



Richard Rodney Bennett Spells

Jane Manning *soprano* • The Bach Choir
The Philharmonia Orchestra • Sir David Willcocks *conductor*

Nicholas Maw Life Studies

The Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields
Sir Neville Marriner *director*

Nicholas Maw

Life Studies

39'46

- | | | |
|---|------------|------|
| 1 | Study I | 6'47 |
| 2 | Study II | 9'32 |
| 3 | Study III | 3'58 |
| 4 | Study IV | 1'41 |
| 5 | Study V | 4'42 |
| 6 | Study VI | 2'36 |
| 7 | Study VII | 3'12 |
| 8 | Study VIII | 7'23 |

The Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields
Neville Marriner *director*

Violin: Iona Brown *leader*

Malcolm Latchem, David Woodcock,
Roger Garland, Colin Sauer,
Marilyn Taylor, Andrew McGee,
David Takeno, Graham Cracknell,
Jonathan Strange

Viola: Stephen Shingles,
Anthony Jenkins

Cello: Dennis Vigay, Roger Smith

Double bass: Raymund Koster

Richard Rodney Bennett

Spells

36'06

- | | | |
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| 10 | Spell of safekeeping | 5'14 |
| 11 | Spell to bring lost
creatures home | 4'21 |
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Jane Manning *soprano*

The Bach Choir

The Philharmonia Orchestra

Sir David Willcocks *conductor*

Total timing

76'19

Nicholas Maw and Rodney Bennett

Nicholas Maw and Richard Rodney Bennett first met at as students at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1955. Half a century on and working in the US, they continue to follow one another's work with friendly interest. Yet their musical personalities could hardly be more distinct. In 1955, Bennett had already published a number of 12-tone pieces, was writing his first film score, and could ripple off the most difficult contemporary piano music and idiomatic jazz. "It was like Mendelssohn," Maw has recalled, while ruefully casting himself as "the archetypal provincial boy coming up to the big city", with his modest instrumental technique and few tentative pieces.

Both composers went on to study in Paris. Bennett, and his student contemporary, the pianist – and then aspiring composer – Susan Bradshaw (1931-2005), went to Boulez. Maw went ostensibly to Nadia Boulanger but learned far more from the Schoenberg pupil Max Deutsch. Yet Maw remained unhappy about the avant-garde music

Bennett and Bradshaw were enthusiastically promoting as a piano duo, and was only to find his alternative way after some struggle.

Today, Maw can look back on a substantial succession of richly conceived works on the largest scale; Bennett on a dazzlingly diverse catalogue of serial concert music, vastly varied film scores and jazz pieces, while much of his time is now spent as an inimitable cabaret performer. Yet ironically, as Bennett has more recently shed his serial rigours, his music has moved closer to what Maw was composing all along. Both have always sustained standards of craft and the ideal of the well-made piece; both have proved romantics at heart. The two works on this disc represent their composers at their most characteristic – a timely re-issue as each, unbelievably, turns seventy.

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Life Studies

It was never possible to dismiss Nicholas Maw's early music merely as reactionary; the harmonic procedures beneath its luscious and passionate surfaces always seemed too innovatory for that.

Nonetheless, his apparent resistance to the serial and constructivist techniques of the Continental 'post-Webern' avant-garde did rather set him apart from his gifted generation of British contemporaries around 1960. In fact, he had tried 12-tone technique during his time at the Royal Academy and, after a year's study in Paris, had virtually ground to a compositional halt in his efforts to come to terms with the assumed 'historical inevitability' of the Boulez aesthetic.

Yet, if his ultimate recoil into an almost entirely intuitive approach to his first major commission, *Scenes and Arias* (1961-62), represented a considerable act of creative courage, even Maw himself was surprised by the richness and diversity of possibilities released in that surpassingly romantic youthful masterpiece. So much so that the next

few years became something of a conscious 'second apprenticeship', an attempt to sort out the expressive and structural forces he had unleashed, in a series of instrumental works with leanings towards neo-classicism – the String Quartet (1965), the Sinfonia for small orchestra (1966) and the Sonata for strings and two horns (1967) – and in the elaborate balances of contrasting set numbers in his comic operas, *One Man Show* (1964) and *The Rising of the Moon* (1967-70).

Whether or not a certain slackening in composition in the early 1970s indicated that the process of formalisation had now gone rather too far, Maw seems to have seized upon the commissioning of *Life Studies* for the 1973 Cheltenham Festival to return to some of the bolder implications of *Scenes and Arias*. The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields being a virtuoso group of 15 solo strings, he decided in the first place to project the work not as a closed form but a book of studies for ensemble, by analogy with the books of solo studies of Chopin,

Paganini and others. Seven Studies were ready for the Cheltenham performance, but Study VIII was added in 1974, and in 1976 Maw took advantage of the fact that Studies I and II had originally been linked, to recompose them into a single movement, adding a new Study II and arranging the rest into the published sequence recorded here. However, the work retains its element of open form in that ensembles are free to select shorter groups of Studies in their own ordering, while Studies II, III, VI, VII and VIII are also performable by full string orchestra.

Nonetheless, the balance of 15 soloists also suggested textural possibilities. Maw's harmonic sympathies had always been with composers encompassing a wide diversity of chord types rather than with the homogeneity of much serial music, and echoes of Britten, Bartók and Berg are all to be heard in *Life Studies*: the sighing semi-tones of the 'Chant' from Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* in Study I, Bartókian diatonic skirlings in the central section of Study II and skittering

parallel chords reminiscent of the 'Andante Amoroso' of Berg's *Lyric Suite* in Study V. But Maw frequently goes beyond any of these composers in his superimposed density of harmony, as though he were specifically deploying the resources of his 15 equal parts to investigate the degree to which chords can be enriched without actually passing over into the domain of undifferentiated textural noise.

He also takes advantage of the Baroque-derived balance of the Academy, of ten violins, two each of violas and cellos and one double bass, to divide his forces into two septets of five violins, and one viola and cello, arranged to left and right of the double bass in a semi-circle. Though classical forms are still to be discerned in the background of such studies as III and VII, much of the music is generated by a kind of dialectic of opposing textures between the two sides. Indeed, while Maw is prepared to concede that extra-musical associations played some part in the work – Study II was suggested by

a memory of his father playing Chopin, others by certain landscapes – one gets the impression that the word ‘Life’ in the title refers as much to the renewed spontaneity of its structures and invention.

Study I is broadly palindromic. A double-bass solo initiates a strange texture of static chords and swooping glissandi over an obsessive pedal E, from which, in turn, emerges a slow melody for three violins in group 1. (Much later, Maw was to use this as the theme of his fine *Romantic Variations* of 1995 for orchestra). A central section in which group 1 enter in a sumptuous D flat major briefly illumines the brooding atmosphere, after which the violin melody, buffeted by a scrabbling counter-texture, gradually disperses back into the opening atmospherics, a solo violin finally completing the opening double-bass solo.

Study II, by contrast, is an almost continually evolving structure based

upon weaving figuration suggested by two of Chopin’s Preludes Op. 28, passed back and forth between the two groups in counterpoint to gradually emerging slower phrases; after its eventual climax bisected by brusque chords, a brief recapitulation of the opening leads to a nocturnal fade-out in C major. Study III is closer to traditional scherzo form. An opening section in which scurrying figures from group 1 interact with suspiring chordal phrases from group 2 gives way to a ‘trio’ in which group 2 play a long unison melody against pizzicatti flurries from group 1, after which the opening section is repeated with a short coda of tremolo shuddering.

Study IV opens in a manner reminiscent of the Threnody from Maw’s *Sinfonia*, with a cluster of throbbing cross-rhythms for group 2 against which group 1 accumulate a texture of florid arpeggios and wistful harmonics – the whole comprising a short invocation to Study V, which follows without a break. In this the Bergian skitterings already

referred to intermittently interrupt a long pizzicato solo for the double bass which the composer suggests should be 'swung' as though against the regularity of an imaginary jazz beat. Study VI is overtly regular, proceeding in a sequence of short, antiphonal litanies, the severity of which is mollified by Maw's characteristically glowing harmony. Later, group 2 introduce a rising melodic line that gradually fades out before an abrupt concluding reference back to the opening.

Study VII begins as a kind of textural canon with overlapping entries of the same, violently turbulent material by each of the two groups. A development section over scudding semiquavers leads to a *stretto*-like telescoping of the opening and a transition at the moment of maximum tension straight into Study VIII, the longest and grandest of the set. This is cast in the manner of a slow-motion recitative, with *ritornelli* of densely radiant pentatonic-based chords interspersing arch-like *arioso* phrases for the unison violins first of

group 1, then group 2, then the two in extended two-part inventions, finally homing on a unison D for the whole ensemble.

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Spells

Spells, with words by Kathleen Raine, was composed between May 1974 and January 1975; it is dedicated to Jane Manning and the choirs of the Three Choirs Festival and was first performed by them in Worcester Cathedral on August 28, 1975, when it was conducted by Donald Hunt.

The work is scored for large forces – triple woodwind, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, percussion, piano/celesta, harp and strings – and includes two songs for soprano solo and orchestra, ‘Spell of Safekeeping’ and ‘Love Spell’, which may be performed separately (under the title of *Love Spells*), as may the motet for a *capella* chorus, ‘Spell of Sleep’. Of the remaining movements, the first and third are for orchestra and chorus alone; soloist and chorus unite only during the closing pages of the last. Throughout the work the hypnotic repetitions of the poetic spells are reflected in musical ostinatos of various kinds – both of rhythmic pulse and of recurring pitches. The first and last movements, for

instance, are linked by the insistent throb of repeated notes that underpin the harmony for long stretches – and by the obsessive tread of a rhythmic canon between pairs of voices, in each case one bar apart.

Following the introductory question (‘Who will bear away grief?’) to the opening ‘Spell against Sorrow’, the vocal canon is heard against the steady urgency of a pulsating unison – at first set low in the bass on timpani, harp and piano, later with the addition of vibraphone, as it climbs upwards through the orchestra before dying back to end as it began. The music grows in intensity while becoming imperceptibly faster towards a climax at the words “Black crow..”, at which point the gap between canonic entries narrows as the voices come together as a 4-part chorus for the first and only time in the movement.

‘Spell of Safekeeping’ begins with a rocking figure placed high on muted violins. This is expanded and developed

by the orchestra around the dreamy, recitative-like utterances of each portion of the soprano spell (each floating to its highest point at the top of a harp glissando) until, at the central climax, it briefly becomes a rotating accompaniment to a melodic counterpoint between soprano and violins.

‘Spell to Bring Lost Creatures Home’ is a virtuoso scherzo for orchestra in a persistent 6/8 time, with the words of the choral spell sustaining a broader 2/4 pulse superimposed on the surrounding rhythmic ostinato. Just as each verse of the poem ends on the word ‘home’, so each choral section ends on a unison D – until the final cadence resolves from a long-held E flat on to a hummed D flat in preparation for the unison C sharp with which the next movement begins.

Starting from this unison, and three times returning to it at the refrain “Let him be...”, ‘Spell of Sleep’ gradually gathers momentum, reaching a height of

pitch and intensity as the chorus opens out from the initial two voices into four, then five and finally into six parts as the piece sinks downwards and inwards towards its scarcely audible close.

‘Love Spell’ is both the longest and the most overtly dramatic movement of the whole work. Here, the ostinato idea is closely related to the shape of the poem – in which each line of each 3-line verse begins with the words “By the...”: in the soprano part, each threefold repetition of these words takes the same note as its starting point, with each succeeding phrase taking over and extending the contours of the one before. As the occasional refrain “Bring my lover” becomes more insistently regular in its recurrences, eventually separating each verse of the poem, so the musical development becomes richer and the word setting more melismatic – until a shortened recapitulation of the opening makes way for an unaccompanied soprano cadenza which descends from a high C sharp to the B below middle C. This B

is then sustained throughout the quietly pulsating coda, remaining unresolved until it rises upwards to a unison C at the start of the last movement.

The opening section of 'Spell of Creation' is scored for double choir. Each of the first three verses is set in canon (one bar apart, as in the first movement), moving outwards from the unison with which each begins and increasing the number of voice-parts from two up to the eight of the double chorus. Meanwhile, the initial note of each canonic entry is sustained in the orchestra throughout each verse as a bell-like ostinato (harp, vibraphone, piano and horns, as well as tubular bells), marking the five beats to the bar with the unchanging pattern of short-long-short-short. As the pitch range of the choral verses expands, so the orchestral texture becomes denser and the pace of the music increases. A sudden wordless outburst by the soloist leads to a chorale-like climax for the single four-part choir, over which the soprano soars in passionate affirmation

before merging into the surrounding voices. The coda – now with the more serene pulse of six beats to the bar – contracts the thematic material of the opening canonic verses into a long melody for unison chorus: starting once more from middle C, this melody moves upwards in pitch as the unison opens out to become one octave and then two octaves apart, closing in again as it returns full circle to middle C – with the voices then fading into the bell-like resonances from which they emerged at the start.

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Nicholas Maw

Nicholas Maw was born in Grantham in the East Midlands on 5 November 1935. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London – harmony and counterpoint with Paul Steinitz, composition with Lennox Berkeley – and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and with Schoenberg's pupil Max Deutsch.

Throughout his long and single-minded career, Maw has forged a highly individual musical language, which despite his absorption of the disciplines of serialism is essentially tonal in orientation. His primary concern has always been to find a contemporary continuation of the Romantic tradition, with particular stress on the elements of harmony and large-scale form.

Maw's mastery of orchestral writing became evident early in his career, with his *Scenes and Arias* for three female voices and large orchestra of 1962. This was followed by several smaller-scale works, including the set of *Life Studies* for 15 strings of 1973, and in 1987 by the extraordinarily ambitious

Odyssey, which at over 95 minutes is surely the longest continuous work ever written for orchestra. Subsequent orchestral works have included the nocturne *The World in the Evening*, a Violin Concerto premiered and recorded by Joshua Bell, and a Concerto for English Horn (cor anglais) first performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra in April 2005.

Maw has also written chamber, instrumental and vocal music, and three operas: the farcical comedy *One Man Show* of 1964; the romantic comedy *The Rising of the Moon* for the 1970 Glyndebourne Festival; and much more recently the tragic *Sophie's Choice*, based on the novel by William Styron, which was premiered to sold-out houses at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in December 2002.

Richard Rodney Bennett

Like his near-contemporary Richard Rodney Bennett, Nicholas Maw now makes his home in the United States. Since 1984 he has lived in Washington, D.C., and he is currently professor of composition at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

Richard Rodney Bennett was born on 29 March 1936 in Broadstairs, on the Kent coast, into a musical family. He began composing as a child, and from the age of eleven had informal consultations with the pioneering modernist Elisabeth Lutyens. He later studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Lennox Berkeley and Howard Ferguson, at summer courses in Darmstadt, and in Paris with Pierre Boulez.

In the music he wrote after returning to Britain, Bennett drew back from the complexity associated with the European avant-garde, instead adopting what Stephen Walsh has called “a neo-Romantic serialism closer to Berg than Webern”. This proved effective in operas, notably *The Mines of Sulphur* and *A*

Penny for a Song for Sadler’s Wells Opera, and the large-scale choral and orchestral works *Epithalamion* and *Spells*. But he also composed prolifically for orchestra, both with and without soloists, chamber ensembles, solo instruments and voice.

Meanwhile he was pursuing several parallel careers with equal flair: as a prolific composer of scores for feature films, three of which have been nominated for Academy Awards; as a concert pianist, notably in duos with the pianist Susan Bradshaw, the soprano Jane Manning and the horn player Barry Tuckwell; and as a jazz performer, at first partnering singers, later also as a solo cabaret artist.

For some years these aspects of Bennett’s career existed in separate compartments, with occasional exceptions such as *Jazz Calendar*, which became a popular ballet score. But the success of his film music and cabaret performances encouraged him to reach out to the general concert-goer, and since

the late 1980s he has been writing in a freely tonal idiom, often with an element of “crossover”.

Richard Rodney Bennett has lived in New York City since 1979, but remains a British citizen. He was appointed CBE in 1977, and knighted in 1998.

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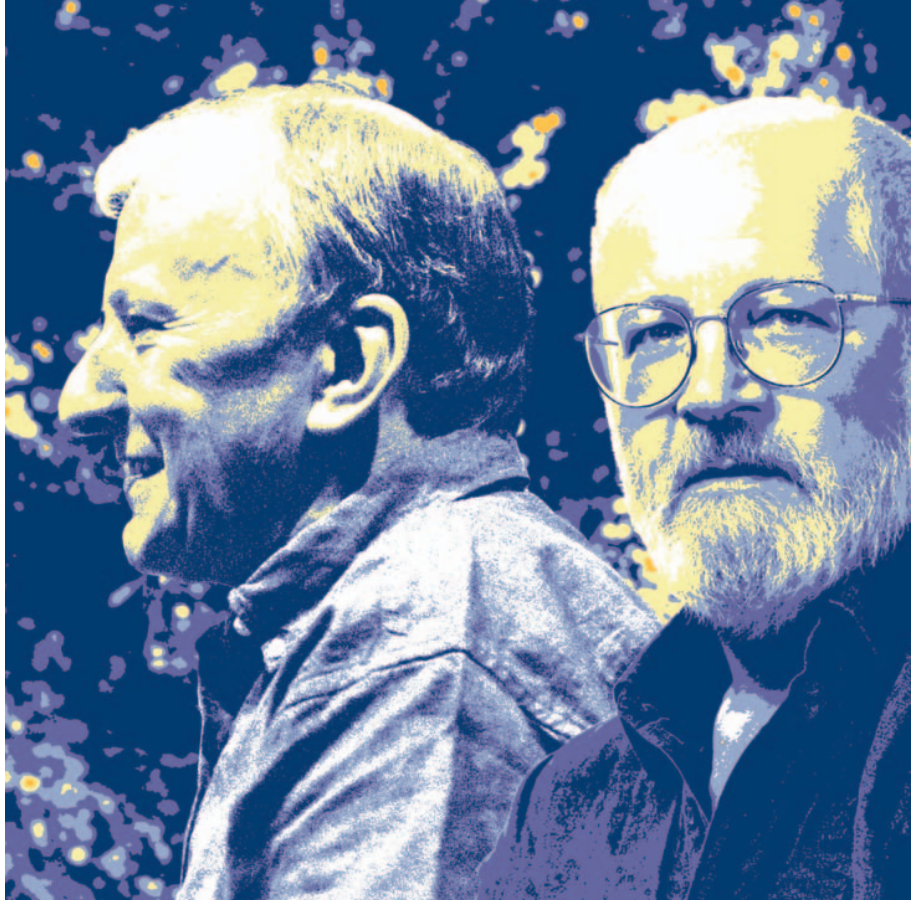
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Maw • Bennett

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