GEORGE BENJAMIN

A MIND OF WINTER

A setting of Wallace Stevens' poem 'The Snow Man' for soprano and orchestra

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A Mind of Winter was written for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the 1981 Aldeburgh Festival. It was first performed by Teresa Cahill, soprano, and The Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Jerzy Maksymiuk on 26 June 1981 at The Maltings, Snape, as part of the 34th Aldeburgh Festival.

A Mind of Winter is recorded by Penelope Walmsley-Clark, soprano, and the London Sinfonietta conducted by the composer on Nimbus CD NI 5075

Duration: 9 minutes

Orchestral parts are available on hire from the publishers

PROGRAMME NOTE

A Mind of Winter is a setting of 'The Snow Man' by the American poet Wallace Stevens. A contemporary of Eliot and Pound, he lived most of his life in New England, and it is only in recent years that his true stature as a poet has been widely acclaimed.

Two things immediately appealed to me about 'The Snow Man' — the abundance of beautiful winter imagery within its compact frame, and the deep ambiguity of its meaning. In this setting, the frozen, snow-covered terrain is depicted by an immobile four-part A minor chord on muted strings; suspended cymbals and multidivided string glissandi portray icy gusts of wind. Various individual aspects of the scene are suggested by other instruments — a solo oboe, woodwind in groups of two or three players, two lyrical horns. At the centre of the landscape stands the solitary Snow Man — a muted piccolo trumpet— around whom the soprano weaves slow, angular phrases whilst beholding 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is'.

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The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter To regard the frost and the boughs Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time To behold the junipers shagged with ice, The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think Of any misery in the sound of the wind, In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land Full of the same wind That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener who listens in the snow, And, nothing himself, beholds Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Text conveight 1923 and renewed 1951 by Wallace Stevens. Reprinted from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens,* by Wallace Stevens, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. (U.K.: Faber and Faber Ltd.)

ORCHESTRA

2 Piccolos (doubling 2 flutes)

Oboe

Cor anglais (doubling oboe 2)

- 2 Clarinets in Bb
- 2 Bassoons
- 2 Horns in F
- 2 Trumpets
 - 1: piccolo trumpet in D (with harmon mute)
 - 2: trumpet in C (with straight mute)

Percussion (one player)

- 3 suspended cymbals
 - 1: small ordinary cymbal
 - 2: medium sizzle cymbal (nailed)
 - 3: medium-large ordinary cymbal
- 2 triangles (small & very small)
- 1 small side drum

Strings: 6 6 4 4 2

N.B. Both doublebasses with 5 strings, not C extensions

 $\hat{b} = 1/4$ tone sharp

a = 1/4 tone flat

All transposing instruments are written in C

NOTES ON PERFORMANCE

A clear vocal sonority, without too much vibrato, is preferred. The singer must pay special attention to the dynamics.

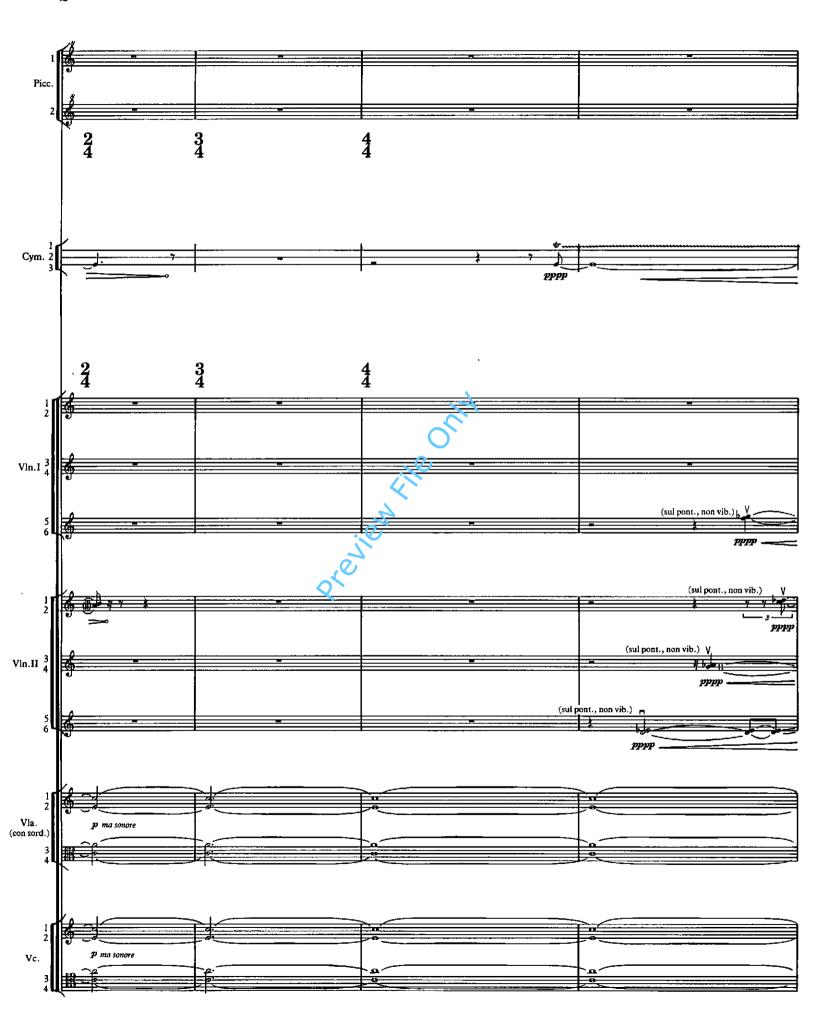
In the multidivided glissando writing for the strings, either *sul ponticello* and *non vibrato* (e.g. page 1) or in harmonics (e.g. page 11) there should be a downbow on the highest point of each crescendo (see examples on pages 1 and 3).

In some passages where the length of the notated diminuendos in the cymbal part exceeds the natural resonating time of the cymbals (e.g. page 3), subtle, imperceptible strokes should be added to sustain a progressive diminuendo (to silence) over the full notated duration. This will sometimes be found to be unnecessary, and must in any case not be applied to the final entries after figure Q.

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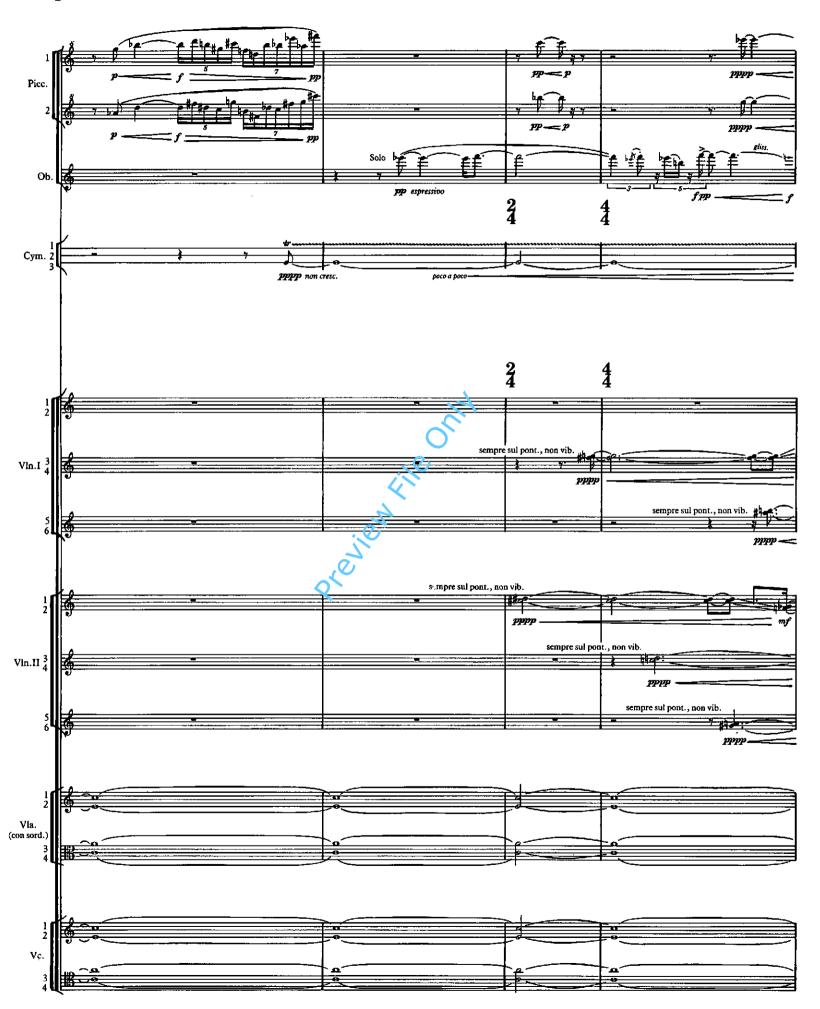
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^{*} Cymbals: see notes on performance.







* Trpt. 1: Harmon mute (with stem in 'out' position) throughout the piece.