



Beowulf Music

For Guitar and Percussion

Nigel Morgan

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About The Piece

In 1975 Nigel Morgan was commissioned to create the score for a production of the Early English epic poem *Beowulf* at the new National Theatre on London's South Bank. It was a production with life-size puppets by Christopher Leith and a new verse translation by Larry Butler. The score involved two singers as narrators and two musicians playing harp (a copy of the Sutton Hoo instrument) and percussion. In 1978 the composer decided to reinvent the score as an instrumental fantasy: for guitar and percussion. This score was written for the composer/performers Nigel Morgan (guitar) and Patrick Brandon (percussion) and toured extensively as part of a programme featuring their music.

The music does not 'tell the story' of *Beowulf* but rather focuses on events that recur within the poem but in no particular order: the extraordinary fight scenes, the sea journeys; the formal dialogues between king and hero, the death of a hero. Three extracts from the original text are used as an underscore to introduce particular sections.

There are many modern translations of *Beowulf* in print. The composer's favourites are those in verse by Seamus Heaney and in prose (for children) by Kevin Crossley-Holland. On the Internet a good introduction to Beowulf can be found at:

www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~beowulf/main.html

Performance instructions

Performer 1: guitar

Performer 2: marimba, congas, bongos, maraca, guiro, claves.

Dynamics and performance instructions are used only sparingly. When they do appear they should be considered as a guide or starting point, no more. Performers might like to approach their parts as though actors in a drama. The guitar could be said to stand for Beowulf, the heroic male, the forces of good against evil. The percussion part is certainly the stuff of the

monsters, the avenging mother, the dark forces of malignant marsh and mere. However, in the concluding duo for guitar and marimba both instruments weave intricate sea journeys, towards forthcoming fights and a hero's homecoming.

The guitar part is not presented with the composer's fingering. It seeks to encourage performers to create their own. For those reluctant to do this an edited version is available on request. The part is notated an octave higher than it sounds.

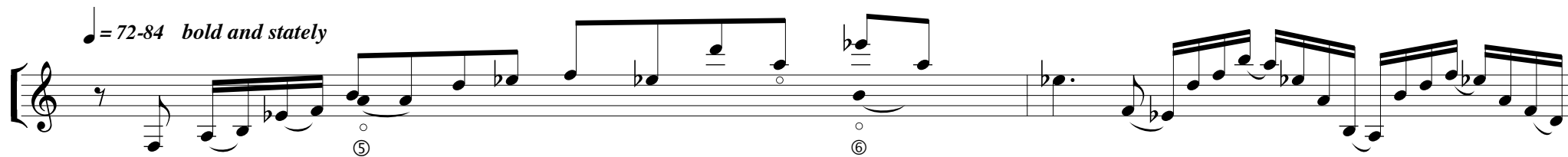
In the original performances the guitar used was an amplified Stereo Ovation classical guitar. Amplification is encouraged in this work because of the extensive use of harmonics and resonances in the guitar part, but in intimate surroundings an unamplified performance can be magical. There is certainly no reason also why a steel-string acoustic guitar could not be used, and even an electric instrument might be considered. What needs to be remembered at all times is that the music should reflect something of the hard, aggressive edge and horror of the *Beowulf* poem. It is by turns chilling, proud, tender, heroic. The performers should also attempt to conjure up something of the age-old heroic style of story-telling which in the case of *Beowulf* was undoubtedly sung accompanied by a small harp.

Note 1 - the player should use alternating thumb and index finger or plectrum to very slightly damp the 6th string, but unevenly to produce a kaleidoscope of harmonics. The notes should sound forced and very deliberate. In these passages, which occur several times throughout the piece, the guitarist is asked to gradually slow down the repeated phrase whilst the percussionist holds the tempo.

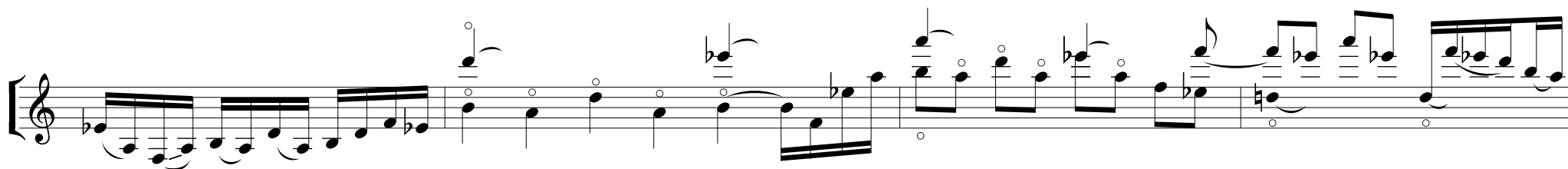
Note 2 - when tuning the 6th string to F the music played by the right hand does not stop. The player should not worry if the retuning is not wholly completed before the entry of the melodic material played on the 4th string. There are several opportunities between each melodic phrase for the bottom F to come gradually to the 'correct' pitch.

A version for harp and percussion is available.

Beowulf Music



Hither have fared to thee far-come men o'er the paths of ocean, people of Geatland; and the stateliest there by his sturdy band



is Beowulf named. This boon they seek, that they, my master, may with thee have speech at will: nor spurn their prayer



to give them hearing, gracious Hrothgar! In weeds of the warrior worthy they, methinks, of our liking; their leader most surely,



a hero that hither his henchmen has led.

A

6

6:4

11

with a premonition of terror

10
16

conga

with the fingers

17

22

Measures 22-26 of a musical score. The system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together, and a few accidentals (flats). The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and rests, often beamed in pairs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

27

Measures 27-31 of a musical score. The system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with eighth notes, some beamed, and a few accidentals. The bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and rests. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

32 **B**

Measures 32-36 of a musical score. The system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff. Measure 32 is marked with a box containing the letter 'B'. The treble staff has a more complex melodic line with many beamed eighth notes and some accidentals. The bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

37

6

42

take maraca

maraca
conga

2
4

47

$\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ **C**

quasi pizz pesante (see note 1)

p i p i p p i p i sim

6 6 6 6 6

2
4

52

proud and resonant
normale

p i p i p

6

10
16

56

60

RH pizz (see note 1)

p i

3

6

bongos
maraca
conga

D

2/4

64

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

take medium to hard beaters

69

3 6

in anger

10/16

72

10/16

pressing forward

on the rim

poco a poco

77

5
4

take claves

guiro
claves
conga

12
16

diminuendo

80

F *heroic*

12
16

as though from a distance

83

②
③

86 **G** *sul pont e sotto voce*

The Weder-Geat lord boldly hastened, biding never answer at all: the ocean floods closed o'er the hero. Long while of the day

gradually closer and closer

vicious

use claves as sticks

90

fled ere he felt the floor of the sea. Soon found the fiend who the flood-domain sword-hungry held these hundred winters,

pizz.

suddenly distant

94 *vicious and aggressive*

greedy and grim, that some guest from above, some man, was raiding her monster-realm. She grasped out for him with grisly claws,

gradually closer and closer

extremely vicious

98

and the warrior seized; yet scathed she not his body hale; the breastplate hindered, as she strove to shatter the sark of war, the linked harness, with loathsome hand.

102

poco a poco

suddenly distant

106 **H**

RH pizz (see note 1)

diminuendo

tasto

110 *bold and stately*

5/4

113

115 *proud and resonant*
(gradually tune ⑥ to F, see note 2)

4/4

117

④

121

④

125

④

Musical staff 125: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes. A circled '4' is above the first measure. A fermata is over the final note of the first system. The second system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes.

129

Musical staff 129: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes. A fermata is over the final note of the first system. The second system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes.

133

Musical staff 133: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes. A fermata is over the final note of the first system. The second system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes.

137

J

Musical staff 137: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes. A fermata is over the final note of the first system. The second system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes. A box containing the letter 'J' is above the final measure of the second system.

141

Musical staff 141: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes. A fermata is over the final note of the first system. The second system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes.

145

149

153

157

loco

161

K

as though from a distance

15
16

equally distant

marimba

use soft mallets

12

bongos
conga

165 *rim* *centre* *gradually louder and aggressive*

169 *centre* *rim* *as loud as possible*

172 *gradually less aggressive but more deliberate*

poco a poco dim.

176 *gently resonant*

marimba

179

Tis time that I fare from you. Father Almighty in grace and mercy guard you well, safe in your seekings. Seaward I go, 'gainst hostile warriors hold my watch.

182

185

188

M*less resonant and more deliberate**hard and aggressive*bongos
conga

191

194

197

Musical score for measures 197-200. Measure 197: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a sharp sign. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measure 198: Similar melodic and rhythmic patterns. Measure 199: Treble clef has a long note with an accent (>) and a slur. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 200: Treble clef has a long note with an accent (>) and a slur. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern.

200

N *gently resonant*

Musical score for measures 200-203. Measure 200: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 201: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 202: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 203: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern.

flowing

marimba

203

Musical score for measures 203-206. Measure 203: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 204: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 205: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern. Measure 206: Treble clef has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass clef has a rhythmic pattern.

206

Measures 206-208 of a musical score. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in treble clef and contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

209

Measures 209-211 of a musical score. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in treble clef and contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

212

Measures 212-214 of a musical score. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in treble clef and contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#). A circled 'O' symbol is placed above the first measure of the upper staff, with the text *bold but resigned* written below it.

215 *dark and ominous*

218

221 *gradually fading into the distance*

224 *a final heroic statement*

l.v.

... he was the mildest, the most loved, the most kind to his own, and most worthy of praise.