



A much commissioned and frequently performed composer, a creative teacher and an original programmer, John Woolrich is an important figure in British musical life.

Woolrich has a practical approach to music making: he founded the Composers Ensemble, and the festival, Hoxton New Music Days.

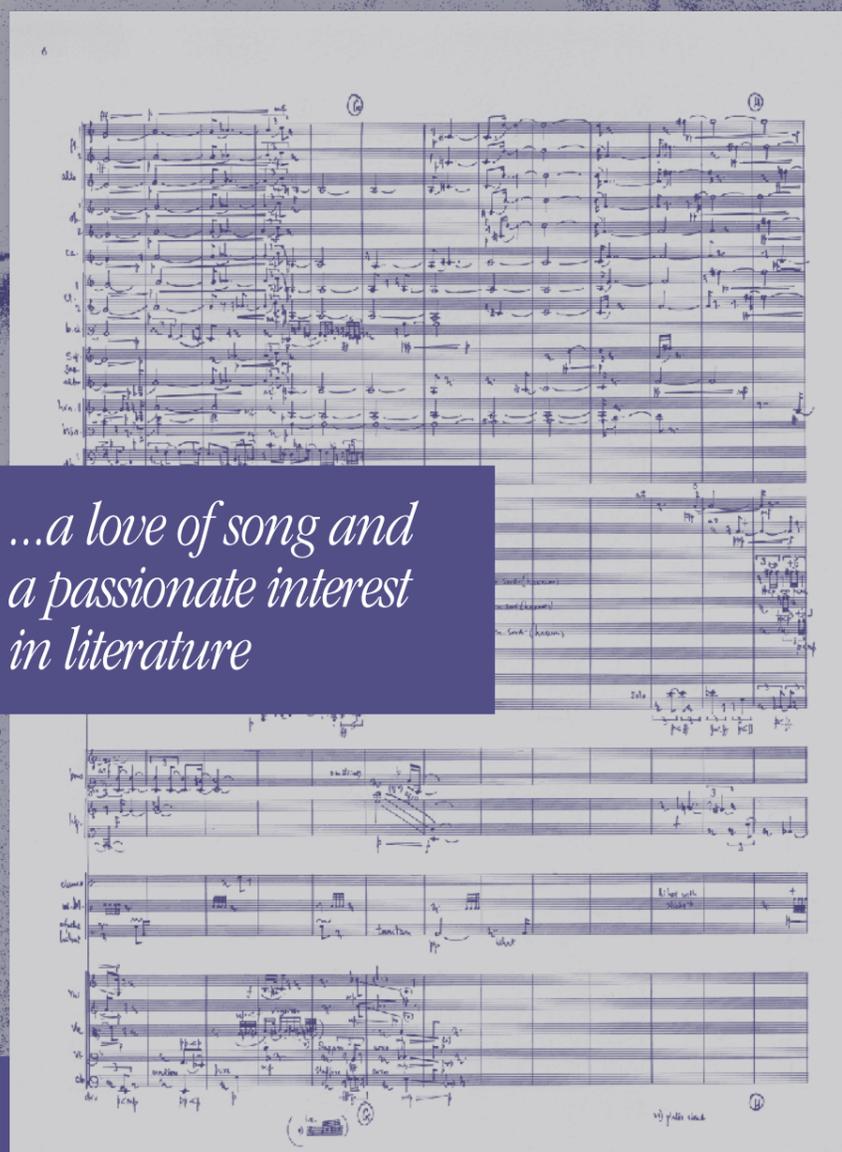
In 1994 he was appointed the first Composer in Association to the Orchestra of St John's, and his successful collaborations with Birmingham Contemporary Music Group led to his appointment as an Artistic Associate in 2002. Since then he has held several important artistic positions with Britten Sinfonia (Associate Composer, 2001-2004), the Aldeburgh Festival (Associate Artistic Director, 2005-2010) and Dartington International Summer School (Artistic Director, 2010-2013). He has also been Lecturer in Music at Royal Holloway, University of London and Professor of Music at Brunel University.

john woolrich

...mastery of creative transcription

Woolrich's reputation was firmly established by the time of the 1986 premiere of *The Barber's Timepiece* (later taken up by Leonard Slatkin, and recorded by BBC SO), and by the 1990s Woolrich had a string of prestigious orchestral commissions which resulted in some of his most important works: concertos for viola, oboe and cello. Other orchestral pieces written during this period include *The Ghost in the Machine* (1990), premiered in Japan with Andrew Davis and the BBC SO, and *Si Va Facendo Nocte*, commissioned by the Barbican Centre. In 2001, Woolrich undertook a music theatre commission from BCMG and Trestle Theatre Company which resulted in *Bitter Fruit*, a masque for mime actors and ensemble. It was performed with Thomas Adès, and later with Pierre-André Valade on an 8-date UK tour.

In the last years Woolrich has composed *Capriccio* for violin and strings, for the Scottish Ensemble, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil* for the London Sinfonietta, a violin concerto for the Northern Sinfonia featuring Carolin Widmann, and *Falling Down*, a double-bassoon concerto for the CBSO and Margaret Cookhorn.



...a love of song and a passionate interest in literature

Selected work highlights

ORCHESTRAL

The Barber's Timepiece (1986) 7 minutes

3(II=picc.III=afi).3(III=ca).3(I+II=Ebcl.III=bcl).ssax.
asax.1.2.cbsn - 5.ptpt.2.3.1 - timp - perc(3);
claves/vibraslap/2/3 hi-hat/2 BD/tamb/4 wdbl/4
c.bells/tam-t/whip/afuche (cabaca)/2 log drum/SD/
6 tpl.bl/jingles - pno - harp - strings

'... cleverly devised, texturally fresh and engaging ...'

FINANCIAL TIMES (PAUL DRIVER), 16 JUNE 1986

Concerto for Cello (1998) 23 minutes

3.2.2.2.cbsn - 4.2.flhn.2.btrbn.1 - timp - perc(2);
3 djun djuns/siz.cym/taiko/tam-t - strings

Concerto for Oboe (1996) 26 minutes

2 picc.1.3.Ebcl.1.cbcl.ssax.2.cbsn - 4331 - timp -
perc(4): metal claves/waterphone/susp.cym/10 or
so tin cans/brake drum/2 tam-t/tgl/anvil/lions roar/
5 scaffold bars/hammer/BD+ped/BD/2 scaffold
feet/4 car wheels/Verdi BD/hi-hat/2 spring coils/
oxygen cylinder/crot - strings

'... it has a distinctive feel, the textures are crisp and vivid, and he has solved the problem of balancing the relatively slender sound of an oboe against a full orchestra in an ingenious and convincing way.'

THE GUARDIAN (ANDREW CLEMENTS), 16 AUGUST 1996

Concerto for Viola (1993) 20 minutes

2(I=picc.II=afi).2.2(II=bcl).2(II=cbsn) - 2200
-perc(2): 12 thai gong/2 tam-t/BD/spring coil -
harp - strings

'... a masterpiece - in any sane society, it would have had fifty performances by now. I can't bear the conclusion without being moved almost to tears.'

COLIN MATTHEWS ON BBC RADIO 3, MAY 2002

Concerto for Violin (2007/8) 21 minutes

1(=picc).1.ca.1.bcl(=Ebcl).1.cbsn - 2201 - perc(1);
mar/high wdbl/hi-hat/sizz.cyms/BD with cyms
attached/BD - strings

Double Mercury (2003) 20 minutes

2 picc.1.2(I+II=ca).1.bcl(=Ebcl).1.cbsn - 4220 -
perc(2): 2 hi-hat/susp.cym/2 clashed cym/2 tam-t/4
wdbl/logdrums/tapan/2 guero/1.2 tom-t/2 BD/lions
roar - harp (with amplification) - strings

The Elephant from Celebes (2005) 20 minutes

picc.2.2.ca.2.bcl.2.cbsn - 4331 - timp - perc(2):
piccolo SD/xyl/hi-hat/2 sleigh bells/cyms/cabasa/
vibraslap/2 bongos/2 splash.cym/BD/tam-t/guero/
SD/Peking Opera gong/8 tom-toms (with a wide
range of pitches)/sandblocks - strings

Falling Down (a capriccio for double bassoon and orchestra) (2009) 15 minutes

3(III=picc).3(III=ca).3(III=Ebcl.III=bcl).2 - 4431 -
timp - perc: susp.cym/hi-hat/clash.cym/lion's roar/
BD - strings

'As well as putting an aural spotlight on the contra's purring/growling timbre, Woolrich sets up playful, wistful conspiracies of sound with its usual neighbours, trombones, tuba and cor anglais. From the opening cascade the balance of vibrant, concertante exchanges between instruments and more contemplative episodes is engaging.'

THE GUARDIAN (RIAN EVANS), 27 JULY 2009

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The Theatre Represents a Garden (after Mozart) (1991) 15 minutes

2222 - 2000 - strings

'... a quarter-hour journey through memories and discoveries of Mozart, mostly fleeting and unfamiliar. The artistry comes in the linking-up, and the delight comes in the confounding of expectations. While the harmonies are largely classical, they often relate to each other in sly modern ways...'

THE INDEPENDENT (ROBERT MAYCOCK), 27 AUGUST 1991

For more information,
or to receive any
scores or recordings,
please contact:

Promotion Department
Faber Music Ltd
Bloomsbury House
74-77 Great Russell St
London WC1B 3DA

Promotion tel:
+44(0)207 908 5311
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www.fabermusic.com

STRING ORCHESTRA

Capriccio (2009)

15 minutes

solo violin and strings

'... pure Woolrich... it careers along from one abrasive musical idea to the next, before gathering itself into a fierce motoric climax and finally collapsing from exhaustion.'

THE GUARDIAN (ANDREW CLEMENTS), 1 JULY 2011

Wolf: Italian Songs (arr. Woolrich) (2009)

9 minutes

solo violin or solo viola and strings

'Individual instruments sang out these tender, teasing love songs as fugitive threads in a cunningly woven tapestry of transcription.'

THE TIMES (HILARY FINCH), 17 JUNE 2010

It is midnight, Dr Schweitzer (1992)

12 minutes

6 vln.2 vla.2 vlc.db

The Street of Crocodiles (2005)

15 minutes

piano, trumpet and strings

Ulysses Awakes (1989) (after Monteverdi)

8 minutes

viola and 10 solo strings (6 vln.vla.2 vlc.db)

'... a powerfully effective piece, which manages to be utterly faithful to the spirit of Monteverdi and yet entirely part of Woolrich's musical world too.'

THE GUARDIAN (ANDREW CLEMENTS), 1 JULY 2011

ENSEMBLE

Caprichos (1997)

7 minutes

chamber ensemble of 12 players: picc(=afl). Ebcl(=bcl).ssax - hn.tpt.trbn - perc(1): mar/BD/ tam-t/2 peking opera gong - pno -vln.vla.vlc.db

Dartington Doubles (1988)

5 minutes

chamber ensemble of 10 players: afl.ssax - hn.tpt - perc(2): boobams/BD - pno - vln.vla.vlc

Envoi (1997)

8 minutes

chamber ensemble of 7 players: afl.bcl - perc(1): mar/log drums/BD - pno -vln.vla.vlc

From the Shadow (1994)

7 minutes

five pieces for 11 players: fl(=picc+afl). cl(=Ebcl+bcl).ssax - hn.tpt - pno -perc(1): 12 or more tin cans/4 car wheels/2 brakedrums/anvil/hi-hat/8 scaffold bars/3 scaffold feet - vln.vla.vlc.db

'... a highly physical little suite in five movements exploiting the resources of junkyard percussion... a seductive interlude...'

THE BIRMINGHAM POST (TERRY GRIMLEY), 31 JANUARY 2000

Going a Journey (2006)

23 minutes

chamber ensemble of 16 players: picc.ca.3(III=bcl). dbl bsn - 2 hn.tba - timp - perc(1): mar/rototoms/ log drum - 2vla.2vlc.db

Lending Wings (1989)

14 minutes

chamber ensemble of 16 players: 1.1.1.1(=cbsn) - 1110 - perc(2): 2 tam-t/12 tpl.bl/12 c.bells/2 hi-hat/2 log drum/2 BD+foot ped - harp - pno - 2 vln. vla.vlc.db

'... not just accomplished in technique but models of unfussy, strongly characterised musical thinking.'

GRAMOPHONE (ARNOLD WHITTALL), OCTOBER 1996

Suite from Bitter Fruit (2002)

20 minutes

chamber ensemble of 16 players: fl(=afl+picc). ob.cl(=bcl).ssax.bsn(=cbsn) - hn.tpt.2 trbn.tba - perc(2): 2 tam-t/2 BD/SD/2 whip/anvil/flexatone/ car wheel/2 peking opera gongs/2 hi-hat/2 susp. cym/2 small crash cym/5 tuned gongs/10 tin cans/ dustbin/wdbl/cuica/mil.dr/rattle/thunder sheet/2 spring coils - vln.vla.vlc.db

CHAMBER

Adagissimo (1997)

8 minutes

piano quartet

The Death of King Renaud (1991)

12 minutes

string quintet: 2 vln.2 vla.vlc

'Pragmatic and scrunchy, mostly tonal and homophonic and free of allegiance to any particular dogma, The Death of King Renaud mused upon an old Norman folk song... an imaginative score.'

EVENING STANDARD (CHRISTOPHER GRIER), 5 NOVEMBER 1991

A Farewell (1992)

10 minutes

cl.vla.pno

In the Mirrors of Asleep (2007)

8 minutes

fl.cl.vln.vlc.pno

The iron cockerel sings (1998)

10 minutes

wind ensemble of 6 players: fl(=picc+afl).ob(=ca). cl.bcl.hn.bsn(=cbsn)

Brahms: Ophelia Songs (arr. Woolrich)

5 minutes

soprano and chamber ensemble of five players: 2 cl - vla.vlc.db

A Presence of Departed Acts (2002)

10 minutes

cl.vln.vlc.pno

'The initial eleven resounding piano chords are recalled throughout the work, sometimes in sorrow, sometimes in anger. The result is an emotionally rewarding piece encompassing the gamut of grieving, from the tranquillity of private lamentation to raw uncomprehending rage.'

THE INDEPENDENT (PAUL CONWAY), 29 MAY 2002

Quick Steps (1990)

6 minutes

wind octet: 2 ob.Ebcl.cl.2 bsn.2 hn

Sestina (1997)

12 minutes

piano quartet

A Shadowed Lesson (1999)

12 minutes

chamber ensemble of 5 players: pno - vln.vla.vlc.db

INSTRUMENTAL

The Kingdom of Dreams (1989)

9 minutes

oboe and piano

Pianobooks I – XIII (1991-2002)

see individual Pianobooks for durations

piano solo

Themes

A number of preoccupations thread through John Woolrich's varied output: the art of creative transcription (*Ulysses Awakes*, for instance, is a re-composition of a Monteverdi aria, and *The Theatre Represents a Garden: Night* – a work for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment – is based on fragments of Mozart), a fascination with machinery and mechanical processes (heard in many pieces including *The Ghost in the Machine* and *The Barber's Timepiece*), and a love of song and a passionate interest in literature (from simple folk poetry to the fantastical visions of E.T.A. Hoffmann).

Andrew Parrott on Woolrich's connection with music of the past

'Music of the past forms a seemingly ever greater part of our present musical life. It is therefore no surprise to find a composer such as John Woolrich exploring corners of this musical treasure store (notably Monteverdi) in his own works. His approach is far removed from the nostalgia, and equally from the purely formal abstractions of others who have drawn inspiration from earlier music; it stands perhaps closest to that of Stravinsky who could re-fashion Pergolesi in his own unmistakable image, with a cocktail of simple arrangement, cunning distortion and pure fantasy. Woolrich's own wry, yet affectionate, re-workings of familiar material belong fully to our own time.'

Joanna MacGregor on Woolrich's rich, constantly-evolving style

'Like all the most interesting composers, Woolrich's work is a kaleidoscopic mixture of spiky wit, lightness, dark menace, on canvases that are hugely ambitious or delicately miniature. I would never predict how a Woolrich piece will unfold; he's the master of surprise and variation. I've premiered some of the pieces from his *Pianobooks*, a wonderful collection of dramatic vignettes... deep in atmosphere, undeniably modern but with the ghosts of the past tiptoeing through them.'

Steven Isserlis on Woolrich's lyricism

'Woolrich really understands the essentially lyric nature of the cello, and writes music for it that is very much the voice of the individual speaking, in contrast to the sometimes violent outpourings of the orchestra. His concerto is not a vehicle for soloistic virtuosity, or instrumental special effects; it is a heartfelt personal confession, tragic but ultimately redemptive – deeply-felt music that really communicates its message.'

Performers

Woolrich's music has been performed by some UK's finest orchestras and ensembles, as well as a host of leading conductors. He has a considerable reputation overseas, especially with *Ulysses Awakes* – for solo viola and strings – which has been heard over 220 times in more than 21 countries.

Orchestras/Ensembles

BBC Symphony Orchestra
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
London Mozart Players
BBC National Orchestra of Wales
London Sinfonietta
Scottish Ensemble
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra
Australian Chamber Orchestra
Zurich Chamber Orchestra
Swedish Chamber Orchestra

Conductors

Richard Hickox
Yan Pascal Tortelier
Andris Nelsons
Andrew Davis
Sakari Oramo
Oliver Knussen
Martyn Brabbins
Thomas Adès

...a fascination with machinery and mechanical processes

