

The Cloud of Unknowing

Kenneth Hesketh
(b 1968)

In composing this work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, I was confronted by many different feelings. It was commissioned by Hilary and Timothy Reynish as part of a series in memory of their third son, William. For various reasons it proved a difficult work to write, not the least in how to approach the piece and what to say musically that would not seem trite or contrived.

I turned to early English literature, in this case texts dealing with the mystical or metaphysical. Such texts have long interested me. The title of this work comes from an anonymous manual and guide to mystical experience and was written in the late fourteenth century. In a manner similar to the concept of nirvana in oriental religion, the text espouses an emptying out of all intellect, of all feeling, so that in silence God's love and majesty may rush in. A second text, namely, *A Litany* by John Donne, also influenced the concept of this piece, specifically with reference to stanzas 23 to 25. Certain phrases and words seem to resonate musically and it was from these beginnings that the work took shape.

The work grows from one melody which is heard almost at once. Constant variation, renewal and development of this theme moves the music forward, sometimes gently, sometime fiercely. The piece starts and ends as if from afar. Various accompanying figures are allowed to flow freely from background to foreground, seemingly at will. The overall structure moves through three sections; processional, mercurial and eventually explosive, recessionary.

The Cloud of Unknowing is dedicated to the memory of William Reynish but also with deep affection to Tim and Hilary.

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Tim Reynish

Tim Reynish studied horn with Aubrey Brain and Frank Probyn, and gained his ARCM while still at school. After taking a music degree at Cambridge, he was principal horn with Northern Sinfonia, Sadler's Wells Opera (now ENO) and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. His conducting studies were on short courses with George Hurst at Canford Summer School, Sir Charles Groves and Sir Adrian Boult, Dean Dixon in Hilversum, and Franco Ferrara in Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena. Tim has conducted concerts with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the BBC Regional Orchestras and the London Symphony Orchestra, as well as in Norway, the Netherlands and Germany, and opera in Sweden.

In 1975 Tim was invited by Sir Charles Groves to become tutor for the Postgraduate Conducting Course at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM). Two years later he succeeded Philip Jones as Head of School of Wind & Percussion. At the RNCM, he conducted a number of operas, including *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *La Bohème*, *Erwartung*, and several operas by Britten. With the RNCM Symphony Orchestra, his performances included symphonies by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Bruckner and Mahler, as well as Strauss tone poems *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, the Verdi *Requiem* and Tippett's *A Child of our Time*. In the following two decades, he developed the wind orchestra and ensemble of the RNCM to become recognised as one of the best in the world, commissioning works from composers such as Richard Rodney Bennett, John Casken, Thea Musgrave, Aulis Sallinen, Adam Gorb and Kenneth Hesketh, performing regularly in major festivals such as Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Huddersfield and Three Choirs, broadcasting for the BBC and Classic FM, playing at three World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles Conferences, and making commercial compact discs for Doyen, Serendipity and Chandos.

In the decade since his retirement, Tim has held visiting professorships at Baylor University, University of Kentucky, Ithaca College, Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Cornell University. He has given clinics, lectured, guest conducted and adjudicated in the USA, Europe, Asia and Australia.