

LINES OF LIFE II: VOICES/KINDERSCENEN

(lyric episodes for ensemble)

(1987-88; revised 1995)

The title of this work – actually the second in a sequence – comes from one of Holderlin’s poetic fragments: a passage that conveys with great simplicity the healing enlightenment that he still felt able to affirm, even when he was already overshadowed by madness.

‘The lines of life are various, as roads are, and the mountains boundaries. What here we are, yonder a god can complete with harmonies, eternal recompense, and peace’.

The narrative, or reverie, unfolds in a succession of lyric episodes, most of them reflective, which are harshly obtruded upon, with increasing force, by four chorale-like ritornelli. Also interleaved are two more densely crowded developments for the ensemble, as well as more playful material. Lasting around 20 minutes, the piece falls into two sections. Although the musical strands in this piece are variegated – some indeed are recalled from forty years ago – there is, I hope a secure ‘family resemblance’ enshrined in the feature of a major third.

Cavafy’s poem is essential:

Ideal and dearly beloved voices
of those who are dead, or of those
who are lost to us like the dead.

Sometimes they speak to us in our dreams;
sometimes in thought the mind hears them.

And for a moment with their echo other echoes
return from the first poetry of our lives –
like distant music fading away at night.

Commissioned by the BBC, this work was first performed by Lontano under Odaline de la Martinez in a BBC Pebble Mill Concert in 1988.