

"*Fauvel's Rondeaux* for clarinet, violin, and piano (which also exists in a version for clarinet doubling bass clarinet) is in the form of a gigantic rondo in which the opening music acts as the ritornello material, and the episodes that constitute the main part of the work, instead of being in contrast with the main idea (as in the classical rondo), form the substance of the music. To some extent, the trio is a satellite work of my ballet *Edward II* (1994–1995) first performed by the Stuttgart Ballet in 1995. In the ballet, which was choreographed by David Bintley, a kind of commentary, sometimes ironic, sometimes savagely direct, is provided by occasional appearances of a troupe of entertainers (jugglers, clown, musicians) led by Fauvel.

The origin of the work lies in the ancient *Roman de Fauvel*, in which a donkey (Fauvel) becomes Lord of the World, a kind of Lord of Misrule. The political and religious satire, often scurrilous and crude, allowed an expressive extension of the world of the English and French courts in the ballet, and directly related to Edward's tragic fate in that his assassin enters as Fauvel, with an ass's head, and reveals himself as Lightborn, the murderer, only after a short while. In the trio, various sections from the ballet are drawn upon, including some crudely playful dances performed by the troupe of wandering players. The final, intensely chromatic section is taken from the evil *pas de deux* performed by leading conspirators against Edward, his wife (now his widow) Isabella, and her corrupt lover Mortimer.

The contrast between the playful nature of the court entertainment and the gradually darkening world of conspiracy, lust, and power-mania, which slowly develops in the ballet, is the kind of changing character that has long fascinated me, and it was this that I wanted to explore further in this trio. There are, of course, substantial sections that are different to anything in the ballet, but much of the material of these is derived (retrospectively, as it were) from the music of the final *pas de deux*. The work is about eighteen minutes in length. It was commissioned by the Verdehr Trio and is dedicated to them."

—John McCabe

The world premiere of *Fauvel's Rondeaux* was on July 8, 1997 at the Wharton Center at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

John McCabe (1939–2015) had a dual career as composer and pianist that established him as one of the leading British musicians of his generation. Born in Huyton, Liverpool, he received his early education through home schooling and subsequently at the Liverpool Institute. Further study took him to the Royal Manchester College of Music and Munich for studies in composition with Thomas Pitfield and Harald Genzmer.

McCabe was a prolific composer from an early age, having written several symphonies by the age of eleven. However, his early works were largely overlooked because he was perceived as a pianist rather than a composer. It was not until the 1990s and the success of his piano work *Tenebrae* that he came to be viewed primarily as a composer.

McCabe composed in almost every genre, though large-scale forms lie at the heart of his catalog with seven symphonies, twenty-four concertante works, and eight ballets. His numerous concerti include four for piano; three for violin; one each for viola, harpsichord, oboe d'amore, clarinet, trumpet, and flute as well as two double concertos and the *Concerto for Orchestra*. His chamber music includes seven string quartets. Solo instrumental music was mainly written for the piano and included thirteen studies for the instrument and the *Haydn Variations* written to commemorate the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of Haydn's birth.

As a pianist, McCabe had a wide range of repertoire from pre-classical to modern composers. He specialized in twentieth-century music, particularly by English composers, and also the music of Haydn. McCabe gave the UK premiere of John Corigliano's *Piano Concerto*, and his recording of Haydn's complete piano sonatas was described by *Gramophone* as "one of the great recorded monuments of the keyboard repertoire."

McCabe authored several musical monographs on the music of Haydn, Bartok, and Rachmaninoff. He also wrote a book on the contemporary English composer Alan Rawsthorne.

McCabe was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1985 for his services to music. He won the Classical Music Award at the 59th Ivor Novello Awards, and he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Liverpool.

McCabe was pianist-in-residence at University College, Cardiff and later served as principal of the London College of Music where his effort to enhance the college's profile resulted in its merging with Thames Valley University. He also held visiting professorships at universities in Melbourne, Australia, and Cincinnati, Ohio in the United States. He had a long association with the Presteigne Festival in England.