

BIOGRAPHY

British composer Graham Lack was born in 1954 in Epsom, a former spa town in the County of Surrey. Formative experiences include singing in the Proteus Choir Guildford under distinguished conductor Vernon Handley, who offered him early encouragement, the appointment at the age of 18 as Choir Director at St Paul's Church Howell Hill in Cheam – a traditional parish within the Anglican community – and first professional performances of early works by the Choir of Chichester Cathedral.

Graham Lack studied Music Paedagogy at Bishop Otter College in the University of Chichester (1972–1975), obtaining a Certificate in Education with the highest marks in his year. He was the sole recipient of the Sussex Area Training Award, and also received a stipend from the Idlewild Trust for further studies. Much is owed to Michael Waite, his mentor at that time. Graham Lack received his BMus (Hons Lond) in Composition from Goldsmiths' College in the University of London (1976–1980), where he was a student of Anthony Milner, a stringent teacher and himself a pupil of Mátyás Seiber. He then obtained his MMus (1980–1981) in Historical Musicology at King's College in the University of London, where he was a personal student of Brian Trowell and his supervisors included Pierluigi Petrobelli and Reinhard Strohm. Moving to Germany in 1982, Graham Lack held a Lectureship in Music at the Munich Campus of the University of Maryland until 1990, and pursued doctoral studies at the Technische Universität Berlin. He was Head of Music (sabbatical cover) at Cricklade College, Andover 1993–1994.

Choral music was a strong compositional point of departure for Graham Lack. Early works include the 12-voice a cappella *Sanctus* (commissioned by Queens' College Cambridge) and *Hermes of the Ways* (commissioned by Akademiska Damkören Lyran Helsinki). He showed a later interest in compositions for vocal ensemble employing one voice per part. There followed *Estraines* (a commission from the King's Singers, recorded on Signum). Wide reception has been accorded the *Four Lullabies* (nos. 1 & 2 recorded by VOCES8 on Signum). The more recent cycle *Demesnes* (TTBB) was commissioned by Quartonal (recorded on Sony Classical) and premiered to great critical acclaim at the Mecklenberg Vorpommern Festival in 2013, with a subsequent

performance at the Schleswig Holstein Music Festival in 2014. Sjaella commissioned and premiered the cycle *Desire Lines* (SSASSA) at the MDR Musiksommer that year. The most recent work in this genre is *This Ember Night* for VOCES8 (recorded in 2017).

Songs for voice and piano also form part of Graham Lack's current work catalogue and include *Five Images* for high voice and piano, and *Geranienlieder* for soprano and piano (work in progress).

The composer continues to invest much time and energy in the selection of poetry and literature suitable for setting to or adapting for music. He is widely read and takes an intrinsic interest in editions offering parallel translation, such as the works of Giacomo Leopardi. For longer pieces of a dramatic nature, he writes the libretti himself, the results being often macaronic, drawing on Middle English, English, Mittelhochdeutsch, Altdeutsch and Old French sources.

As his confidence as a composer grew, Graham Lack began to write works employing both choral and instrumental forces. *The Legend of Saint Wite* for high voices and string quartet has been widely performed in the UK and Germany. REFUGIUM, for SATB chorus, organ, positive organ and three orchestral percussion was premiered by Trinity Boys Choir London and Cirrus Voices under David Swinson in 2009 and recorded live in 2012 in the Herz Jesu-Kirche Munich for CD and LP release. Trinity Boys Choir also commissioned the recent *To the Tallow and the Wick*; cast in three tableaux, it is scored for SSA voices, positive organ and handbells, and was recorded in 2017 (Rondeau Horizon). A recent commission, from the City of Fürstfeldbruck, Germany, was *The Way The Coloured Stones*, for soprano, harp, percussion and double bass. Here Graham Lack pays homage to, but does not draw on, the musical language propounded by French modernist composers of the mid-twentieth century.

Of importance to the composer remains a pragmatic wish to seek new sounds within already established genres, or to extend these forms. *Petersiliensommer* for SSA voices and harp offers the chance for choral directors to programme a summer piece as opposed to a winter one like Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*. In *The Night Adamantine*, for male voice choir, horn quartet, harp and piano, Graham Lack links a well-known Schubert work, *Nachtgesang im Walde*, to other repertoire using similar

forces. The commission was from Camerata Limburg, sets the composer's own translations of poetry by Johann Gabriel Seidl – the author of the 'Night Song' poem – and was premiered under Jan Schumacher in Weimar in 2014. A CD release is planned with the renowned quartet German Horn Sound.

Works of a religious nature and with a dramaturgical intent represent another aspect of Graham Lack's oeuvre. The canticle *Sudor anglicus*, for example, was commissioned by the Fugato Festival Frankfurt in 2008. It is scored for vocal soloists, organ and handbells, and tells a dark tale of pestilence in the Middle Ages. The libretto – again by the composer – draws on Latin and High German contemporary accounts. *The Angel of the East*, for solo soprano, SSA chorus and instrumental groups, is a church opera. The piece, to a libretto by the composer based on a poem by John Donne and passages from 'The Revelation of Saint John', was premiered to great critical acclaim in Miltenberg, Germany in 2011. One major work planned is an opera *Der Garten des Rabbiners*.

Chamber music works to emerge from 2000 onwards include a Trio for clarinet, violin and piano, and a Quintet for violin, viola, violoncello, horn and piano. The *Quartettsatz* was commissioned and premiered in 2000 in Oxford by the Allegri String Quartet, and *The Pencil of Nature* for string trio was commissioned by the renowned 'musica viva' series and premiered in Munich in 2011. The performance was broadcast live by Bavarian Radio.

Works for keyboard instruments include *Michaelmas Dark* for organ solo, the first tableau of which was premiered at St Paul's Cathedral London in 2013, and *The Dove The Flight Geometrical* for harpsichord solo. The Six Preludes for solo piano, the titles of which are taken from the peculiar world of particle physics, are dedicated to Hélène Grimaud (Truth), Dejan Lazić (Up), Bertrand Chamayou (Down), and Markus Groh (Beauty). The world premieres of Nos. 1 & 2 (Charm, Strange) were given by Lukáš Vondráček in the Queen Elizabeth Hall London in 2015 as part of the prestigious International Piano Series.

The *Fünf Elegien* for zither solo were originally conceived as didactic literature and have been widely played in Germany. A transcription for guitar was premiered by the renowned soloist Aniello Desiderio in 2015 and will be published in 2018.

Recent instrumental and orchestral works include *Wondrous Machine* for multi-percussionist Martin Grubinger, and *Nine Moons Dark* for large orchestra. The cycle *A Sphere of Ether* for SSA chorus and orchestra was commissioned and premiered in 2012 by the Young Voices of Colorado and Littleton Symphony Denver. And 2015 saw the premiere in Würzburg by the Monteverdi Chor and Vogtland Philharmonie of *Sitherwood*, for soprano solo, SATB chorus and very large orchestra.

Graham Lack is currently completing a new commission, *Aeolian Concerti*, for double string orchestra, piano, percussion and celeste. Future projects include a violin concerto *The Windhover* for Benjamin Schmid as well as a chamber opera *The English Sweate* for VOCES8. The 2020/21 season saw the successful launch of an innovative micro-commissioning project.

Graham Lack has chaired symposia on New Music both for the University of Oxford and the Goethe Institut. He has contributed to *Groves Dictionary of Music* and *Tempo Magazine* for Contemporary Music, and from 2008–2014 acted as Consultant Editor of the *International Choral Bulletin*. He is a Corresponding Member of the Institute of Advanced Musical Studies in King's College London, was a jury member of the 2013 and 2015 Rimini International Choral Competition, the 2016 choral conducting competition Towards Polyphony Wrocław, and Jury President for the First and Second International Competition for Choral Composition held in 2011 and 2013 under the auspices of the International Federation for Choral Music. He was Artistic Director of the concert series *punkt5* (on the 'dot' of 'five') in Schloß Bissingen Germany 2012–17. In 2008 he was awarded a composer prize by *BBC Music Magazine* and won in 2015 the Ortus International New Music Competition held in New York. Publishers include Schott Music, Edition Peters, Preissler Verlag, Edition Ferrimontana and Thomi-Berg Musikverlag. CD recordings of his music have been released on the Sony, Signum and Stone record labels. From January 2018 Graham Lack is Composer Fellow with Trinity Boys Choir and Cirrus Voices London.

June 2021

This biography generally may be shortened, edited, and excerpted from. An email to sabine-frank@graham-lack.com with any such intention to publish would be greatly appreciated by the composer.