

SWIFT SEVERN'S FLOOD

Nigel Clarke

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Swift Severn's Flood is written for and dedicated to Luc Vertommen and members of the Brass Band Buizingen based near Brussels, Belgium. The first performance was at the 16th World Music Contest in Kerkrade, Netherlands on 12th July 2009.

Swift Severn's Flood is a musical portrait of William Shakespeare's fictional depiction of Edmund de Mortimer's bloody battle with Owen Glendower (Owain Glyn Dwr) on the banks of the River Severn in Henry IV, Part I. Owen Glendower (c.1359-1415) had legitimate claim to the title Prince of Wales and took up arms against Henry IV to this end. Initially, in 1405, he was successful in his quest and the great castles of Harlech and Aberystwyth were captured, until Prince Henry (eventually to become Henry V) reversed Glendower's success. We do not know what happened to Glendower: English writers of the time say he died of starvation in the Welsh mountains, while Welsh legend has it that he died of old age escaping English retribution.

I developed *Swift Severn's Flood* in a number of workshops and rehearsals with Luc Vertommen and Brass Band Buizingen. This was an example of how the collaborative process between performer(s) and composer affects not only the finished piece of music, but also the performance.

Swift Severn's Flood is in one movement and is both heroic and brooding in nature. The work requires great virtuosity with fast, furious running passages juxtaposed against extreme dynamic contrasts. This is the second of my brass band works in which I have explored a Welsh theme, the first being *Gwennan Gorn* which was written for James Watson and the National Youth Brass Band of Wales and recorded by the Cory Band, conducted by Robert Childs.

The title of this work is derived from a quotation from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, delivered by Hotspur (Henry Percy) :-

*Those mouthed wounds, which valiantly he took
When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition, hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower:
Three times they breathed and three times did they drink,
Upon agreement, of swift Severn's flood;
Who then, affrighted with their bloody looks,
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank,
Bloodstained with these valiant combatants.
Never did base and rotten policy
Colour her working with such deadly wounds;
Nor could the noble Mortimer
Receive so many, and all willingly:
Then let not him be slander'd with revolt.*

Henry IV, Part 1. Act 1, Scene 3