

Autumn Voices

Haunted by Verlaine's famous lines *Les sanglots longs Des violons De l'automne...* Autumn Voices concerns the extraordinary colour-spectral transformation of the autumn leaf-change.

This process is mirrored in musical terms by a gradually evolving harmonic field based on the spectra of the violin's four open strings. This harmonic field starts from a simple combination of twenty harmonics (the first five partials of each string) and very gradually fans out to form a rich palette of eighty harmonics (the first twenty partials of each string). At certain points during this process the fundamentals of the four spectra are shifted downward in steps of a perfect fifth, further emphasising the gradual increase in natural resonance between the violin and its electronic counterpart, and causing an inevitable timbral transformation as the violin is gradually forced to expand its initial field of twenty natural harmonics to include artificial harmonics and normal stopped notes.

The songs of many birds are mingled with Verlaine's *sanglots* to articulate this constantly enriching spectrum, but as the theoretical point of maximum coloration approaches, the leaves are cruelly blown away leaving the bare woods to resonate only the sounds of dead branches and the creatures of winter.

Autumn Voices was commissioned by the BBC, and written and realised between September 2000 and May 2001. I would like to record my gratitude to Mieko Kanno for her close collaboration throughout the composition of the work, which was written for her and is dedicated to her.

James Wood