

Eseld Pierce

talks to Guy Woolfenden about
A Name Perpetual



GW: *Eseld, yesterday we played your lovely piece, A Name Perpetual. I thought it went rather well, but I am more interested to hear your views on the performance, and how you came to receive the commission.*

EP: Well, I was really pleased with the performance and it was a great privilege to have it played at this conference, alongside so many other really fine works. I was commissioned to write the work by Keskerdh Kernow, a Cornish organisation formed

to promote Cornish culture and which, last year, organised the re-enactment of the 1497 Cornish Rebellion, when the people of Cornwall marched to London to protest about excessive taxation. It was commissioned for the Cornwall Youth Wind Orchestra and was premiered at Blackheath Concert Hall in 1997 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of that event.

GW: *Blackheath is where the massacre happened?*

EP: That's right, we know it as the Blackheath Skirmish. The Cornish rebels were attacked by the King's Army, defeated, and the two Cornish leaders were captured and hung, drawn and quartered. On the way to his death, one of them, Michael An Gof stated he would have "a name perpetual and a fame permanent and immortal". Hence the title *A Name Perpetual*.

GW: *And how long did it take you to write it?*

EP: It took about six months to write it, I'd say.

GW: *Well, works for concert band take a long time to write, don't they? They are very labour intensive, with lots of notes in them.*

EP: Yes. And I was quite inexperienced in the medium. I didn't really know anything about wind bands at all.

GW: *It doesn't show! But since writing A Name Perpetual (which is called in Cornish, Hanow a bes vynytha), you have gone on to write a Violin Concerto.*

EP: No, actually I wrote the Violin Concerto the year before. I spent the whole of my second year at the Birmingham Conservatoire on that, and when it didn't get performed, I decided to enter it for the Cornish Young Composers' Competition, which I won in September.

GW: *So you are now officially Cornwall Young Composer of the Year 1997-1998.*

EP: Yes, I think it lasts until next Autumn.

GW: *Congratulations! Have you had any ideas about writing another wind band piece?*

EP: After all the music I have heard at this amazing conference, I would really love to write another piece. There is another wonderful Cornish tale, *The Mermaid of Zen nor*, which I find fascinating and I think would make a really good piece.

GW: *Would it be a traditional three movement piece?*

EP: Yes.

GW: *Fast, slow, fast?*

EP: No, slow, fast, slow.

GW: *That's good - break the mould again! Because what's impressive about A Name Perpetual is that it's one great tranch of music, it's continuous and it tells a story.*

EP: Yes, I quite like the way all the material works the whole way through the piece - it's all based on more or less the same material.

GW: *And I gather that the Band of the Royal Marines has shown an interest in it?*

EP: Yes, they are based at Torpoint, near Plymouth, and they may be coming down to give a concert in the wonderful new Hall for Cornwall in Truro. They seemed interested and it would be an immense honour if they played *A Name Perpetual*.

GW: *Perhaps you can persuade them to try your new piece as well, and you must write lots more for us. I have always wanted to ask you about your name. Is Eseld a variant of Isolde?*

EP: Yes, that's right. It's the Cornish version of it.

GW: *Well, Tristan and Isolde is a Cornish story. So have you any plans to write an opera?*

EP: Not yet! Actually a Cornish writer did contact me the other day, and asked if I wanted to write a Cornish opera with him, but I am really not sure whether I could commit the amount of time needed for an opera yet.

GW: *Well, it might take you more than six months! It took Wagner several years to knock off the libretto of The Ring and Tristan, before he even got going on the music, so I expect you are right!*

It has been a great privilege for me to conduct your piece, and I know the Birmingham Conservatoire musicians were very proud of you. There has been a huge amount of interest in A Name Perpetual, because the most appealing thing about it, I think, is not just the notes or your very professional technique, but that the piece seems to speak from the heart. I believe you have hit on that most important truth: whatever the style, music has got to say something to people, and I'm sure that's what will endear A Name Perpetual to wind band lovers all over the world.