

Julian Wagstaff – Symphony for Chamber Orchestra
Programme Note (for first performance, Reid Hall, Edinburgh, 12/11/05)

The basic ideas for a first symphony have been with me for some time. However, it was not until the Edinburgh University Chamber Orchestra approached me earlier this year with a request for an orchestral piece that the work received the impetus it required, and I was finally compelled to get the “dots” onto paper. (It should be said that this process has continued even as Michael and the orchestra have been rehearsing, and their forbearance in this regard has been greatly appreciated.)

Thankfully, though, the piece we shall hear this evening is fully complete. The symphony is essentially about tonalities - that is, musical keys, and the various ways in which different keys may co-exist, interact, conflict, dissolve and cohere. The work is cast in a single extended movement, stressing the organic character of the whole. This is not to say that there are not clearly discernible sections in the work – there are, and these may be briefly characterised as follows:

- Introduction - Three pitches – C, B-flat and E-flat are introduced by the woodwinds. These are gradually joined by the other notes of the three corresponding major triads, as the winds are joined by other sections of the orchestra. When all of the pitches are present, we are left with a Bb13b5(no7) chord, which is carried by piano and pitched percussion under a trumpet fanfare as the introduction ends.
- Exposition - Three contrasting principal themes in each of the three keys are introduced – by the strings (in C), woodwind (E-flat) and brass (B-flat / G minor) in turn.
- Development - The three principal themes are developed, with use of the whole orchestra. During this section, too, each choir remains fixed within its own specified tonal zone or key.
- Scherzo - Three loud tutti chords herald the start of the Scherzo, commencing with a statement of a new tune on flute and piccolo over a string ostinato. Gradually the tonal range of each choir is extended until all chromatic intervals are possible in all choirs.
- Slow Section - During the slow section, the fringes of tonality are reached and explored, utilising the new chromatic freedoms realised during the scherzo.
- Finale - The Finale takes the form of a deferred recapitulation of the three principal themes from the Exposition section. Chromatic possibilities are brought more tightly under control, and the symphony ends within the sphere of extended tonal harmony, realised across the entire orchestra.

The total duration is approximately 24 minutes. The symphony will form part of my final portfolio in the context of my PhD studies at Edinburgh University.