

Ross Edwards

# **Maninyas**

for violin and orchestra  
piano reduction



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## Maninyas - Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1981-8)

Ross Edwards

In creating a sound world uniquely his own, Australian composer Ross Edwards has responded chiefly to his natural environment. In the early 1970s he experienced a compositional crisis where he found he was no longer able to compose and could not even listen to music. Instead he turned to sounds of the Australian bush for consolation with striking creative consequences.

Although composed in 1988, the stylistic origins of *Maninyas* date from the period between 1977 and 1984 when Edwards was living in a coastal village north of Sydney. Composing in this tranquil environment adjoining a national park, two distinct musical styles emerged, each strongly influenced by the sounds and rhythmic patterns of the natural environment.

The first of these is characterised by refined, subtle and austere textures and has come to be known as Edwards' sacred style because of its alignment with certain oriental musical traditions. Here, isolated sound events are conceived for their spatial and timbral intensity. Rather than hearing a logically ordered sequence of events, the listener becomes aware of the uniqueness of each acoustic experience. The beginnings of Edwards' sacred style appear in the early orchestral work *Mountain Village in a Clearing Mist* (1973) and can be identified in such works as *The Tower of Remoteness* (1978), for clarinet and piano, and *Yarrageh* (1989), for solo percussion and orchestra.

The other style is characterised by an abstraction of insect and bird sounds, lively tempi and rhythms, angular pentatonic melodies and simple drone-like harmonies and is now referred to as the *maninya* style. This latter style is developed in the *Maninya* series, a set of vocal and instrumental works written in the years 1981-1986. In describing the compositional process for *Maninyas*, the composer mentions that after several false starts, it was a spontaneous decision to take two pieces from the series and orchestrate them for the present concerto.

But while the outer movements are obviously in the *maninya* style, the central movement consists of a violin cadenza and a slow, serenely elegaic chorale. The first movement of the violin concerto was in fact modelled on *Maninya I* (1981-5), for voice and cello, and the last movement was based on *Maninya V* (1986), for voice and piano. The solo violin in the concerto is an extensive elaboration of the vocal part, although it sounds very different to the original compositions.

According to the composer, 'I had an "up-feeling" in the piece. I'd been writing deeply introspective music and I suddenly noticed the outside world. It was just intensely ecstatic - the sky was blue, the warm air was full of shrieking parrots and an irresistible impulse to dance suddenly took over the music.'

*Maninyas* has a lushness in its almost romantic orchestral writing, a flamboyance in the virtuosic solo part, and an insistent rhythmic energy organised into patterns that suggest ritual activity. The overall effect can be both exhilarating and confronting, and while the work has always been enthusiastically embraced by audiences and musicians, its flouting of the mores of academic modernism confounded the more conservative critics at its early performances.

*Maninyas* was commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation with financial assistance from the Australian Bicentennial Authority, to celebrate the nation's bicentenary in 1988. It was given its first performance in the Sydney Opera House in August of that year. Dene Olding, for whom it was written and to whom it is dedicated was the soloist, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was conducted by David Porcelijn.

Nina Apollonov