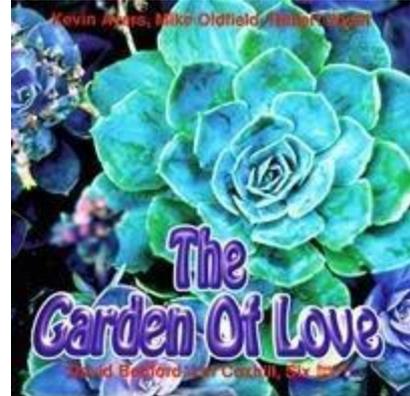


Pop and Avant Garde Mixed: David Bedford's *The Garden of Love* (1970)

by John France

Introduction

One musical anniversary that will probably pass unnoticed in 2020 is the half-centenary of David Bedford's (1937-2011) remarkable *The Garden of Love*. Yet, this is a period piece that exemplified much that was happening in the world of music in 1970. Two things are self-evident in even the briefest study of this work. First, the prevalence of 'avant-garde' techniques of the 1960s, including improvisation, graphic scores, and indeterminacy, and secondly, it is an excellent example of a crossover work between 'classical' music and the world of 'progressive rock.' Other instances of this genre include Jon Lord's Concerto for group and orchestra (1969) which was a collaboration between Malcolm Arnold and Deep Purple, Emerson, Lake and Palmer's recreation of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1971) and Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1974).



The Work

The Garden of Love is an experimental piece of musical theatre scored for an ensemble of flute, clarinet, horn, trumpet, double bass, dancers, and 'pop group'. There is a diverse group instruments used by the group members: electric guitar, vocals, electric piano, organ, electric bass guitar, tenor and soprano saxophones, Swanee whistle, Indian bird warblers, drums, and '6 beautiful girls (for dancing and turning the pages)'. The score carries the following dedication: Susan, Sarah, Tammy, Chloe, David Atherton, all at Blackhill [Enterprises], Kevin Ayers, Lol Coxhill, Mike Oldfield, Robert Wyatt and the little man in the soiled, lemon coloured suit.' It is to be wondered who this last-named individual was. The other names were Bedford's family, the work's conductor, and the personnel of the Whole World Band.

In *The Garden of Love*, Bedford has created a 'semblance of music theatre' (Hall, 2015, p.87) to match the nature of 'pop concerts' at that time. He needed to generate 'a visual dimension' as well as interesting music. The piece is about 20 minutes long and is divided into two discrete parts. The first seventeen minutes is instrumental. Here, the ensemble plays music which has been 'written' for them by the composer, but also introduces improvisation either individually or as a group. This 'avant-garde' section of the music, which is in Bedford's 'concert hall style', comes to a full stop, before the final part of the work introduces the inimitable voice of Kevin Ayers singing William Blake's eponymous poem which is the heart and goal of the work. This text was taken from his collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience* first published in 1789.

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.
And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
So, I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

This poem is traditionally seen as pointing up some of the disagreements that Blake had with the religious establishment. Despite his deep faith, Blake considered that Christianity (or religion in general) should be about love, freedom, and joy, rather than man-made rules and restrictions. Especially destructive is the propensity of organised religion (of any faith) to punish sinfulness at the expense of inculcating religious understanding. The priests, ministers and holy men and women have destroyed what they ought to have been encouraging: *The Garden of Love* has turned into a graveyard.

There is an unresolved chronological issue with *The Garden of Love*. Despite the date of composition 'officially' being 1963, there is much to indicate that the music may have been subject to considerable revision. This assumption can be made because the 'pop' element is so perfectly crafted for Kevin Ayers and his artistic parameters. His musical style came to the fore in the experimental days of the progressive rock and psychedelic movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ayers and his Whole World Band did not form until early 1970 specifically for the album *Shooting at the Moon*. Clearly, David Bedford would have been aware of Ayer's performances in the Canterbury Scene bands such as The Wilde Flowers and Soft Machine, but the archetypal vocal sound envisaged for the present work did not appear on the rock scene until *Joy of a Toy* issued in 1969. Bedford provided the musical arrangements for these above-named albums, as well as playing organ and other keyboard instruments.

Analysis

The most significant study of David Bedford's *The Garden of Love* is contained in the remarkable *British Music Now* (1975, p.138f). Carolyn Stokoe notes that this is the 'most extensively improvisational work' yet composed by Bedford. Despite this freedom, she explains that 'the chance elements operate within a tightly organised structure.' Much of the score is written in 'semi-determinate notation' of various kinds including graphics, conventional staves with time signatures and the composer's trademark space-time notation on between three to five lines. The last-named technique simply allocates 'seconds' to given musical events, before passing on to the next one. The overall impression is that 'the improvisational character of the piece dominates the atmosphere throughout.'

Stokoe notes that the formal structure of the work features 'Six Imitation Games.' The first five are scored for several different instrumental combinations, while the sixth combines all the 'games' together. This leads into a 'massive improvisational climax' involving the whole ensemble.

The progress of the work is relatively straightforward, the 'games' being simple in concept. Often a single instrument introduces a phrase of music, either improvised or written in standard notation. The other players would imitate or 'comment' upon it to the best of their ability. Clearly the instrumental timbres did not always allow this to happen. David Simmons (Musical Opinion November 1970) suggested that this improvisation had some remarkable outcomes with 'brass...competing with drums, or more feasibly an anxious saxophone enjoyed struggling against the flute...' After a massive climax, and a 'lunga pausa' the music moves to Kevin Ayers' performance of the Blake song. The dancers and the audience were invited to participate in these revels in 'informal club style.' (Stokoe, op.cit.). The score actually calls for the dancers to join in during the 'Imitation Games' by 'playing' the piano and organ.

The formal structure of *The Garden of Love* would become a model for further works including *Nurse's Song with Elephants* and *Sad And Lonely Faces*.

Premiere

David Bedford's *The Garden of Love* was premiered at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank, on Saturday, 26 September 1970. Other works heard that evening were Don Banks's *Meeting Place* for jazz combo, instrumental ensemble and electronics and John Tavener's *A Celtic Requiem* featuring vocal and instrumental groups and 'ritualistic enactment of children's games.'

The performers participating in *The Garden* featured Kevin Ayers and the Whole World Band as well as a group of five players drawn from the London Sinfonietta. The Whole World Band included Kevin Ayers (vocals) and Mike Oldfield (guitar), Lol Coxhill (saxophone) and Robert Wyatt on drums. David Bedford played keyboards. The entire ensemble was conducted by David Atherton. As noted above, the score also called for '6 beautiful girls (for dancing and page turning).' For information, the orchestral soloists were, Sebastian Bell (flute), Antonia Cook (horn), Antony Pay (clarinet), Peter Reeve (trumpet) and Daryl Runswick (double bass).

The following Monday, the *Daily Telegraph* (28 September 1970) reviewer (A.E.P.) was impressed with the entire concert. He considered that 'The London Sinfonietta's new season of concerts was launched with spectacular impact...[with] a programme planned and executed with characteristic flair...' He noted that the first section of *The Garden* 'formed a preparation for the "folksy jamboree" of Kevin Ayer's song. It is not how I would have described this softly psychedelic vocal number. The early section consisting 'predominately of improvised imitation games involving different pairs of players, singly and in concert.' A.E.P. felt that these 'games might need to be more tightly controlled for they seemed too protracted and their musical relevance was obscure.'

Max Harrison reviewed the concert for the *Musical Times* (November 1970). He began by noting the 'violent' gestures featured in Bedford's new piece. He remarks on the 'diverse media involved' that 'are somewhat beyond normal orchestral resources.' He concludes by proposing that 'if it is true that on the contemporary scene nothing succeeds like excess, then this score's densely matted later stages - with random tone-clusters on electric organ and electric piano, the pop group's amplification remorselessly close to ear-splitting level, the soprano saxophonist doodling a bad imitation of John Coltrane, and many other felicities - must be accounted a triumph.'

An extensive review was submitted to *Musical Opinion* by David Simmons (November 1970). He considered that *The Garden of Love* was 'a blend of...'noise' and repose, but all united in a spirit of communality.' He noted that the orchestral players did not wear 'tails'. This, he felt, was allowable as 'the result of this piece was to produce a farrago of concert gaiety.' The 'theatrical' aspect of the work was 'not for the staid or the prim, [but] was still at best so well-mannered in its deliberate anarchies, and at worst, such as when the dollies (sic) came on with or without Indian bird warblers, horribly self-conscious.' His conclusion insisted that there were 'many moments of infectious delight in the whole [piece] and these against all suggested probability were genuinely musical on impulse.' It is interesting that Simmons did not mention Kevin Ayers' vocal contribution to this work.

Anecdotally, the Musical Director (not the conductor) of the London Sinfonietta was so incensed by the 'pop' music element of *The Garden of Love*, that he walked out of the Queen Elizabeth Hall. He was joined, apparently, by several members of the audience. (VP180CD Liner notes). It is also reported that during the 'dancing girls' takeover of the instruments, the band stopped for a beer break.

Recording

The Garden of Love had to wait until 1997 before a live recording of the 1970 premiere concert was released. It was issued by the Voiceprint label (VP180 CD). This was a mini disc and included only the present work. It has long been deleted. Fortunately, the album has been uploaded to [YouTube](#). I was unable to find a review of this CD.

Conclusion

I doubt that *The Garden of Love* will receive many further performances. Even in our extremely permissive age it is unlikely that 'six beautiful girls' cavorting on the concert platform and a rock band drinking ale 'on stage' would tick all the P.C. boxes for artistic funding. But the most important reason that it will fail to be revived is that it is clearly a work of its time. Even Kevin Ayers' distinctive voice is

now recalled only by greyheads and baby boomers. The modes of execution and composition are no longer seen as relevant. The avant-garde experiments of the 1960s and 1970s have been cast to the wind. Nowadays, Einaudi and his acolytes rule the roost with their simplistic, insipid, vapid, neo-pop. Yet, for listeners 'brought up' on the imaginative excesses of this vibrant period, David Bedford's *The Garden of Love* will hold some continuing fascination and collective memories. Finally, Blake's text of Kevin Ayers' song is a relevant today as it was in 1970 and in 1798.

Brief Bibliography

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Stokoe, Carolyn in *British Music Now: A Guide to the Work of Younger Composers* ed. Lewis Foreman (London, Paul Elek, 1975)

The pages of *The Daily Telegraph*, *Musical Times*, *Musical Opinion* etc.