

The Blue Box

for cor anglais, violin and bass clarinet

J. Simon van der Walt

The Blue Box

J. Simon van der Walt

Program note

On the afternoon of Tuesday 30 December 2003, at a spot adjacent to the southbound A77 between Hansel Village and the Dutch House Roundabout, a man wearing a red jumper was seen walking in a field to the left with a blue box on his head.

I wonder why?

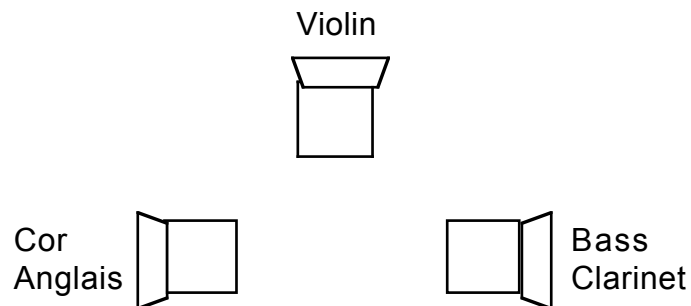
(Perhaps he feels the same way I do.)

Duration ~6'10

Commissioned by Symposia

Performance notes

- Stage plan



Analysis

'The Blue Box' is the latest of a series of works built upon the same premise;

'If one starts by considering an ensemble as a collection of *performers* rather than a collection of *instruments*, and the performance area as an undiscovered space, what musical consequences follow?'

(from program note to 'othing', for strings)

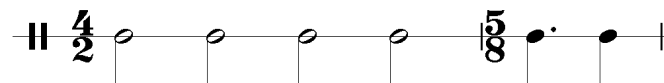
In this case, the limitations of the commission were strict; there was no possibility of using a ghetto-blast in the piece as I had originally wished, neither was it possible for me to meet and discuss anything with the players beforehand, or even find out who the actual individuals involved would be. The space was an unknown, and the context was a lunchtime concert which it was anticipated would be attended by virtually no-one.

It is within these dismal parameters that I came up with this sad little piece; the players stuck in a limping groove, screwing the pages of their music up and throwing them away as they struggle to escape from their musical prison. Only at the end of the piece do they appear to make some sort of breakthrough, yet to a place only barely less brown and claustrophobic than the one they had left.

(In the event the concert was well attended, the venue apt, the players pulled the piece off despite scant rehearsal, and the composer went home very happy!)

- All players seated, as close together as possible
- Preferably uncondacted. If conducted, the conductor may remove and tear up the violinist's music at b40 instead of the clarinettist
- Parts are supplied on separate sheets of A4 and A3 paper. For the sake of normal rehearsals, lay the sheets on the floor instead of destroying. For dress rehearsals with scrunching and tearing, as many copies of the parts as are necessary should be photocopied
- The various theatrical actions involving the parts must be done in a completely deadpan, matter of fact manner. The audience may choose to find this funny; the performers must not
- The scrunching and tearing of the paper should be done briskly, firmly, and quite loudly. The discarded sheets might be tossed slightly to one side or behind the players
- There is no hurry. Take as much time and care over this as any other musical phrase; in particular, at bb59-61 where the previously screwed up balls of paper are retrieved from the floor, smoothed out, and replaced on the stand
- At this point the instructions as given in the score are a little opaque, but it will be obvious what to do from the parts. The gag is that the players only *appear* to play from the sheet retrieved from the floor
- At bb91-94 it is not necessary to *show* the audience the back of the sheet; just lift it up naturally and fairly slowly in such a way that it is merely *possible* for the audience to get a glimpse of what is written
- Repeats at bb93 & 94 are 'till ready'

- On the decision to notate the piece in 21/8; I thought long and hard about this, and decided I could find no way of splitting this up into its component parts without destroying something of the rhythmic essence of the riff. As all of the players are playing homorhythmically virtually throughout, I trust the piece can be made to work. Were I to conduct it, I would probably give six beats thus;



although a case could be made for other interpretations. At any rate, this is the plan adopted during the running passages which occur at various points

- Whilst by no means bebop and certainly not swing, the phrasing of the main riff will be better understood by players with some familiarity with jazz. However, if scrupulous attention is paid to making the notes at the end of each phrase staccato as marked, and giving other notes their full value, the correct effect should be produced
- However, a complete change of character occurs for the final contrapuntal section from b98 to the end; here, the players should revert to a more or less classical approach, lyrical, cantabile, with the possibility even of some flexibility in tempo.

The Blue Box

J. Simon van der Walt

$\text{♩} = 89$

Cor Anglais (in F) *mf*

Violin *mf*

Bass Clarinet (in Bb) *mf*

CA *mp subito* *cresc*

Vln *mp subito* *cresc*

B Cl *mp subito* *cresc*

CA *ff* *mp subito* *cresc*

Vln *ff* *mp subito* *cresc*

B Cl *ff* *mp subito* *cresc*

10

CA *ff dim* *p*

Vln *ff dim* *p*

B Cl *ff dim* *p*

13

CA (*ancora p*)

Vln (*ancora p*)

B Cl (*ancora p*)

16

CA *f subito*

Vln *f subito*

B Cl *f subito*

19

CA

Vln

B Cl

22

CA

Vln

B Cl

Scrunch up p1 and throw it away

n

24

27

CA

Vln

B Cl

mf

mf quasi solo

mf

30

CA

Vln

B Cl

33

CA

Vln

B Cl

36

CA

Vln

B Cl

Scrunch up p2 and throw it away

n

40

CA

(This bar will need to be memorised, as clarinettist will remove your music at this point!
Or improvise similar flamboyant, upward rushing phrase.)

Vln

3 V

B Cl

mf

mf

mf

44

CA

Vln

B Cl

47

CA

mp subito *cresc*

Vln

mp subito *cresc*

B Cl

mp subito *cresc*

50

CA *ff mp subito cresc*

Vln *ff mp subito cresc*

B Cl *ff mp subito cresc*

53

CA *ff p*

Vln *ff p*

B Cl *ff p*

56 **Molto rall** **Lento** ♩ = 106 **Deliberately**

CA *f (non dim!)*

Vln *f*

B Cl *f n*

59

Gross swell,
molto vib, tone almost breaking up,
cut off suddenly

Retrieve any crumpled sheet of paper from the floor.
Smooth out and replace over current page, then play from RH page

CA

Vln

B Cl

Retrieve any crumpled sheet of paper from the floor.
Smooth out and replace over current page, then play from RH page

Retrieve any crumpled sheet of paper from the floor.
Smooth out and replace over current page, then play from RH page

n

21/8

21/8

21/8

♩ = 89

62 **Tempo primo**

CA

Vln

B Cl

pp cresc

p cresc

pp cresc

p cresc

pp cresc

p cresc

65

CA

Vln

B Cl

mp cresc

mp cresc

mp cresc

68 **Molto rall**

CA *mf cresc* *f cresc* *ff*

Vln *mf cresc* *f cresc* *ff*

B Cl *mf cresc* *f cresc* *ff*

♩ = 89 **Half as fast**

73

CA *ff sempre* *sim* *sim* *sim*

Vln *ff sempre* *sim* *sim* *sim*

B Cl *ff sempre* *sim* *sim* *sim*

Drop previously retrieved page to the floor

Scrunch up next page and discard

♩ = 89 **Tempo primo**

84

CA *meno f*

Vln *meno f*

B Cl *meno f*

88

CA

Vln

B Cl

90

CA

Vln

B Cl

Lift up last double page and bring to front of pile, so that audience see writing on the back

92

CA

Vln

B Cl

$\text{♩} = 106$ **Rather slower**

Lift up last double page and bring to front of pile, so that audience see writing on the back

Join Vln when ready. Repeat this bar till Cl enters.

Start this passage as soon as ready (at new tempo!); don't wait for other players to finish scale runs. Repeat this bar till CA enters

mf

CA joins; repeat this bar till Cl enters.

Wait till Vln starts playing

Lift up last double page and bring to front of pile, so that audience see writing on the back

95 Cl joins; this bar once only then carry on ♩ = 89 (Or slower)

CA Cl joins; this bar once only then carry on

Vln Cl joins; this bar once only then carry on

B Cl Join other players; this bar once only then carry on

mf *ff* *f espressivo* *meno f*

ff *f espressivo* *en dehors*

mf *ff* *f espressivo* *meno f*

102

CA *ben f*

Vln *poco meno f*

B Cl *ben f*

107

CA *ben f* *mf sweetly*

Vln *ben f* *mf sweetly*

B Cl *mf sweetly*