

Simon Cummings

Blesi (Five Transitions of the Soul)

for 6 players

instrumentation

FLUTE / BASS FLUTE

B \flat CLARINET / BASS CLARINET

VIOLIN




CELLO

PERCUSSION: TUBULAR BELLS, MARIMBA, DEEP TAM-TAM, PEDAL BASS DRUM, SMALL BELL (ideally , but a higher octave is acceptable)



PIANO


performance notes

 = multiphonic (pitch indicated should be heard)  = multiphonic (approximate pitch)  = key rip

 = Bartok pizzicato  = excessive bow pressure; pitched but distorted  = utmost bow pressure; pitchless scraping

m.s.p. = molto sul ponticello **m.s.t.** = molto sul tasto **c.l.b.** = col legno battuto (all cancelled with **arco nat.**)  = stop bow on string

 = 'dead' note, the mallet remaining in contact, choking the sound  = damp

 = fist cluster, around indicated central note

For the sake of rhythmic clarity, tremolandi are notated throughout as trills with the alternating pitch shown in brackets. The pair of pitches should sound with equal intensity. All tremolandi are to be played as quickly as possible.

duration: c. 6 minutes

first performance: 30 November 2009: Curious Chamber Players, Rei Munakata, Recital Hall, Birmingham Conservatoire

blemish, *tr. v.* to damage, injure, sully; to spoil by a flaw.

Etymology: Middle English *blemisshen*, from Anglo-French *blemis-*, stem of *blesmir*; akin to Old Norse *blesi* blaze

“To read the summary of what God looks for in us is to become conscious of how little we have attained to it, a consciousness which may be followed by the temptation to doubt whether it is even possible. But we must remember that it represents an ideal of perfection, the value of which lies in the fact that it is almost out of our reach in this life, but that it is only in reaching after it, not in lowering it, that we can approximate to it. Perfection in this life consists in tending towards perfection, more in aiming at the ideal than in attaining it.”

(Bede Frost, *Lent with St Benedict*)

This piece was conceived during a time spent in Iceland in 2001. ‘Blesi’ - Icelandic for “one that blazes” - is the name given to a geothermal phenomenon found within the Geysir National Park (home of the original geyser). It consists of a pair of deep pools of water, one of which is a light green colour, its water boiling hot & its surface shimmering & steaming (being the origin of its name). A thin connecting rivulet allows water to flow across into the other pool, the water of which is a deep azure blue; its temperature is very warm, but nothing like the searing temperatures of its source. This struck me as an apt metaphor for the tenuous relationship between the individual & God, where the blazing source becomes cooled to, at best, a warm version of the original.

The work explores this idea in part through the parallel notion of being ‘out of sync’. The material is rooted in a deep, fundamental pulse, in groups of seven, from which the ensemble rebels & ultimately disconnects, forging its own way forward within a different metre (grouped in sixes). The fundamental material is essentially changeless in character, simply tolling out its metre in calm simple fashion, while the instruments that have split off from this pursue alternative ideas, focussing on five episodes, each of which explores a different kind of transition. Ultimately, this essential lack of synchronisation is shown in the structural divisions of the work, which form a large 7:6 rhythmic relationship, mirrored in the shifts of metre, from seven to six. These numbers were chosen for their symbolic connotations within Christianity, seven being the ‘perfect’ number associated with God, whereas six is commonly associated with evil. The rhythmic relationship of 7:6 can therefore here be seen as an attempt at perfection (7) but within a context that is nothing of the kind (6).

The five central episodes explore transitions inspired by a lyric from a song by Nine Inch Nails: “so many dirty little places / in your filthy little worn out broken down see through soul”. Those five epithets, ‘filthy’, ‘little’, ‘worn out’, ‘broken down’ & ‘see-through’, form the basis for the transitions. Some involve a shift in the parameters of a basic state, while others undergo a complete change of behaviour. But throughout them all, it is too simplistic to say that the transitions are “from good to evil”; the overall deviation away from the underlying order may be viewed in that light, but not the transitions themselves. As a consequence of the deviation from seven to six, they could perhaps be said to be ‘not good’ in their entirety, but I see both merits & shortcomings in both the start & end conditions of each transition.

It goes without saying that, in different ways, **Blesi** explores failure. But my hope is that the work will be heard in a broader, more optimistic light: of the determination to keep striving in the wake of failures & mistakes, & of the heroism & indeed holiness that impels such aspirations.

S. C.

to Paul Berg

Blesi

(Five Transitions of the Soul)

SIMON CUMMINGS

$\text{♩} = 50$

FLUTE
ff strong *f* *mf*

CLARINET IN B \flat
ff strong *f* *mf*

VIOLIN
ff strong *f* *mf*

VIOLONCELLO
ff strong *f* *mf*

PERCUSSION
Tubular Bells to Tam-tam Tam-tam*
ff strong *f* *mf*
*a medium-soft mallet should be used, retaining the amorphous splash of sound, but with an audible strike

PIANO
ff strong *f* *mf*

CLT.*
Vlc.

The musical score consists of six staves: FLT., CLT., VLN., VLC., PERC., and PNO. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into three measures. The first measure has a dynamic of *mp*. The second measure has a dynamic of *p*. The third measure has a dynamic of *pp*. The CLT. staff has a dynamic of *pp* at the start of the third measure, followed by *mf* and *p*. The VLN. and VLC. staves have dynamics of *mp*, *p*, and *pp* across the three measures. The PERC. staff has dynamics of *mp*, *p*, and *pp*, with a note in the third measure labeled "to Tubular Bells". The PNO. staff has dynamics of *p* and *pp*. The CLT. staff has a time signature change from 1/4 to 6/4 in the third measure. A downward arrow points to the CLT. staff in the third measure.

* the conductor should continue to beat in $\frac{7}{4}$,
but with indications for those in $\frac{9}{4}$, as shown

A

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

FLT. *f* *mpsf* *f* *p* *f sub.* *mp* *f sub.* *mf* *ff* *f* *mf* senza vibr.

CLT. *mf* *mp* *p* *f sub.* *mf sf* *f* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* senza vibr. vibr. 3:2 senza vibr. vibr. 3:2 3:2 senza vibr.

VLN. *f* *mf sub.* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* *mf* arco nat. molto vibr. m.s.p.

VLC. *p* *mf sf* *mp* *mf* *p* *f* *mp* *ff sub.* *mf* *ff sub.* *mp* *mf* *f* arco nat. 3:2 senza vibr. vibr. senza vibr. arco nat. m.s.p.

PERC. Tubular Bells *f* to Tam-tam Tam-tam *f* *mf*

PNO. *f* *mf*

CLT.
VLC.

B*

PNO.
PERC.

The musical score consists of six staves. The first four staves are for FLUTE (FLT.), CLARINET (CLT.), VIOLIN (VLN.), and VIOLA (VLC.). The fifth staff is for PERCUSSION (PERC.) and the sixth for PIANO (PNO.).

- FLT.:** Starts with *f*, then *ff*, *mp*, *f sub.*, *mf*, *mf*, *f*, *mp*, *f*.
- CLT.:** Starts with *mp*, *ff*, *f*, *ff*, *mf*, *ff*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, *f*, *mp*.
- VLN.:** Starts with *f sub.*, *mf*, *ff*, *m.s.p.*, *mf*, *mp*, *f*.
- VLC.:** Starts with *ff*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, *mp*, *f*.
- PERC.:** *mp*, *p*, *pp*. Includes instruction "to Tubular Bells".
- PNO.:** *mp*, *p*, *pp*.

Performance instructions include: *molto vibr.*, *vibr.*, *senza vibr.*, *arco nat.*, *senza vibr.*, *m.s.p.*, and *arco nat.*. Time signatures include 3:2, 2/4, and 6/4.

* at this point, the conductor should switch to beating in $\frac{6}{4}$ with indications for those still in $\frac{3}{4}$, as shown

FLT. *mp* *f* *mp fmp* *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *p* *f* *mp ff* *mp* *p* *f* *ff* *p* *ff* *ff* *ff* *5:4*

CLT. *f > mp* *f* *mp* *ff sub.* *f* *ff* *f* *ff* *p* *mp* *f* *p* *mp* *f* *ff* *f* *pp* *fff* *p* *f* *p* *f* *pp* *mp* *p* *f*

VLN. *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *p* *mp* *ff* *p* *mp* *ff* *p* *ff* *f* *p* *f* *p sub.* *f* *fff* *pp* *5:9*

VLC. *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *ff* *ff* *f* *mp* *p* *ff* *p* *f* *p* *ff* *mp* *f* *p* *f* *ff* *mp* *f* *ff* *p* *f* *mp* *ff* *pp* *ff* *3:2* *3:2*

PERC. *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *mp* *ff* *p* *mp* *ff* *mp* *p* *mp* *ff* *mp* *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *p* *fff* *p* *fff* *mp* *ff* *mp* *3:2* *8:7* *8:7* *5:8* *7:13* *17:10*

PNO. *mf* *p* *mp* *f* *mp* *p* *ff* *p* *mp* *9:13* *mp* *f* *ff* *5:6* *f* *mp*

PNO. PERC. (indicated by arrows at the top)

Tubular Bells, Marimba, Tam-tam (played with marimba mallet), Pedal B.D.

Solo Sost.

C

FLT. (5:4) 11:7 take Bass Flute *recklessly enthusiastic & optimistic* *fff pp ff mp fff* *f* *ff* *f* *ff* *ff poss.*

CLT. (13:7) 9:10 take Bass Clarinet *plangent, grotesquely expressive* *p* *f* *mp* *ben f* *troppo f* *raucous* *ff* *screaming!*

VLN. (5:9) 10:7 *stiff, pompous; four-square* *mp* *ff* *p* *pp* *ff* *pp* *ben f* *ff*

VLIC. 3:2 3:2 15:8 *mawkish, excessively 'lyrical'* *p* *fff* *f* *fff* *mp* *ben f* *ff*

PERC. (17:10) 4:7 *aggressively insistent & overbearing* *fff* *p* *fff* *ff* *mp* *pp* *mp* *f* *sempre (relentless)* *tr* *tr*

PNO. (5:6) 11:10 9:12 *theatrical: pseudo-appassionato* *fff* *mp* *fff* *p* *ff* *11:12* *13:12*

(Solo)
(Sost.)

FLT. *fsf mp mf f mf port pp p*

CLT. *sf mp port troppo f mf fsf mf f f mf ff f port mp p mf f mf ff f mf f*

VLN. *m.s.p. indignant sf ff f ff f mf mp f mf p mf p arco nat. 3:2 3:2*

VLC. *f mp mf ben f sf ben f mp p warm mp p ff f ff*

PERC. *Tubular Bells Marimba Pedal B.D. mp f mp p f mf*

PNO. *mf < mf < ff mp*

(Solo Sost.) the Solo Sostenuto pedal is no longer to be used

Ped. (Ped. ad lib.)

Musical score for six instruments: Flute (FLT.), Clarinet (CLT.), Violin (VLN.), Viola (VCL.), Percussion (PERC.), and Piano (PNO.). The score is written in a single system with six staves. It features complex rhythmic patterns with numerous slurs and dynamic markings. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *ff* (fortissimo). The percussion part includes specific instructions for 'Tam-tam' and 'Pedal B.D.'. The piano part includes an 8-measure rest in the right hand and an 8-measure rest in the left hand. The score concludes with a 7/4 time signature.

(*Ed. ad lib.*)

PNO.
PERC.

E

PNO.
PERC.

FLT. *(5:6)* *6:7* *3:5* *3:4* *3:7*
mp *ff* *p sub.* *ff* *f* *p sub.* *mp*

CLT. *5:7* *5:7* *4:5* *4:7* *3:2*
mp *mp* *ff* *mp*
 take Clarinet Clarinet

VLN. *3:4* *5:7* *3:5*
f *mp* *mp* *con sord.* *ff* *f* *p* *mf* *mp*

VL. *6:7* *4:5* *4:3* *con sord.*
mf *ff* *mp* *mp* *ff* *f* *mf*

PERC. Tubular Bells muted* to Tam-tam
p *p*
 * the sustain pedal is no longer to be used, resulting in a very short 'clang'
 * a very heavy cloth or towel should be draped over the tam-tam, drastically reducing the duration of its vibrations

PNO. *p*

(the sustain pedal is no longer to be used)

PNO.
PERC.

PNO.
PERC.

PNO.
PERC.

Musical score for Flute (FLT.), Clarinet (CLT.), Violin (VLN. sord.), Viola (VLC. sord.), Percussion (PERC.), and Piano (PNO.). The score is in 7/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and 3:2 ratios. Dynamics range from *pp* to *mp*. The Percussion part includes a section labeled "to Tubular Bells".

FLT. *p* *pp*

CLT. *p* *pp*

VLN. (sord.) *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp*

VLC. (sord.) *mp* *p* *pp*

PERC. *pp* to Tubular Bells

PNO. *pp*

F*

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

FLT. *pp sempre*

CLT. *pp sempre*

VLN. (sord.) *pp sempre*
via sord., attach practice mute with practice mute

VLC. (sord.) *pp sempre*
m.s.t. via sord., attach practice mute with practice mute

PERC. *pp*
Tubular Bells to Tam-tam Tam-tam* (if necessary) * during the next six bars, the material used to mute the tam-tam should gradually be removed

PNO. *pp sempre*
una corda (al fine)

* at this point, the conductor should revert to beating in 4, with indications for those still in 7/4, as shown

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

CLT.
Vlc.

FLT. *ppp* exhale

CLT. *ppp* exhale

VLN. *ppp* exhale

VLC. *ppp* exhale

PERC. *ppp* (unmuted) Small Bell

PNO. *ppp* exhale
Close lid

The musical score is arranged in six staves. The Flute (FLT.), Clarinet (CLT.), Violin (VLN.), and Viola (VLC.) parts feature long, sustained notes with breath marks and dynamic markings of *ppp*. The Percussion (PERC.) part includes a 'Small Bell' with an '(unmuted)' instruction. The Piano (PNO.) part consists of sustained chords in both hands, with a 'Close lid' instruction at the end. Rehearsal marks are present at the beginning of each staff. A '3:2' ratio is indicated above several notes in the Flute, Violin, and Piano parts.