

Nicola LeFanu on her Music: written for the Park Lane Group, as 'featured composer', January 1994.

What a lot of music I've written! —nearly fifty pieces, of all sorts and sizes. Like sending a family of children out into the world, some fall by the wayside and others establish themselves successfully. Some come cropping up in the most unlikely places and others resurrect when I've almost forgotten them. The music must make its own way, it's detached from me and I from it; but I retain an affection for most of it, gratitude to the musicians who gave it a first hearing, and delight in performances from a new generation. Among the many pleasures of growing older (true!) is that of knowing that my music is not restricted to a London-based clique but has reached out to a much wider musical community.

If I look back and consider my life so far (over twenty - five years of composing) I would say that the two formative influences in my life are two composers: my mother, Elizabeth Maconchy, and my husband David Lumsdaine. What I owe them is inestimable.

Beyond that I would look back at my education, and remember the years of musical discovery in my late teens: studying with Jeremy Dale Roberts, friendships begun at Oxford and R.C.M. which still continue, and then later the inspiration of working with Earl Kim at Harvard.

If I was to single out particular events, then I think the premiere performances of *Columbia Falls* in 1975 (CBSO), and the experience of raising an infant (my son Peter was born in 1982) would stand out above all else for me. Next after that would come my predilection for opera: working with the BBC Singers on my radio opera *The Story of Mary O'Neill* (1987) or working in Norfolk in 1990, rehearsing and performing *The Green Children*, the children's opera I wrote with the poet Kevin Crossley Holland. The marvellous performances *Blood Wedding* received in 1992 were a culmination of many things I had aspired to in my career.

If I had to choose one work to represent me, it would be *The Old Woman of Beare* (1981). I think it encompasses both the lyric and the dramatic aspects of my work - and it could only have been written by a woman.

Of the pieces to be heard this week, one or two strike me now as dated, for example *Abstracts and a Frame* (1971), with its rather self-conscious organisation—a 'necessary' student work; but by contrast, *But Stars Remaining* (1970), is a work which I would be proud to have written yesterday. It uses the full gamut of the female voice, both technically and expressively, ranging from the dramatic and virtuosic to the intimate and inward. The dedicatee and first performer was Jane Manning, to whom I and so many of my friends and colleagues owe a profound debt. It was, and is, a great inspiration to work with her.

Penny for a Song (1981), can speak for me, for my musical aspirations, better than any other of the works being performed this week. In these songs I wanted to create musical images that would be vivid and characteristic enough to resonate for us as verbal or visual images do. I wanted single images which could speak concisely and would be strong enough to inform complete musical shapes; I wanted to create a maximum resonance in a small temporal space. Like many of my works, the piece explores cyclic form, weaving different threads together to form a whole. Continuity is achieved through discontinuity. Likewise in the *Lullaby* (1988), fleeting images are brought together to create the whole. I am fond of the harmony in the closing movement of this piece; you can hear my predilection for moving smoothly between chromatic and diatonic harmony. It was a study for aspects of the Saxophone concerto, though in that context the perspective is altered by the added plane of the microtones.

At present I am immersed in discovering the sound-world of *The Wildman*, my fifth opera, commissioned by the Aldeburgh Foundation for performance in June 1995. Opera remains my passion: I live through each moment physically, seeing every detail in my head; at the same time the great challenge is holding in the imagination a network of long-term musical relationships. Voice-leading will stretch across two hours; each detail of timbre and tessitura, pitch and rhythm, must function both locally and in the long-term.

The operas are writ large, as they must be; the chamber works we shall hear this week are their complement: 'fleeting glimpses of a world that is always there if we stop to listen for it.'

©Nicola LeFanu

December 1993