

FROM FELL TO SEA was written in the Spring of 2000 to a commission from the Friends of the Tees Valley Youth Orchestra with funds provided by British Reserve. It is an unashamedly programmatic piece of music, describing not only the physical line of the River Tees (from Cross Fell in Cumbria, over the falls at High Force, through Teesdale and the farmlands of County Durham to the large towns around Tees Bay where the orchestra is based), but also the "time line" - the historical course which parallels the geographical: I am astonished at how closely these two are linked, although it is a shame that we can't move the Roman settlement at Piercebridge about fifty miles upstream! I would prefer the listener to make up his or her own mind about what is being "represented" in any particular portion of the piece (or even to just enjoy the music in abstract terms), but signs of our past litter the banks of the river - the invasions by Romans, Vikings and Normans, the spread of Christianity, the devastation caused by the Black Death, industrialisation, the 20th Century wars. Despite the diversity there is really only one theme in the entire piece, flowing like a river but pervading all the episodes in one way or another.

Towards the end of the piece is a massive storm (or is it a war?) . When this subsides one can just hear a string quartet playing Beethoven, as though drifting across the North Sea in a cold breeze: whilst I was writing the piece I was talking (in relation to another project) to Anita Lasker Wallfisch, one of the survivors of the women's camp orchestra at Auschwitz; she described to me how one night one of their number had arranged this Beethoven for quartet for them to play just for themselves, and it is included here as a symbol of hope and humanity to accompany these young players, who visited Auschwitz when they toured Poland with this piece in July 2000, and for whom such horrors will hopefully remain a thing of the past.

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