

‘The Platinum Suite’ (2022)

by Seonaid Aitken

Commissioned by The Dionysus Ensemble
for The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee - June 2022

PROGRAMME NOTES

1. Constant

“Change has become a constant” - HM Queen Elizabeth II
(2002 - Golden Jubilee speech to parliament)

The longest reigning British Monarch for 70 years, The Queen has seen an incredible amount of social change. However, she has remained the one constant throughout the lives of our generation and this is musically signified by the recurring 7-crotchet ostinato in this first movement. Opening with sparkling harp and pizzicato strings as a nod to the Crown Jewels, the music is grounded in C major with an innocence to the opening melody denoting the young Elizabeth taking up her duties as head of state. As the piece unfolds, a stately chorale appears but is left hanging unfinished mirroring the next part of The Queen’s journey which is still to be written.

2. Comets

Ice, metal, rock, dust.

German astronomer Caroline Herschel moved to Observatory House in Slough in 1786 and was the first woman in England to have an official government position and to be paid for her work in astronomy. She was also the first woman to discover a comet which is the inspiration for this second movement. Syncopated rhythms, icy *sul ponticello* string effects and gritty bass clarinet sounds set the scene for the comet’s journey through space at its most intense phase. The vocalisation in the middle of the movement is a nod to Caroline’s brief career as a singer when she first moved to England (I imagine her singing to herself during her many long nights of stargazing) and the intensity subsides leaving a ‘tail’ of subdued thematic material.

3. Celebration

Diaspora.

A vibrant celebration of music inspired by the wide range of cultures - from the Commonwealth and beyond - present in the population of Slough. Drawing from Indian Classical music inflections, modes and drones, Pakistani devotional music and Polish folk music, this last movement of ‘The Platinum Suite’ has joy and rhythm at its heart. Tapping on instruments and clapping together projects community spirit with bright melodies and ringing strings bringing a feeling of jubilation.