

String Quartet No.2: *La Maestà*

Firenze - Vespaila - La Maestà - Scherzo - La Tempesta

La Maesta (1995) is a five-movement exploration of harmonic ambiguities echoing the landscapes of Tuscany . The instruments are tuned on two quartertonal levels. Superimposing microtonal levels can have an extraordinary neutralising effect on semitonally derived dissonance; what is heard initially as bell-like pictorialism in *Firenze* returns at the end in this more functional role. *Vespaila*, a duet, is a short, frantic study in melodic shaping and harmonic densities: “vespa” means wasp. *La Maesta*, thirdly, recalls the mural in Siena by Simone Martini (1315-1344) of a Mother and Child. The movement reflects both the structure of the painting, in its symmetry, and something of my emotional response to it in its ambiguous harmonies: some of Italy's magic is the simultaneous contrast and similarity of the life portrayed in ancient art and the place and the people now.