Programme note

**Illuminations - 12 Pieces for Piano after Rimbaud (1996, revised 2006)**

**by Douglas Finch**

1. Mystic

2. Flowers

3. Marine

4. After the Deluge

5. Dawn

6. Vigils

7. Cities

8. Night

9. Fairy

10. War

11. Genie

12. Departure

The first version of *Illuminations* was written in 1996, and dedicated to my Canadian piano teacher, William Aide. The pieces were influenced by Arthur Rimbaud’s prose poems of the same name, (1872-75), though rather obliquely. The titles, all but one taken from Rimbaud, were added as an afterthought when revising the pieces in 2006, ten years after they were first written. The revision was extensive, with two being entirely dropped in favour of new pieces (4 and 8), and several being extended considerably.

In his brief career, Rimbaud displayed a powerful ability to convey spiritual experience through the sensual qualities of language – a language full of cryptic symbolism, puns and, above all, voluptuous sound – conjuring up events and images which are dream-like and hallucinatory, such as the numinous vision in ‘Mystique’: *La douceur fleurie des étoiles et du ciel et du reste descend en face du talus, comme un panier, - contre notre face, et fait l’abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous.* (The blossoming gentleness of the stars and the sky and all the rest descends on the grassy bank like a basket of flowers – just above our face, and makes the abyss fragrant and blue beneath.) Translation by Louise Varèse, New Directions Publishing, 1946.

The title ‘*Illuminations*’ is ambiguous. The English connotation, from ‘illuminated manuscripts’, would imply that the words transcend their medium and become pictures. (Nick Osmond, edition of ‘Illuminations’, Athlone Press). But the French meaning is of sudden moments of enlightenment, or inspiration – which is closer to what I mean to convey in using it as a title for this set of pieces.

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