# The Mill Suite

## For Chamber Choir *(SATB)* and String Quartet

Philip Seaton

Copies of the scores:

- Full score
- Choir score with piano reduction
- String quartet parts

can be downloaded from
***www.andartmusic.uk/philipseaton***

# The Mill Suite *(Philip Seaton)*

The Mill Suite was commissioned by the Mill Hill Music Festival for performance at the opening concert of the 2003 Festival.

The Mill Suite is full of nostalgia for the rural scenery of Mill Hill where Philip spent his school days.

The Mill Suite is made up of five short movements, each a setting of a poem by an English romantic poet. The movements are poetically and musically diverse but a number of common themes run through the movements: the word 'mill' appears in all the poems; there are a number of leitmotifs which occur when particular words are sung; and from the opening harmonics in the first movement to the climax on the word 'heaven' in the final movement, augmented fourths frequently recur throughout the suite.

In the first movement, 'Song', by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), chilly harmonics set the lonely wintry scene. The 'mill' leitmotif, three mechanical quavers following a quaver rest, is introduced at the end of the movement as the basses sing *'and little motion in the air, except the mill-wheel's sound'*.

The second movement offers a complete change of character. Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) poem The Second Visit' about recollections of a miller's family is in a jocular Allegro. The switching between fast semi-quaver passages and slower passages aims to capture the floods of fond memories and pauses for reflection in Hardy's poem.

A short viola recitative provides the link to the third movement, 'The Brookside' by Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885). Milnes' moving poem about waiting for a lover by a brook is the emotional heart of The Mill Suite. It is the longest of the movements and is also conspicuous for having no leitmotifs: ‘The beating of my own heart, was all the sound I heard'. The long pauses in the refrain are intended to let the listeners' own heartbeats become an integral part of the music.

The fourth movement is a short intermezzo, an excerpt from Samuel Woodworth's (1785-1842) poem ‘The Bucket'. As a poem about recollections, the music recapitulates the material from the first and second movements before a held note leads directly into the final movement.

The last three verses of Samuel Rogers' (1763-1855) poem 'A Wish' are all variations on the opening verse. In the final verse, a church bell motif in the string quartet accompaniment gradually rises up to an augmented fourth climax on the word 'heaven', the point that the entire piece has been aiming towards.

The Mill Suite is dedicated to the memory of Philip’s grandmother, who died suddenly during its composition. She would not have wanted a melancholy memorial. The Mill Suite ends quietly with a final statement of the mill leitmotif in a warm A major.

# The Poems

## **Song** *(Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792 1822)*

*A widow bird sate mourning for her love upon a wintry bough;*
*The frozen wind crept on above, the freezing stream below.*
*There was no leaf upon the forest bare, no flower upon the ground,*
*And little motion in the air – except the mill-wheel's sound.*

## **The Second Visit** *(Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928)*

*Clack, clack, clack, went the mill-wheel as I came,*
*And she was on the bridge with the thin hand-rail,*
*And the miller at the door, and the ducks at mill-tail;*
*I come again years after, and all there seems the same.*

*And so indeed it is: the apple-tree'd old house,*
*And the deep mill-pond, and the wet wheel clacking,*
*And a woman on the bridge, and white ducks quacking,*
*And the miller at the door, powdered pale from boots to brows.*

*But it's not the same miller whom long ago I knew,*
*Nor are they the same apples, nor the same drops that dash*
*Over the wet wheel, nor the ducks below that splash,*
*Nor the woman who to fond plaints replied, 'You know I do!'*

## **The Brook-Side** *(Richard Monckton Milnes, 1809–85)*

*I wander'd by the brook-side, I wander'd by the mill;*
*I could not hear the brook flow, the noisy wheel was still;*
*There was no burr of grasshopper, no chirp of any bird,*
*But the beating of my own heart ……. was all the sound I heard.*

*I sat beneath the elm-tree; I watch'd the long, long shade,*
*And, as it grew still longer, I did not feel afraid;*
*For I listen'd for a footfall, I listen'd for a word,*
*But the beating of my own heart ……. was all the sound I heard.*

*He came not, — no, he came not — the night came on alone,*
*The little stars sat, one by one, each on his golden throne;*
*The evening wind pass'd by my cheek, the leaves above were stirr'd,*
*But the beating of my own heart ……. was all the sound I heard.*

*Fast silent tears were flowing, when something stood behind;*
*A hand was on my shoulder, I knew its touch was kind:*
*It drew me nearer—nearer, we did not speak one word,*
*For the beating of our own hearts ……. was all the sound we heard.*

## **The Old Oaken Bucket** *(Samuel Woodworth, 1785-1842)*

*How dear to this heart are the scenes of my childhood,*
*When fond recollection presents them to view!*
*The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wild-wood,*
*And every loved spot which my infancy knew!*
*The wide-spreading pond, and the mill that stood by it,*
*The bridge, and the rock where the cataract fell,*
*The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,*
*And e'en the rude bucket that hung in the well ……*

## **The Wish** *(Samuel Rogers, 1763-1855)*

*Mine be a cot beside the hill, a bee-hive's hum shall sooth my ear;*
*A willowy brook, that turns a mill, with many a fall shall linger near.*

*The swallow, oft, beneath my thatch, shall twitter from her clay-built nest;*
*Oft shall the pilgrim lift the latch, and share my meal, a welcome guest.*

*Around my ivy'd porch shall spring each fragrant flower that drinks the dew;*
*And Lucy, at her wheel, shall sing in russet gown and apron blue.*

*The village-church, among the trees,*
*Where our first marriage-vows were giv'n,*
*With merry peals shall swell the breeze,*
*And point with taper spire to heav'n.*

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