

Rough Magic (1996-97; rev.2000) for large orchestra

commissioned by Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

FP: 30, 31 January & 1, 4 February 1997, Chicago IL

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Barenboim, conductor

dedicated in gratitude to Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

During the year that I lived in New Mexico, I drove several times per week past the Sandia Mountains, which the First Nation Tewas call Oku Pin. The Tewas consider the range to be sacred, and the residence of a powerful spirit. One day while driving, I had the sense of the mountain's presence in a heightened way, and this was accompanied by an impression of a massive series of dense chords, like sonic monoliths, one slowly succeeding the other. It was a very vivid occurrence that was repeated on a number of occasions.

For many composers, the notion of material is often a fairly compact musical idea, such as a theme or a motive, or a short chord progression. The material that was inspired by my experiences and which lies at the foundation of **Rough Magic** is in fact a rather extended chord progression: 448 chords, each one containing 12 different pitches and all of the intervals from a minor second to a major seventh. The whole is comprised of five shorter sequences that recur several times each. I am also concerned with making the musical journey a scenic one, so in my imagination, this long progression traverses a cinematically match-cut sonic panorama. This process could be interpreted as a sort of parallel to the Australian Aboriginal tradition of the Songline, though here the melodic line is a chain of chords, and all of the transitions are instantaneous instead of gradual. For the formally-inclined listener, it is like hearing a rondo of passacaglias isorhythmically colliding with a rondo of orchestrational textures.

The title is drawn from Prospero's speech near the end of Act V of *The Tempest*, one of Shakespeare's most overtly musical plays. At that point Prospero decides to renounce the supernatural powers that he has used to regain his dukedom, referring to the spells and incantations he has employed to summon and dismiss storms and eclipses as 'rough magic'. In truth, my work has nothing to do with the political intrigue of the plot or the actions of those characters. Instead, I think that the connection occurs more on the level of experiencing Nature's intensity and encountering sudden dramatic contrasts.