

## 'Hill Stanzas'

*for Ronald Brautigam*

I. Water

II. Sleep

III. Glamourie (*enchantment*)

IV. The Tailors' Stone

I was delighted when Ronald Brautigam invited me to write a concerto for him.

When we met in Amsterdam to discuss the nature of the piece, he suggested that the new work might have a connection with the north east of Scotland, where he stays often with his Scottish wife.

This led me to the extraordinary writing of Nan Shepherd in her book 'The Living Mountain'. I was lucky enough to be offered a place to work in Glenshee, in the Cairngorms National park, from where I could explore and get a sense of the vastness of the landscape. I wrote most of the concerto there. I made sound recordings of running water, birdsong and the commotion of grouse rising from the heather. All this with a background of constant wind.

Shepherd writes:

*Bird song, and the noise birds make that are not singing, and the small sounds of their movements, are for the ear to catch.*

At the same time I was listening to Ronald's playing, on piano and on fortepiano. His virtuosity and sensitivity was the starting point for the piano writing, and the piece is written so that it may be played on either instrument.

The first two movements' titles are taken from chapter titles in Shepherd's book, beginning with 'Water':

*'- the slow slap of a loch, the high clear trill of a rivulet, the roar of spate. On one short stretch of burn the ear may distinguish a dozen different notes at once.'*

The chapter 'Sleep' describes the many times she has slept on the plateau, and the various awakenings she experiences – a bird alighting on her arm, a deer grazing nearby, and most dramatically, after falling asleep near the summit looking down into Coire Breachan 2000 feet below:

*'... I awoke and found myself staring down black walls of rock to a bottom incredibly remote....With a gasp of relief I said 'Coire Breachan', turned around on my back, eased myself from the edge, and sat up. I had looked into the abyss. '*

*Glamourie* is a Scots word meaning something unexplained: the supernatural. The Cairngorms resonate with a wealth of story and tradition. It is said that a fiddler long ago employed at Balmoral now haunts the surrounding hills, and can be heard playing at night.

Another legend surrounds *Clach nan Taillear* – The Tailors' Stone – named after three tailors who perished there one night. They wagered they would dance at three 'Dales' within twenty four hours and having performed two-thirds of their programme sank exhausted at this spot. The movement draws on a traditional reel '*The De'il among the Tailors*', interspersed with darker music. As Shepherd describes:

*But the ear can listen also to turmoil. Gales crash into the Garbh Choire with the boom of angry seas: one can hear the air shattering itself upon rock. Cloud-bursts batter the earth and roar down the ravines, and thunder reverberates with a prolonged and menacing roll in the narrow trough of Loch Avon.*

Piano Concerto no.1 was commissioned by the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, the Orchestra Filharmonica di Torino, L'Orchestre de Picardie and Norrlandsoperan Symphony Orchestra.

The World Premiere was given by the Amsterdam Sinfonietta on 11 March 2016 , directed by Candida Thompson, and the Italian Premiere, 19 April 2016 by Orchestra Filharmonica di Torino.

The French Premiere was given on 25 May 2016 by L'Orchestre de Picardie and the Swedish Premiere on 8 December 2016 by Norrlandsoperan Symphony Orchestra.

The soloist in all premiere performances was the concerto's dedicatee, Ronald Brautigam.

*Sally Beamish 2015*