

Fra Duri Scogli for chamber ensemble (2003)

Don Paolo di Firenze (c.1355-1436/7) was a Florentine abbot of some renown. Besides thirteen madrigals, he left 40-50 ballate and two sacred works. He is also known for a text on music theory.

His work, *Fra Duri Scogli*, came to my attention via some research into the music of *Ars Subitior*, itself a development of the *Ars Nova* period. The original madrigal was vocal and written in two parts with an optional counter-tenor (originally in G). The text talks of being lost, rudderless in the stormy sea of human existence, where only those who are already tried and tested are given any hope. The rest are allowed to flounder. But, says the poet, if ever he survives he will exact his revenge on his tormentors.

Influenced by the text, particularly the idea of the storm followed by uneasy calm, I began to look at the original melody in order to find intervallic 'corners' I could exploit in my own stylistic way. Gradually these areas become more dominant in the musical fabric and, eventually, act as wedges to break apart the original. The work may therefore be seen as a musical hybrid of both myself and Don Paolo, each of which might be seen as foil to the other.

Fra Duri Scogli sanç'alcun governo
mi trovo, lasso, in tempestoso mare;
perdut'ho ll'orça e son a meço 'l verno.

Naufragando come huom suol fare
di scorpio quella casa mi spaventa
che ssuol'a più periti aiuto dare.

Ma se Fe' ha piatà, chi ne tormenta
dolente fia assai, né mai contenta.

*(Among hard rocks and rudderless
I find myself, alas, in stormy seas;
my bowlines lost, and winters raging.*

*Shipwrecked, as men are wont to be,
that nest of scorpions terrifies me,
helping only those more tried and tested*

*But if faith shows mercy, my tormentors
shall ever rue, and never feel contented.)*