

Hornarama Code: 17564

McCabe, J: Castle of Arianhod (The Goddess Triology I)

Horn and Piano

“Arianrhod is one of the three aspects of the Great Goddess of Celtic mythology, together with Blodeuwedd, the flower maiden/love goddess, and Cerridwen, the death goddess. Arianrhod, whose name has been translated as "She who turns the Silver Wheel of Heaven", is the goddess of birth and initiation - her Castle is the place where the mighty dead, chieftains and heroes, go after death to await reincarnation, and it has also been linked with the Milky Way constellation.

The work is based, technically, on the concept of the decay of a musical sound and its rebirth in another form. This concept governs the formal flow of the music, and also the particular kind of variation technique employed in it. Indeed, the original idea for the work was precisely this kind of abstract piece - only after the composition had been commenced was the extraordinary aptness of this mythological connotation pointed out to me, and it gave rise to further musical ideas, as for instance in a section headed "The Silver Wheel of Heaven", in which the rotation of a series of three chords in various transpositions, gradually descending and in ever-decreasing note-lengths, is married to the idea of the constellation (or Castle) turning on its axis.

The image of decay and rebirth is expressed directly in the short opening section and in the link with the next, slow section - the processes undergone in this opening paragraph are repeated throughout the work. The opening part reappears in various forms at the peak of each section, being repeated most straightforwardly at the violent conclusion of the music. The Castle of Arianrhod, which forms the first movement of the tripartite Goddess Trilogy for horn and piano, was first performed in November 1973 at Pennsylvania State University, USA, by Ifor James and the composer, and it lasts about ten minutes.

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