

Sonata Brevis

Composed by Rodney Newton for solo euphonium & piano

Duration: c. 5 minutes

About the Music... Rodney Newton is no stranger when it comes to composing for brass; after hearing James Gourlay premiere his superb concerto for tuba I commissioned him to compose this work. *Sonata Brevis* was completed in January 2003 and received its premiere at the Royal Northern College of Music on April 2nd 2003 performed by John Wilson and myself. The work may be considered an exercise in compression, cast in classical sonata form but lasting only five minutes.

The material is based on a sequence of twelve chromatic notes. However, despite these notes undergoing the usual inversions and retrogrades associated with dodecaphonic technique, this is not a serial composition. The series and its transformations are used more in the way of modes and all the harmonic and melodic material may be traced back to the original twelve-note row.

The first movement, *Allegro Energico* is in traditional sonata form with a craggy exposition, a more lyrical second subject, a short development, a recapitulation and the briefest of codas (a mere two bars). The second movement, *Molto Moderato* is a *chaconne* and, again, is in the traditional form used by Purcell and Bach. The third movement, *Molto Vivace* is a very short, high-spirited rondo, lasting just one minute.

Performance Tips... Having given many performances of *Sonata Brevis* I have found that the majority of obstacles the work presents in performance are not related to individual difficulties in the solo line. The solo line will of course require concentrated practice relating to pitching, varying styles and controlled phrasing, however, there are other more technical obstacles which can determine the work's effectiveness in live performance. I am referring to how we start the 1st and 3rd movements and how we continue from one movement to the next.

I have found the most effective way of ensuring a secure opening to the work, and indeed the 3rd movement, is by creating a preparatory beat for the accompanist. This can be achieved by inhaling the required amount of air over one crotchet beat at the correct tempo in a slightly more animated fashion than normal. This way the soloist is in control of where the first beat is, ensuring the opportunity to inhale a good breath before entering on the 2nd quaver. Following the final note of the 1st movement I would suggest the tension is kept with only a moment's silence before the piano begins bar 72. During the first 8 bars of the 2nd movement the soloist has time to place the mute and make any technical adjustments for good intonation. Although the piano finishes the 2nd movement alone, I would suggest the soloist remains still until the movement ends. Following this there is no option, but to break the tension as the mute is removed and the tuning slide readjusted before starting the final movement.

About the composer... Born in England in 1945, Rodney studied at Birmingham's School of Music - now the Birmingham Conservatoire, before freelancing as a professional percussionist with many of the U.K.'s leading orchestras, including the London Symphony. In 1985, following five years as principal timpanist with the English National Opera, Rodney began to work in films and television as a composer, arranger, musical director and music consultant, collaborating on countless feature films and television series before entering the world of higher education as a specialist tutor. He ran a post-graduate degree course in film music at the London College of Music, taught at the Royal Academy of Music and also the London Film School where he is currently a Music Consultant.

During the 'nineties Rodney became much involved with brass bands, being responsible for the musical arrangements of 2004 Turner Prize-winner Jeremy Deller's celebrated Acid Brass project. Since that time he has firmly established himself as one of the leading composers in the brass band movement.

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Rodney Newton

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Allegro energico ♩ = 136

Soloist

Piano

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