

CATENA for eleven solo strings was commissioned by Opus 20. It is in one continuously unfolding movement lasting around 18 minutes. It was composed in summer 1999 at the Centre d'Art i Natura, Farrera, in the high Pyrenees. The original catalyst for the piece was U. A. Fanthorpe's poem 'Palimpsest':

Once the surface of the ground has been
The sidelong eyes of dawn and twilight
disturbed, the effect is, for all practical
catch in the net of their long shadows
purposes, permanent: the perfect
what is no longer there: grass offers
vestigia of a temple, as
its mute sermon on earth's derangement,
easily discernible in the
invisible and indelible
corn as on paper.
as children's hatred.

As the music grew in my mind, a second landscape came into play: the view from my studio window, which looked straight into the folds of the mountains. With every shift of the light this seemingly unchanging view was altered. As well, there was on the studio wall a painting in which the artist had captured this same outlook from four different perspectives.

These images and ideas are what inform the piece. The diatonic 'natural tuning' of the opening underpins all that follows, though it is seldom glimpsed, being overlaid with chromatic or microtonal harmony. The layers of the music are constantly reshaping themselves, so that different textures and melodies come into focus.

I called the piece 'Catena', using the word in the sense of 'a chain of hills'; but also remembering the 'Catena' pieces by the composer Donald Sur, who died in summer '99, and to whose memory the piece is dedicated.

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