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| **Maw, (John) Nicholas (1935-2009)** |
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| Nicholas Maw was one of the leading British composers of his generation. His music balances modernist sensibilities with musical and expressive impulses derived from Late Romanticism, often on a large scale and with reference to traditional genres. In later life he relocated to the United States of America, where he died from heart failure, with complications from diabetes.  Though born into a musical family in Grantham, Lincolnshire, Maw only began composing at the instigation of a school music teacher at the age of fifteen. He subsequently studied at the Royal Academy of Music (1955-8) with Lennox Berkeley; both the Academy and London in general provided an environment where he could for the first time encounter early twentieth century modernist music (in particular that of the Second Viennese School) and more contemporary idioms. Supported by a French Government scholarship, Maw continued his education in France with Nadia Boulanger (who helped him secure the Lili Boulanger Prize in order to remain in Paris for a further six months) and Max Deutsch. Though Maw’s earliest works, such as the EIGHT CHINESE LYRICS (1956) and NOCTURNE (1957-8) already demonstrated familiarity with the music of the Second Viennese School (as well as that of Britten), the compositions Maw produced on his return to England, such as the SIX CHINESE SONGS (1959) revealed a Boulezian influence.  A crisis of confidence emanating in part from stylistic concerns led in the ESSAY FOR ORGAN (1961) and above all in SCENES AND ARIAS for three female voices and large orchestra (1962; rev. 1966) to a rapprochement between the rigour inherited from serial thinking and the sensuousness of late Romantic lyricism and harmonic language. In his own words, Maw 'put [his] roots in the place where [he] felt they need to be put down: in the music of before the First World War'. In practice, this led to a fruitful tension between modernist fragmentation and Romantic expressive values, a tension borne out in subsequent works such as the STRING QUARTET No. 1 (1965), SINFONIA (1966), and the two comic operas ONE MAN SHOW (1964) and THE RISING OF THE MOON (1967-70).  A commission to write for the London Symphony Orchestra in 1972 led eventually to ODYSSEY (1972-87), an unbroken 90-minute work for orchestra in which Romantic compositional principles are expanded to extremes (for instance, the treatment of lengthy musical themes as individual motifs). This, and Maw's music of the 1970s and 80s more generally, can thus be understood in part as a positive exploration of the music of the late nineteenth century in the light of the late twentieth. Further examples include the manipulations of texture and density in LIFE STUDIES for 15 strings (1973-6), the composition of character pieces PERSONAE for piano (1973; 1985-6), and rethinking of genre, as in the SONATA NOTTURNA, which is in effect a concerto for cello and strings.  In later years, Maw's music continued to explore melodic writing on the largest scale, but with an increasingly clear tonal focus, as can be found in the expansive VIOLIN CONCERTO (1993) and the choral-orchestral HYMNUS (1995-96). Alongside such grand public gestures exist finely crafted chamber works, including three further STRING QUARTETS (1982, 1994-5, and 2005) and choral works such as ONE FOOT IN EDEN STILL, I STAND (1990). The key work of this period was the opera SOPHIE’S CHOICE, which occupied Maw from 1990 to 2002. Though critics took Maw’s assemblage of a libretto from William Styron’s book to task, his lucid orchestral writing and generous lyricism garnered praise. Chronological List of Compositions Eight Chinese Lyrics, for mezzo soprano (1956)  Sonatina, for flute and piano (1957)  Nocturne, for mezzo soprano and chamber orchestra (1957-8, rev. 1973)  Six Chinese Songs, for alto and piano (1959)  5 Epigrams, for mixed chorus (1960)  Our Lady’s Song, for mixed chorus (1961)  Essay, for organ (1961, rev. 1963)  Chamber Music, for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, and piano (1962)  Scenes and Arias, for Soprano, Mezzo soprano, Alto, and orchestra (1962 , rev. 1966)  Round, for unison children’s voices, choir, and piano (1963)  The Angel Gabriel, for choir (1963)  Balulalow, for choir (1964)  Corpus Christi Carol, for soprano, descant recorder, and piano (1964)  One Man Show, opera (1964, rev. 1966, 1970)  String Quartet no.1 (1965)  Sinfonia, for small orchestra (1966)  The Voice of Love, Mezzo soprano and piano (1966)  6 Interiors, for high voice and guitar (1966)  Sonata, for string orchestra and 2 horns (1967)  Double Canon for Igor Stravinsky (1967)  The Rising of the Moon, opera (1967-70)  Epitaph-Canon in Memory of Igor Stravinsky, for flute, clarinet and harp (1971)  Concert Music, (from The Rising of the Moon), (1972)  5 Irish Songs, for mixed chorus (1972)  Personae I–III, for piano (1973)  Life Studies I–VIII, for 15 solo strings (1973; 1976)  Serenade, for small orchestra (1973, rev. 1977)  Te Deum, for Treble/Soprano, Tenor, choir, congregation, and organ (1975)  Reverdie, for male voices (1975)  Nonsense Rhymes, for children's voices and piano (1976)  La vita nuova, for Soprano and chamber ensemble (1979)  Summer Dances (1981)  Flute Quartet (1981)  String Quartet no. 2 (1982)  Night Thoughts, for flute (1982)  Spring Music, (1982–3)  Little Suite, for guitar (1984)  Sonata Notturna, for cello and string orchestra (1985)  Personae IV–VI, for piano (1985–6)  Odyssey, for orchestra (1972-87)  Little Concert, for oboe and small orchestra (1987)  The World in the Evening (1988)  Ghost Dances, for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (1988)  3 Hymns, for choir and organ (1989)  5 American Folksongs, for Soprano and piano (1989)  Roman Canticle, for medium voice, flute, viola and harp (1989, rev. 1991)  Music of Memory, for guitar (1989; rev. 1991)  One Foot in Eden Still, I Stand, for soprano, alto, tenor, bass soloists, choir and optional organ (1990)  Piano Trio (1990-91)  American Games, for symphonic wind band (1991)  Shahnama, for small orchestra (1992)  Sweté Jesu, for choir (1992)  The Head of Orpheus, for soprano and 2 clarinets (1992)  Violin Concerto (1993)  String Quartet no.3 (1994-5)  Dance Scenes (1995)  Voices of Memory (1995)  Hymnus, for chorus and orchestra (1995-6)  Sonata, for violin (1966-7)  Stanza, for violin (1997)  Narration, for cello (2000-1)  Sophie’s Choice, opera (1990-2002)  Intrada, for string quartet (2002)  Fanfare, for brass ensemble (2004)  Tango from Sophie's Choice, for guitar (2004)  Concert Suite from Sophie's Choice, for optional soprano and orchestra (2004)  Concerto for cor anglais and orchestra (2005)  String Quartet no.4 (2005)  String Sextet (Melodies from Drama) (2006-07) |
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