

THE ANCIENT MARRINER
(originally written for Sir Neville Marriner's 75th
birthday, and altered for his memorial service on 19th
November 2016, when it was read by Richard Suart)

It is an Ancient Marriner
Who conducteth one in three.
The other two just sit there
Pretending not to see.
Musicians sometimes do this –
They slump, without emotion
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.
“We fear thee, Ancient Marriner,
We fear thy skinny hand.
It waves about from side to side
Controlling all the band.”
For music can be deadly –
Ask any second fiddle
You dream you're playing Mendelssohn
And wake up in the middle.
They force you to play Hummel,
And even Humperdinck
And Water Music everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.
And so it was that Neville
Set out upon his own –
He thought “I'll be a Devil –
Pass me that telephone –
I'll phone the best musicians
And see what fruits that yields”.
The fruits were the Academy
Of St. Martin in the Fields.
A band with no conductor –
Now, that was something new
Not picked for looks, but talent –
They were a ghastly crew.
They played, rehearsed, rehearsed some more –
However long it took.
And sometimes they got paid
A fee from Molly's blue maths book.

The world had never heard the like
To concert halls they'd flock,
To hear the Ancient Marriner
Impaled on the Baroque.
They gained John Gray, George Malcolm,
All players of renown
Along came Raymond Keenlyside
And then Iona Brown.
"Iona Brown, violin" on every
Poster did foretell.
The other fiddlers said
"I own a brown violin as well".
And now 'twas like all instruments
And now a heavenly flute
And now it is an angel's song
That makes the heavens be mute.
No-one had heard musicians
As wonderful as these
So Neville was invited
To conduct Los Angeles.
He went to Minnesota,
He played Carnegie Hall
(Though around his burning hotel suite
There hung a smoky pall).
He made a lot of C.D's –
More than anyone.
So many that the company
Shouted "Oh, Well Done".
We still hear thee, Ancient Marriner,
But you've left us all forlorn,
And sadder – so much sadder
We will rise the morrow morn.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Stilgoe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R'.

RICHARD STILGOE

26 February 1999, amended 20 October 2016