

Music for the painter Jack Smith

Music for the painter Jack Smith was commissioned by The Brighton Festival to celebrate my 40th Birthday. Over the past few years I have looked at many paintings by Jack Smith. His wonderful colour combinations, structures and absolute ability to convey an emotional quality usually attributed to music (often joyful in temperament), makes me feel like I AM listening (or I suppose looking at) music. I have had personal contact with Jack (a passionate new music lover) and his wife Sue (also a wonderful artist) and it seems fitting to connect this piece to them, especially as each morning the first thing I look at on my wall is a large 'joyful' and loud red painting by Jack.

The work is something completely new for me and is a departure from what I usually do in my music, whatever that may be in terms of structure, use of pitches, rhythms etc. I wanted to create of piece that had very little going on in terms of melody/harmony and all the other traditional ways of thinking and composing music. So I set up a mechanical system and set the dynamic range in regular blocks of either ppp! or fff! The flute and clarinet change their instruments throughout using piccolo, bass flute and Eb, Bb and bass clarinet. The instrumentation is made up of what performers are available for any particular concert.

(Extended programme Note for the concerto version of Music For the Painter Jack Smith)

I wrote a 'concerto' version of Music for the painter Jack Smith, which adds a duet of violin (using a Paganini piece) and viola (using a Krutzer study) to a background of the original chamber piece. I retained the ppp! and fff! dynamic blocks, even in the solo parts. The violin plays the famous Molto Perpetuo piece throughout, sometimes in high harmonics (in the ppp! sections), and much slower than would be usual for this showpiece. I wanted the effect to be like practising a regular pattern study (etude), rather like a performer practises scales and arpeggios, the piece, in constant semiquavers just goes on and on, detached from everything around, and only reacting in the sudden change of dynamics. The viola player plays the complete krutzer study which is a basic fingering exercise. The overall effect at times in a kind of anti-concerto where the soloists are fighting a battle with the ensemble. I was interested in trying to add a melodic (not by me, but by one of my favourite violin composers) element to the rather mechanical aspects of both my Jack Smith music, and the Krutzer study. Like other pieces of mine, I have always been interested in adding or making a collage of music by other composers within my own composition.

Andrew Toovey