

The Parliament of Angels (1995)

The Parliament of Angels was inspired by a series of fifteenth century frescos in the crypt of Bayeux Cathedral depicting 'Musical Angels', each of whom is to be seen playing a different musical instrument. I had the idea to 'bring to life' these characters and enable them to establish dialogues with each other, to discuss, argue and debate.

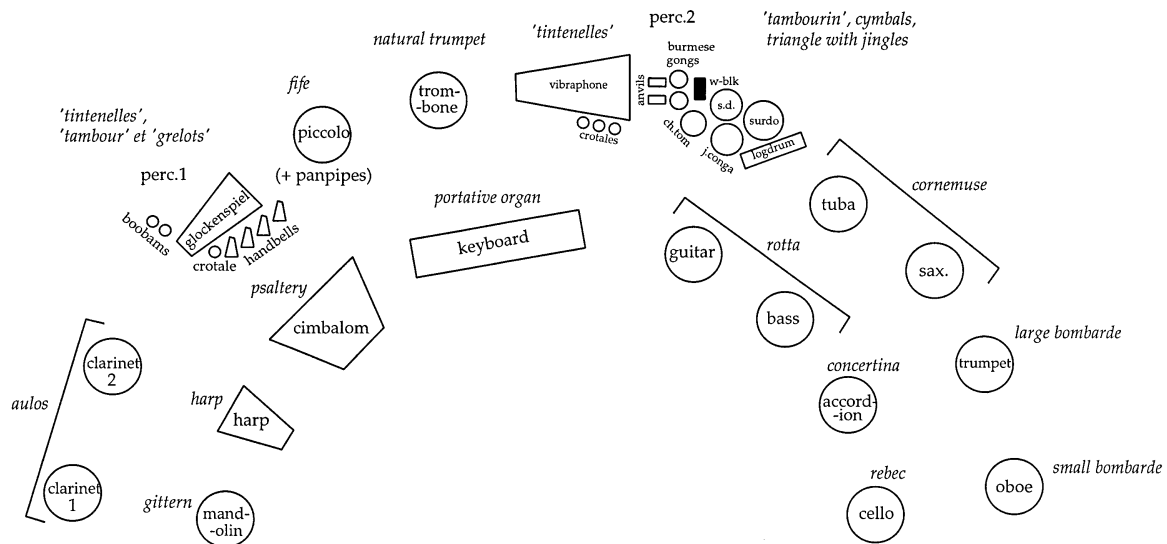
Two things in particular interested me about the group of instruments depicted - firstly that they were associated with very different musical contexts (military music, dance band music, church music and so on) and so probably would never have been heard playing together. Nevertheless I could imagine that, were they to be introduced to each other, they might very well have a great deal to discuss!

Secondly, whilst many of the instruments are the direct ancestors of many of our modern instruments (such as *rebec* [=violin], *harpe*, *bombarde* [=oboe] and *trumpet*), others (such as the *psaltery* and the extraordinary *rotta*) either died out altogether, or (as in the case of the *cornemuse* [=bagpipe]) never became integrated into the modern orchestra. My idea was to try and find modern counterparts for all the instruments, even if, (as in the case of the *cornemuse* and the *rotta* which play drones as well as melodies) two musicians would be necessary to replace the original one. The diagram below shows how my final choice of instruments evolved out of the original instruments in the frescos.

In the Crypt at Bayeux the frescos are to be seen adorning six pillars to left and right of the small central aisle - this rather austere and ordered arrangement suggested the left and right side of a parliamentary debating chamber, and this gave me the idea of transforming these 'heavenly figures' into politicians - correspondingly the musicians in my work are laid out in two balanced groups to left and right of the stage.

Finally, the aspect of 'time walking' (or looking back to the fifteenth century in order, perhaps, to force an evolution in methods of sound production or even new kinds of instruments) is presided over by the one sound common to almost all ages - the church bell (whose sound is heard both in its natural form as well as electronically treated), which represents the chairman (or 'Speaker') of the Parliament, and which attempts to maintain order in the evolving debate.

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The names in italics show the instruments depicted in the frescos, which the modern instruments represent