**Mark-Anthony Turnage** (b. 1960)

Edward Venn

Mark-Anthony Turnage is one of the leading British composers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. His prolific output fuses stylistic elements, compositional techniques, and instrumentation from art music, jazz, and popular music, as well as, on occasion, more quotidian material such as football chants. The experience of working with jazz musicians such as Peter Erskine (a regular collaborator) has resulted in a long-standing commitment to improvisation in his music.

Born in Essex, 1960, Turnage encountered a considerable range of art music through his family and, particularly, BBC Radio 3. Turnage had compositional lessons as a teenager with Oliver Knussen; like Knussen, Turnage later studied with John Lambert at the Royal College of Music and Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood. It was during his time at the Royal College that he familiarised himself with jazz and soul; Miles Davis became a particular influence.

The classical and jazz elements of Turnage’s first acknowledged work, NIGHT DANCES(1981), continued to be explored in subsequent compositions in the 1980s: ON ALL FOURS(1985) employed Stravinskian techniques for developing pitch material, and works such as LAMENT FOR A HANGING MAN (1983) and RELEASE (1987) made characteristic use of soprano saxophone and percussion. In his first opera, GREEK (1986-88), an adaptation of Stephen Berkoff’s play of the same name, Turnage’s capacity for extremes of musical violence and lyricism, underpinned by a rhythm from the football terraces, were pressed in the service of a critique of contemporary British politics underpinning a modern retelling of the Oedipus myth.

In a series of works written when composer in association with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Turnage explored further the various tendencies present in his early music. Thus THREE SCREAMING POPES (1988-89) took further the expressionist soundworld of GREEK; MOMENTUM (1990-91) was based on football chants familiar to the players of the CBSO and KAI (1989-90), a concerto for cello and ensemble, reworked material originally intended for an opera on Charlie Mingus.

BLOOD ON THE FLOOR (1993-96), a 50-minute work for ensemble, represents a major milestone in Turnage’s development, juxtaposing and integrating jazz soloists (Erskine, Martin Robertson and John Scofield, all of whom were frequently called on to improvise) with more ‘classically’ organised material. SCORCHED (1996-2001) explores such means further, re-composing sixteen works by Scofield.

The social commitment demonstrated in the subject matter of GREEK can be found across much of Turnage’s major works. During the composition of BLOOD ON THE FLOOR, his brother died from drugs, and a number of movements reflect this tragedy in both title and content. In the dramatic scena TWICE THROUGH THE HEART (1996), Turnage sets poems by Jackie Kay depicting the memories of an abused woman imprisoned for murdering her husband. The lurid life and death of the model Anna-Nicole Smith, depicted in the opera ANNA NICOLE (2008-10), is used to comment on contemporary society’s obsession with celebrity.

Turnage’s idiosyncratic blend of styles and techniques makes easy categorisation of his music difficult, veering as it does from quasi-expressionistic violence through to the Beyonce-influenced rhythms of HAMMERED OUT (2009-10). It is in this pluralism, coloured by his ‘urban’ soundworld characterised by wind, saxophone, percussion and bass guitar, and his frequent recourse to lamenting genres that his musical personality is most apparent.

KEY WRITINGS ABOUT TURNAGE:

Clements, Andrew, *Mark-Anthony Turnage* (London, 2000)

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF COMPOSITIONS

And Still a Softer Morning (1978/83; withdrawn)

Night Dances (1981)

Kind of blue (1982; withdrawn)

Entranced (1982/86)

Let us sleep Now (1983; withdrawn)

After dark (1982-3; withdrawn)

Lament for a hanging man (1983)

Ekaya (1984)

Sarabande (1985)

On All Fours (1985)

One hand in Brooklyn Heights (1986; withdrawn)

Beating about the bush (1987)

Gross Intrusion (1987)

Release (1987)

Greek (1986-88)

Three Screaming Popes (1988-89)

Greek suite (1989)

Some Days (1989)

Kai (1989-90)

Three Farewells (1990)

Momentum (1990-91)

Are you sure? (1990-91)

Her Anxiety (1991)

Leaving (1990/92)

Killing Time (1991; withdrawn)

Forty Bob Fanfare (1992)

Sleep On (1992)

Set To (1992-95)

Drowned out (1992-93)

Your Rockaby (1992-93)

This Silence (1992-93)

A Deviant Fantasy (1993)

Two Elegies framing a shout (1994)

Dispelling the fears (1994-95)

Barrie's Deviant Fantasy (1995)

Tune for Toru (1996)

Blood on the Floor (1993-96)

Twice through the heart (1996)

Four-horned fandango (1995-96)

The Country of the Blind (1997)

Cortège for Chris (1997)

Three Memorials (1995-97)

Still Sleeping (1997)

Silent Cities (1998)

An Invention on 'Solitude' (1997-99)

Evening Songs (1998-99)

The Silver Tassie (1997-99)

Vocalise (1999)

True Life Stories (1995-1999)

About Time (1999/2000)

Fractured Lines (1999/2000)

Another Set To (1999/2000)

Bass Inventions (1999/2000)

Dark Crossing (2000)

Three Songs (2000)

Two Vocalises (2000/2001)

On Opened Ground (2000/2001)

Scorched (1996/2001)

Cantilena (2001)

When I woke (2001)

Etudes and Elegies (2000/2002)

The Torn Fields (2000/2002)

The Game is Over (2001/2002)

Slide Stride (2002)

Snapshots (2002)

Calmo (2003)

Crying Out Loud (2003)

Eulogy (2003)

A Man Descending (2003)

No Let Up (2003)

A Relic of Memory (2003)

Riffs and Refrains (2003)

A Short Procession (2003)

Two Fanfares and a Lament (2003)

Scherzoid (2003-04)

Two Baudelaire Songs (2003-04)

Yet Another Set To (2004)

An Aria (with dancing) (2004)

Carnac (2004)

A Fast Stomp (2004)

A Few Serenades (2004)

From the Wreckage (2004)

A Soothing Interlude (2004)

Three Trios (2003-05)

A Slow Pavane (2004-05)

Bleak Moments (2005)

Ceres (2005)

Hidden Love Song (2005)

Juno (2005)

Lullaby for Hans (2005)

Three Asteroids (2005)

The Torino Scale (2005)

From all Sides (2005-06)

About Water (2006)

Ah, Quegli Occhi! (2006)

Christmas Night (2006)

Claremont Carol (2006)

Fanfare (from all sides) (2006)

Misere Nobis (2006)

Returning (2006)

Three Night Carols (2006)

Air with variations (2007)

Chicago Remains (2007)

A Constant Obsession (2007)

Five Views of a Mouth (2007)

Mambo, Blues, and Tarantella (2007)

A Prayer out of Stillness (2007)

Tango (2007)

Out of Black Dust (2007-08)

Bellamy (2008)

Five Processionals (2008)

Four Chants (2008)

Twisted Blues with Twisted Ballad (2008)

Grazioso! (2009)

Hilaries Hoedown (2009)

Milo (2009)

Texan Tenebrae (2009)

Anna Nicole (2008-10)

Hammered Out (2009-10)

In the Bleak Midwinter (2010)

Amelia's March (2010)

GG (2010)

Leap (2010)

Three for Two (2010)

Canon Fever (2011)

Johnston (2011)

Trespass (2011)

Undance (2011)