



PICKARD

The Flight of Icarus; The Spindle of Necessity; Channel Firing

Christian Lindberg (trombone);
Norrköping SO/Martyn Brabbins
BIS CD-1578 66:24 mins

BBC Music Direct £11.99

A pupil of William Mathias and a great admirer of the symphonism of Robert Simpson, John Pickard is now in his mid-forties. Rhythmically dynamic, passionately concerned with processes of organic growth, his music is grounded in a much-expanded tonality that encompasses a huge and stimulating harmonic spectrum. Works for piano, string quartet and brass band have been recorded, but Pickard is a born master of the orchestra, so BIS's imaginative decision to make this disc deserves high praise.

Though not literally programmatic, the three featured works respond to extra-musical stimuli. Greek myth (but also the terrible toll in life of the manned space programme) inspires the bravura full-orchestral toccata *The Flight of Icarus* (1990); Plato's speculations on the afterlife of good and bad souls, and the shape of the cosmos, shape *The Spindle of Necessity* for trombone, strings and percussion (1998), a richly satisfying vehicle for the incredible virtuosity of Christian Lindberg. There's often a Holstian quality of vision to Pickard's work: he does interstellar distances superbly. But the 1993 *Channel Firing*, after Thomas Hardy's great poem on the persistence and futility of war, strikes deepest. Cast in funeral-march mode, with *Götterdämmerung* reminiscence, this is one of the finest British works of the 1990s. Pickard's deep appreciation of Havergal Brian is inescapably

apparent in the awesome final climax. A marvellous disc, urgently recommended. *Calum MacDonald*
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BBC Music Magazine August 2008