

HARLEQUIN MEMORIES for bassoon and string quartet (2011) – 20 minutes
EP 72215

Harlequin Memories was commissioned by Stephen Massil to celebrate the life of his father Bill Massil (1912 – 2004). The commission, for the Spitalfields Festival, stipulated that the piece reflected the ‘topography’ and events of Bill Massil’s life: his early days in the family workshop in Hoxton amongst the cabinet-makers of Shoreditch, later years as the owner of a successful wood-turning factory. Certainly, images of busy activity – repetitive but skilful – led to some of my musical ideas.

My quintet is in one continuous movement, lasting about 20 minutes, but it is made of many episodes, like so many vignettes of a long and active life. Three cadenzas for the solo bassoon punctuate the flow.

There were two images from the account of Bill Massil’s life, and my own exploration of his ‘home ground’, that made a particular impression. One was of the garden of the Geffrye Museum, where he placed a bench in memory of his own father. The garden’s calm formality sparked the quiet spacious music which opens my quintet, and recurs subsequently.

The other was of a striking Harlequin figure, which Bill Massil commissioned from the wood carver Ian Norbury. First, it inspired my suite for solo bassoon *Sir Harlequin* (2010). In the quintet, much of the bassoon part has a Harlequin character: it leads the quartet on, teases them, boasts to them or is gently accompanied by them as Harlequin courts Columbine. This *dolce* courtship is glimpsed early on and returns to close the quintet in an extended lullaby.

The three solo cadenzas reflect Harlequin too: the first playful, the second proudly acrobatic, the third an agile dance.

Bill Massil was a keen patron of the arts, a lover of chamber music and a supporter of young musicians. This continues through his son Stephen, to whom *Harlequin Memories* is dedicated.

Nicola LeFanu.