

GIVEN DAYS

SOUNDS OF FAIR ISLE

Music: ALASTAIR STOUT

Text: VARIOUS AUTHORS

Introduction

Summer, Autumn, Winter

Spring

Instrumentation (Score in C):

Professional ensemble:

Clarinet in B flat (doubling Bass Clarinet)

Horn in F

Violin

Violoncello

Baritone

Amateur ensembles:

2 narrators

Chorus:

Soprano (including soloist)/Alto (including soloist)

Tenor/Bass

(7 of the chorus play large wheel sockets – or other chimes.

An 8th member plays a bell)

Folk group:

Fiddle

Guitar

Bodhran

Duration: approximately 30 minutes

Given Days

“After the usual periods of high winds, driving rain, heavy salt and gales, We often get a day of calm bright sunshine – a ‘given day’. Then we appreciate being alive, being here on Fair Isle, and so we do different things – a walk up Malcolm’s Head or off in a yoal perhaps. These ‘God-given days’ are special.

The community of Fair Isle commissioned the work for the Classic Fair Isle Festival held on the island during August 2002.

Funds were provided by the Awards for All Programme (involving the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scottish Arts Council, SportScotland and the National Lottery Charities Board), the Shetland Arts Trust, the Shetland Islands Council (Department of Education and Community Services), The Kenneth Leighton Trust and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, as well as through local events.

It was first performed in the Fair Isle Community Hall on 23rd August 2002 conducted by the composer. The professional performers were Stuart King (Clarinets), Evgeny Chebykin (Horn), Emily Davies (Violin) Clare O’Connell (‘Cello) and Andy Ross (Baritone). The amateur performers were the Fair Isle Choir, members of the Lerwick Choral Society and a folk group of local musicians.

A Jewel in the Ocean

Famous for birds, knitwear and historic shipwrecks, Fair Isle is a tiny jewel of an island lying halfway between Orkney and Shetland. Well known as one of the sea-areas on the BBC Shipping Forecast (“...Fair Isle, southerly gale force eight increasing severe gale nine soon...”), the island offers a warm and friendly welcome to visitors. Owned by the National Trust for Scotland, it is one of Britain’s most successful small communities, pioneering projects in wildlife tourism, windpower and sustainable management of the environment. Fair Isle lies about 40 km southwest of Shetland’s Sumburgh Head. Just 5km long and 3 km wide, it is mostly surrounded by impressive cliffs, rising to over 100 metres at the spectacular Sheep Rock and almost 200 metres along the heavily indented west coast. The 70 or so islanders live predominantly in traditional crofts on the more fertile and low-lying southern third of the island. The northern part is largely rough grazing and rocky moorland, rising to the 217-metre Ward Hill. Fair Isle’s oceanic climate brings stormy but fairly mild winters, while summer visitors can expect rapid changes in the weather: a day of sparkling sunshine and incredible visibility can easily be followed by one of thick mist and low cloud.

Written for amateur and professional musicians and amalgamating the traditional music of Scotland with contemporary classical music, the work celebrates the history of the island, as well as the traditions and talents of the islanders (from boat-building, violin-making, knitting and weaving, to silver craft, glass-staining and information technology). The music sets texts by both islanders and visitors, who have written about the “essence of Fair Isle” - history and historical events, daily life, people, folklore, animals, birds, buildings, musical heritage and the future.

The Introduction sets paragraphs taken from the booklet ‘Safeguarding Our Heritage’ by N. Riddiford, interspersed with quotations from famous figures including the Duchess of Bedford and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Summer, Autumn, Winter sets a new text by Jonathan Lennie, whilst also quoting verses by Shetland poets.

Spring is a setting of words by the school-children of Fair Isle.

The texts are all used with permission.

Verses from “Gyaain ta da Eela”

by Christine De Luca

Pakin up wir proil, we’d mak fur hom
blyde o kent lichts. We’d row
peerie wyes, owsin as we gud
Abune wis, tirroricks flitin
an a mird o maas laavin an divin
plotin fur muggies.

We’d tak da boat in on a flowin tide,
dicht an shoard her', dan rin hom prood
i da darkenin wi a fraacht o fish
We’d aet wir supper
tae tales o uncan Odysseys
in idder voes.

“Fridarey Hairst”

by Jonathan Lennie

(Summer)

Let fishing hands guide us in to the
gathering.
Here in the muckle mouth of the morning,
mapped with weathered veins battered and
broken, the hunched figure straightens, the
face opens, but the wind snatches the words
from the mouth of the sailor.

Wind drops, there is a sigh on the sea. And
five fathoms down *the* spilt harvest of
galleons. Ah, that September morning when
angels walked from the water.

But we have our treasure: glistening hairst
hauled from the Deep (feel the lines quicken
and shudder!)

Prey on the rising hull, bow to the parting
wave, back to the shore. Turning the
wooden blades. Strong arms heave the
island closer.

(Autumn)

Raise a prayer for the sea fruit, a glittering
steepel. Then we turn inland, backs hung
with silver. Along the cliff-top and its
vertical voices.
Steal
down
to
pluck

the
ledge
harvest.

Treading the hairst rigs of kale and tatties.
The coarse wind relentless picks at the
bright stitches; a harvest of needles weave
the rough fibres. Craft upon craft, life upon
life. Time falls back; the machines are
rolling, past a crofter bent beneath a sickle
moon. Hymns from the kirk float across the
lamb-racing earth alive with bleating.
Overhead, serenaded by selkies, the
departing geese are wailing, *the eiders are
booming*, the puffins growling, a Redshank
laments the summertide ebbing. Why, even
gateposts are tuned to the windsong. Dear
Lord, the very land is singing.

Instruments of His chorus, tune us fit for this
harmony. And when there are no more
words to be spoken, there will still be that
music.

(Winter)

*A communion of voices and the croftlight
blazes. The hearth's mouth feeds from the lip
of the casting, unhinged from the earth
millennia waiting. Now that leaning foot
reels in a partner fuelled by the grain
harvest and well-crafted music, while mighty
blades turn the air into pictures, BBC
flickers wherein the world enters.*

*Outside in the darkling thunder, peerie
lungs shrill in the feathered heart of the
howling.*

"Gale force eight and rising."

*We await the Good Shepherd (as she
returns to the fold) and telephone calls
from the lambs that are scattered.*

*As night beds down, I hear Thy voice
constant in the hush of the ocean.*

Southlight on the northern swell trawls
the long wave empty, turning the beam
out and away.

But what after the dark and when I am
young again? Who then will gather the
Fridarey hairst?

Verses from "Winter Comes In"

by Jack Renwick

Yowes kruggin kloss ida lee o a daek-end
Creepin frae a chill at bites ta da bon;
Solana an scarf aa wirkin inshore,
A sign at da best o da wadder is don.

Hail sheetin doon wi a Nort wind ahint it,
Blottin oot laand an sea frae da scene,
An iron coortin closin ower aathing:
Winter has com ta da Islands ageen.

Verse from "Da Year Gengs By"

by Tom Laurensen

Wi stirmin taes an hackitt hands
An'frosty winds fae arctic lands
An'moorin snaa
We're blyde tae see da paet fire taands
An'draw wis in tae lowein braands
Till he's awa'.

Verses by Barbara Wilson

Far away across the waters, lies the dear land of
our birth

Scattered are her sons and daughters far and wide
o'er all the earth

Oft we dream, 'tis not surprising, of the rugged
rock-bound shore, of thy towering cliffs uprising,
mid the cold grey ocean's roar.

Yet they every mood so varied, doth our hearts
but closer bind, to the isle with non compared,
and our friends we've left behind.

(Words in Italics are not set to music)