

Jonathan Little : Woefully Arrayed

Audio CD

Navona



The disc of sacred and secular choral and polychoral music by Jonathan David Little, *Woefully Arrayed* (review below), is nothing short of remarkable. Stunningly recorded, the pure sonic joy is visceral. On a personal level, I haven't experienced such revelation in choral terms since the Tallis Scholars' first recording of the Allegri *Miserere*. As an interviewee, it turns out, Little is every inch as fascinating as his music. The following in-depth interview may be seen as an indispensable complement to the listening experience itself.

Your history was traced in Martin Anderson's interview in Fanfare 36:1 (2012), so this time we'll be concentrating on your most recent disc on Navona, Woefully Arrayed. You talk in that previous interview about the importance of accessibility, and the music on the new disc has an instant appeal. Yet you balance that with a depth that has variously been called "ecstatic minimalism," "antique futurism," and "picturesque archaism." How do you react to those labels (and labels in general, for that matter!)?

When you embark upon your first compositions, and are building a compositional career, nothing could be further from your mind than how, one day, audience and/or critics might begin to "define" your music stylistically. I don't think you even consider terribly closely the "tradition" or "school" to which you belong. Indeed, in our unique age in the history of music—that is, having arrived at a time when we can begin to hear and appreciate the music and techniques of many past eras and indeed various geographical locations as well—it is not surprising that some composers are becoming exceptionally eclectic. As a composer, you do tend to draw from all the best and most striking models as you build your own technique, and then, one day, when quite a few of your works can be heard, the "receptors" of your music inevitably begin to insist on knowing how your music might be defined; and we do live in an age when everything, it seems, must be classified according to its genus—artistic or otherwise (and this certainly also aids some aspects of the commercialization of music). Did the Impressionist painters want to be known as "Impressionists"? Most likely not. They might—if forced—have perhaps chosen a name that allied innovative concepts of color and texture with those relating to the fleeting and changing nature of light across time. But then, they may consequently have chosen a name far too complex to be instantly appreciated by

the public! I don't think it is often therefore the composer who chooses the label, or "ism," with which, ever after, they tend to become associated.

As to the labels thus far applied to my own "brand" of music, they may not even have settled down yet; equally, I am not unhappy with those that have been applied, in the sense that they may convey some initial ideas of what the music might be like. Wonderful labels such as "antique futurism" (compliments of an Italian music critic, who favors marvelously florid language) are at once accurate, but at the same time could be confusingly contradictory for a novice listener. "Picturesque," "archaic," "Minimalist," "ecstatic"—these are all accurate to some extent, but can they cover the entirety of techniques and soundworlds of a composer's body of work?

I do, however, think that no matter how chameleon-like and eclectic a composer is, there should still be a unity or unifying principle of general style and sound within each individual work, and certainly a reasonably distinctive language overall in which the composer speaks. (And this is the great challenge of our time: to forge from so many elements a flexible and coherent language that is also capable of true profundity.) "Finding your voice" as a composer will generally only emerge over a relatively long period of time. I think I was about 40 years old before I knew I had matured enough artistically to feel confident in my own technical language and its resulting sound—but I hope it keeps evolving, as I keep writing and learning, in an endless cycle.

Artistic labels are perhaps for the world to decide. I can't even now think how best to describe my own music. You might equally ask what it is that is most important to me as a composer, and work outwards from there. For me, this embraces concepts such as beauty of line, of constantly building intensity in a certain direction, and of gorgeousness of sound—all adding up to the overall goal of transporting the listener to that other, "higher plane" of our existence—redeeming the time, you might say, so that we can be reminded of the deepest and truest of things, and aspire to reach towards the finest of all our qualities; for we might otherwise today drown in the ever-present mundane (which, I think, Flaubert was already railing against, well over a century ago) or sink under the weight of the depressingly constant barrage of news of the world's many tragedies. Perhaps this is indeed escapism towards the ecstatic? But surely that is what is needed now, more than ever, in what could become a very "cold" and bland world, without the necessary balance of exposure to the most humanizing and civilizing qualities of the arts. Therefore, besides technical accuracy, I also want the emotional heart of the music to come across in performance, and in recordings—however "classical" in construction (conservatively constrained), and irrespective of the level of symmetry and refinement, in any particular work. We still need the sort of *passion* that we seem to be in danger now of losing, largely as Aldous Huxley foresaw in *Brave New World*. I hope we have achieved a reasonable balance in this regard throughout the current album, for I am always a fan of rubato and other unwritten freedoms, *wherever the music requires* (and it very often does), for best and most visceral effect. It is impossible to indicate every nuance when producing a manuscript; indeed, a manuscript documenting every single nuance would be ridiculously cluttered, and consequently unreadable!

An integral part of your expressive vocabulary is polychoralism: the spatial arrangement of choirs and the use of that as a vital part of the compositional process. The idea, therefore, becomes far more than an effect; it is an integral part of the musical statement. Can you trace your fascination with this method of writing, and how it came to mean so much to you? When allied to other technical devices, the deployment of choral and/or instrumental forces within a particular space is an important and sometimes overlooked component of a work's

effect upon the ear: Sounds can emerge from left/right, forward/behind—and, to use an analogy with painting—foreground, middle ground, and background. In opera, such spatial effects have routinely been used for years (besides performing on the move, of course), and these effects have spilled over into symphonic works, too. One need only think of straightforward examples such as offstage bells and cowbells in Mahler’s work, or Holst’s brilliantly atmospheric use of offstage women’s chorus in “Neptune” from *The Planets*. And then, into this mix, you can also add devices such as larger forces versus smaller forces, and have single instruments or voices pop up as well, like individual specks of light or color. In adolescence, hearing Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for double string orchestra first awoke me to such possibilities. (And this piece also incorporates string quartet, so that it, in fact, comprises three different “sizes” of performing groups.) In such works, the forces, and their deployment, are an essential part of the overall effect, especially within a large, cathedral-like space (the first performance in this case being in Gloucester Cathedral). The evocative and luxuriant harmonies resound and interact throughout the space in a cleverly calculated way. Yet it is interesting to note that Vaughan Williams still subsequently felt the need to revise this work twice, for purposes of both tightening the structure and further refining the sound. One can almost think of the venue itself as a special type of overarching “instrument” or “sound body”—and one that needs to be mastered, tuned, and played well, like any other: and naturally this will involve determining where the various forces should most appropriately be placed.

The Kyrie on this present album was my first experiment with the sounds of double choir and soloists floating around a large, resonant space. (Its first performance was in Waltham Abbey—where Tallis worked—as part of the 500th anniversary celebrations of his birth.) The use of double choir imparts a left/right “stereo” effect, while the two extra groups of soloists (SA + SSA) add further twin sound sources as they echo across high balconies. I envisioned these soloists as constituting a physically higher-level stereo addition, though the conductor, Philip Simms, had a slightly different idea. While he did choose to place the soloists side-to-side and above the double choir, he positioned them well *behind* the audience. The effect was completely unexpected, disembodied and striking. This proved to me that while a composer should aim to suggest an ideal layout, there may be other equally valid possibilities for the deployment of various forces in “polychoral” works—as best suited to a particular venue (that oft-forgotten, but ever-present “instrument”). The practicalities of musical acoustics must be the determining factor here. Real problems can emerge when forces are placed too far apart, and/or where the performers have difficulty in hearing, blending, keeping in tune, or following the rhythm in conjunction with other sub-groups of performers. Hugh Keyte believes that the performance of one very ambitious late Renaissance polychoral work failed spectacularly precisely because of such reasons—and there is also evidence to show that sub-conductors were required in some quite complex late Renaissance and early Baroque works, this being the period when “polychoralism” rose to its ultimate heights in terms of sophistication, before subsequently falling out of fashion.

As the Kyrie was such a success in terms of my early choral works, I determined upon two things. Firstly, that the deployment of choral and/or instrumental forces in designated spatial configurations ought in many works to be considered more closely by a composer (as one of several elements in fashioning a new composition). And, secondly, that I would like to find out more and pursue writing a set of choral works exploiting the range of techniques permitted by such subdivision of forces and spatial configurations. Happily, the Australia Council invested in the writing of these works, and the peer reviewers of my initial proposal

to the Council also seemed intrigued as to the possibilities. And so it was that the Australia Council approved the writing and recording of a series of works that would feature intricate “polychoral”-inspired techniques: multi-part, multi-division, solo, and unusual spatial effects (a mode of working labeled *cori spezzati*—literally “split” or “separated choirs”—as the technique was referred to in the Renaissance and early Baroque periods).

Having written *Wasted and Worn* as the first of three major new works, I found I had then to pause and undertake a further and much deeper “research” phase, since I realized there was much I still did not know about the whole armory of techniques upon which so many brilliant Renaissance polychoral composers had once drawn. I put to Robert Hollingworth this question: “Being in the midst of an international project related to writing and recording contemporary choral and ‘polychoral’ works (for which I am also now trying to construct diagrams to illustrate how, for best effect, these works could be performed), I am wondering what, and how much, definitive evidence actually exists as to where exactly the performers may have been spatially positioned when originally performing Renaissance works....” “Actual evidence?” he queried. “Practically nothing. However Hugh Keyte has thought about this long and hard....” I can remember being more than a little shocked that we seem still to know so very little about all this, and it was to Hugh Keyte that I turned for advice, and for clues. (He also kindly agreed to write a contextual essay on “polychorality” for the CD booklet—which is a useful starting point for beginning to understand some of the issues involved.) It dawned on me that the Renaissance must have been an age of the rediscovery of multi-dimensional artistic perspective not only in visual form (as with “linear perspective”), but in *aural* form as well (since the more ambitious composers seemingly experimented with different types of sonic placement, aural “depth of field,” and other such effects, all related to the perception of sound in space). Continued research is unearthing facts about the hiring and placement of performers in Renaissance music, but, of course, even beyond that, I want to know how the *composers* themselves thought, and ultimately almost to try to isolate and understand each and every one of the various forgotten techniques and myriad possibilities involved in writing for multiple groups of forces at once.

It is like being the musical equivalent of an archaeologist: We dig up a bare few clues from archival records, or from scores, and from these, then try to reconstruct a whole vanished compositional and performing tradition. All I can say is that some of the works on this CD begin to go some little way to reclaiming the lost potential of performing spaces—and rediscovering an esoteric form of compositional knowledge that has, in large part, now been lost. I would still like to learn so much more! But such knowledge is never so that I can write “old”-sounding music; rather, it is so that I can add a valuable extra resource to my compositional palette. In all of the works that I explored in order to find technical precursors, only the *Dedication Service for St. Gertrude’s Chapel, Hamburg*, in 1607 (see the edition edited by Frederick K. Gable, published by A-R Editions) retains comprehensive documentation as to where instrumental and vocal forces were placed during the actual performance—in that particular case, literally producing a sort of “surround-sound” effect around the auditors. You will, therefore, see that I have made a point to include very thorough diagrams in both my musical scores, and in the CD booklet, as to where my performers should best be positioned (complete with any possible alternatives). In 400 years’ time, I don’t want there to be any wildly speculative debate about where *my* performers ought to be placed!

How do you decide on the layouts? Is it to do with the acoustics you are writing for, indeed specifically for the place of the work’s premiere? The booklet to the Navona release

helpfully gives diagrams for Gloria, Wasted and Worn and That Time of Year, and they are all individual.

To begin with, the *type of work* it is, and the *text*, together first suggest what spatial arrangement may prove most appropriate for a new work—at least on a general level—and so it evolves from there. Of course, this necessarily involves envisaging the ideal performance venue and acoustic for each work. I believe that Benjamin Britten always kept in mind his performance venue when he was writing, and it is clearly important to do so, wherever that is possible. But, if you are writing more “speculatively” shall we say, and there is no guaranteed performance venue, and/or the work might, or could, be performed in a variety of different types of venue, then one’s imagination and experience must come even more into play in trying to ensure that the effect, in performance, will be largely as intended. (This also assumes that some venues will *not* be terribly appropriate for particular works—and a good conductor or programmer should be able to factor this aspect into their thinking, besides other obvious considerations: of forces involved, complexity, style, contextual interest, and the order amongst other works, and so on.)

Venues also affect *how* a work is performed. To take one simple example, *Woefully Arrayed* will need to move more quickly in a smaller performing space, or it will seem to drag and lose onward momentum (always bearing in mind that it will probably not be very effective in a less than medium-sized venue). But in a very large, resonant space—and especially with bigger forces, too—*Woefully Arrayed* can be taken at a more leisurely pace (really quite *lento*), and yet it will not *seem* at all slow in this circumstance. A larger venue will, moreover, allow for the full range of subtleties of overlapping/mingling lines and echoes to be appreciated, so increasing audience appeal, as the several groups of sounds initially emanate from particular directions then travel around the entire space in interesting patterns on beguiling journeys that circumscribe the listener.

The final layout of the forces involved in these vocal works will have involved many rounds of fine-tuning as the work progresses (not least to make sure that any individual performers required are to be found in the right place at the right time, especially where there has been some movement of the singers away from their original positions—as there is, indeed, in both *Wasted and Worn* and *That Time of Year*). The final layout for *Wasted and Worn* indicates *all* of the physical movements, both large and small: whether simple displacement from the original position (and return), or merely a very subtle quarter-turn round and away from the audience (so that the singer sounds a touch more distant—but not nearly so distant as being initially placed, or subsequently moving, much further away).

I’d like to ask about your relationship with the past. In the op. 18 Gloria (Et in Arcadia ego) you quote an anonymous 14th-century three-part setting of Ave maris stella, a setting itself based on an even earlier chant (going back at least to the ninth century!). Is the past an inspiration? Or a building block? Or something to meditate on? There’s almost a Russian doll element to that piece; you take off one layer of reference and reveal another one!

The past is a treasure. The past may be “a foreign country,” but it is also a treasure—often just waiting to be discovered. It is an inspiration, a source of all manner of wonderful technical devices (concerning which I have always been eager to learn). It is also a vital starting-point for *the new*, always informed by the very best of past workmanship. Instrumental and vocal technologies and capabilities may change through the ages, but many techniques of musical composition are merely recycled and reinvented, in different ways. And, of course, the balance and type of the total musical parameters, or components, employed in a musical composition (consisting of elements such as melody, harmony,

rhythm, texture, structure, dynamics, orchestration, special devices, etc.) re-evolve and are refashioned in differing proportions, and are given new emphases of importance, so to produce seemingly brand-new “flavors” from the age-old ingredients within. Emerson’s marvelous essay “Quotation and Originality” pretty much summarizes my beliefs philosophically in this regard. Emerson maintained: “We cannot overstate our debt to the Past, but the moment has the supreme claim. The Past is for us; but the sole terms on which it can become ours are its subordination to the Present.”

I have recently started using the phrase “historically-informed composition”—as a complement or counterpart to that well-known phrase, “historically-informed performance”—and as a way of emphasizing the fact that few compositions of any style are truly radically “new” underneath. This “historically-informed” label also stresses the importance of making a lifetime study of musical techniques, and indeed the musical techniques of all ages, if one truly wishes to master one’s craft—especially in an era when it begins to seem as if anyone can easily become a composer, or indeed artist of any type, without the long years of study and contemplation of past models necessary ultimately both to develop one’s own expressive language, and to find ways to evoke the deepest of messages that have at least some chance of resonating across the ages. It is for me almost a moral imperative that any serious composer today should aim to absorb all past traditions, whether stemming from the Middle Ages (including any techniques well enough understood even from before that—together with the remnants of long-established folk traditions), or whether derived from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, or “Modern” periods. It may also prove helpful to seek inspiration in the music of cultures reasonably alien to one’s own, provided that such “spice” still sits comfortably within a (novel) stylistic whole. And your Russian doll analogy is quite apt: Inside the music may be many archaeological layers, wherein are to be found much older techniques and references. The “outer” layers may point to something quite new in sound—while the creator’s skill is, in some way, often thoroughly to blend and to conceal what lies within!

The more outward-going side of you is evident in the Polyhymnia disc Martin Anderson talked to you about last time (Terpsichore the Whirler is wonderfully extrovert, as is the brief Fanfare); yet even here, the intensity of Polyhymnia is like an orchestral version of the choral glories of your disc, the Olomouc orchestra strings absolutely radiant. Would you see ecstasy as at the core of your music?

I would agree that much of *Terpsichore* is certainly less “cerebral” than several of my other works! *Terpsichore* aims to create a “whirling kaleidoscope” of orchestral colors and textures. Yet even that work should ideally raise our spirits to exuberant heights. Perhaps it might indeed be construed as a more extrovert manifestation of the “ecstatic.”

For many years, I did not use or apply the word “ecstasy” to my works in any way, but the concept admittedly does embody an important principle in terms of the purpose of much of my music, which is to uplift the listener, and so has much in common with religious or spiritual paradigms of reaching towards the ecstatic and transcendent. If I may make a couple of rough parallels with fine art and sculpture, there is an aspect of what I do that might be likened to a kind of intense, modern Pre-Raphaelitism in music, or even be considered “Bernini-like”—in that it aims to encapsulate certain qualities of refined power and poignant ecstasy—a feeling that is at one and the same time both religious *and* sensuous: Hence I find it necessary to insist that there must also be deep *passion* at the heart of creating such “radiance” (another descriptive word which seems perfectly appropriate—as do terms such

as “ethereal,” “otherworldly,” and “visceral”—all applied by various critics over recent years).

The earlier disc also included the Kyrie from Missa Temporis Perditi, a Mass which I believe is still in progress? I wonder if this idea of not having to rush a work, of the music being in process and coming when it's ready, is a reflection on the sense of timelessness your music itself exudes? In fact, the Kyrie, op. 5, was first sketched in 1985 but only completed 20 years later—is that right? Is there any projected finish year for the Missa?

At the heart of what you say lies an interesting question, and one that I'm not sure I can answer exactly. All artists tend to work in different ways. I have certain overall aims in terms of projects I would like ultimately to complete, but several of them seem so potentially vast in conception that the only way sensibly for me to deal with them—and *maintain quality*—is indeed not to rush them. The only real downside of this approach, working sometimes over several years, is that there may be a danger that the many components of a large-scale work completed over long time periods may not always fully cohere stylistically. I try to avoid this, where possible, by sketching initial ideas for the whole. You will have noted in the CD booklet that it also mentions how opus numbers are accorded to my works chronologically by date of *conception*, rather than completion. This can result in what seem like strange anomalies in terms of a creative timeline, but I believe it forms the truest record of one's work. (This also provides the reason why pieces belonging to the same series may have quite different opus numbers.) The Kyrie was first sketched out (in this case, in quite some detail) almost 20 years before the opportunity presented itself to refine and complete it for a specific purpose. Happily, with *The Nine Muses* series of large-scale instrumental works (and perhaps voices might yet also be involved in some capacity), stylistic unity is not so much an issue, as each one of the Muses will have a completely different character—illustrative of their unique attributes, or “personalities”!

I have tried to move more quickly on bigger projects, but they involve such detailed concentration over such extended periods of time that it is just too exhausting to work in that way for long. What you hint at is true: Some works come when they come, and when the time is right—and most are best produced after long cogitation, technical trials, revisions and refinements. For the current project, even creating and recording three new, fairly large-scale choral works of differing types over two years (in addition to recording two others pre-existing) was quite an intense experience, but would never have come about so quickly had it not been for funding from the Australian Council. This funding made it possible, but also entailed some fierce deadlines—and deadlines do not always sit comfortably with creative necessity. Having said that, the other extreme then rears its head: the fact that the five-or-so-section *Missa Temporis Perditi* might be 40 years in the making from the date of its first conception, while the nine movements of the *Nine Muses* may ultimately take 20 or 30 years—which, I admit, sounds an outrageously long time! Perhaps I can comfort myself with the fact that Leonardo da Vinci took the entire latter part of his life to produce his *Mona Lisa*, or that the artist-technician A.-L. Breguet's “Marie-Antoinette” watch was only completed 44 years after he first accepted the order (though unfortunately he didn't quite live to see it finished). (Both of these examples constituted true labors of love—involving great self-challenge, and astonishing technical brilliance.) So, no, there is not yet an end date in sight for some of my “series” works. But when the time is right for each, and as the opportunity presents, I hope to turn my attention to every one of my works-in-progress, and will, one day, declare them complete!

There are other practicalities and exigencies, in addition, of course, two of which—my university teaching, and my interest in writing and documenting various aspects of music concerned with inspiration and technical innovation—also occupy my time. But all these tasks essentially complement, and, I trust, enhance one another. I have had two substantial books published in recent years (again, I'm afraid, two decades from first conception!): *The Influence of European Literary and Artistic Representations of the 'Orient' on Western Orchestral Compositions, ca. 1840-1920: From Oriental Inspiration to 'Exotic' Orchestration* (2010), and *Literary Sources of Nineteenth Century Musical Orientalism: The Hypnotic Spell of the Exotic on Music of the Romantic Period* (2011)—for which I agreed to work with a publisher who did not wish, or economically need, to cut, abridge or otherwise edit the text, to delete any of the illustrations, or to disturb the layout. This consideration was very important to me. And with regard to my writing, I intend next to compile a “menu” of compositional devices (another long-term project!), which can be used as a sort of *aide memoire* of technical devices for working composers, just as much as for students of composition—and which may have the additional function of encouraging a broadening of the pool of techniques upon which a composer may draw. All these studies help me to understand past musical traditions and practices.

But none of this quite answers your question about the perceived “sense of timelessness” in some of my works—though perhaps having free rein over the length of time needed for any production *may* assist in generating “long-lived” works. Speed is often the enemy of intricate creation and perfection of form.

There are most certainly aspects of works such as *Polyhymnia*, *Woefully Arrayed*, and *Gloria* that do seek almost to disrupt and defeat time—to find the stillness at the center of the music, and, just occasionally, to lose all sense of “pulse.” (This is a dangerous artistic conceit, since almost all musical compositions depend upon some internal onward impetus in order to maintain their fluidity and direction, as well as the development and transformation of their materials, and indeed often merely a sufficient sense of evolution so as to sustain even the slightest interest.) Undoubtedly, such moments of seeming stillness are a reaching for *ekstasis*—a sense of mystical self-transcendence, a “standing outside oneself,” here mediated by the creator/artist. Can we indeed fashion such a thing as a “dynamic stillness”—and, in doing so, use art to defeat time—that single (undefinable and incomprehensible) concept that would appear to be the barrier to immortality? (Or, at least, can we *seem* to do so, and create a representation, or *simulation*, of timelessness?) This is an element of the unique bond between the spiritual and the artistic, and, I think, at the center of what true religion and art ultimately seek: by some means to negate time and to latch on to the Eternal. The greatest of all our artworks seem to function as momentary gateways to the pseudo-Eternal in some way—though such moments may also be evoked through contemplation of nature, or upon sudden recognition of the generosity of the human spirit. Musical notation and other artistic symbols (all functioning like some mystical, arcane language), when decoded and revived by us, can undeniably lead us to rapture, and open up those rare and precious moments of “epiphany,” in which we perceive important connections and meanings that may unite with other such transcendent experiences glimpsed at various stages along, what might be termed, our “circumambulatory journey” through life. (While we always tend to think of both life and music proceeding and steadily progressing in a straight line, as time passes, I doubt this is a truly useful way to regard such experiences, and so favor the notion of seeing life and art more as a meditation, from different perspectives, upon the whole.)

Your new disc is neatly divided into “sacred works” (opp. 13, 5, and 18) and secular works (opp. 6 and 2), so I’d like to move on to the latter if that’s OK: The secular Wasted and Worn, op. 6, is at once a tribute to the artist John William Godward (1861–1922) and to all artists who follow their muse irrespective of contemporary tastes and fashions, often leading to obscurity and indeed in Godward’s case, suicide. Godward’s paintings are now labeled as “(Victorian) neo-classicist,” but they certainly weren’t recognized to the extent they could have been in his lifetime. And there does seem to be an especially mournful quality to your piece, with its tightly knit harmonies. It is also a more general tribute to those artists who toil away, unrecognized: Would you like to elaborate on all of this, perhaps? How did the underlying premise affect the way you wrote the piece, either in harmonic terms or in terms of construction?

I found the text very apt, and quite affecting, on several levels. “Wasted and worn that passion must expire, / Which swept at sunrise like a sudden fire....” The verse is an excerpt from “A Parting” by John Leicester Warren. It can be read in terms of romantic meaning, of course, but also *in creative terms*, as referring to the fire of inspiration and enthusiasm when all ideas begin to come together, and a new work starts to be forged (in the same way that Elgar quotes Shelley in the published score of his Second Symphony: “Rarely, rarely, comest thou, / Spirit of Delight!”). Warren’s verse succinctly charts the inevitable end of that process, and indeed seems to sum up the result of a lifetime of artistic work—when work has been generally unappreciated during the actual years of its creation: “His footsteps foiled, his spirit bound and numb, / Grey Love sits dumb.” It is not hard to find examples of creators of all types who would have felt themselves, in worldly terms at least, to be largely failures (though they will probably not have thought so in terms of the richness of the nourishing, necessity-driven life of the mind and spirit they will have lived, and all that they will have learned and experienced). Think of Van Gogh, and even the somber and solitary Warren himself (indeed, are many aware of his work at all?); but it struck me that John William Godward seems to epitomize such appalling vagaries of fortune. The contrast between how much Godward’s work is valued (quite literally) and admired today, and generally how very little it was during his lifetime, is fearsome. Added to that, his own family and relations so despised his art, his career, and his conduct, that they subsequently sought actively to obliterate his memory—including destroying all known papers, and every single photograph. And, as if that were not enough, following a lifetime of largely solitary work for this shy and hardworking but prodigiously talented individual, and having at last achieved great heights of technical perfection (that incorporated many thousands of hours of the most painstaking detail of a type that few have matched before or since), a sudden stylistic revolution in the early 20th century caused his entire opus to be regarded, almost overnight, as old-fashioned, “insipid,” and thoroughly undesirable.

At least a little public recognition is needed to nourish an artist’s often fragile spirit, and to help him or her find the courage to trudge on, and create again, no matter what the knock-backs; but to keep on going and live your ideal in so hostile an environment is utterly extraordinary—and, moreover, to pursue those ideals so steadfastly, not even knowing if any of those people that come after you will feel even the slightest benefit from your creative legacy. Yet it is precisely upon such individuals that the progress of art, and life, depends; it is through them that a record of beauty is made and bequeathed (whereby also the finest aspects of the human soul are preserved)—to be passed on to, and so nurture, subsequent generations. This also reminds us that it is rarely or solely the famous names of the day that posterity selects as most treasured inspiration for those that come after us, but often just a

few very hardworking, lesser-known individuals, who toil away incessantly, driven by inner necessity, and the fire of a great, almost holy light. They manage to embody the finest experience and ideals of their era, which, at rare intervals in their own lives, they have been fortunate and gifted enough to perceive, to comprehend, and to codify in terms of their art. Time transforms their work into future inspiration, and so nourishes those who are yet to be born. Such precious souls become our artistic Cassandras: We pay homage to their work and memory when they are gone, but so often misunderstand, ignore, and even deride all they create within the very era of the formation of their art.

As to *Wasted and Worn* itself, I sought to try to capture several passing episodes of different hues within the overall melancholic and poignant mood, united by the recurrence of a strange and haunting refrain that periodically surges up and fights against “the dying of the light.” Soon after the opening, the music reflects upon some uncomfortable inner thoughts, but never fails to revive—albeit briefly—and to reminisce upon recollected moments of great beauty and brilliance.

I had some trouble fashioning the whole of this work, and on completion remained for some time quite uncertain about it. It is only now, after several months, that I begin to think that there may be some enduringly powerful and worthy elements within. An uncomfortable text will put you through the emotional mill at the time you come to deal with it, and may leave you more than a little unsettled and unsure about it for a good while afterwards.

The Shakespeare setting (That Time of Year) sets Sonnet No. 73, a sonnet infused with the melancholy of the passing seasons. You score this for three male voices against two female ones, and Gesualdo has been linked to this piece in mood. It also includes some performer choice (the phrases of the middle section) and a “mobile” element (in this middle part, low male voices move to the center while all others move backwards to produce a framing arc). Is this element of choice something you have used much? Or will in the future? The “drama” of the choral participants’ moving around the stage seems entirely apposite to bringing these texts to life....

Also, it’s a nice link that Shakespeare and Gesualdo are near-exact contemporaries. Was that a deliberate linking in your piece?

The piece *That Time of Year* was given a workshop performance by the BBC Singers in October 2016, and I pay tribute to Judith Weir for her advocacy on my behalf in asking the singers to practice exactly the movements you describe. But she was unsuccessful! Perhaps they felt there was not enough time to incorporate the movements, and/or it was too easy to trip over the staging, and/or the choir were not used to such demands, and preferred solely to concentrate on getting the notes right! This proved a lesson in itself about resistance to innovation and unwillingness to “perambulate” if you are a usually static choir. Yet some groups have in recent years been starting to experiment with this, and, of course, opera singers do it all the time. It does make me think more of reserving the use of movement for dramatic works, perhaps—though, I should say that having witnessed an American choir (the Chamber Choir of Christopher Newport University) undertake well-rehearsed choreographic movements in both *That Time of Year* and *Kyrie* (during a performance at the Ferguson Center for the Arts in Virginia, earlier in March 2016), it undoubtedly does add significant interest and impact both aurally and visually. Even watching the singers neatly changing positions between the works creates a splendid sense of curious anticipation as to what might be coming next! Likewise, the “aleatoric” middle section of *That Time of Year* tends to prove a challenge for most performers, and needs decent rehearsal time to make it a success. Here,


some “live creativity” is handed over to the performers, and this is a mode in which they are not often used to working (so should, perhaps, be used sparingly, and with caution).

The linking of Shakespeare and Gesualdo was a happy coincidence, but it was very apt that some inspiration from both filtered through into *That Time of Year*, in order to help evoke both the mood of the text, and the spirit of the period.

How’s the Muses project going? You said in your previous interview you were working your way through them in the “established” order. And related to that, can I ask you about plans for compositions going forward? And upcoming premieres and subsequent recordings?

I have sketched out plans for a couple more of *The Nine Muses*. I also aim in the immediate future to complete one or more further works for string orchestra, also the odd choral work whenever possible, as well as working on the book of compositional techniques that I mentioned earlier. (A disc of string works, before long, would be good, too!) Perhaps I will turn my attention more now to dramatic works as well. Initially, I have in mind a sort of opera-ballet project, but will not elaborate too much about it now, since laying ideas bare at an early stage before they are fully conceived seems to me somehow to detract from their ultimate richness, by robbing them of their mystery and true potential.

Perhaps the way I proceed with my works is a little odd—which is to say that I do try, where possible, to have them “preserved” in published and recorded format as soon as they are completed, sometimes even before they have been premiered in performance. Historically, of course, the reverse has tended to be the case: Works are only recorded after several performances. I think I pursue publication, and especially recording, in order both that nothing should be lost that might be worth preserving, but also so that there might be an initial “reference recording” of each work for audiences, performing groups, and conductors to hear (at which point I then tend to lobby for performances). One can also learn much from close listening to recordings of one’s music. I should also state that any first recording made does not necessarily represent what might be a best or “definitive” version, although, in the case of the works on this disc, they should, I hope, act as an excellent and stimulating starting point. In truth, perhaps the “ideal” performance is only ever heard in a composer’s head....

 **LITTLE** *Woefully Arrayed*, op. 13¹ (two versions). **Kyrie**, op. 5.² **Gloria**, op. 18.³ *Wasted and Worn*, op. 6.⁴ *That Time of Year*, op. 2⁴ • ^{1,3}Andrew Shenton, ²Philip Simms, ⁴Paul John Stanbery, cond; ¹Heinrich Christensen (org); ^{1,3}Vox Futura; ²Thomas Tallis Society Ch; ⁴Stanbery Singers • NAVONA 6113 (69:54)

Described by my colleague Lynn René Bayley as “a major new, original, and quite brilliant classical voice” (Want Lists 2008, *Fanfare* 32:2), Jonathan David Little is a composer whose music is vital, urgent, and yet somehow timeless at the same time. Reviewer Martin Anderson, in interview with Little (*Fanfare* 36:1), described the music as “ecstatic Minimalism,” and I can see no reason to argue. According to the composer’s own website, alternative descriptions of his works from European critics have included “antique futurism” and “picturesque archaism.” Despite the multiplicity of recording venues (mainly U.S., the op. 5 Kyrie being the exception, taken down at the Church of St. Alfege in Greenwich, UK), there is a blissful homogeneity here in terms of recording standard.

At some 25 minutes in duration, *Woefully Arrayed* (with an alternative title of “Crucifixus pro vobis”) has a mesmeric element to it, the refrain earning more and more elaboration as

the composition progresses. Choral layouts are helpfully given in the excellent booklet, which also includes a superb essay on polychoralism by Hugh Keyte. That essay refers to Tallis's *Spem in alium* and how the different subdivisions of the choir might have been laid out spatially, an aspect viscerally brought to light this concert season in London where Vladimir Jurowski conducted a performance of the Tallis in half-light with choirs spread around the Royal Festival Hall; a blaze of light (literally) following the end introduced the opening of Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Little plugs directly into the ethos of polychorality. His *Woefully Arrayed* is a masterpiece of time-stretching. As lines float and interact throughout the soundspace, there is a distinct impression of atemporality, of altering the way the listener experiences time. There is an abridged version (starting at the Third Refrain) that concludes the disc, lasting 12 minutes instead of 25; the effect in a complete play through of the recital is of a sort of homecoming. It has a real point in giving the impression of a cycle gaining completion after the wonderings into other territory, and 12 minutes is just enough to once more submit to the work's hypnosis.

The Kyrie on this disc has an opus number of its own but is actually from the *Missa Temporis Perditi* (a work which is yet to be completed). For double choir with SSA and SA soloists, the piece requires a minimum of 22 singers and includes a short passage utilizing off-stage voices. This is the recording in Greenwich, just prior in fact to the work's second public performance, in November 2005. The sound is superb, full and reverberant without smudging. The Thomas Tallis Society Choir is in fine fettle. The Gloria is from the same source, even though it holds a separate opus number and is currently described as a "companion piece." Little inserts a very short quote from an anonymous 14th-century setting of *Ave maris stella*, itself based on a chant dating back to at least the ninth century. Recorded some 12 years later than the Kyrie in Boston, MA, this is slow-moving and poses huge challenges to the upper echelons of the choir, all magnificently handled here. The highest voices cope superbly with the Gloria's radiant close.

The next two pieces are secular works and are performed by the Stanbery Singers. The first, Little's op. 6, uses texts by Thomas Gray (the 1751 "Elegy in a Churchyard," as head-quotations) and John Byrne Leicester Warren, Lord de Tabley (the poem "Wasted and worn that passion must expire"). Little's imagination is more focused on the gesture here, enabling more of a feeling of unfolding narrative. It is to a Shakespeare sonnet that Little's op. 2 moves to: "That time of year thou mayst in me behold." Scored for three male lines against a female two to reflect the weighted melancholy of Shakespeare's text, Little writes more emphatically modally in a deliberate tribute to the Italian madrigal tradition as exemplified specifically by Carlo Gesualdo. There is a semi-aleatory aspect to the central panel, in which singers are given a range of notes to choose from; at this point, too, in live performance one can see the baritones and basses move to the center of the stage while the rest of the choir moves backwards and further out to form an arc. The actual choice of pitches is the composer's, and ensures a continuity of harmonic language, but the change in choral color is undeniably clear. The performance itself is unbearably gentle, even wistful, with the emphasis on lower registers underlining the sense of regret.

This is a superb disc, one that simply gets better on each and every listening. There is a radiance to Little's writing that seems shot through with spiritual light and which speaks on a very deep level to the listener. **Colin Clarke**

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