

Alec Roth – **ALL SUMMER IN A DAY** – story: Ray Bradbury – lyrics: Jo Shapcott

commissioned by Opera North

first performed by children from England Lane Primary School, Knottingley, Opera North Ensemble, Martin Fitzpatrick (conductor), Nadia Molinari (director), Knottingley High School, 30 April/1 May 1996

revised version: children from Westminster Primary Schools, Imperial College Ensemble, Howard Moody (conductor), Rebecca Meitlis & Ian Spink (directors), Bloomsbury Theatre, London, June 2002

A musical drama for children to perform to adults

SYNOPSIS

From their schoolroom in the glass-domed underground city on Venus, the children stare out at the pale jungle which covers the planet's surface; and at the rain. On Venus the rain never stops – except for just one day every seven years. The children were born here, descendants of the pioneer colonists from Earth, and are too young to remember the sun. But Margot can remember. Her family are recent arrivals from Earth, and because she is different, she is teased and bullied by her classmates.

Today there is great excitement. According to the scientists, today is the day the rain will stop, the clouds will part, and the sun will appear again. In preparation, the children have written poems about what they imagine the sun is like, but they are outshone when Margot recites her “Letter to the Sun”. As the teacher goes off to find the key for the glass doors, the children round on Margot, led by William, the class bully. They attack her, bundling her up and locking her inside a cupboard. Suddenly, the rain slackens and the teacher returns to open the glass doors.

The sun appears and, in a frenzy of excitement, the children run out to play. They feel the power of the sun making them grow, like the amazing vegetation around them. But all too soon the brief summer is over. The rain begins again and they return to the schoolroom, carrying only their memories to sustain them for another seven years. As the glass doors close, they remember Margot. She is released from her cupboard prison. The children hang their heads in shame, conscious only now of what they have done. Margot walks past them to the glass doors and stares out at the rain.

DURATION

ca. 35 minutes

FORCES REQUIRED

All Summer in a Day is designed to be performed by a group of school children (age approx. 8-11) and their teacher. It is also suitable for larger groups in or out of school, such as Junior Choirs or Youth Theatre Groups.

CHARACTERS: A class of young schoolchildren and their teacher

The TEACHER

Spoken Role (adult)

The CLASS

Children's Chorus (optimum number 20-30)

MARGOT, a new member of the class

Medium Voice (d-d')

WILLIAM, the class bully

Spoken Role (strong rhythmic sense required)

(Other small individual parts are taken by members of the Children's Chorus)

RAIN CHORUS (optimum number 30+)

The Rain Chorus represents the sounds of the rain (using body instruments) in Scenes 1 and 3, and may join in singing with the Children's Chorus in Scene 2

INSTRUMENTATION: Chamber Orchestra

Piccolo; 2 Clarinets; 2 Horns; Strings without Violins; 1 Percussion (Vibraphone + Untuned); and Keyboard (the work may also be performed with Keyboard alone, using the vocal score)

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Full Score; Vocal Score; Orchestral Parts

“Based on a short story by Ray Bradbury, adapted by the poet Jo Shapcott, All Summer in a Day is no shallow musical romp. Alec Roth's beautiful music is underlaid by a haunting sadness reflecting the enclosed grey world of children brought up on the planet Venus where it rains continually except for a few glorious hours every seven years . . . an unforgettable experience for performers and audience alike.”

(Pontefract and Castleford Express, 4 May 1996)