

Hans Werner Henze  
ROYAL WINTER MUSIC  
Elliot Simpson, guitar

My idea of developing music from Richard of Gloucester's monologue 'Now is the winter of our discontent', and of generating more music from that material, was conceived during the 1960's. Ten years later it took a more concrete form, when Julian Bream suggested to me that I should write a substantial new guitar work for him. More time went by, and only last year, having finished 'We come to the river' could I begin to realize our plan. Then began a collaboration with the instrumentalist that went through various phases, from which I gained a more profound knowledge of the technicalities and of the sound-world of the guitar. I would even go so far as to say that this collaboration gave me a new concept of how to write for an instrument with a rich tradition. The guitar is a 'knowing' or 'knowledgeable' instrument, with many limitations but also many unexplored spaces and depths within these limits. It possesses a richness of sound capable of embracing everything one might find in a gigantic contemporary orchestra; but one has to start from silence in order to notice this: one has to pause, and completely exclude noise.

The dramatis personae of this piece enter through the sound of the guitar as if it were a curtain. Through masks, voices and gestures, they speak to us of great passion, of tenderness, sadness and comedy: strange events in people's lives. Into this, the whispering voices of spirits are mingled. The epilogue is spoken by Oberon, pacified and reconciled, as though Nature had been subjected to Man.

Five years after completing the first sonata for guitar I set about writing a second one, not simply in order to retain the overall title of the (now complete) cycle with its clear reference to Richard III, but also because of my more general attachment to Shakespearean characters (which have contributed their share to my conception of the world), and these characters, or, at any rate, some of them, once more induced me to try to create their musical portraits.

Aguecheek was one of my favorites when I was a music student in Braunschweig. Perhaps it was not just Shakespeare but also the producer and the actor of Aguecheek who caused me not to miss a single performance of 'What You Will' at the theatre there around 1943. The comic element in Aguecheek's character is his inability to find his bearing in this world and to live in it—indeed, he appears, even from a physical point of view, unfit to live. But there is, at the same

time, a tenderness about him, and a sadness like that emanating from a wilting meadow-saffron. He is on his way to the flowers to become himself a flower, a thistle probably, or something quite impossible even in the world of plants. He also has the scent of flowers, and he combs his long golden and English hair.

Bottom's Dream: he is dreaming that all the boorishness which has hitherto encumbered his life and finally culminated, so he thinks, in the even coarser image of an ass, has fallen away from him, left him for good: no more toothache, no more gout; he is no longer ashamed of his paunch and thinks he now smells more sweetly. A handsome flower-bedecked youth, he lies blissfully in the arms of the gorgeous Titania, he feels on top of the world and has no further wish except this one: never to wake again. This is Shakespeare the romantic, the pastoral poet evoking whisps of mist and the cold, gruesome moon, the gentle madness, the oppressive dream, the magic of a summer's night, the sound of harps, a spook- but here it is, above all, the wondering and the elegiac mood caused by complete contentment.

The third and last movement of this new Winter Music (which has to manage without the dialectic form of the sonata) portrays the mad lady appearing like Maria Callas in the same part (though without the same sonority), clad in a long robe, her hair undone, her crazy eyes following the smoky flickering light of a candle on a Georgian candle-stick which she herself supports with one arm as if it were a torch, while the other points a sword at her breast. She moves through the bleak halls of her cold, black palace, a thunderstorm is raging outside, the wind is howling, she is totally mad, talks incoherently, sings dirty ditties, swears and shouts. For all that she is immensely royal, her madness is majestic. Unlike the fragile little Ophelia who evokes pity, Lady Macbeth is carved from quite a different block and does not evoke our pity at all; we are afraid of her. In fact, the piece is particularly difficult to play, and many a guitar player will approach it with fear and trembling, just as we ourselves would not care to cross the path of Lady Macbeth, above all not now and in her present state.

-Hans Werner Henze-

Recorded June 16-18, 2010 in the Lille Konsertsal,  
University of Stavanger, Bjergsted.  
Special thanks to Mark Drews and  
the University of Stavanger.

Production, editing, mastering by Jason O'Connell

Recording by Margaret Luthar

Editions: Schott, Mainz

Guitar by Dominique Delarue (2005)

Artwork by Sammy Owen

[www.elliotsimpson.net](http://www.elliotsimpson.net)

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# Sonatas on Shakespearean Characters

## I. (1975/1976)

1. Gloucester | Ritornello | 7:51
2. Romeo and Juliet | Ritornello | 5:35
3. Ariel | Ritornello | 8:15
4. Ophelia | Ritornello | 4:49
5. Touchstone, Audrey and William | Ritornello | 5:05
6. Oberon | 9:23

## II. (1979)

7. Sir Andrew Aguecheek | 6:51
8. Bottom's Dream | 7:04
9. Mad Lady Macbeth | 10:13

Total Time | 65:04

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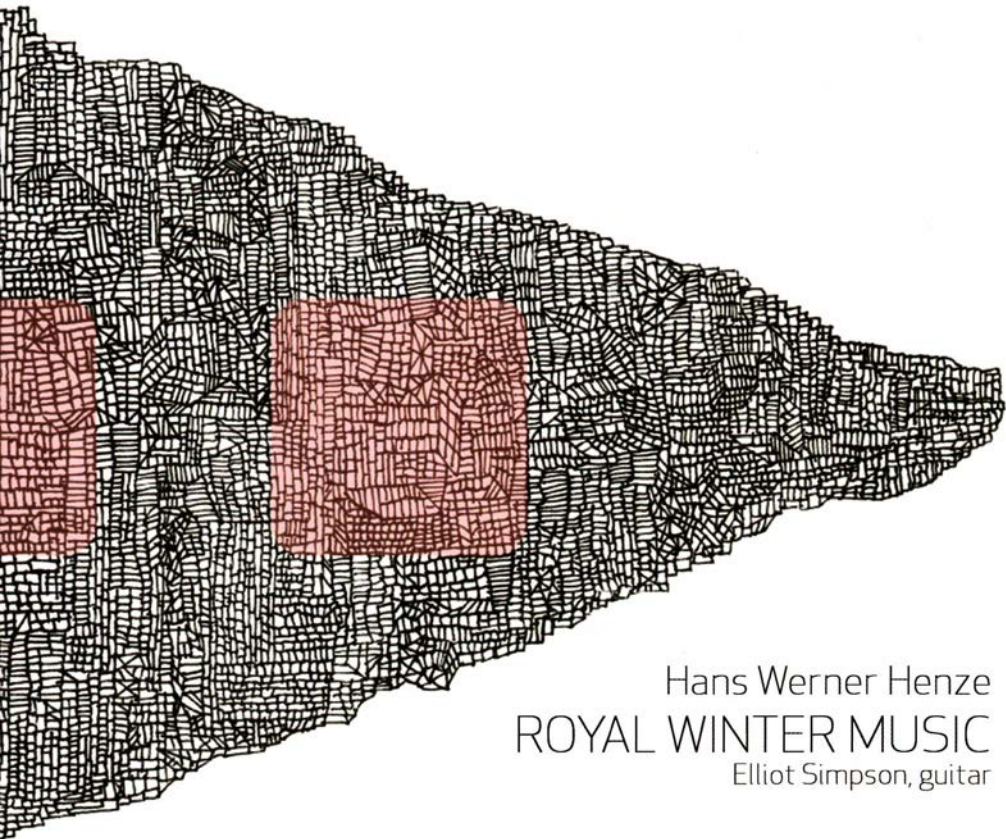
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