choir.

The lyrical and evocative opening metamorphosed into a multi-layered choral prologue in which the drama built to a massive climax, a tiny trickle slowly becoming a raging torrent. At times, the first part was listless, at others almost calm. Right through the piece the word-painting by the orchestra richly complemented the narrative of the words.

The restless cross-rhythms in the second part led to a furious depiction of storms in which choral voices were also used as instruments to add to the drama. The children's choir was particularly special, coping with complex lines

with ease and with a purity of tone and clarity of diction. The adult choirs, too, produced some splendid a cappella sections in part three.

Tenor John Daszak was a fine lyrical soloist and Conductor Harry Bicket, perhaps more often associated with early music, drew the drama out of this piece in fine style.

21 January 2008

Jan 21 2008 by Glyn Mon Hughes

Liverpool Daily Post

A RHYME FOR THE SEASON:

THERE seems to be a new wave of confidence sweeping its way along Hope Street. For the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, that was summed up in Opening Flourish, the first concert of the all-important 2007-8 season, the first of the two seasons overlapping the Capital of Culture year.

That confidence was no more evident than in the fact that two world premieres took up the bulk of the first half and, far from scaring audiences away, the hall was comfortably full, a far cry from the experience of recent years.

Hesketh's *A Rhyme for the Season* was a vibrant work, absolutely bursting with energy and passion. Occasionally contemplative, especially in the middle section, the verve with which the RLPO was instantly imbued by conductor Vassily Petrenko set the scene for what was an exciting overture to the season.

Sep 17 2007

Glyn Mon Hughes

Liverpool Daily Post

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic is premiering 30 new works over the next 15 months, commissioned to mark the 800th anniversary of the city's founding, and to celebrate Liverpool as European Capital of Culture in 2008. Conducted by Vassily Petrenko, the opening concert of the new season kicked off with two new works, both by prominent Liverpoolian composers.

Kenneth Hesketh's *A Rhyme for the Season* is a short, snappy overture that catches the anticipatory mood of Merseyside. A showpiece for an orchestra that is clearly on a roll, it is virtuoso stuff, full of whip-crack rhythms and vertiginous instrumental writing, and the dexterity and panache of the performance served as a reminder of how Petrenko has transformed the RLPO since he became principal conductor last year.

Tim Ashley

Monday September 17, 2007

The Guardian

DETAIL FROM THE RECORD:

"All good things come in threes" wrote Alban Berg in the score of his Chamber Concerto. He may have been referring to the numerological complexities of its construction, but the maxim proved its validity when a trio of fine works was presented by the London Sinfonietta under Oliver Knussen.

Kenneth Hesketh's *Detail from the Record* is from a work in progress: a puppet ballet based on Japanese folk tales. Hesketh's music has all the delicacy and subtle colouring of a Japanese print. A shuddering bass clarinet is followed by the gelid sonorities depicting the icy breath of the water sprite in *The Cold Lady*. If the string writing looks back to Berg, the tenuous wisps of sound testify to the power of Hesketh's own imagination.

The Evening Standard

June 01, 2006

Ballet for puppets pulls right strings

London Sinfonietta/ Knussen

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Barry Millington

Kenneth Hesketh's *Detail from the Record*, completed five years ago, started the ball rolling. In some surface respects Knussen must have felt that he was conducting one of his own works: compact; illustrative; sonorities carefully polished. The piece consists of snapshots from a puppet opera in progress, *The Record of Ancient Matters*, based on Japanese folk tales. Heard neat, Hesketh's atmospheric music already takes us to strange places, where suspended notes hover, percussion battalions cut a swath, and motifs bubble and fade in synch with whimsical scenarios.

First Night reviews

The Times

June 01, 2006

Geoff Brown

Kenneth Hesketh's *Detail From the Record* was effectively a quarter-hour sampler for a work-in-progress, a puppet ballet based on Japanese folk tales. The four extracts woven into a single musical span are finished in a thoughtfully exquisite, almost Ravel-like way, while the transparency of the scoring recalls a piece like *Mother Goose*.

Friday June 2, 2006

The Guardian

Andrew Clements

This oddly if (as it so proved) viably put-together trio of works from the London Sinfonietta and Oliver Knussen featured two world premieres from younger British composers and a still-undervalued Viennese classic. *Detail from the Record* is a suite by Kenneth Hesketh from his in-progress puppet ballet *The Record of Ancient Matters* – whose sequence of Japanese-inspired folk-tales should prove as characterful to watch (at least if the preparatory sketches by Amy Luckenbach – displayed in the foyer and reprinted in the programme – are anything to go by) as it is to listen to.

Thus the quiet but restless atmosphere soon established in 'Of Moths and Dragonflies' gives way to a chorale-led evocation of ancient splendour – contrasting with the depiction of a first vengeful, then remorseful water-sprite and concluding with the antics of a badger who resides in a tea-kettle. All very entertaining in a decidedly whimsical way – as is Hesketh's score, which is not to detract from its considerable sophistication of scoring or striking imagery, expertly welded into a continuous span that hardly sounds a suite as such. Enticingly played by the Sinfonietta, it is further evidence of the composer's continued refining of his intricate but never diffuse approach to sonority – and with a gestural lightness of touch all too easy to overlook but which should never to be taken for granted.

Tuesday, May 30, 2006

The Classical Source

Richard Whitehouse

POETIC CONCEITS:

Yet it was Kenneth Hesketh's *Poetic Conceits* (2005) that otherwise stole the show. Without having sacrificed the finesse that made his early ensemble pieces so alluring, Hesketh here distils a keen motivic continuity that is audibly sustained over the five movements. The limpid yet restive motion of 'Cold Pastoral' and the brittle gestures of 'Epigraph' follow the stark writing of 'Epigram', then the freewheeling interplay of 'Mad Pursuits' is capped by the technical and expressive synthesis that is 'Epitaph'. An individual, intriguing and successful way to effect a large-scale structure – with piano-writing that consistently holds the attention, yet without drawing attention to itself as such.

The Classical Source

Wednesday, March 08, 2006

Richard Whitehouse

TWO LAPELS AND A POCKET:

Spirited and lively with crack effects

The Goettinger symphony orchestra opened their concert with a premiere in the city hall. The first suite from

Kenneth Hesketh's chamber opera *The Overcoat* (after Gogol) celebrated a successful premiere under the direction of Christoph Müller.

How does one overcome the unknown? Very simply: One makes it known. This is what conductor Christoph Müller did... in the premiere of the suite *Two Lapels and a Pocket* by the English composer Kenneth Hesketh (born 1968): The GSO played short sections of the composition and in addition Mueller told the audience what action the music was to accompany.

Thanks to this preparation, the listeners encountered a comfortable atmosphere of familiarity when listening to the complete suite, the motives seemed like old acquaintances, increasing in certainty, so that this very coloured and innovative music won at once many friends, in no small part thanks to the sympathetic and lively interpretation of the premiere. The reception was far more than just a "good result", so much so that orchestra, conductor and composer were evidently happy.

December 2005

Das Orchester - Review

Goettinger Symphonie Orchester

Christoph Mueller

Stadthalle, Goettingen

FRA DURİ SCOGLI:

The two Hesketh pieces - *Fra Duri Scogli* and *Dei Destini Incrociati* - were fascinating, combining elements of Renaissance polyphony with his own unique language.

Feb 15 2005

Daily Post

Glyn Mon Hughes

NETSUKE FRAGMENTS:

By contrast, Kenneth Hesketh's short works, *Netsuke Fragments I & II*, presented often densely textured and sparkling miniatures after Netsuke, small and intricately carved toggles traditionally used by the Japanese to attach pouch-cords to kimono sashes.

William Yeoman

Purcell Room, London

Tuesday, January 11, 2005

CAUTIONARY TALES:

Cautionary Tales is a work with a crystal-clear sound image and an intense structure.

North Holland Dagblad

ASKO Ensemble

January 2004

THE CIRCLING CANOPY OF NIGHT:

...But the most heartening piece was *The Circling Canopy of Night* of 1999 from a youngish, very talented Brit, Kenneth Hesketh.

Fantastico e delicato, the score's opening direction reads. Words well chosen: the piece takes flight beautifully, musing on the universe through tingling, skittering strands of sound, streaked with the chocolate burblings of bass clarinet or soprano sax.

Geoff Brown

The Times

August 22 2001

Works by three major figures of the era - Stravinsky, Xenakis, Henze - were joined by music by Bach (idiosyncratically arranged by Stravinsky) and the young British composer Kenneth Hesketh.

However, if there was a piece too many in this particular concert, where prolonged platform-changing inevitably sent the concert into overtime and precariously close to the last Tube home, it would be impossible to say which. All five were examples of compositional concision at its most refined - even the melee of notes that makes up Hesketh's recent *The Circling Canopy of Night*, a glistening whirl of nocturnal colours, had a driving sense of purpose and onward movement.

The highways and byways of modern music

Matthew Rye

The Telegraph

23 August 2001

NETSUKE:

Netsuke by Kenneth Hesketh, is a colour-filled piece, notable for attention to detail, polish of surface, and beguiling flecks of contrast. Hesketh's piece was led with precision and spirit by Stefan Asbury, coordinator of new-music activities.

Richard Dyer

Boston Globe

Tanglewood Summer Festival

13 August 2001

Netsuke for eight instrument, an intricate and shapely construction with many vivid ideas. Well commissioned, well composed.

Financial Times

Endymion Ensemble

Purcell Room

April 6 2001

David Murray

AT GOD SPEEDED SUMMER'S END:

The BBC Philharmonic played to a full and enthusiastic house on Saturday, in a programme consisting of Mahler's Second Symphony and world premiere of a new work by young English composer Kenneth Hesketh.

At God speeded summer's end (the title comes from Dylan Thomas' Prologue) is, in the composer's words, a procession of schezos constructed on the same formal ideas as Dylan's poem, complete with its own acrostic pattern, At a time when many new works declare affinities with a poem or a painting - even a line of philosophy - it was heartening to receive the composer's explanation of exactly how a piece of music relates to its supposed source of inspiration.

All the same, interesting and invaluable though this information is, it rarely impacts on the listener's experience, particularly at first hearing. Nevertheless, each section had its own character, ranging from mystical to hard-driven and climatic. Hints of a dance seemed to bubble beneath the surface, never coming up for air but breathing life into the fast flowing stream of sound. Punctuated through with climaxes, all the music's accumulated energy exploded dramatically in the final moments.

Guardian

Tuesday 14 November 2000

BBC Philharmonic

Vassilly Sinaisky

Bridgewater Hall

Manchester

Pauline Fairclough

Hesketh, whose name may not be familiar to readers but on this evidence soon will be. In under 15 minutes, he built up a convincing structure, spikily scored with flashes of Waltonian electricity and showing a musicianly aptitude for knowing just when to relax tension and when to tighten the screw again. This was emphatically not one of those noisy exercises in orchestration going nowhere. It knew exactly where it was going and got there.

Sunday Telegraph
19 November 2000
BBC Philharmonic
Vassilly Sinaisky
Bridgewater Hall
Manchester

It says much for Kenneth Hesketh's *At God speeded summer's end* that memories of its fierce driving energy were not eclipsed by the Mahler. His title is from Dylan Thomas' Prologue, and his music is a fireball of energy, such as one might expect of the scherzo of an Elliot Carter symphony. The young Liverpool-born composer has already made his mark in America and Germany, and on this evidence it is easy to see why.

Telegraph
Monday 13 November 2000
BBC Philharmonic
Vassilly Sinaisky
Bridgewater Hall
Manchester
David Fanning