



Anthony Johnson

Making the Music to *Endymion*

Keats's *Endymion* (1818) – in which the shepherd-king Endymion is claimed in love by the Moon – is a youthful poem of dreams within dreams. In part it is an exploration of the connections (as well as the disconnects) between the apparent 'real' and the life of the imagination. But above all it is a celebration of the richness to be enjoyed when the two states of our being harmonize and work together *in tandem*: a conjunction of which Keats, as a medic as well as a poet, was keenly aware.

Approaching the challenge of creating a musical backdrop for *Lausuntaryhmä Endymion's* performance (translated into Finnish by Timo Leinonen), it seemed best to set the poem in a series of 'Chinese boxes', each one mixing fantasy and logic in different ways. On the outside, I took the planetary positions within the twelve houses of Keats's horoscope on the day of his birth (October 31st, 1795) and reset them within the twelve tones of western music. This created an 'Endymion' theme, which could be reiterated in different guises throughout the performance. Because Endymion is beloved by the Moon ('Selene' / 'Cynthia'), the same musical intervals also generated a 'lunar' theme (largely in harmonics) which melded with those of Endymion from afar.

Inside the world of the poem – and making up much of its bulk – is an intense materiality: envisioned by Keats through the sensual perception of the smallest details and imagined for the purposes of the poem within a pantheistic, pastoral world. Unsurprisingly here, the music is mainly forged from elements in the British / Celtic folk tradition, most especially tunes remembered from my youth (when I even worked, briefly, as a shepherd). These include songs – such as 'The Shearing's Not for You' (a.k.a 'Kelvingrove'), which belongs (in different versions, some bitter, some more affirmative) within the hard-won world of pastoral *amour*. The tune also reappears at one point in the performance as a jig. Other dance tunes emerge in the performance as well, such as 'Old Noll's Jig' (for the old priest) and 'The Linden Tree' (both from the seventeenth-century Playford Collection of ancient dances). And elements from all these Chinese boxes mix and match in Keats's *Hymn to Pan* (praised by the poet, William Wordsworth) which forms the centrepiece to Book I of the poem.

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