

Lullabies for Philomel ***for solo oboe and electronics***

- 1) Prelude: Inside a metal cage, a solitary lovebird laments and dwells on the time when there were two
- 2) Philomel's cry
- 3) A serpentine question
- 4) Metamorphosis: bells and birds

Philomel, for soprano, recorded soprano and synthesized sound was a pioneering electronic work by Milton Babbitt, who died in 2011. Composed in 1964 using a very early RCA synthesizer, the emotional power and effectiveness of the piece is remarkable. The music tells the tale of one of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*: Philomela is the victim of incredible brutality at the hands of her brother-in law, the King of Greece, who cuts out her tongue to prevent her revealing the crimes that have been perpetrated against her. The gods intervene and turn her into a bird so she can be free and sing once more. She then sings her story with great intensity.

Lullabies for Philomel is a homage to Babbitt. In the piece I mirror elements of the story but also offer Philomela music that I hope provides her with some comfort after the trauma she has suffered. There are certain parallels between the two pieces: both works focus on E, the madrigalists' symbolic pitch for a cry of anguish. Also, in *Philomel* the interplay between the live voice and its manipulated version is key whereas in *Lullabies* I have retained this idea but have metamorphosed solo soprano voice into a solo oboist. All the sounds of the piece are created from oboe samples and therefore the entire texture emanates from the sound of the instrument. In the choice of oboe soloist I pay a further homage, this time to Benjamin Britten, whose haunting and energetic *Metamorphosis after Ovid* for unaccompanied oboe has become a central piece of repertoire for the instrument and is also a great source of inspiration for me.

Cameron Harris: August 2012 rev. 2014
