

Andrew Lewis

Penmon Point

– for Maurice Lock –

A cold, clear Advent day. In the distance, snow-capped mountains appear still and at peace, yet close by the sea relentlessly pounds the Point on three sides. The steep pebble beach is drawn by waves that crackle and seethe with the mass of moving stone, while frozen pools on the shore splinter and craze in joyful counterpoint. Half a mile distant an island rises up, almost touchable - Seiriol's island, home of the hermit, now lifeless yet still echoing with ancient worship. Even the lighthouse, beacon of guidance, tolls in ceaseless praise, as if to continue the songs of men who now sing before God.

Penmon Point, December 2001

Penmon Point is a place of extraordinary sounds, and this piece draws together its three main sonic elements:

Musica Mundana – The ceramic, roaring scintillation of the waves lifting and perturbing the steep banks of huge pebbles at Penmon is one of its most characteristic sounds. Together with this, the splintering of ice, the cries of birds and the acoustic ambience of the location provide Penmon Point's *natural* voice.

Musica Humana – Seriol's monastic settlements, founded in the 6th century, are long deserted, but the nearby Priory Church continues his tradition. A 7th century plainchant hymn associated with the season of Advent, *Conditor Alme Siderum* ('Creator of the Starry Skies'), in various guises and transformations, is the *human* voice of Penmon Point.

Musica Instrumentalis – The lighthouse, both visually and sonically, is a strikingly artificial presence in an otherwise untamed environment. The tolling of the lighthouse bell every thirty seconds similarly suggests the order and conceit typical of instrumental or 'machine' music. Thus this bell provides the overall structural organisation of the piece, both horizontally (it sounds every thirty seconds in the music itself) and vertically (its first eight partials form the pitch structure of the entire work).

All three musics are linked by their periodicity, the ebb and flow of the waves, rise and fall of the voices, and regular tolling of the bell creating a variety of rhythmic interactions.

Penmon Point is one of a series of works based on different coastal locations on the Isle of Anglesey, North Wales. It was composed in the winter 2002-03 in the Electroacoustic Music Studios of Bangor University (Wales, UK) and premiered on March 22, 2003 during the Electric Spring Festival in Huddersfield (UK). It was awarded First prize at the 5th Concurso Internacional de Música Eletroacústica de São Paulo (CIMESP '03, Brazil).