

2018 Creative Works Award
Second Symphony – The Elements (Composition)
Professor Hendrik Hofmeyr

Hendrik Hofmeyr is Professor and Head of Composition and Music Theory at the South African College of Music, UCT. He has been described as the most performed and commissioned composer of classical music in South Africa, and has won several national prizes and awards, as well as three international competitions, among them the prestigious Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition.

Hofmeyr's *Second Symphony – The Elements* was premiered in 2017 by the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Conrad van Alphen. The work explores the notion postulated by the ancient Greeks that everything in the universe is constituted of four basic elements, namely air, earth, water and fire. As in mediaeval metaphysics, the elements are also treated as symbols of human conditions. For Hofmeyr, the challenge was to find musical materials that corresponded not only to the physical, but also to the emotional, psychological and symbolic connotations of these elements, and to weld them into a work which could be appreciated also at the level of absolute music. The result is an essay in the creation of monumental structure from the smallest particles of the musical fabric, mirroring the concept of physical and spiritual universes evolved from the elements. This is achieved by creating a strikingly original musical language in which a myriad micro-activities accrue to form vast textural and architectural complexes. While such practices were not uncommon in atonal works, their deployment in an expanded tonal context, and in conjunction with symphonic thematicism, is extremely novel.

The symphony is usually regarded as the apex of instrumental writing in any composer's oeuvre, and this, Hofmeyr's first purely orchestral symphony, is the first major symphony to emerge in South Africa in more than 30 years. The work, while demanding both in terms of execution and appreciation, was well received by the public and critics, and was described by the Cape Times as a most important addition to the South African symphonic repertoire.