

Written on Skin

Opera in Three Parts

Text for music by
MARTIN CRIMP

after the anonymous 13th century *razo*
GUILLEM DE CABESTANH – *Le cœur mangé*

Set to music by
GEORGE BENJAMIN

TEXT FOR MUSIC

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De Nederlandse Opera (Amsterdam),
Théâtre du Capitole (Toulouse),
Royal Opera House Covent Garden London,
Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*

Commissioned by the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence,
De Nederlandse Opera (Amsterdam),
Théâtre du Capitole (Toulouse),
Royal Opera House Covent Garden London,
Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

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to Bernard Foccroulle, general director of the Festival
d'Aix-en-Provence, for his support throughout the gestation
and composition of this work.

Duration of opera: c. 95 minutes

The first performance was given at
the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence,
with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra,
conducted by the composer,
at the Grand Théâtre de Provence, on 7 July 2012

The cast was:

Christopher Purves (The Protector)

Barbara Hannigan (Agnès)

Bejun Mehta (Angel 1 / The Boy)

Rebecca Jo Loeb (Angel 2 / Marie)

Allan Clayton (Angel 3 / John)

Katie Mitchell (stage direction)

Vicki Mortimer (sets and costumes)

Jon Clark (lighting)

Characters

THE PROTECTOR

Baritone

AGNÈS, his wife

Soprano

ANGEL 1 / THE BOY

Counter-tenor

ANGEL 2 / MARIE

Mezzo-soprano

ANGEL 3 / JOHN

Tenor

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PART ONE

I CHORUS OF ANGELS

- ANGELS 2 + 3 Strip the cities of brick
dismantle them.
Strip out the wires and cover the land with grass.
- ANGEL 2 Force chrome and aluminium back into the earth.
- ANGEL 3 Cancel all flights
from the international airport
- ANGELS 2 + 3 and people the sky with angels.
- ANGEL I Erase the Saturday car-park from the market-place
rub out the white lines.
- ANGELS 2 + 3 Shatter the printing-press.
Make each new book a precious object
written on skin.
- ANGEL I Make way for the wild primrose and slow torture
of criminals.
Fade out the living; snap back the dead to life.
- AGNÈS and the PROTECTOR are revealed/enter.*
- ANGEL 2 The woman?
- ANGEL I Was married age fourteen.
Can't write. Not taught to read.
Grey eyed. Intelligent. No children.
- ANGEL 3 And the man?
And the man?