

burr

(programme note for first performance, 2002)

While I am delighted that this piece is being brought to life today by Mark and Jim, I now find myself in the strange position of attempting to dream up – almost five years after the event, and before hearing the piece – a creation myth for my own handiwork. Rather than consulting sketches for the work (they're here somewhere) or trying to think myself into whatever state I was in back then (revisionist), I'll take the coward's way out and mention some of the meanings packed into the short word used for title, which may well have affected the course of the composition.

Words tell most about words:

A circle of light round the moon, or a nebulous disk of light enfolding it.

A rough ridge or edge left on metal or other substance after cutting, punching etc.

A rough sounding of the letter 'r'; hence a rough or dialectal utterance, to speak with rough articulation.

The Banyan tree.

A whetstone.

From the above list, please choose your own red herrings.

If we change 'dialectal' to 'dialectical' in the above, it may give a good clue to what the piece is 'about'.

burr is the first—and the only completed—piece in a series called Three Shadow Pastorals, all duets for a clarinetist and viola player. The other two, *rime* and *blaze*, are dedicated to the memory of my mother and John Coltrane respectively, *burr* to that of Morton Feldman.