

Incantamenta (Incantations) (1991)

INCANTATION: magic formula chanted or recited, a spell.

As in several previous vocal works, in *Incantamenta* I have tried to establish a rich palette of vocal sounds extending from 'sung' through 'sung speech' to 'spoken', and incorporating all the various shades that come between. I have often found that the precise point where 'sung speech' becomes 'spoken singing' is difficult to define, and the transition from one to the other is extremely difficult to execute. My solution here has been to employ a method of 'inflection', 'note-bending', or 'intonation' (as in the Chinese sense), applied systematically to all except the very shortest notes.

The text is an imaginary 'composed language', possibly reminiscent of certain African dialects, but with its own very distinctive character. The individual vowels and consonants are organised systematically, and articulated by the rhythms in exactly the same manner as are the pitches. Furthermore, just as the basic pitches are subject to 'inflection' or 'intonation', so are the basic vowels (u, o, a, e) affected by diphthongs (brightening, darkening or closing of the vowels), which further enhances the effect of the intonations. Hence both text and pitch are totally integrated into the rhythms.

Incantamenta consists of three movements and a coda (*Lamentum*) which follow each other without a break. In the first the singers are divided into two distinct 'layers', one half of the singers providing a backcloth of pure, uninflected, sung lines to the others' trance-like, inflected incantations. The second movement is a kind of frenzied 'Litany' between the two bass soloists and the chorus, who together become transported into a state of almost disturbing agitation. The third movement is an elaborate 'tapestry' of rhythmic cycles which unfold at different speeds. As the rhythms become augmented the music becomes gradually slower and increasingly melancholic. This leads inevitably to the final *Lamentum*. This elegiac coda was composed around the time of the outbreak of the Gulf War, in response to the horrific massacre of thousands of innocent lives, many of whom were denied even the dignity of a proper burial.

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