Tilikum

for orchestra

Martin Humphries
- 2017 -
I. – WHITETWASH
II. – SHOWTIME
III. – SONAR LAMENT
IV. – PENT UP
V. – BLACKFISH
In 1983 an Orcinus orca (killer whale) was captured off the coast of Iceland. Since then he has performed as a display whale in aquatic theme parks and oceanariums. He remained in captivity for 34 years until his death in 2017. He was the largest killer whale ever captured and was involved in the deaths of three people. His name was Tilikum.

My piece is divided into five sections charting key events in the life of this whale. WHITEWASH depicts the open sea and subsequent netting in and capture of Tilikum as a two-year-old calf. He was separated from his family pod and mother, with whom he would have spent his entire life had he remained in the wild. SHOWTIME presents the unabashed pleasure of a theme park show in all its glossy splendour. The first attack follows, in which Keltie Byrne fell into Tilikum’s tank and was suffocated by the 12,500-pound whale. SONAR LAMENT explores an acoustic anomaly discovered when orca mothers were separated from their children in captivity. They have been found to produce long-range sonar in futile attempts to contact one-another. Sonar works by emitting pulses of sound and listening for morphed echoes in response. In captivity, tanks act as echo chambers for these cries and have led (in part) to many whales being diagnosed with psychosis. In 1999, animal trainers arrived one morning to find Tilikum parading the body of Daniel Dukes on his back.

Wild killer whales swim up to 100 miles per day. In captivity circling the tank is the only option. PENT UP follows this cyclic pattern of behaviour, spiralling towards one final attack in which senior SeaWorld trainer Dawn Bramecheau was attacked in front of on looking tourists following a theme park show. BLACKFISH (a Native American name for wild orcas) returns to the oceanic material of the opening, albeit transformed into a sterilised and chlorinated rendition. Tilikum died in captivity in 2017 from a bacterial infection. The same week I had my first workshop with the LMO.

This work was developed for the London Medical Orchestra as part of the Adopt a Composer scheme, funded by the PRS for Music Foundation and the Philip and Dorothy Green Music Trust, and run by Making Music, in partnership with Sound and Music and BBC Radio 3. I would like to thank the ensemble for their enthusiasm and open-mindedness, as well as Jon Hargreaves and Fraser Trainer for their energy and advice throughout the project.

**Programme note:**

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**Performance note:**

- The full brass complement (with the exception of tuba) require straight mutes.
- Division of string desks through letter L may be adapted to suit the performing ensemble. The desired effect is to maximise the separation of the stereo field.
- When not breathing ‘musically’ through movement V, players should simply breathe normally. This need not be silent.

**Attacks**

- In order for each ensemble to make this work their own, they are required to create material for each of the three attacks themselves.
- The desired length and character is prescribed, however, the ensemble (and conductor) have the freedom beyond these parameters.
- Possible musical qualities could include extremes of register, sudden dynamic swells, pointillistic/percussive sounds, extended instrumental techniques etc. These are only a few possible suggestions and the ensemble should take time to experiment with creating the visceral and aggressive quality of sound these attacks require.
- The attacks should be largely improvised, although care should be taken in rehearsals to refine the material of these crucial moments in the piece.
- Programmatically, each attack is different, with the provided character directions chosen to stimulated appropriate musical responses. The first is animalistic and wild, the second deranged and psychotic, the third a malicious and calculated brutality. This nuance should be conveyed in the orchestra’s performance.
- Each part, including the score, is provided with blank systems to allow players to write in pre-decided material.

**Notation**

Some less common notation is used in Tilikum and is explained below:

- Long pause
- Very low note (but not strictly the lowest):
- Very high note (but not strictly the highest):
- Crescendo from nothing:
- Maintain same note (when exact note is note prescribed)
- Change note by step (within prescribed scale):

**Brass**

- The full brass complement (with the exception of tuba) require straight mutes.

**Percussion**

- Timpani must be set as close to centre as possible; i.e. directly behind principal clarinet and bassoon.
- Remaining percussion may be arranged in any convenient way behind timpani.
- Additional suspended cymbals to be set as far stage right (behind first violins) and stage left (behind double basses) as possible.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7
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1 = Bass drum 2 = Low conga 3 = High conga 4 = Low bongo 5 = High bongo 6 = Suspended cymbal 7 = Tam-tam
Instrumentation:

Piccolo
2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in B♭
Tenor Saxophone
2 Bassoons
4 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in B♭
2 Trombones
Bass Trombone
Tuba
Timpani
2 Percussion
Xylophone – Congas – Bongos – Suspended Cymbal (x1)
Bass Drum – Tam-tam – Vibraphone (if available)

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Double Bass

Score in C

Duration: c. 15 minutes