

Koblenz Concerto

for two guitars and orchestra

Stephen Goss (2019)

1 Rhine Falls	3'30"
2 Lorelei	5'00"
3 Rhein II	7'00"
4 Castles in the Sky	3'45"
5 Symphony of Light	4'45"
	24'00"

The *Koblenz Concerto* explores the rich history of the local area and its connection with the river Rhine. The solo guitarists journey along the river from the Bodensee to Köln. Along the way, the changing musical landscape is shaped by ancient myths and artworks that were inspired by the river.

The concerto begins and ends bathed in light: J.M.W. Turner's impressions of the Schaffhausen waterfalls and Gerhard Richter's bold stained glass windows in Köln Cathedral. The central movement, and still centre of the concerto, evokes Andreas Gursky's *Rhein II* – an artistically manipulated photograph that reduces the Rhine to calm, static, horizontal bands of colour. Interspersed are two intermezzi. One tells the story of the Lorelei and the other portrays the Romantic castles that adorn the hillsides along the river.

All five movements flow into one another – there are no breaks between movements.

The **Rhine Falls** at Schaffhausen were painted many times by J.M.W. Turner who was endlessly fascinated by the play of light on the effervescent and troubled water as it cascaded over the rocks and drops of the falls. It's here that the soloists' journey begins. The concerto starts in the relative calm and tranquillity of the river, but as we approach the falls the music becomes more animated, eventually submerging the soloists in frantic activity. Once the falls have passed the soloists re-emerge and we return to the peace of the river.

Before long we hear the alluring song of the **Lorelei** on two clarinets, accompanied by glockenspiel and vibraphone. The soloists become distracted and enchanted by this beguiling music. When the Lorelei's song returns it is more compelling, and the soloists become spellbound, unaware of anything around them, intoxicated by the siren's captivating voice. After much struggling, the soloists manage to break the spell, so that the third statement of the Lorelei's song has lost its potency.

The song seems distant as the soloists move to the still waters of **Rhein II**. I use Andreas Gursky's photograph as a blueprint for my structure. The bands of colour that represent the riverbank, the path, the river, the opposite bank, and the sky, provide the proportions and formal divisions for my music. The musical material is designed to evoke the mood and character of the photograph – static and peaceful.

The calm is interrupted by **Castles in the Sky**, a lightly scored scherzando movement that transports us to the world of the romantic castles that decorate the Rhine. I was particularly drawn to the Stolzenfels Castle at Koblenz, a Gothic revival fantasy that reminded me of an Escher painting – an impossible labyrinth of turrets and staircases (that all look similar, but never quite the same) that don't seem to lead anywhere. Here the music goes round and round in circles: the harmony is based on an elaborate design of falling thirds taken from Beethoven. When music returns, it is never quite the same.

Symphony of Light grows out of *Castles in the Sky* as the brass emerge. This final movement is based on Gerhard Richter's *Symphony of Light*, a spectacular stained glass window installed into Köln Dom in 2007. The window is made from 11,263 glass squares in 72 different colours. I work my way through 72 chords, each assigned a colour based on Scriabin's colour octave, 6 chords for each of the 12 chromatic pitches.

My concerto ends with the two soloists treated as a single entity, brought together by the shared experience of their Rhine journey.

"Have you also learned that secret from the river; that there is no such thing as time? That the river is everywhere at the same time, at the source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in the mountains, everywhere and that the present only exists for it, not the shadow of the past nor the shadow of the future."

Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha

"Traditions are rivers which run through history irrigating human experience."

James MacMillan

The Koblenz Concerto was commissioned for SoloDuo and the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie. It is dedicated to Georg Schmitz.

The premiere took place on 7th June 2019 at the Rhein-Mosel-Halle, Großer Saal, Koblenz – Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela (guitars), Mihhail Gerts (conductor), with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie.