The Lion and The Eagle

by Andrew Hugill

For Simon Emmerson, to celebrate his 60th birthday

Composed for the Dirty Electronics Ensemble
directed by John Richards

PERFORMANCE

The piece may be performed on any instruments.

The main ensemble should divide into two groups: the Lion and the Eagle.

Members of the Lion should wear yellow clothing.
Members of the Eagle should wear white clothing.

The Lion's sounds should be lazily powerful, low and menacing.
The Eagle's sounds should be soaring and high, distant yet penetrating.

The Lion roars.
The Eagle cries.

All performers should also have a pair of clacking stones.

There may also be a CD or some additional musicians creating an environment or atmosphere: quiet, steadily present, like the wind drifting and fluctuating.

PROGRAMME NOTE

Centuries ago, a student asked his master, Basilius Valentinus,"What is the secret of alchemy?" The master replied,"In VITRIOL is the answer." Observe:

Visita (Visit)
Interiora (the interior)
Terrae (of the earth;)
Rectificando (in rectifying,)
Invenies (discover)
Occultum (the hidden)
Lapidem (stone.)

[Note that 'vitriol' here refers to a clear, viscous liquid nowadays known as 'sulfuric acid'.]

IMAGERY

The appended picture may be projected on a backdrop throughout. Part 1 takes place in darkness. Throughout Part 2, white lights should gradually fade up. In Part 3, the lights should turn red. The performers should face each other across the stage in their two groups.

PART 1: Nigredo

Working within the groups, performers should improvise freely, concentrating on making sounds that are as different as possible from those produced by their neighbours. The aim is to corrupt and dissolve any perceived relationship between members of the group. The effect should be chaotic. Contrasts in dynamic, rhythms, timbres, pitches, are all desirable.

This part should last approximately 3 minutes.

PART 2: Albedo

With the differences between individuals firmly established, it is now time to find similarities, conjunctions. The two groups work independently of one another. The aim is to achieve a simultaneous, collective roar or cry. When this is reached it should be repeated, over and over, with uneven gaps in between and with somewhat varying content each time. Samples of actual lion roars or eagle cries may be added into the mix for effect.

Once both groups have found their sound, they should begin to take notice of one another. At first, they should alternate, as if calling to each other. Then, when a rhythm is established, they should begin to merge. The Eagle, being swifter, should move its cry steadily forwards in time, overlapping the lion roar, until eventually the sounds synchronise. This should repeat at least three times, with silences of equivalent duration in between.

Part 2 should also last about 3 minutes.

PART 3: Rubedo

There are two features of Part 3: the prolongation of the sounds and the introduction of the clacking stones (which may be amplified if necessary)..

The synchronised cries and roars continue to repeat, but now the aim is to extend the sound by a little each time. Each collective sound is followed by a brief silence. Each successive sound is longer than the last. Not all instruments will be able to sustain that long. When an instrument can no longer sustain, the performer should take up clacking stones and begin tapping out the following rhythm (keep repeating in a loop until the end of the piece).
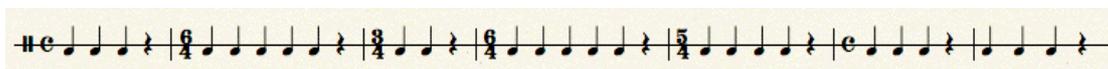
Each new clacker should join in with this pattern until everybody is playing it. Don't worry about exact synchronisation: an approximate unison will do. When everyone is clacking (instruments with very long sustains should drop out anyway), the piece should conclude with the following rhythm, clacked three times: three successive clacks followed by a pause of equivalent duration.

The lights, now red, should cut to black on this cue.

Part 3 should also last approximately three minutes.