

Symphonic Overture from *John Paul Jones*

The *Symphonic Overture* has its roots in my stage musical *John Paul Jones*, which premiered in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2001. Essentially a tragedy of ambition, the musical tells the story of the son of a Scottish gardener who became a hero of the American Revolution as the “father of the American navy”.

The *Symphonic Overture*, however, is not strictly programmatic, rather it is symphonic. It takes a number of the key musical-thematic ideas from the score of the stage show and transforms them kaleidoscopically, fragmenting and re-compiling them in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

The work is in three clearly discernible sections. The first interlaces the Scots jig in 6/8 (which opens the musical) with the anthemic “Freedom Arise” theme in 4/4 (which closes it), by means of metric modulation. The second, slower section is essentially a canon and variation on the “Home Again” ballad from Act I of the show, while the third and final section is a radical development of the “Battle of Flamborough Head” sequence, again from Act I of the musical.

My intention in writing this piece was to explore how essentially quite simple base material, from a highly tonal, “popular” musical work, can be transformed into something both tonally more ambiguous and technically more intricate while retaining the spiritual essence of the original material.

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The first performance of this work was given on 1st April 2006 by the Edinburgh Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Robert Dick, in the Queens Hall, Edinburgh.