

## Choroi kai Thaliai (Revels and Dances)

Whilst on a visit to Indonesia in 1981 I had the experience of attending the Temple Festival in Peliatan, Bali. Throughout the whole night of festivities there were people drinking, eating, watching Gamelan and puppet shows, laughing uproariously at bizarre drama performances, sleeping, playing games and praying silently in the temple. It was this unforgettable experience that gave me the initial idea for *Choroi kai Thaliai*. However, anxious to avoid any literal representation of events, I sought texts from another culture altogether - this was Ancient Greece and the universal cult of Dionysus. In the selection of totally unrelated texts on which I finally settled I could see the possibilities both of devising a scenario that recalled the fantastic, surreal atmosphere of the Peliatan festival, and also of building a rich polyrhythmic structure from the fabric of the texts' metre. Once the sequence of texts was decided, the music was written in just three weeks, early in 1982. It is scored for soprano and percussion soloists, and a chorus of voices assembled onto a pre-recorded tape. In the opening Prelude, a Delphic Paean to Apollo, soprano, percussionist and chorus in turn appeal to the Muses to join them in singing Hymns to Apollo. This leads directly into the first main section, a Homeric Hymn to Apollo, This lively dance describes the enchanting and captivating manner in which Maidens of Delos are able to imitate the sounds of men's voices and castanets as they dance and sing hymns to Apollo. The next section is from a Hymn to Sleep from Sophocles' *Philoctetes*:

Ἔπν' ὀδύνας ἀδαίης, Ἔπνε δ' ἀλγέων εὐαῖς ἡμῖν	Sleep, sleep. who knows nothing of pain or sorrows, on a fair wind may you come to us, blessed,
Ἐλθοις, εὐαίων εὐαίων, ὦναξ· ἴμμασι δ' ἀντίσχοις	blessed one, O Lord! And may you keep over our eyes this brightness
τάνδ' αἶγλαν, ἃ τέταται τανῶν. ἴθι ἴθι μοι πραιών.	that over them now is spread. Come, come I pray, healing one.

By this stage the men have fallen asleep - their dreams become mingled with the events surrounding them and become disturbed and macabre. In this context the third section (from Aristophanes' *Frogs*) takes on the character of an erotic dream.

The men wake for the fourth section (from Euripedes' *Bacchae*), a dramatic enactment of the appearance of Dionysus. At the climax of this dance Dionysus speaks (his part take by the percussionist), creating awe and terror as he kindles fire and causes destruction - the house of Pentheus is thrown down in ruins, the tomb of Semele is struck by a thunderbolt and the Maenads hurl themselves to the ground in terror. This leads directly, and with more than a touch of irony, into the Postlude, a Hyporchema by Pratinas, in which the soprano delivers an impassioned and bitter attack on the current state of modern music with its predilection for crude instruments -

*Mine is Dionysus, it is for me to shout, for me to sound his praise..let the flute take second place... let it be content to lead the campaigns of soused young revellers, battering on our doors. Smash the instrument with the voice of the speckled toad, burn the spittle-wasting reed that chatters and strides across melody and rhythm, its body fashioned by a boring tool... Thriambos, Dithyrambos, ivy-haired lord, listen, listen to this my Dorian Dance!*

James Wood