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| **Hugh Wood (b. 1932)** |
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| Hugh Wood is one of the leading British composers of his generation. In his contributions to all of the major musical genres (with the sole exception of opera), he has focused on the renewal rather than the rejection of tradition. He has taught at Morley College and the Royal Academy of Music, and at Glasgow and Liverpool Universities, and he joined the Music faculty of Cambridge University in 1976. A year later, he was appointed lecturer in Music and Fellow of Churchill College; he retired in 1999.  Hugh Wood was born in 1932 into a music-loving family, and though he ultimately studied Modern History at Oxford, music remained central to his extra-curricular activities both at school and at university. Formal music study commenced in 1954 with lessons from William Lloyd Webber; later, Wood studied with Iain Hamilton, Anthony Milner and Mátyás Seiber. The Bryanston (later Dartington) Summer School provided numerous opportunities to engage with early and mid twentieth century music: above all, the experience of hearing the music of the Second Viennese School proved pivotal. Wood first responded to this encounter in chamber works written in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and labelled his *Variations For Viola and Piano* (1957-8) his Op. 1 in recognition that he had discovered his own voice. The presence in this work of a quotation from Beethoven is significant, revealing the extent to which his engagement with twentieth-century modernism was informed by broader musical traditions. Subsequent works continued to explore small forces—Wood has remained committed to chamber music throughout his career—and in the FOUR LOGUE SONGS (1960-61; rev. 1963), along with the earlier LAURIE LEE SONGS (1958-9), Wood’s sensitive response to twentieth-century English poetry is apparent.  Yet it was with the poetry of John Milton, in *Scenes From Comus* for soprano, tenor and orchestra (1962-5), that Wood’s music reached a wider audience; the music is characterised by densely chromatic motivic writing, Romantic lyricism, and dancing rhythms related to those of Igor Stravinsky and Michael Tippett. In this and the elegiac *Cello Concerto* (1965-69), the expressive fervour is underpinned by a tightly organised structure that owes something to certain principles of Schoenbergian serialism (and Bergian expressionism) without lapsing into dogma.  Nevertheless, Wood was aware that the closely argued pitch structures of his music might lead to fastidiousness; the greater emphasis on texture in the music of the late 1960s and early 1970s is to a certain extent a response to this concern. Thus in the *String Quartet* *No. 2* (1969-70) and the *Chamber Concerto* (1970-71, rev. 1978), mild aleatoricism (inspired by, amongst others, Lutoslawski) is used as a musical resource, as is a mosaic-like formal construction drawn from Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Though strictly notated and through-composed, the *Violin Concerto* *No. 1* (1970-72) and the *Song Cycle to Poems by Pablo Neruda* (1973-4) bear witness to a continued freeing of expression. An apparent creative block, coinciding with work on the composition of a 40-minute *Symphony* (1974-82) was resolved in the *String Quartet* *No*.*3*  (1976-8); both the quartet and symphony to varying extents outline emotional journeys from bleakness (or violence) to triumph. Their diatonic endings point to an increasingly relaxed approach to the evocation of traditional, tonal materials in Wood’s later output.  The poetry of Robert Graves has provided a continued source of inspiration to Wood: sets of songs to his words were collated in 1976, 1982, 1983, and 1984, and in 2005-06 Wood assembled the song cycle *Wild Cyclamen*. Vocal writing accounts for around half of Wood’s output, whether in single-authored collections such as *The Horses* (Ted Hughes; 1963-7, rev. 1968), *The Rider Victory* (Edwin Muir; 1968), *D.H. Lawrence Songs* (1966-2001), the German-language *Erich Fried Songs* (2000), and *Tenebrae* (Geoffrey Hill, 2002), or in the collections of songs *Op. 25* (1959-85), *Op. 37* (1984-93) and *The Isles of Greece* (2007). In 2010 Wood returned to three songs written in the 1950s, orchestrating them for string orchestra in *Beginnings: Three Early Songs*. To this list must be added two profoundly poignant works completed in 1989 – the choral-orchestral *Cantat* to words by D. H. Lawrence and *Marina*, a setting of T. S. Eliot for voice and chamber ensemble. Both were written in memory of Wood’s daughter Jenny, as was a third work, *Serenade and Elegy* for string quartet and string orchestra (1998-9).  The 1990s gave rise to a string of major high-profile works: a *Concerto For Piano* (1989-91), a *String Quartet No. 4* (1993), and a set of *Variations For Orchestra* 1994-7; rev. 1998). Wood’s recent music has tended to avoid the profound dramatics of his earlier output in favour of lighter, or more elegiac, works. The more popular vein that informed the *Concerto For Piano* can be found too in the *Violin Concerto* *No. 2* (2004) and *Ballade* (2011), and in works such as the *Clarinet Quintet* (2007) and *Divertimento* (2007) Wood has incorporated more explicit reference to native early twentieth century traditions.  Wood is well known as a writer and broadcaster; a volume of his selected writings was published in 2007, giving an insight into his values and thoughts about music. |
| Further reading:  (Black)  (Black, Hugh Wood)  (Venn) |