



London  
**Sinfonietta**

# **Teachers' Resource Pack**

## **MUSICAL CLICHÉS**

**Music & Film and Benedict Mason**

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# INTRODUCTION

## LONDON SINFONIETTA *CHAPLINOPERAS* BY BENEDICT MASON

*ChaplinOperas* is a piece for live ensemble performed to three classic Charlie Chaplin films: *Easy Street*, *The Adventurer* and *The Immigrant*. In 2007, the London Sinfonietta toured the piece across the UK.

### **ChaplinOperas Performance Dates**

24 Feb, Brighton | 27 Feb, Basingstoke | 28 Feb, London | 2 March, Manchester | 4 March, Perth | 6 March, Sheffield

### **About this pack**

This pack can of course be used as an introduction to the composer, Benedict Mason, and his composing styles and techniques. The materials begin with an introduction to music and film followed by a range of possible activities for use in the classroom to help gain access to the ideas behind the composition. Further background reading includes simple information and analysis of the work to be heard in concert, a brief introduction to the composer and his output and some additional web references for additional study if required.

The teacher ideas and activities for the classroom have concentrated on a few key aspects of the work of the composer – sound and film, textures and styles, playing and composing techniques. Instead of providing step by step lesson plans, it gives practical ‘jumping off’ points with a range of ways to explore the music and ideas contained in *ChaplinOperas*. The teacher can use elements of some of the activities with younger students at KS3 and retaining the others as extension activities. More advanced students can explore for themselves and think widely about all or most of the activities.

Teachers will know themselves the nature of the learning in terms of the national curriculum for KS3 pupils and do not need detailed help to justify these activities, and older students can use any of these activities as projects in their examination work. However, a simple statement about the musical learning to be found at the end of each activity is provided as guidance and relevant national curriculum statements are noted to support busy teachers.

We hope the materials will help teachers think broadly and innovatively about how to approach challenging music in the classroom and help make it accessible to their pupils.

# MUSIC AND FILM

The score for any film requires the composer to add to the effect of what is on screen by

- Heightening the full range of emotions expressed in the story line
- Illustrating or reflecting the situation or context on screen
- Helping to foresee events

Film music is a hugely important sector of the film and entertainment industry now and has had a developing history all the way from the early days of the silent films to TV animated shorts today.

The music written for films over the last century has developed from a pianist accompanying on sight a silent film, to a fully notated score for a large orchestra or smaller ensemble, an electronic soundtrack or a combination of the two. Voices are used sometimes to add additional musical colour or feeling. Even though popular music styles are sometimes used, most studios will prefer an orchestral score since it can be more closely adapted to the action or feelings on film – popular music dates easily, is often time limited and less rhythmically or harmonically flexible. Importantly, the use of silence can be very powerful and made more so by the sound that precedes and follows it.

In the early days silent movies were always accompanied by music, mostly provided by in-house pianists or organists. Some orchestral scores were produced using pieces by famous composers and which were provided as 'cue sheets' to help pianists during performance but these were rarely released as the definitive score. Catalogues of these were developed and broken down into moods – sad, threatening, suspense, chase etc. The musical director at each theatre found appropriate music and put it in the order of the cue sheet or substituted something similar. Some ignored the cue sheets altogether and wrote or arranged their own music.

Today, the composer for a fully scored film is usually involved in the very early processes of making the film and will discuss the early filming with the director to determine the style and themes to be used. He then works on the score and will have to go through many adaptations before both sides are happy. Where the director trusts the composer, the film sequences may be edited to fit the music rather than the other ways round if the dramatic effect warrants it.

Occasionally the director may decide to use already written pieces – a strong example of this is Kubrick's use of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* in 'A Space Odyssey.' Other music written for film is later adapted for use in the concert hall. Vaughan Williams' *Symphonia Antarctica* was written for a film called 'Scott of the Antarctic' but is now played in a concert hall as his seventh symphony. John Williams' music for countless films such as Star Wars, ET and Harry Potter are produced in band or orchestral versions almost as soon as the film comes out. An army of other composers are less well-known, those such as Shirley Walker (eg. Batman, Superman and Final Destination films) were extremely influential but were also almost completely unknown to the general public.

A contracted orchestra records the music in front of a large screen and usually works with a click track to better synchronise the music with the film. Because a score nearly always needs some flexibility in interpretation during the filming process, the orchestra is most often conducted by the composer, making the job an extremely varied and skilled one. The conductor of the London Sinfonietta at the performance of *Chaplin Operas*, Franck Ollu, will also use a click track to help synchronise the film and music.

# IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

The following activities are intended to help students think about and become familiar with the techniques used by Benedict Mason in the *Chaplin Operas* and to make them more accessible. Some of them are improvised with whatever instruments are played by the students and may develop into longer compositional or performing projects if wished. They are framed so that students may do all or part of any one of the activities at several different levels of competence.

## 1. SILENT FILMS

Think about the elements of music which might be used to accompany silent films. The music probably needs to

- synchronise with the action
- express the full range of emotions of the characters on the film
- express the actions on screen – panic, crying, humour, chases, seasickness etc.
- provide sound effects for specific happenings – hitting, falling over, church bells etc.
- prepare the audience for something about to happen

What else do you need to think about?

Try some of the following ideas:

### Selecting music for a story line

- Decide on a very simple, even trite sequence of events – eg. girl meets boy, previous boyfriend comes and assaults the new man, girl cries, boyfriend charges away and is arrested by the police, girl and new boy happy together.
- Look out a range of music of varying styles on CD and choose a section which would illustrate each part of the sequence.
- Record the snippets in sequence and play them back. Do they match your story line?

**Writing music for a film.** Use a short sequence of film with a little drama in it – any film will do, including adverts – and turn the sound off. Analyse the various elements in it which might need illustrating. Write/invent/play music for at least three instruments which would illuminate what is happening on screen. Play along with the film and invite comment by others about its appropriateness or subversive tendencies.

**Subverting the meaning on film as Mason does.** Use the same sequence of film but try subverting what it does, for example

- Someone falls heavily – play a light triangle sound or whistle
- During a chase – create music which indicates the chaos and panic in the minds of the participants but doesn't replicate any of the action
- Use vocal sounds, singing and speech (singspiel) as a backcloth – you might use words to ask questions of the actors on screen as to what they are doing, or quote poetry to them, or make a political allusion to what they are doing.

## LEARNING

<b>Key musical learning at all stages</b>	Matching and synchronising moods, emotions and actions in music.
<b>KS3 programmes of study - key elements addressed in this exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating and developing – 2b</li> <li>• Responding and reviewing – 3b</li> <li>• Listening and applying knowledge – 4b</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	Breadth of study – 5b, 5e

## 2. IN THE STYLE OF THE *CHAPLINOPERAS*

There have been many descriptions and suggestions by reviewers and other commentators as to how Mason's music fits together with the films and what it sounds like.

Discuss what the music might sound like and how you might create it if it is described in the following way.

- **Like a Jackson Pollock painting.** Look up Jackson Pollock on the web and try making music in the way he painted (see Appendix 3 for website references)
- **Like a James Joyce stream of consciousness.** Use this introductory snippet to Circe from *Ulysses* by James Joyce to write supporting music for.

**Circe (Nighttown) from James Joyce's *Ulysses***

*The Mabbot street entrance of night town, before which stretches an uncobbled transiding set with skeleton tracks, red and green will-o'-the-wisps and danger signals. Rows of flimsy houses with gaping doors. Rare lamps with faint rainbow fans. Round Rabaiotti's halted ice gondola stunted men and women squabble. They grab wafers between which are wedged lumps of coal and copper snow. Sucking, they scatter slowly. Children. The swancomb of the gondola, highreared, forges on through the murk, white and blue under a lighthouse. Whistles call and answer.*

- **Pastiche using quotations from a whole host of different styles**

Try one player playing any straight piece while three or four other musicians intersperse a range of very short quotations from, or in the style of, the following:

- Noel Coward
- Buddy Holly
- The Palm Court Orchestra
- A romantic opera
- Steve Reich
- Pink Floyd
- A musical equivalent reference to a Giles cartoon (see Appendix 3 for website reference)
- Train music of some kind
- Any other recognisable snippet of something you can play
- Invent an orchestral 'sneeze' and put that in too.

Make sure that all the quotations link in well with the main piece and slide in and out effectively. Play the piece over and over again without stopping, changing its dynamics, speeds and moods at will.

- **Write it down**

Try writing your orchestral 'sneeze' down – the more instruments you have used the more accurate it must be.

### LEARNING

<b>Key musical learning at all stages</b>	Relating music styles to visual and literary styles or periods; developing techniques of pastiche.
<b>KS3 programmes of study - key elements addressed in this exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling sounds – performing skills – 1c</li> <li>• Creating and developing – 2a</li> <li>• Responding and reviewing – 3c</li> <li>• Listening and applying knowledge – 4c, 4d</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	Breadth of study – 5a, 5b, 5d, 5e

### 3. ORCHESTRAL TECHNIQUES AND SOUNDS

#### Using a sampler

The very many sounds asked for in the score from the E MAX sampler include the following noises. Try to develop those sounds or sample some of them (and then use them with other instruments).

- Plug hole gurgle
- Scaffolding clang
- Telephone gibberish – speeded up
- Various telephone sounds, ringing, dialling, bleeps, operator voice etc.
- Paper bag burst
- Cheek pop
- Hiccough
- Squeaky door ascending in pitch
- Squeaky door descending in pitch
- Loud drip
- Church bell
- Waves
- Dog bark
- Seagull cry
- American and Russian national anthems
- Word processor blip
- Parrot saying hello
- Glug glug - bottle neck
- Burst of radio gibberish
- Motorcycle disappearing
- Comedy sound crash (you can use a BBC sound effects CD for this and you may find other good sounds there too - Google BBC sound effects and several suppliers will come up)

Try using some of these noises in one or two of the compositions you have done in the previous exercises.

#### LEARNING

<b>Key musical learning at all stages</b>	Sampling sounds and their use when played with acoustic instruments.
<b>KS3 programmes of study - key elements addressed in this exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling sounds – performing skills – 1</li> <li>• Creating and developing – 2a</li> <li>• Responding and reviewing – 3c</li> <li>• Listening and applying knowledge – 4d</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	Breadth of study – 5a, 5d, 5e

# BENEDICT MASON'S *CHAPLINOPERAS*

"Film, now, is an entertainment industry offering the composer little beyond pocket money, usually at a cost to his spirit." Benedict Mason

**ChaplinOperas** was commissioned by the Ensemble Modern as part of the Chaplin Centenary in 1988 using three short silent Chaplin films, *Easy Street*, *The Immigrant* and *The Adventurer*. These three films come from a set of twelve produced for Mutual Films in 1917 and all use Chaplin's favourite actors to play the girl, Edna Purviance and the villain, Eric Campbell.

**The Orchestration** is different for each film but in general the instrumentation is as follows:

Flute, piccolo and alto flute, Oboe, Eb clarinet / bass clarinet, Saxophone (soprano, alto, tenor, bass clarinet), Contra-bassoon.

Trumpet (picc and cornet), Horn, Trombone (picc trombone and slide trumpet).

Percussion 1: 2 tymps, Kit, bass drum, steel drums, vibraphone, xylophone, slide whistle, duck, snare drum, claves, low A tubular bell, lions' roar, end of round wrestling bell, maracas, whip, Klaxon, geophone

Percussion 2: 3 rototoms, 3 congas, log drum, marimbula triangle, sandpaper blocks, agogo bells, cabaza, xylophone, glockenspiel

E-max sampler

2 pianists at one concert grand piano plus DX11FD

Harp

String sextet plus a 5 string double bass (all slightly amplified)

Soloists: mezzo soprano and bass baritone

All players are directed to speak or play various percussion instruments from time to time.

## **A semi-operatic film spiel**

The music is played as an accompaniment as the films roll in grainy 35mm prints. But it is not mere accompaniment. The audience has the traditional silent film piano treatment in their heads and is confronted with something which goes way beyond their expectations and indeed which is often very strange, anarchic and difficult to comprehend. The music reflects, augments and often contradicts the moods and actions on screen with lots of layers of sound, wit, literary and musical allusions which at different times support and subvert the images. There are added sampled sounds and layers of text sung or spoken by amplified singers.

The sound is tied tightly to the images even where it directly contradicts them. For example, there is a splendidly humorous moment when truncheons are wielded to a weedy little 'plink' sound. Performers are on and around the stage offering another layer to watch, listen to and laugh with on stage. The players are also asked to synchronise their playing with the screen rather than the conductor. Chaplin reissued his greatest silent films with a soundtrack which layered sentimentality on sentimentality – this work is the ultimate antidote.

As a film maker Mason is experimenting with a new genre and way of thinking about film and music that is not just about entertainment. He is also very interested in the divergent times in which the film and the music has been created or in the predictable nature of the original music used. The music is frenetic, like the action in the film, but is at the same time surreal and unsentimental unlike the films themselves – almost Theatre of the Absurd. It is certainly often almost incomprehensible. The musical language includes virtually every 20<sup>th</sup> century idiom you can think of. He throws in little quotations, snippets and allusions from Debussy and Verdi plus Strauss, Dvorak, Steve Reich (New York being their only relationship) to raise questions in the mind of the listener/viewer. Sound collages, popular tunes, riffs and polyrhythm's are woven into the fabric with humour and immense skill and this is something he has done before. Mason's first silent film music was for René Clair's classic 1927 farce *An Italian Straw Hat* and was also full of ironic quotations, this time on French musical history.

*"The audience in a theatre regulates the performance" (Brecht), and for me the best place for the composer to work now, (outside the concert hall), is in the opera house. These three scores are virtually unseen, or inverted, opera, and have a rich and diverse subplot added by the singers (and the subtitles). One could call the genre a 'semi-operatic filmspiel.'* Mason

The singers sing and speak in several languages which seem to highlight the silent nature of the films – they can be 'read' by anyone in any language after all. Their largely incomprehensible nature adds to unreality of it all. Mason makes it clear that some of the texts they sing are designed to create a sort of subplot of the implied fatalism, disjuncture and alienation of the lives of those on screen – and of course their lack of appropriate language when many of them in *The Immigrant* arrive in New York. Part of the text in *Easy Street* comes from the Britain of Margaret Thatcher, long after the films were produced. He uses puns, riddles and other word games as part of the comment. Mason also includes letters written to him complaining about his music – he is a true deconstructionist.

The music does not always seem connected to the film, for example when you expect a change of mood or speed as the actions speeds up or becomes more dramatic, it does not happen. Also the music does not always reflect the emotional hinterland of the players or the story and sometimes the effect is of a manic whirlwind or a disjointed dream happening just off screen in their 'real' lives.

### **Music, sound effects and theatre**

Sound effects are important and are particularly interesting when they are sampled (see list in the third of the student activities). The music also sometimes imitates or contradicts the sound effects. The orchestra includes a large percussion section including items such as a synthesiser, sampler, Swanee whistles, a pop gun, a coffee grinder, a wrestling bell, a wind machine as well a plethora of duck noises and sirens. The harpist has to play with hairbrushes, a credit card and plectrums. The DX keyboard has to be harmonium among other things and the pianist plays inside the instrument with brushes and chains. There is also theatre and the pianist starts by dusting the keyboard marked in the score "like Mrs Mop". All the players have to play one percussion instrument each and one toy or instrument such as a kazoo during the performance.

The score is meticulously timed and annotated down to the last second. The foreword is very long and there are countless instructions to players throughout the score. Despite appearing to be anarchic, some of the actions are very carefully calibrated – handbell ringing, kicks, truncheon blows and so on. The score is studded with instructions to players – for example, during the card game in *The Immigrant*, the score has 'shuffles, left, right, splits pack, splits pack, cards down, slams pack' all the way through in very precise places, another example is there a cymbal roll is indicated as 'splashy'. Also the whole orchestra is required to shout '*Help*' and once in several languages at a time, this is very complex and very dense music – perhaps too complex?

# CHAPLINOPERAS – the music and film

Given here is a very brief synopsis of each of the three films used by Benedict Mason in his piece *ChaplinOperas*, followed by rather more detail about Mason's soundtrack and how it relates, or doesn't relate, to the films we see. Included are quite substantial parts of the texts used by the performers where appropriate. They are often very hard to hear or understand so this should give an idea of the breadth of texts used and their origins, the juxtapositions between their seriousness and light heartedness.

## Introduction

**Brief synopsis.** *The Tramp sat outside the mission, is tempted in by the sight of a girl, he takes part in the service holding a baby for someone sitting next to him and listens to the preacher.*

As an introduction to the main films Chaplin's Tramp character is seen outside the mission with the harmonium playing inside. He follows the girl inside and takes part in the service with the preacher with a 'hell and fire' text laid over whatever he was actually saying. 'And there followed hail and fire mingled with blood', 'Repent or else', 'Blessed are the dead', 'You have no use of money in heaven', 'Give generously' are a taste of the text. There is a continual subverting of the sounds of singing, hymns, bells ringing, the preacher and the organ. The effect of the silence as he sees the girl who wants to save him is very strong.

## Easy Street

**Brief synopsis.** *The Tramp somehow joins the police force and as a rookie cop in a tough neighbourhood he tries to overcome the biggest of the local bullies with all predictable results. Even with bullies, drug addicts, and gangster, the good-hearted chap uses a little unconventional policing - when his truncheon proves ineffective on the very large Eric Campbell's thick head, he resorts to gassing him with a street lamp which bends back and forth to help the process along.*

In this film there are quite a few musical sections which directly reflect the action on screen: the fight music provides a splendid cacophonous backdrop with shouts, bells, saxophone interjections and general chaos portrayed with much calling from voices in the orchestra; Chaplin's dance as a policeman is accompanied by whistles and the bass creeps up as the police do as well; as the villain enters the station the anarchic hitting of instruments on strings and brass is close to the action. The silence at the key swallowing moment with vocal noises indicating a sort of joke panic is full of humour.

There are quotations from recruiting adverts for the Metropolitan Police – 'we're looking for mature fit people ...you'll learn the art of handling people ...'.

The woodwind, brass and string players plus solo singers chant a rhyme

*'PC Plod is on the beat  
See him walking down the street  
When you're all tucked up at night  
Warm pyjamas sleeping tight  
A SUPERCOP patrols the town.....  
Men who live off sin and vice  
Are hunted down and trapped like mice'*

Other texts used, sometimes in a sort of Brechtian sprechgesang, include the Book of Revelations, items from the newspapers, Prometheus Unbound, Konrad Lorenz, Roget's Thesaurus, Roger McGough poems, and various radio programmes. When the adversaries stalk each other (like in children's games,) they are accompanied by children's counting games and in the chase we have a snatch of horse-racing commentary. Short musical excerpts from Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* remind us that we are at a Revivalist meeting.

## The Immigrant

**Brief synopsis.** *Charlie Chaplin's tramp comes with many others as an immigrant to America on a rolling boat. He has to contend with poverty, language problems and a very large head waiter (Campbell again), only to get the girl, marry her very quickly and, we are led to assume, live happily ever after.*

The scene here is immigrants travelling to New York and the cheerful music is rather like the fair in Stravinsky's *Petrouschka*. The marvellous "seasick" music, glissandi, creaks and bangs, with women's voices calling and comforting, the cacophony of the dinner time bell with the farce of the scene depicted and the card game are all wonderfully coordinated music with the action. Russian poems on Homesickness and Motherland are quoted as they arrive indicating their sense of strangeness and inability to understand what's going on.

*'Any home to me is alien, any temple to me is empty....*

*Far away from the shores of the promised land  
Keeping at the bottom of my soul of hope pale light...*

*I waves questioned and the ocean misty roared in answer:  
Forget your radiant dreams; forget hope  
There's not you trusted in dream deceptive and strange...'*

As the ship glides by the Statue of Liberty there is a mournful cor anglais followed by a rare stillness in the music. The cacophony resumes as they are herded off the boat. Hints of a jazz joint come from the saxophone, the horn muted for the nose blowing, the folk-like violin playing jabbing at the beans on the dinner plate and some pseudo-dance music subverting the scene all add to the humour of the events. The panic engendered by not being able to pay the bill is felt in a Jackson Pollock-like splattering of the sounds hinting at the chaos and terror within. Whist the Milhaud-like saxophone and piano suggestions at the final marriage round off the film with a total lack of sentimentality, allusions are everywhere.

## The Adventurer

**Brief synopsis.** *Chaplin plays an escaped convict who, after fleeing by outwitting the police in his escape, hides out in a high society party crawling with the cops.*

On screen the audience reads the following:

<p>The Adventurer, released October 17<sup>th</sup> 1917, was the last Charlie Chaplin Mutual Comedy. Although it seems somewhat a relapse into the style of his earlier Keystone's it was the most popular film in the whole series of twelve. The Mutual comedies gave Chaplin both financial and artistic freedom and popularity unequalled by any other screen personality of the time.</p>
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And at the same time we hear the whole company, including the sampler, instructed to 'OOOOOOORRRR – rah! Or –ya! Or – Ya! Or – ya!' Plus what are described as 'menacing quasi laughs – Hoy, hoy, hoy, hoy, hoy!!' And then 'Cher Igor, Va vite; voir le film de Chaplin. C'est une incroyable merveille. Pauvre Gautier Vignal! Je t'embrasse, Jean'.

The 'speech song' includes early on a declamation that the 'American persecution of the British reached epic proportions in the 1910s. No longer tolerated in Boston and New York circles, many exiles from the United Kingdom sought sanctuary on the West coast, under the impression that they would be less conspicuous. Here they lived a rough and ready existence on the very edge of civilisation. They lived like animals. Like moles they learnt to live in burrows underground.'

All this and more is against the tide of more laughing, choking, 'Whoops' and 'Oh Dears' in various languages.

The vocal contributions in this film are largely in English so we can at least sometimes nearly follow them. Excerpts proliferate from Blake, Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, Brecht, Stravinsky letters, proverbs, various encyclopaedias and dictionaries, and finally the aptly titled Stephen Games '*What really was going on?*'. Frantic and anarchic music reflects the action. The stylised English accents are there sometimes to emphasise the high society situation he has found himself in. And there's more political comment going on throughout the piece.

Musically the score includes a full range of sound effects and sound pictures: snores, climbing sounds in the orchestra for climbing the rocks; vocal roars from the players as Chaplin crawls on all fours; Morse code beeps; jazz sax and sliding strings at the decadence of it all ('...*It takes two to tango, go and eat coke...*'); electronic drips of water, trombone slides and col legno strings along with the swimming and saving from drowning; vocalisations (*bdbdddum; bbbdbbum; bdbdddddum*); again silence and the timing of the shock of kicking produces both orchestra and audience laughter. Some lovely tea room string quartet allusions and anarchic violin waltzing disintegrate almost as they start ('...*Etiquette is just a systematic form of not kicking each other...*').

'*What's going on?*' is the final intelligible call – a perfect ending with manic chanting and then the long still moment when he is caught and finally escapes - as all good heroes should.

# Appendix 1

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION, BENEDICT MASON

### BENEDICT MASON

#### Life, interests and musical style

Benedict Mason was born in 1954. He was a student at Kings College, Cambridge and then moved on to the Royal College of Art to study film making. He only turned to composing in the 1980s but made his mark quickly. He was honoured very quickly with the Guido d'Arezzo prize for 'his meticulously titled 'Oil and Petrol Marks on a Wet Road are Sometimes Held to be Spots where a Rainbow Stood'. He won the Benjamin Britten Competition in 1988 for his first orchestral piece, *'Lighthouses of England and Wales'*. Other awards include a Fulbright Fellowship, the Third Britten Award and the Paul Fromm Award.

#### A Sound Artist

Mason calls himself a 'composer and sound artist'. His style is diverse and his particular interests include the effects of the spatial relationships, sound pictures and film music.

The slightly whimsical titles of many of his works are a clue that each piece is the stimulus for the style of the piece. *'Lighthouses'* is clearly using sea music as a stimulus. He has written with playwright Howard Brenton a 'grand opera' on football, pop music and Germany called *'Playing Away'*. *'Animals and the Origins of Dance'*, is a light set of 'twelve ninety-second dances' in a variety of different rhythms, some of them played simultaneously. How about *'Steep Ascent within and away from a non-European Concert Hall: Six Horns, Three Trombones and a Decorated Shed'* written in 1995.

#### Space

*"No composer knows as much about concert hall doors as I do,"* says Mason. The use of the opening angle of the doors to exactly regulate the amount of exterior noise getting into the hall is the kind of meticulous detail that absorbs him.

He is very interested in the spaces in which his music is played, writing music for particular halls which take account of the particular resonances of them. He has written an extended series of pieces under the title 'Music for Concert Halls' for several different spaces from Frankfurt and Paris to Amsterdam and Lucerne. The space gives the music its character, and the music can become the function of the building. In one Concert Hall work, the audience triggers the air conditioning units as they pass through the exhibition. In another, he plays with the acoustics of the lobbies, staircases and cloakrooms. Sometimes the players are not even in the concert hall itself. In the 'Trumpet Concerto', only the solo trumpeter is inside the auditorium. Sometimes the audience can barely hear what they are playing and they resemble nothing as much as visual art installations. When musicians are outside the auditorium, the distance seems to make a different sound to how it would be if they just played quietly.

#### Journeys and symphonic painting

The orchestral work *Lighthouses of England and Wales* is based on a journey. One summer, Mason visited most of the lighthouses between Solway Firth and the Farne Islands and carefully wrote down the frequencies of their signals. The piece is rather like a symphonic tone poem or even painting and is an almost impressionistic piece in which individual beacons contrast with each other's individual signals making interesting interference patterns.

#### Recording and performing

Mason's music is challenging to play and because of the physical focus of some of it is often difficult to record. Only a very small proportion of his output has been recorded yet and Mason is more keen to insist on the music as *"live musicians in authentic acoustic environments, as opposed to the artificiality of music conveyed via domestic loudspeakers."* (Richard Toop).

*'Sadly orchestras don't seem to be able to serve the modern composer in any radical way unless one stays within a largely 19th century framework.'* Mason worked with the Ensemble Modern as one of the very few capable of interpreting what he wanted. The London Sinfonietta is similarly unusual in being able to put his music on.

### **Postmodernism and Mason**

In the words of Homer Simpson *"Weird for the sake of [being] weird."* (Moe Szyslak).

The word 'Postmodern' is used frequently among commentators about Mason's music. This is a very difficult term to define, not least because it isn't really 'post' anything. It has to do with irony, parody, pastiche, even silliness, and the deconstructionist undermining of structures and assumptions and the fluidity of knowledge in our modern era feature strongly.

Certainly, a sort of stylistic irony is never far from his work, with hints and suggestions of styles which are then almost immediately undermined. In *Playing Away* Mason and Brenton rewrote the Faust story as a football story - a *'Greek tragedy seen through the eyes of a tabloid newspaper'* as Mason put it. There are many popular allusions in it with quotations and lots of parody throughout. Other influences include the musical irony of Mauricio Kagel's and the polyrhythms of Ligeti'.

### **Composing method**

In an interview Mason gives a pleasing glimpse into his way of working and his love/hate relationship with the computer:

*".....the constraints of poverty! I have only a laptop which is continually falling apart, and no expensive software! Even for the moments where I needed musical notation in precise graphical positions, I had only a free demo version of Sibelius where it was not possible to save, and I had to resort to using screen shots. And all the rest (the main graphics) was done with Appleworks which came free with my laptop. I decided to try to make it that everything had to be done in a computer for precise temporal measuring.*

*But I still start to wonder why use a computer. I love and hate the things. With *Animals and the Origins of Dance* (1992) where 22 musicians play Bossanovas and Jitterbugs and what have you, in 12 different tempi, computers were scarcely available, and I simply used chains of A4 pages and measured everything with a ruler and calculated cumulatively, like Nancarrow - though I have never punched holes. I'm not sure if computers save us time, though this piece would not be possible without present day technology which I am happy to make use of. I am no luddite. (However the purity of the initial working process has had to be compromised in post production through the sad constraints of using commercial software designed for commercial music).*

## Appendix 2

# MUSICAL OUTPUT

Benedict Mason's musical output at the age of 50 plus is already substantial. The list below is not comprehensive but some key works to look out for particularly include the following. The titles in themselves are instructive as to his intentions.

### For full orchestra

*Lighthouses of England and Wales* (1987)

*Clarinet Concerto* (1995)

*Concerto for the Viola Section* (1990)

*Ohne Mißbrauch der Aufmerksamkeit* (1993) with an actor, horn and 6 other obbligato horns

*Sapere Aude* (cantata) for solo soprano (1989)

*Second and Third Musics for a European Concert Hall* (both written in 1994)

*Animals and the Origins of the Dance* (1992) with computer-controlled clicktracks and sequencers; players double on tin whistles, slide whistles and whistles

*Asko. Paradiso. The Fifth Music: Resumé with C.P.E. Bach* (1995) orchestra includes sampler and four assistants

*Imposing a Regular Pattern in Chaos and Heterophony* (1990)

### For smaller ensembles and voices

*Chaplin Operas* (1988) for bass baritone and mezzo soprano.

*Double Concerto* (1989) for horn and trombone.

*Nodding Trilliums and Curve Lined Angles* (1990) for four percussion soloists

*Self-Referential Songs and Realistic Virelais* (1990) or solo soprano

*Adagio Con Molto Sentimento d'Affetto* (1988)

*Brass Quintet* (1989)

*Horn Trio* (1987) for horn, piano and violin with cassette player and small loudspeakers

*Two String Quartets* (1987 and 1993)

*Room Purcell* (1995) for 5 viols and 3 tapes

*Sara Stowe, Matthew Spring and Adrian Jack with Hurdy Gurdies, African Xylophones, a Sampler and a Dictionary* (1994)

*Quantized Quantz* (1992) for flute/live electronics, computer & tape

*Six Caprices* (1987) for violin

*Six Piano Etudes* (1988)

*Oil and Petrol Marks on a Wet Road are Sometimes Held to be Spots where a Rainbow Stood* (1987) for 16 solo voices

*Playing Away* (1993) for Helden Tenor, 19 subsidiary roles, Baritone, Bass, 2 Sopranos, Chorus.

## Appendix 3

### USEFUL WEBSITES FOR REFERENCE

<http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/music/reviews/article23963.ece>

A review of ChaplinOperas

[http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2431&State\\_2905=2&ComposerId\\_2905=1008](http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2431&State_2905=2&ComposerId_2905=1008)

Biographical and analytical materials

<http://benedictmason.com/>

Homepage of the composer - you can hear him talking about his work on this site.

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/fridayreview/story/0,,1364506,00.html>

A review of a performance of ChaplinOperas

[http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State\\_3041=2&workId\\_3041=8136](http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=8136)

Description and some analysis of ChaplinOperas.

<http://myclimatspainters.free.fr/pollock1.htm>

Jackson Pollock pictures

[www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/pollock\\_jackson.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/pollock_jackson.html)

More Jackson Pollock pictures and posters

[www.gilescartoons.co.uk/notes.asp](http://www.gilescartoons.co.uk/notes.asp)

Random Giles cartoons

## **ABOUT THE WRITER**

These materials were written by Anice Paterson, commissioned by the London Sinfonietta. After 20 years teaching music and performing arts in schools, she was Music Adviser for Leicestershire Education Authority, Chair of the National Association of Music Educators (NAME) and for five years before her recent retirement was responsible for the production of all publications for NAME. She continues to be a practising musician and guide to young teachers.