

## Neil Buckland - Clarinet Concerto

(includes *Then I Became* for clarinet)

My clarinet concerto was completed in 2016, but the first theme of the first movement and the main theme of the finale are based on sketches made many years prior to that.

The first movement reflects my interest in Joseph Campbell's idea of the "Hero's Journey". This concept has been used in a simplistic way as the basis for numerous film plots ever since Hollywood discovered it, but Campbell's original conception is subtler, less rigid, and based on a deeper understanding of human psychology. The basic outline is simple: the hero is introduced, sets out on a journey, encounters a mentor, companion or "shadow", they go through many challenges and ordeals, and finally return home transformed. The use of this structure in music is not much discussed, but sonata form, one of the most common musical forms since it was developed in the 18th century, has a very similar outline. In sonata form the "exposition" introduces a first subject or theme (the "hero"), then a second subject in a different key (the companion or shadow). A "development" section (originally called "free fantasy") follows, in which the themes go on a harmonic journey and endure many challenges to their integrity. Finally, in the "recapitulation", the themes return, transformed by their experiences and now both firmly in the home key. The first theme may appear on the surface to be unchanged, but is now seen (heard) in a different light (transfigured, you could say) as a result of the ordeals it has been through.

The first movements of most concertos since the time of Mozart are in a variant of sonata form, and I have followed this tradition (more or less) here. In the back of my mind, however, was a story that is often given as an example of the hero's journey, the medieval tale of Percival (Parzival, Parsifal), in which a naïve youth sets out in search of the Holy Grail and after many adventures finally attains it. I haven't attempted to represent this story or its details in any literal way, but it has been a kind of subliminal influence on the content and form of the music.

The second (slow) movement is based on a vocal composition I wrote in 2006, *Then I Became*, which has a prominent part for solo clarinet. Here I have given what was originally the vocal part to the clarinet, and extended and elaborated it with flourishes impossible for a singer, while the clarinet solos in the vocal version are transformed here into dialogues with a solo cello, a solo violin occasionally also joining in. The lyrics of the vocal version suggest some of the ideas and feelings behind the music: "Then I became as a bird, whose body was of Oneness and whose wings were of Everlastingness, and I continued to fly in the air of the Absolute, until I passed into the sphere of Purification, and gazed upon the field of Eternity, and beheld there the Tree of Oneness. When I looked I myself was all those" (Abu Yazid al-Bistami, 9th century Sufi, transl. Reynold A. Nicholson). This movement can also stand alone as a separate piece, under the title *Then I Became*.

The finale is in rondo form and reflects my enjoyment of folk and world music. It makes much use of asymmetric metres such as are sometimes found in traditional eastern European music. The first theme is in 7/8 time with occasional bars of 8/8, 5/8 and 3/8, and is in the style of Greek traditional music. (It's possible it may actually be a Greek folk tune. I noted it down many years ago, at a time when I was both inventing original melodies and exploring various folk traditions, and I neglected to make a note as to its origins.)

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