

***Lydian Sky (2020)***

by

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'Lydian Sky' – with its contemplation of the cityscape – conveys obliquely a consideration of humankind's collective ambition and the ephemerality of success by which individual observers may be attracted and immersed. The poem, including in its musical context, seeks to achieve this idea primarily through its emphasis on the sensory.

The poem links technically to the diptych 'The Hand' (2018) and 'Hope Shadow' (2019) in that it extends some of the techniques of musical poetry composition explored in those earlier texts. When developing this new poem, I began with a response to David Braid's music for *Lydian Sky* (2003) and the David Braid sextet instrumental recording of 2005, which was notable for the instrument-player idiosyncracies of Mike Murley and others. A creative opportunity arose because the music in the source materials features an overarching structural background timbral direction governed by the harmony and this is made all the more vivid and nuanced through the existing performance to which I was able to refer for inspiration. In the key of the original performance, Murley's tenor saxophone has a bold colour, which includes a ringing high B natural (concert pitch) on the raised fourth of the Lydian mode. I matched vowel sounds to such qualities as well as to the colour modifications that occur as the harmony shifts. For instance I would select a vowel that has an open, brighter sound when the harmony 'opens up', and I would select darker, mixed vowels as the dominance of bright tones diminishes. What emerged from my phonological improvisations was a matching of timbral change that has the potential to be noticeably evident to the listener, perhaps more than in my previous work.

'Lydian Sky' as a poem technically draws out a gentle trajectory of descent through diminishing phonological brightness or vibrancy. It also draws out of the music a particular visual path: over the course of an afternoon, a long, slow quasi-filmic shot pans from above, becomes immersed into the cityscape structures, then pans out again as the colours darken and the eye moves upwards.

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High on high,  
Fiercely shining there in the whites,  
Light on light –  
Whiter than the boreal ice –  
Drifting 'neath clear aether.

After that,  
Radiant structures caught in a broad  
Golden hold.  
Winter turned with gilt flames this time.  
See her blaze: shimm'ring burn.  
Bolder, the light  
Starts to deepen lines that have turned warm.

[MUSIC]

Grander strands -  
Glitt'ring brilliance - see where they stand.  
Northern-formed.  
Buildings find their frosts now thaw:  
Burning squares, like bare flares...

... Warm and tall;  
Softer hues whose rhapsody brought  
Purple there,  
Bluer where this resonant air  
Turns each thread from plain gold.  
Watch how they rise  
Whilst the dusk descends on the wide earth.