

*The Long Negation* is a setting of a poem by Peter Abbs. The text is presented by two performers – one speaks, the other, a mezzo soprano, sings, and both are accompanied by a small instrumental ensemble comprising clarinet, viola and piano. My own ensemble, 'Pedlar's Dream', gave the premiere in 2011.

The piece is partly a response to hearing Brahms's Two Songs with viola, op.91, two or three years ago. These fine, intensely beautiful songs should be more widely known, and it seemed a good idea to put them at the centre of a programme featuring the Brahms clarinet/viola sonatas, plus something new. 'New', I thought, should mean both text and music, so I asked my friend the poet Peter Abbs to consider writing a response to one or both of the poems set by Brahms. In the end, he chose to respond to the second song, a setting of Geibel's 'Geistliches Wiegenlied' (or 'spiritual lullaby'). Geibel's text itself drew on a Spanish original from the late Renaissance/early Baroque, so *The Long Negation* has a long history behind it. . .

The music 'responds' to Brahms through adding a clarinet to the mezzo/viola/piano combination, and explores the new possibilities afforded by having the text spoken as well as sung. The presence of speech reflects the poem's melancholy sense of loss:

Came no archangel. Came no cherubim.

No *Gloria in Excelsis*.

'No Gloria', insists the speaker. Yet the singer is allowed a long, almost ecstatic melisma on the word 'Gloria'. . .

Julian Broughton, March 2012