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The Dark Corner:
a study of the dynamic dialectic between women composers and the Australian orchestral milieu

Volume Two

Orchestral Composition
GAIR NA MARA
(Sea-Sounds)

RUTH LEE MARTIN

1998

for symphony orchestra
Gair Na Mara
(dedicated to Wendy Slonim)

In Eilean a’ Cheo, the Isle of Mist, the sounds of the Western sea foretell good weather and bad, birth and death, the drowning of dear ones. The sea has given to Hebridean song its fiercest joy and its most passionate sorrow - the songs of sea-joy belong to men and women but the songs of sea-sorrow belong to the women alone. The sea-sounds voice the power of the elements in the raging sea, or in the quiet evening they fill the listener with a longing which is hope born in pain. Perhaps other seas have voices for other folk, but the Western sea alone can speak in the Gaelic tongue and reach the Gaelic heart (Kennedy-Fraser, 1922, p.124).

The belief in the sea as mother of all life has survived into our own times. Its mystery and depth made it the supreme feminine symbol and as patriarchal ideas gained prominence its secret and forbidden aspects were increasingly stressed. It contained strange creatures, hidden palaces and hoarded treasures: only exceptional divine beings were able to live in it. But endless taboos came between sea and man. It was dangerous to probe its depths and only in particular cases were faultless heroes allowed to travel through the marvellous universe of that lost paradise (Markale, 1976, p. 44)

Gair Na Mara (Sea-Sounds) is based on the Hebridean folk-song, Cronan na Maighdinn-Mhara (The Mermaid’s Croon).
Instrumentation

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Bb Clarinets
2 Bassoons

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
2 Tenor Trombones
1 Bass Trombone
1 Tuba

Timpani
Percussion (2 players – refer to percussion key)
triangle
brake drums high and low
tam tam large
medium suspended cymbal
woodblock
snare drum
bass drum
tom toms high and low
glockenspiel
xylophone

Harp
Celesta

Violins Ia, Ib, Ila, IIb
Violas I, II
Cellos I, II
Doublebasses I, II

Duration: ca. 21 minutes
Explanation of terms

r.sh. - rim shot

flt. - fluttertongue

quasi-gliss - this effect requires a slurring between notes to give the impression of glissandi in the woodwind. Where true glissandi can be performed by players it should be done, bearing in mind that intonation should take precedence.

Trills and ornaments are to take their time value from the preceding note.

Accidentals are placed in front of each note - if the note does not have an accidental in front of it, it is a natural.

The large square brackets denote a prominent melodic line.
Percussion Key

- Tube and Cow Bell
- Woodblock
- Bass Drum
- Suspended Cymbal
Fl.

Br. Cl.

Bb

Horns 1-3

Horns 4-6

Tpt.

Horn 1-2

Horn 3

Tbn.

Harp

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Harp

Cbl.

Vio. 1a

Vio. 1b

Vio. 2a

Vio. 2b

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vln. 1a

Vln. 1b

Vln. 2a

Vln. 2b

DbCl

DbBsn. I

DbBsn. II
with a sense of urgency
With a sense of unease
Tempo gradually accelerating
With a sense of delight

Music notation is shown with various instruments indicated, such as Fl, Ob, Bc, Tpt., etc., and musical notations indicating dynamics and expression.