

CELLO CONCERTO – ‘DEATHWATCH’ (1971-74)

Although it may seem unconventional in some ways, there is much that is traditional in this work. It exploits in a dramatic way some of the usual relationships of concerto form: conflict and conciliation; domination and subjection; and these are expressed, acted out, by the performers: a small group of seventeen strings, divided into two, flanking the soloist on either side. There’s also a second cellist, hidden, whom I have called the Doppelgänger, a sometimes mocking, sometimes tyrannical or beguiling presence, the invisible familiar of the principal soloist. To underline the difference between them he is amplified.

He is just one of the distorted mirror-images that penetrate the fabric of the work: the layout, structure, material, texture, everything. I’m not sure where I got hold of the idea of mirrors from: possibly the famous scene in Jean Cocteau’s film *Orphée*.

I conceived the work as a composition in black and white, which comprises two Laments, the first desperate, unreconciled, the second – a transmutation of the first – resigned, even ecstatic. Between them is a sequence of episodes called *Caprichos*, an allusion to the etchings of Goya, one of my companions during the long period of composition. Novalis, Lorca, and Rilke were others: indeed, at the heart of the work is Rilke’s idea of *Wendung*, the deep sudden change that may occur at the moment of darkest confusion.

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