

Cable Bay

Andrew Lewis

– for Francis Dhomont –

A very still late-summer evening. Lengthening shadows from the high ground at either side of the bay dapple the rock pools and swirling inlets, so that whatever is not bathed in sunset colours is retreating into gloom. A couple sit at one end of the beach while their small child plays ecstatically in the fading light. Among the rocks and boulders the sea's music is at once both rhythmic and chaotic, sonorous and exuberant, while over the whole scene the spectral sun broods with intensifying lustre, sinking to touch the waves, and to be extinguished by them.

Cable Bay, Isle of Anglesey, North Wales. September 1998

This was the setting in which the original sea recordings for Cable Bay were made, and although it was always intended to be something of a portrait of the place, I found that during work on the piece my approach to the recorded sounds was much more heavily influenced by my memories of that evening than I had expected; so much so that the visual and 'atmospheric' impressions formed while making the recordings became for me inseparable from the sonic character of the recorded material itself. The result is music of a particularly vivid spectral luminescence which revels in the ever-changing colours and forms of that North Wales seascape.

Of particular fascination for me is the contradictory behaviour of the sea; its ability to remain so constant while all the time offering surprises. The musical material in the piece is made to emulate this behaviour, so that unpredictability and stasis become aspects of the same musical ideas. A specific aspect of the sea's behaviour used to shape the music is that of layered periodicities of differing lengths, with the longer periods being the most stable. This creates a scale of possibilities, from very predictable repeated patterns with a long time base (the movement of the tides, the shaping and pacing of musical sections), through medium length periods with some instability (the cyclic ebb and flow of the waves, the structure of musical phrases), to the most unpredictable, short term cycles (rivulets and splashes among the rocks, the detailed perturbations within individual sound objects).

Cable Bay is not only a portrait of a place, but of a place and time: an occasion, a scene, an experience. Completed in 1999, it perhaps also a product of its time, its sunset images offering a potent *fin de siècle* symbol, and its juxtaposition of radiant hues with dark shadows, of stasis with volatile unpredictability and of contemplation with uncertainty, bearing witness to a world enthralled by the intense colours of a fading century, while facing the unknowns of a new millennial dawn.

Cable Bay was composed in the Studios of the Institut International de Musique Electroacoustique de Bourges in April 1999, with preparatory work undertaken in the Studios of the University of Wales Bangor during 1998.