**Editorial**

Graham Hair

*A Companion to recent Scottish Music* covers the period from about 1950 to the present (2007). This is what we mean by ‘recent’.

It’s more difficult to describe exactly what we mean by ‘Companion’. For a start, it is not a dictionary or an encyclopaedia. It is not a reference book. It is not a comprehensive account of a repertoire of musical works which the contributors consider to be important, although a number of chapters deal with such works.

It attempts to give the flavour of a range of musical events which have taken place in Scotland during the period since 1950, and to say something about the persons and institutions whose work contributed to those events. ‘Persons’ include composers, performers, entrepreneurs, musicologists and listeners, amongst others. Under ‘Institutions’ we include large and powerful public institutions such as the BBC, the Conservatories and the Universities, but also choirs, bands and ensembles. We also include interviews with various individuals of all ages from octogenarians to young people in their twenties.

What do we mean by ‘Scottish Music’? Whatever definition we adopt will be controversial, so we have taken our cue from abroad: from Canadian musician Jamie Syer, who visited Scotland while this volume was being written, and thus decided that ‘Scottish Music’ means music made by anyone ‘who lives in Scotland or calls Scotland home’.

Reluctantly, we have restricted ourselves to what in some quarters might be called ‘classical music’ or ‘concert music’, on the grounds that folk music, rock, jazz and other forms of music are already extensively covered in other volumes. But we have not been too legalistic or cut-and-dried about this definition. Many works of ‘classical’ music draw on some of these other forms, sometimes extensively, and one chapter deals particularly with this phenomenon.

More to follow!
Acknowledgements

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# A Companion to Recent Scottish Music: 1950 to the Present

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A Reel of Seven Fishermen – Peter Maxwell Davies

Kenneth Dempster

Introduction

When Max came to live in Orkney during the early Seventies, he joined a community and connected to a culture and environment that contained deep resonances of an ancient Nordic culture. His new homeland encouraged a rejuvenation of his musical vocabulary. Much of his earlier work was chamber music of a startling and uncompromising originality. Almost instinctively he came to Orkney; its traditions full of ancient myths and rituals, embraced by a landscape so open, dramatic and colourful, that many more varied and vivid works would flow from his pen. From the late-Seventies came a series of orchestral works; symphonies, concertos and choral works that demonstrate the technical rigour and vivid imagination of a composer at the height of his expressive powers. Other works, like An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise portray quite directly and autobiographically his new friends and experiences. But above all else Max met George Mackay Brown; a man who became his close friend and soul-mate; whose poems, short stories and novels have been a constant source of inspiration to him; and who helped to co-found one of the UK’s most unique and innovative arts festivals, the St. Magnus Festival.

In examining Max’s work, A Reel of Seven Fishermen, commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony through the generosity of the Ralph I. Dorfman Commissioning Fund, several different strands come together:

• Composed in 1998, it is one of the later orchestral works produced during this 25-year ‘intensive orchestral period’ and displays his mature orchestral technique combined with clear structural thinking;

• It is a work that illustrates how subtly he has distilled the very essence of Scottish traditional music, culture, landscape, light and weather patterns into the fabric of his compositional technique;

• It is also a work that enables us to view his music more generally in the context of some of his most powerful influences, particularly those of Sibelius, Britten and Mahler. In order to illustrate this more fully I have included two ‘perspectives’, each of which focus on a work that resonates clearly with Max’s own approach, be it in relation to form (Sinfonia da Requiem – Britten) or motivic strategies (Symphony No. 9 – Mahler);

• Premiered two years after the death of George Mackay Brown - on 7th May 1998 in Davies Symphony Hall by the San Francisco Symphony (the first performances were conducted by Max himself) - the work stands as a very personal memorial to a close friend and great author. Being inspired by (but not actually setting) George’s poem of the same name, the words of the poem seem to lie just beneath the surface of the music, ‘ghosting’ the musical thoughts and gestures of the composer while he works. And his selection of the work for a 70th Birthday Concert that closed the 2004 St. Magnus Festival, underscores the very personal nature of the music. (In typical manner for a programme fashioned and conducted by Max, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra performed his Six Sanday Tunes with the Sanday Fiddle Club and An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise alongside Mozart’s A major Piano Concerto K488. The presence of A Reel of Seven Fishermen in a concert of such personal significance, speaks volumes about his own feelings for this powerful work);

• The subject matter and principal protagonist of this highly dramatic work is the sea itself. The poem (printed below) makes a clear statement about the riches and dangers of the sea – on the one hand bringing nourishment, commerce and beauty; on the other, occasionally bringing havoc to seafaring communities through the ‘lost souls’ it has taken from their loved ones. In this latter regard Max has had personal experience of losing fishermen friends, as well as his own close-death confrontation with the sea. And being one of the last works to be written in his cliff-top croft on Hoy before moving to Sanday in 2001, the work, I feel, pays due acknowledgement to the inspiring sights and sounds of the sea - this ‘companion at large’ which was always in vista from his writing desk; sometimes heard, other times silent; on occasions colourful and lively, though mostly dark and foreboding.

A Reel of Seven Fishermen has as its starting point the following poem. About the poem Max has said - “I have not tried to illustrate this, or to reproduce its story in linear fashion. Rather, I have listened out for its essence, distilled from the sea and
the rocks before my window on Hoy, Orkney, (my home for nearly thirty years and the location in the poem), imbuing them with terrible and ever-renewed relevance, for the sea continues to call and to claim fishermen in small boats.” There are three movements: 1. Prologue – The Call of the Sea; 2. Reel – The Door of Water and 3. Epilogue.

George Mackay Brown
_A Reel of Seven Fishermen_

(Bride, Mother, Fisherman)

Her hands put flame among the peats.
The old one took three fish from the smoke.
Cod off The Kist, drifting, an undersea song.

She sank buckets in the cold burn.
The old one broke a bannock in three.
A withershin step. A cry! A steeple of wings.

She turned quernstones, circle on circle.
The Book lay open, two white halves.
Twelve arms sought the cold dancer.

She squeezed oil in the black lamps.
The old one spread the kirkyard shirt.
Twelve feet beat on the hill, a dance.

Her hands brought fish and ale to the table.
The old one soughed, a winter thorn.
Twelve feet stood in the door, a dance.

Sea streamed like blood on the floor.
They shrieked, gull mouths.
Then bride and mother bowed to the black music.

from the collection: FISHERMEN WITH PLOUGHS (1971)
and: SELECTED POEMS 1954 – 1983
published by: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd.

**Perspective I**

As a young English composer, Max wrote intricate works that directly challenged the ‘new music’ (Vaughan Williams, Britten, etc.) that was being performed at the time. However, his desire to obtain a ‘complete’ compositional technique also enabled him to draw decisively on these influences: the use of folk-song/plainsong; Britten’s pragmatic compositional style and ability to write quality music for children and amateurs; pastoral and maritime influences - which have become progressively stronger in Max’s works as his relationship with the Orcadian land and seascapes resonates with Britten and his native Suffolk. And there is the parallel between two Antarctic Symphonies, one portraying the dynamics of a legendary narrative (music from the film _Scott of the Antarctic_ by Vaughan Williams), the other “an abstract work, using transmuted sound images”\(^1\) and based on Max’s own experiences of his journey to the Antarctic Peninsula.

_Sinfonia da Requiem Op. 20 (1940) by Benjamin Britten:_ This work (like _A Reel of Seven Fishermen_) is cast in a three-movement structure (slow-fast-slow) where the opening movement, Lacrymosa anticipates the feelings of fear and anger that will follow in the second. A short, syncopated, rising minor second motif is the rhythmic driving force throughout the first movement. And in the opening movement of Max’s work (_Prologue: The Call of the Sea_) a pair of staccato semiquavers forms an ‘ostinato-
like’ figure, full of brooding trepidation, that appears in the opening six bars, then reappears throughout the movement and
the entire work.

Both the Britten (Dies Irae) and the Maxwell Davies (Reel: The Door of Water) have a ‘dance of death’ placed as the central
movement. In both movements, the music ebbs and flows starting from a quiet, uneasy opening through to a climax placed
near the end of the movement; and whilst Britten ends his middle movement with a transitory, fragmented ‘wind-down’
that leads towards the last movement, Max opts for a ‘sudden-drop’ effect after the climax that leaves the listener in a state of
troubled calm for the final few bars.

Both closing movements are cast in tripartite form and express a calm, reflective peace after the previous two, troubled
movements. Britten’s closing movement, Requiem Aeternam makes explicit the dedication of the work, In memory of my
parents. In Max’s final Epilogue movement, his coup de grace is to write a coda of such simple and breathtaking expression,
that at one and the same time it compliments perfectly, and obliterates completely, everything that preceded it!

Analysis I
It is the two outer movements of A Reel of Seven Fishermen that form the body of this analysis. These movements give us
maximum insight into how Max has planned this particular work, including the exposition of principal material and its
subsequent transformations.

First Movement - Prologue: The Call of the Sea
In the first two bars (Ex. 1) of this movement four long-ranging aspects of the work can be seen:

1. Two staccato semiquavers (trombones 1 & 2 and placed on the beat) punctuate the legato musical texture of the
first six bars, disappearing and reappearing at intervals throughout the first movement. The mood of this gesture is
menacing (perhaps representing the dangers of the sea) and its constant presence threatens to upset the equilibrium
of some of the movement’s more settled moments.

2. Falling seconds (major and minor) outline the ‘lacrymosa’ gesture. This falling motif has been utilised by many
composers in their Requiems and In memoriam works. Second and fourth horns play four pairs of falling seconds
in the first two bars and the figure can be viewed as representing the ‘grieving/sighing’ of a lament. This motif also
represents for Max the cry of a seabird – and one such bird makes an unforgettable appearance in the Exposition of
this movement.

3. Harmonising thirds (two parallel lines moving at the distance of a third) are a feature of the harmonic language in this
work. In bar 1, beats 2 & 4, the horns form pairs of minor thirds, each being a resolution of the dissonance from the
previous beat.

4. Rhythmic layering creates a kaleidoscopic effect when contrasting segments of rhythmic material are layered one on
top of the other. This is an orchestral technique Max has developed through his study of Sibelius and the idea equates
to varieties of cloud layered at different heights, or indeed a ‘tidal’ effect of currents and under-currents pulling
against one another. For example, in bar 1 there is a sextuplet semiquaver layer in the cellos (at the fastest rhythmic
level), as well as a semiquaver layer (trombones), crotchet layer (violins and lower horns) through to a minim layer
(at the slowest level) in the upper horns.

All the above ideas form the constituent features of the opening paragraph (bars 1 – 22), and in his programme note for the
work Max states that “the horns and trombones suggest the motion of the waves, while bassoons and contrabassoon establish
the basic modality, on G flat.” And certainly the bassoons enter at bar 3 (on G flat) with a melody that is unequivocally in G
flat, and with the leading-note appearing firstly in its raised, then in its flattened form. However, as the movement progresses
it seems to me that the G flat modality acts as something of a (largely hidden) central reference point, one to which all other
keys in the movement (or even the entire work) relate. And at various points throughout the first movement the keys of D
minor/major, B minor and A minor are tonal centres that are used for the presentation of new material and its “ensuing
Ex. 1 - 'Prologue: The Call of the Sea' - opening two bars

Moderato \( \dot{\text{J}} = 84 \)

- **Horn in F 1.3**
- **Horn in F 2.4**
- **Tenor Trombone 1.2**
- **Violin I** (pizz.)
- **Violin II** (pizz.)
- **Violoncello**

- **Hn. 1.3**
- **Hn. 2.4**
- **Tbn. 1.2**
- **Vln. I**
- **Vln. II**
- **Vc.**
sequence of combinations, transformations and variations.”

The first musical paragraph (there are three altogether that form the movement’s exposition of ideas) ends on a pause in the bar before Letter C in the full score. A few bars earlier a short, but very expressive tuba solo seems to endorse what was already suggested in the horns opening material (Ex. 1) - that a referencing of the BACH motif (a four-note motif that crosses over on itself) will be a related motivic feature of this work. The comparison between the two solo tuba phrases and the BACH motif itself can be seen at Ex. 2

Ex. 2 - ‘BACH’ motif

![Ex. 2 - ‘BACH’ motif](image)

The BACH motif consists of two falling minor 2nd intervals contained within the framework interval of a minor 3rd. The first tuba phrase comes close to imitating the exact contours of the BACH motif, but its intervals are slightly expanded; the second phrase contains greater intervallic expansion. However, after discussing many of the work’s principal features with Max at his home on Sanday in August 2007, I have to conclude that any direct link between the BACH motif and the ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong on which he based so much of the work’s melodic material, appears to be coincidental. However, the close intervallic shaping of both ‘melodies’ as well as the shared symbol of a cross makes for an interesting (possibly subconscious) parallel.

The second musical paragraph begins (Letter C) with one of the most memorable moments in the work: “A solo clarinet – in my imagination here a great seabird – literally calls out across the space between its own high register and that of the accompanying double basses; it has the ‘Crux fidelis’ melody (Ex. 3), filtered through what mathematicians and magicians know as the Magic Square of the Moon, transforming its contour utterly.”

Ex. 3 - ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong

![Ex. 3 - ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong](image)
The musical gestures here are both dramatic and memorable (Ex. 4): an upward-fluttering anacrusis (clearly emphasising the tonality of A minor) lands on a high B;

Ex. 4 - "a great seabird": falling sequences

then a sequence of falling seconds in the clarinet outlines two principal ‘falling’ features of the plainsong melody (Ex. 3a & 3b – three-note sequences). In addition to this, the movement’s opening rhythmic idea of two staccato semiquavers has returned here as a short-long ‘scotch snap’ motif which will permeate much of the rest of the work, and especially the middle ‘Reel’ movement. As the intensity of these repeated, upward-reaching gestures become greater, the anacrusis becomes compressed (i.e. containing more notes, but in a shorter duration) and it reaches higher in pitch. And as it does so, the sequence of an octatonic scale (alternating tone/semitone) carries the solo clarinet up to a penetrating top F and stretches the tonality ever-closer towards D minor.

Once this top F is reached, the violins take the note from the clarinet and use it to launch into the first of four loud ‘musical signposts’ (Ex. 5a – Letter D), each of which has the dramatic effect of both crowning the emotional intensity of the music that preceded it, and then subduing the musical argument for a while thereafter.

Ex. 5 - Four 'musical signposts'

These moments sparkle and splash out of the orchestra like sudden, dazzling glints of sunlight on the sea’s surface. The first of these moments (Ex. 6 – Letter D) leaves the violins quietly harmonising the flutes’ melody (an octave above them) using the combination of falling seconds and harmonising thirds that opened the work.
This six-bar expressive sequential underlay of resolving suspensions (seen in full in the violins - Ex. 6) plays an integral part in the outer movements of the work and is directly drawn from the sequence of four falling notes found in the plainsong melody (Ex. 3c). Each of the 'musical signposts', once passed, has the short-term effect of creating a moment of reflection and is always followed by some form of replaying or reassessment of earlier material. However taken as a whole, the four 'musical signposts' (Ex. 5) progressively rise in pitch, dynamics, scoring and dramatic intensity so as to help propel the movement towards its conclusion.

So far the principal material of the movement has been stated first by brass, and then by woodwind; now in the third and final musical paragraph of this exposition of ideas, the strings declaim the plainsong in unison (Ex. 7) - a capella and harmonised at the octave - but this time the plainsong appears in a more translucent form.

Ex. 6 - First 'musical signpost'

Ex. 7 - String plainsong: rising sequences

Ex. 3d & 3e illustrate that Max is now highlighting sequences of four, or even five rising pitches from the plainsong melody; and just as the BACH motif utilises combinations of 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} intervals, so then many of the motives that Max draws out of the plainsong melody share this commonality. Again the music builds to a high F pitch (bar 45) utilising the medieval Aeolian mode on A. As the intensity of this 'medieval recitative' builds through a second phrase, so he adds the double basses, doubles the span of the octave harmonisation to four octaves and, by raising the seventh degree of the scale to G sharp, begins to re-emphasise the pull of A minor. However, before this tonality has a chance to fully establish itself, the winds enter (Letter F) with a combination of aggressive 'scotch-snap' rhythms and upward-rushing gestures that are redolent of the solo clarinet theme (Ex. 4) and that have the effect of cutting the string plainsong off in its prime. At the same time bassoons and
trombones play an inversion of the six-bar expressive sequential underlay of resolving suspensions (as seen in Ex. 6 and with identical pitches) supported by the timpani which emphasises, in a sequence of falling thirds, the aggressive ‘scotch-snap’ rhythm.

The music now moves into new territory (Letter G). Up until now much of the musical material has been suggestive of the sea and the sounds that surround it. But now we seem to have tangible contact with the swell and complex cross-currents of the water itself. A 32-bar section in alla breve time is mapped out for us by the lower brass (horns and trombones, often in contrary motion) that move stepwise, in pairs and in thirds, steadily up and down. The two trombones move in constant minims while the horns progress in a less even ‘long-short’ rhythm; all the while a third trombone intones a long-held F pitch that finally, and slowly, falls stepwise. This slow-moving, low-pitch layer of music is repeated after sixteen bars (Letter I) thus giving a 32-bar ‘foundation’ upon which he places three additional layers of music:

1. Two flutes alternate with two oboes in playing a legato ‘sea melody’ (Ex. 8) that is directly related to the plainsong as heard earlier by the solo clarinet (Ex. 4) and is in the same modality (A minor).

Ex. 8 - ‘Sea melody’

Two characteristics of this ‘sea melody’ are the triplet embellishments (turns) and the use of the ‘scotch snap’ figure. As the melody progresses its contours gradually change; each melodic fragment becomes shorter as they (flutes and oboes) begin to alternate more frequently encouraging a feeling of momentum during this ‘build-up’ section. This moment is also one of two particular points in the first movement where the influence of Sibelius is felt very strong; a light, ornate woodwind melody floats over the more sustained, dark brass accompaniment. Echoes of the dancing woodwind melodies from the first movement of the Second Symphony by Sibelius come to mind, and at the time Max was composing this work he was in fact conducting the Sibelius Second Symphony.

2. The glockenspiel and crotales also alternate respectively with flutes and oboes, and together with the piccolo, they create a bright, sparkling quality at the top end of the pitch spectrum.

3. Twelve bars before the end of this section the strings re-enter with the ‘medieval recitative’ from earlier (Ex. 7); at the same pitch, but this time more broad and lyrical in manner.

And so, in this section, Max brings together the separate strands of brass, woodwind and string material from the Exposition in order to create a multi-layered section that builds with increasing inevitability towards the second of the four loud ‘musical signposts’ (Ex. 5b).

The high-point having been achieved (Letter K), the music pulls quickly away from the bright, brash E major triad that rings out with such confidence, to quieter and darker related harmonies. This major to minor shift is stretched out over two bars and is an early ‘warning’ of the trouble that lies ahead in the second movement. It also anticipates a key harmonic feature of the closing bars of this movement.
After a short and subdued recitative from solo alto flute accompanied by tremolando cellos, there follows a condensed and dramatic Recapitulation (Letter M). Each of the three principal ideas are heard, and in the original order of brass material, followed by woodwind, then strings – Max calls this ordering of musical ideas and orchestration ‘rhyming’, and it is a favourite compositional device. After the brass have revisited their material (first heard at Ex. 1) – but this time muted and without the aggressive punctuation of the pairs of staccato semiquavers - a powerful climax section then ensues with pairs of horns playing three or four-note rising phrases, often a tritone apart, as if to suggest the malign presence of some devilish playmaker. This contrasts greatly with the accompanying lower strings that play the expressive sequential underlay of resolving suspensions (from Ex. 6) in its original form, thus quietly harmonising the horns’ loud outbursts with a benign combination of falling seconds and harmonising thirds.

The accumulated energy from the climax section helps to propel the music forward once again. First solo clarinet, then other woodwinds, revisits the material from Ex. 4 (but condensed into just two and a half bars!); then the strings play an equally concise recap of their plainsong melody from the Exposition (Ex. 7), but this time transposed up a tone. The quick-fire recapping of short, but clearly identifiable segments of the principal material (and often diminishing the rhythms towards the end of each segment), creates a stretto effect that accelerates the music through to the Coda section.

The Coda (Letter O) starts with a few bars that make much play of the combination of harmonising thirds (horns and trombones) in conjunction with the short-long ‘scotch snap’ motif (clarinets and lower strings). It is a short passage which sounds profoundly influenced by the first climactic moment in the opening movement of Sibelius’ Fifth Symphony.

The material in the Coda continues to cast an eye back to earlier moments in the movement through three final, connecting moments of recitative (in the customary order for this movement of brass, woodwind, and then strings). A solo trombone leads with a reflection on the solo clarinet theme from Ex. 4 (but transposed up a tone), before the alto flute and then first violin continue the train of thought with an interpretation of the ‘sea melody’ (seen in Ex. 8) that builds towards the fourth and final ‘musical signpost’ of the movement (Ex. 5d). Looking closely at the harmonies that underlie these three recitatives from Letter P to the end (Ex. 9), we see an inclination to manipulate the pitches of the chords so as to mix major elements with minor, but especially altering major down to minor.

Ex. 9 - 'Prologue: The Call of the Sea' - closing bars (harmonic underlay)
There is also a gradual falling of pitch in the lower strings towards the pitch A, which then acts as a dominant to the penultimate chord of D major. Finally, a very low B ‘interrupts’ the cadence so that the first movement comes to a close on a B minor triad in root position. These final bars create a teasing, elongated wind-down that is full of ambiguity and uncertainty as to what lies ahead.

**Perspective II**

*Symphony No. 9 (1910) – Gustav Mahler*: There are some intriguing parallels between this last completed work of Mahler’s and A Reel of Seven Fishermen:

- **Pre-Exposition** – In both works, the opening movements kick-off with six bars that set out clearly some of the principal motivic ideas that generate the movement and the entire work.

- **Motivic parallels** – In the outer movements of both works, the dominant expressive material is the interval of a falling second – often contained within the framework interval of a third – and evoking resonances of one of Beethoven’s most beautiful sonatas for solo piano, in E flat major, Op. 81a, *Das Lebewohl*. Both opening movements also share two similar rhythmic ideas: a ‘double-strike’ iteration that accentuates a single tone; and an agitated sextuplet tremolo in the violas (Mahler)/cellos (Maxwell Davies).

- **Formal model** – Whilst the two adagio movements that open and close Mahler’s Ninth Symphony are contrasting expressions of farewell, the two central movements are different kinds of scherzo; the first in dance-rhythm, the second in a rapid march-rhythm. Max’s central ‘scherzo’ movement opens in an airy, dance-like style (much of it lightly scored and in compound time), but as the movement progresses, and particularly after the change of tempo (Moderato to Allegro molto – Letter I), march-like elements begin to predominate particularly through the reiteration of the aggressive ‘scotch snap’ figure and the gradual phasing to simple time. This general accretion of sound and gathering rhythmic/harmonic complexity is like a huge wave building and gaining momentum. The music reaches a shattering climax just before the movement’s end (Letter Z).

- **Key structure** – In Max’s complex and ever-changing world of tonal centres and relationships, often it is a question of which tonality is implied at any one time (and how that tonality relates to what precedes/follows), rather than any movement having a clear, fixed sense of tonal identity throughout. The first two movements of A Reel of Seven Fishermen veer towards the former; the first movement with its varying focus around the tonal centres of D minor/major, B minor and A minor, ends quite clearly in D major (a sort of tierce de Picardie in the context of the preceding music), and I hear all the above keys relating directly towards the central pull of D. The final movement is quite clearly rooted on a D flat major/B flat minor axis. The meandering, searching string lines and the woodwind melodies that permeate so much of this movement finding a final ‘resting-place’ in the key of D flat major (and another tierce de Picardie effect) in those transcendent last 26 bars.

- **In Memoriam** – The three works under discussion (Britten, Mahler, Maxwell Davies) confront death on the most personal level of expression. Mahler had not long previously suffered the death of his eldest daughter and he was fully aware whilst writing this symphony that his own ‘leaving of the world’ would take place sooner, rather than later. Mahler consciously drew on the Beethoven ‘Farewell’ piano sonata and its three-note falling motif that is such an integral presence in the sonata’s opening movement. Maxwell Davies accesses the Beethoven sonata also, but through the conduit of Mahler’s symphony – a kind of ‘passing-on’ of musical ‘genes’.

**Analysis II**

*Third Movement: Epilogue:* This movement is one of the most understated, moving, and perfectly-formed pieces to come out of his pen in recent years. The highly personal nature of the music oozes out of every phrase, and the economy with which the movement is constructed and expressed is quite startling. As an epilogue - a short concluding address (and if in a theatrical context, then usually in verse) - the movement conjures up a mood of calm reflection combined with heartfelt expression. Material from previous movements is taken up, re-examined and then restated in a tone that is subdued, yet resolute. And the parallel with the regular, rhyming scansion of spoken verse is implied in the use of musical phrases and paragraphs that are repeated (often with additional elements/layers), enabling the music to flow through to its final, breathtaking moments.
'Epitaph': The last 26 bars of this movement form an ‘epilogue to the epilogue’; it is an intimate commemoration to the friend he knew so well, and with whom he had worked so closely, for many years. These last bars draw on material from the opening two bars of the first movement, as well as the ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong, and is structured in a clear ABA form. Some of the many notable compositional features are:

- The melody in the solo clarinet (Ex. 10), which is one of Max’s most memorable ‘airs’ in the traditional idiom, falls into three 8-bar phrases (the third has some slight modifications at the end as it moves towards the work’s close). The final two bars of the entire work state the closing chord of D flat major;

- The folk-style melody hints at the pentatonic mode largely through the repetition of its first four notes which are taken directly from the intervals (2nds and 3rds) between the opening notes of the ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong. Melodic turns and grace notes embellish the melody in a vocal, folk-like manner. There is also the suggestion of a folk-style double-tonic (or in this case a double-dominant!) in the middle 8 bars - the double-tonic idea is transposed down a fourth so that the harmonies gently pivot (in alternate bars) between the dominant and subdominant;

- The first two notes of the melody is a falling short-long figure which constitutes a combination of the ‘lacrymosa’ and ‘scotch snap’ motifs (the latter has now lost its more rhythmic and aggressive nature);

- The first four notes of the melody are identical in interval (though a semitone lower in pitch) to the string plainsong melody first heard in the opening movement (Ex. 7);

- In comparing the melodic contours of the melody with the ‘Crux fidelis’ plainsong (Ex. 3), the first and last 8 bars of the clarinet melody (Ex. 10 - labelled g and g’ respectively) rise and fall like the motion of the sea in alternate two-bar phrases; in the middle 8 bars (Ex. 10 - labelled h) the contour of the melody falls and rises in alternate bars;

- In the accompaniment the trombones and cellos harmonise the melody in thirds (also falling and rising) and mostly moving in constant minims or semibreves;

- The choice of instrumentation for these final bars emphasises a dark shade of orchestral colour. Even the slightly longer and more mellow sound of the A clarinet is preferred to its brighter-sounding cousin in B flat.

Architecture: The structure of this movement is simple but highly controlled. The following table sets out the principal sections and sub-sections with the durations of each given in terms of the number of bars:
The quiet and expressive Introduction is scored for strings only. The music is dominated by the idea of the resolution of suspensions (upwards and downwards, but mostly the latter) and as a consequence the movement is predicated on intervallic combinations of 2nds and 3rds. The two-part legato counterpoint is played in rotation by 1st violin, viola and cello, whilst the 2nd violin (pizzicato and appearing only intermittently) highlights rising/falling groups of three notes in the 1st violin part. These rising/falling three-note sequences become a prominent feature in the opening phrase of the two principal melodies in sections A and B.

The double bass meanwhile plays a sequence of sustained pitches that outlines a cycle of fifths. Having taken its cue from the opening resolution that left the viola on a C, the bass plays the pitches F, B flat, E flat, and D flat (the missing A flat is strongly implied before the D flat is heard). Then a sort of compressed rewind back through the above pitches (and shared between bass and 1st violin) ends with the cello back on the pitch of C for the start of the fourth and final phrase of the Introduction.

Because of the sparse writing in the Introduction (it is always in either two or three parts) and the chromatic nature of the individual strands, tonal ambiguity runs deep through all four phrases. However, only at the end of the second phrase (E flat major) does a musical phrase cadence in a key other than the axis keys of D flat major and B flat minor. In keeping with the intervallic nature of the movement (and the work as a whole), it will be observed that the tonal areas of E flat major and B flat minor relate to the ‘final’ tonic of D flat major at the interval of a major 2nd and a minor 3rd respectively.

The combined simplicity and effectiveness of his next move is most subtle. The following A section (Letter B) is in fact a simple repeat of the Introduction; but the strings, instead of being in the foreground, now recede into middle-distance and the background is occupied by the shadowy shimmering of marimba and 2nd violin. There are other subtle changes; the double bass plays the same sequence of sustained pitches (cycle of fifths) as before but now pizzicato, while the bass clarinet takes on the role of sustaining the bass line. And then into the foreground steps a solo flute to play a melody of true simplicity and beauty (Ex. 11).
Having already observed the violins' groups of three falling and three rising notes in the Introduction, the solo flute emerges by slowly rising up an F major triad (the dominant of B flat minor). Joined by alto flute halfway through the A section, the musical texture and intensity thicken slightly towards an appearance of the BACH motif (on the solo flute, utilising its original form and pitches) which is placed just beyond the section's point of golden section.

The strings drop out completely for the contrasting B section (Letter D) in which the harp leads with a steady, almost processional melody in octaves (Ex. 12).

In contrast to the solo flute in the previous section, this new melody opens with a falling triad of B flat minor; and on comparing the two melodies it will be observed that both begin on F, but that the latter is an inversion of the former for the most part (omit consideration of the flute semiquavers). After the harp has finished the melody, the contra bassoon then repeats it as a counterpoint to six short phrases of an alto flute melody that is pitched firmly in the Dorian mode and that emphasises intervallic motifs from the 'Crux fidelis' plainsong.

When the A material returns (Letter F), the section this time is more compressed and strands are layered one upon the other to create a stretto effect. All the recapped material is now situated in the lower strings: viola and cello play the two-part legato counterpoint; double bass supports with their sequence of sustained pitches (cycle of fifths); and the melodic material that previously appeared in solo flute/alto flute is now taken up by divisi 2nd violin. This now frees 1st violin to play a beautiful slow-moving melody (again based on aspects of the plainsong) that ranges between D major/minor and F major/minor. The ominous repetition of the two-note staccato figure (which has been gradually emerging, almost unnoticed, throughout the movement) reminds the listener of the work's starting-point and builds a sense of anticipation towards the Coda.
The link to the Coda is a highly expressive sequence of linking suspensions (five phrases in all) played by pairs of horns and trombones; nearly all the suspensions resolve downwards and each new phrase commences at a higher pitch. This sequence of suspensions reminds the listener of one of the work's most prominent opening ideas – the combination of falling seconds and harmonising thirds. Over a deep, rising bass-line, each sequence inhabits a different modal orbit as the music gradually begins to hone in on the pitch A flat which, once reached, provides a long dominant anacrusis into the Coda (Letter J).

The final 26 bars form a musical epitaph to one of Max’s longest and most dearly-held Orcadian friends. The simple and clearly set-out language that George used in poem and prose is evoked in this delicate piece of musical chiaroscuro. The process of musical distillation that results here is matched evenly by the music’s mood and gait; and when listening to these final bars one can almost envisage George ambling along the street in Stromness or pottering around on one of the town’s piers. It is a moment of musical drama that is as heart-rending as it is simple; unexpected, and yet absolutely perfect.

Endnotes
1 Antarctic Symphony – Symphony No. 8 (2001) – Programme Note by Peter Maxwell Davies.
2 A Reel of Seven Fishermen (1998) – Programme Note by Peter Maxwell Davies
3 References made to rehearsal lettering relate to the Hawkes Pocket Score No. 1340 of the work published by Boosey and Hawkes, 295 Regent Street, London W1R 8JH.
4 A Reel of Seven Fishermen (1998) – Programme Note by Peter Maxwell Davies
5 When discussing material played by transposing instruments, all pitches will be referred to in terms of concert pitch. (NB: In all musical extracts however, transposing instruments are notated at their ‘written’ pitch).
‘Transubstantiated into the musical…’ : metaphor and reality in James MacMillan’s *Veni Veni Emmanuel*

Richard McGregor

*Veni Veni Emmanuel* was composed in 1991/2 and written to a commission from Christian Salvesen PLC for the percussionist Evelyn Glennie and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. It was first premiered on 10 August 1992 at a Promenade Concert and has remained one of the composer's most performed works. Although it is usually described as a percussion concerto, it is perhaps more properly to be thought of as a concerto for percussion and orchestra, the subtitle MacMillan himself uses in the score, rather than as a percussion concerto in the strictest sense. This 're-orientation' is not semantic and will be explored further at the end of this article, after consideration of the various structural thematic and harmonic components that make up the work and the compositional processes that created them.

The work’s appeal stems from the immediacy of the rhythmic components combined with a largely accessible extended tonal language, both of which have been denigrated by critics as somewhat superficial. There is, however, a depth to the work which has remained unexplored until now, and it is exactly because there are many levels in operation that the article explores each of these in turn, before bringing them together in a discussion at the end.

**The Stimulus**

Whenever he speaks about his compositional processes MacMillan usually resorts to religious metaphor as a means of articulating the interface between the creative act and the resulting artefact. MacMillan's thought processes are deeply rooted in the symbolism of his Catholic faith. Like Messiaen before him, he is concerned with capturing the intrinsic nature of music's relationship with the divine force that impels its creation. Thus the stimulus, whether musical or non-musical, which becomes the starting point of a new work is translated by MacMillan in religious terms as a point of Communion, or more precisely, Eucharist: so as in the Mass the waver and the wine are transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, in analogous manner he speaks of an extra-musical stimulus, coming from 'without' the work, being 'transubstantiated' into the new composition.

Most metaphors and analogies have their limitations but if MacMillan’s statement that the plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* was the starting point for the work of that name is true, then it should be possible to deconstruct the 'corporality' of the generating plainchant of that name within the work as a means of analysing the composition processes and methods which underpin the composer's style and technique. The present analysis therefore addresses the essential duality of MacMillan's work, that is, religious intent against musical content. However the composition *Veni Veni Emmanuel* represents rather more than simply a translation of a religious metaphor into musical reality. MacMillan speaks of the work as making a 'liturgical journey' from Advent to Easter. It is therefore axiomatic that there is a religious super text which can be read into and onto the work, such as will also give ‘meaning’ to the compositional processes involved.

Translating the metaphor does not, of itself, provide a critical framework for interrogating the work, and despite the now hundreds of performances and strong audience support, *Veni Veni Emmanuel* has not always satisfied the critics. Certainly at this period in his compositional output MacMillan utilised certain stylistic clichés. The long held single pitch crescendo – which appears not just in *Veni Veni Emmanuel* but also in, for example, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* as well as in *Visions of a November Spring* – has been rather ungraciously termed ‘plagiarised Berg’ by the critic David Wright. Another cliché is the ‘keening’ high pitched sliding violin sound (often marked ‘screaming’) supposedly related to Gaelic Psalm singing, as the recent South Bank portrait attempted to demonstrate.

It is essential to go beyond these obvious clichés to try to discover what lies at the root of MacMillan's compositional aesthetic. Father Gilbert Márkus OP, an academic priest well known to MacMillan has offered a perspective on the role of art which has clearly influenced the way the composer views his compositional processes. Márkus wrote: ‘[It’s] about how art transforms, taking the substance of daily life and offering a symbol which transforms and transubstantiates the patterns of human toil.
In *Veni Veni Emmanuel* the generating plainchant functions as a symbol of sorts deployed so as to transform the material that surrounds it but is, in its turn, the very essence of that material. This is the composer’s idea of the source, the compositional stimulus, being so much a part of the new work that it becomes the work. Following Márkus, MacMillan uses the Catholic idea of transubstantiation as a way of describing this process, not, it should be said, without criticism for his misappropriation of the word. To explain the metaphor in a sentence is impossible and during the course of this article I will be concerned with showing exactly how MacMillan translates the metaphor into music.

**The ‘Veni, Veni’ plainchant**
The well-known Advent plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* is the symbol which, in the words of the Eucharist, is ‘broken for you’, and finally rebuilt towards the apotheosis at the end of the work. Although the technical processes are far less rigorous and systemised in MacMillan’s music, this idea shows the influence of Maxwell Davies, not just in the use of plainchant, but in the fragmentation and ‘rebuilding’ of the musical material.

Here the *Veni Veni Emmanuel* plainchant symbolises Advent in the liturgical progression from Advent to Easter: humanity seeking the Second Coming. A transcript of the plainchant is given in Appendix 1. The occurrences of parts of the plainchant throughout the work are summarised in Chart 1 (see Appendix 2). The source text of the plainchant which MacMillan used was almost certainly the Latin Advent antiphon supposed to date from the time of Charlemagne (771-814), but for the sake of simplicity Appendix 2 utilises the usual English translation.

The chart shows that MacMillan uses only fragments of the antiphon – the chant is only heard in full at the climax of the work where its tonality is G (minor) for reasons which will become more obvious later. The opening fragments are based on the normal E (minor) tonality, as found in numerous hymnbooks. This is taken as the referential ‘tonic’ from which the other transpositions are derived and is first heard at bar 36. The pitch class E is associated with some key structural and thematic elements in the work, as for example in its use as upper pedal in flute in bars 89-99 and as the starting pitch of the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant anticipation in trombone, both of which will be discussed in due course.

**The Formal Structure of Veni Veni Emmanuel**
Before exploring the detail in any depth it is important to understand the structural outline of the work. Stephen Johnson refers to this as the ‘traditional concerto model’ of fast-slow-fast. However that superficial perception of the formal archetype masks a five part structure with, in addition, two Transition Sequences in and out of the ‘central’ slow section based on ‘Gaude Gaude’ (*Rejoice Rejoice* in the vernacular):  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar number and Rehearsal letter</th>
<th>Structural label</th>
<th>Formal structure</th>
<th>Macro- structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Introit- Advent</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 58 at D</td>
<td>Heartbeats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 127 at H</td>
<td>Dance- Hocket</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 287 at P</td>
<td>Transition: Sequence I</td>
<td>transition 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 353 at T</td>
<td>Gaude, Gaude</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 432 at W</td>
<td>Transition: Sequence II</td>
<td>transition 2</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 490 at AA</td>
<td>Dance - Chorale</td>
<td>b’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Bar 565]</td>
<td>[tempo primo]</td>
<td>a’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar 581 at FF</td>
<td>Coda- Easter</td>
<td></td>
<td>A’ and coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ex 1: Veni Veni Emmanuel – Form/Structure grid
The overall form of the work however is an arch shape – with the recapitulation foreshortened as would be expected. In returning to its starting point the work is designed to suggest the cycle of the religious calendar but broken at the very end by Easter. The arch shape is therefore, Bartók-like, lopsided, with the build up taking rather longer to achieve, and the reverse a retrograde of the former sections in compressed form. The emotional climax of the work, with the risen Christ literally written into the music, ‘in the midst of them’ as it were, (of which more later), occurs at the end of the work. However, on the other hand, the structural heart of the work is in the Gaude Gaude section and this is where the point of the Golden Section occurs. Although the whole work is not structured according to the mathematical principles underlying this concept it does have significance as we shall see. MacMillan did subsequently explore the Golden Section more deliberately in the two cello sonatas and other works.

In the interview published in the booklet for the 1997 South Bank Festival of his music ‘Raising Sparks’ (also the name of a song cycle written at that time), MacMillan said: ‘There is a need … for bringing about the development of materials, a chaotic clash of materials, and then to bring about resolution’.8

In this work the resolution is liturgical – there is a steady progression through to the ‘resolution’ contained within the Easter message which is overlaid with a vision of the Second Coming encapsulated in the Easter bells.

**MacMillan’s use of the Veni Veni plainchant**

The plainchant is deployed in two principal ways utilising its pitch content on the one hand, and its rhythmic potential on the other. Sometimes these properties are treated separately and sometimes in combination. MacMillan has spoken of improvising the refrain rhythm of ‘Rejoice, rejoice’ into a ‘heartbeat’ rhythm so that it became one of the initial starting points and, indeed, the central thematic idea of the work.

![Ex 2a: Veni Veni Emmanuel, ‘Rejoice, Rejoice’ motif](image)

Ex 2a: *Veni Veni Emmanuel, ‘Rejoice, Rejoice’ motif*

![Ex 2b: Veni Veni Emmanuel, ‘heartbeat’ motif](image)

Ex 2b: *Veni Veni Emmanuel, ‘heartbeat’ motif*
Although there is an anticipation of the Heartbeat rhythm in the first section it is perhaps not surprising that initially it is the pitch based versions of the chant which predominate. At bar 14 in the first section (Introit-Advent) the plainchant is heard in 12 simultaneous statements utilising T0 through T11 in semiquaver movement as in the following example of the trumpet part:

Ex 3: *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, trumpet part bar 14ff

but the average listener is unlikely to be able to perceive this as the actual plainchant, hearing rather the ‘chaos’ that the composer intends. The first clear statement of the plainchant is at bars 27-35 in trumpet, with brass accompaniment, at T5 (i.e. A, C,E), giving therefore a basic A (minor) tonality – dominant of the D (major) tonality of the final pages of the work. However, it is not until bar 36 that the expected E (minor) tonality appears in horn, though chromatically altered (i.e. E,G,B,A#). This partial statement of the opening phrase of the plainchant heralds the appearance of interspersed E (minor) extended versions of the chant material used in Section 2 (Heartbeats), principally in the viola at 58 and refrain-based material at 62 in wind and in trumpet/brass at 100 (beginning with the pitches D and B).

Ex 4 a/b): *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, plainchant based material - viola part at b. 58, wind at b. 62

However MacMillan soon introduces an important harmonic device which is to have an essential function in the later sections: the juxtaposition of tritone-related statements of sections of the plainchant.10
Typical of this juxtaposition are viola and wind T0 at bar 58 and bars 62-5 respectively, followed by strings T6 at bar 88, and then brass, particularly trumpet, T0 directly juxtaposed with T6 at 108/110. The chart in Appendix 2 shows these juxtaposed tonalities and a brief discussion of two further examples should make the process clear.

In Transition Sequence I the fragmentary trumpet thematic semiquaver cells at T4 in bars 309-14 (C#,E,D#,C#,B…G#) linked to the trumpet’s T4 ‘O Come, O Come’ statement at (316-)318 (i.e. G#,B, D#) are set against cor anglais à trumpet triplet quavers in bar 324ff at T10 (D,F ,A) as this example shows:

Ex 5: Veni Veni Emmanuel, tritone related thematic fragments - bb. 309-14, 318, 324-(6)

Similarly, in the central Gaude, Gaude section MacMillan overlays three temporally distinct ostinati based on the chord sequence for ‘Rejoice, rejoice’ at T7 (i.e. beginning A, F# etc.) with T1 ‘O Come’ fragments on percussion (F,Ab,C) – see bars 359 to 362 for example. A final, structurally very significant, tritone pairing occurs in the Dance Chorale section and will be considered in detail later.

There is therefore a harmonic consistency throughout the work based on tritone-related motifs derived from the Veni Veni plainchant and the idea of pairing is mirrored in other conceptual aspects of the work, including rhythm/pitch, percussion/orchestra, and, metaphorically, Mankind and God.

It is clear then that MacMillan’s continual use of the opening pitches of the plainchant has two principal functions: firstly, from a musical perspective, the tonal implications of the opening trichord are clear and audible, and essentially ‘root’ the music in extended triadic harmony, and secondly, from a religious perspective, the spiritual longing implied in the words ‘Veni Veni Emmanuel’ is also always audible. MacMillan’s use of religious texts has suggested a strong affinity with Liberation Theology, and in this work the Second Coming represents the ‘ultimate’ liberation to which everything points. The fragmentation of the ‘body’ as expressed in the fragmentation of the pitch material represents Mankind’s current state. We hear, to mix the metaphor, as St Paul says, we see ‘through a glass darkly’: it is only through the final exposition of the plainchant in its (fully harmonised) totality that we perceive the ‘whole body’. In metaphorical terms the body in this instance is Mankind itself.

MacMillan would later explore the same ground in the set of works collectively known as Triduum, related to the three days of Easter: The World’s Ransoming, the Cello Concerto and the (First) Symphony, all of which use the same plainchant as the present work. But, it is not the Veni Veni plainchant which ultimately gives these works their shared meaning. Rather, there is another plainchant, less obvious in its usage, but just as meaningful – in fact as I shall suggest much more meaningful. This is the Maundy Thursday plainchant Ubi Caritas (‘Where Charity and love are, there God is’). As we will see this too makes a symbolic and metaphorical gesture, and not just at the Easter climax, of which more later.
The heartbeat rhythm itself pervades the whole work (see Chart 1 in Appendix 2). Naturally the rhythm changes throughout the work but when expressed in pitch, rather than rhythmic, terms it is almost always associated with the descending minor third, as in ‘Rejoice, Rejoice’, and thus the antithetical opposite of the rising minor that opens the Veni Veni plainchant. MacMillan’s idea here is to symbolise humanity and therefore a form of the motif has to appear in all the sections. At its simplest it is:

```
  ee   ee
```
as at bar 62ff in upper wind, but, typically for MacMillan, this is combined with a more metrically diverse, but related, rhythmic motif in lower wind and lower strings which uses half and full bar triplets. No single instrument is associated with the symbolic role until the build up to the final climactic ‘Second Coming’ where at last the percussion personifies expectant humanity.

It is in the central section, the *Gaude Gaude*, that the heartbeat idea receives its fullest expression in the form of three harmonised ‘Rejoice Rejoice’ pitch-based ostinati with distinct and quite separate durational values. This forms a background to the featured solo percussion, and is completely static – leading the critic Stephen Johnson to ask ‘did the quiet repetition… have to drift on so long with so little variation?’.

So far we have only examined the role the basic thematic elements play in the course of the work, but it is now necessary to return to the opening of the work to consider other levels of pitch manipulation present, in particular those which contribute to the tonal framework of the work and which underpin the harmonic processes that permeate the whole, leading to recapitulation and climax.

**Analysis of the first section (detail)**
The first section, Introit-Advent, of *Veni Veni Emmanuel* begins in apparent chaos. See Example 6.

Interpreting MacMillan’s ‘wider theological reasoning’ this is humanity in chaos, perhaps the chaos before the creation of the world, but more likely following MacMillan’s assertion that a starting point was Luke 21, the chaos signalling the end times. There is, however, already order in this chaos.

The opening chord, and also the scalar passages of the opening bars, are based on a devised scale characterised by a chromatic trichord from the starting pitch (F) in normal order (F,F#,G/ A,Bb,C,D). It is tempting to try to equate the initial three pitch cluster as symbolic of the three-in-one Godhead but that is probably going a little too far. What is certainly important for subsequent events in the course of the work is the fact that six of the pitches make up two contiguous triads; in bar one these are F major (F,A,C) and G minor (G,Bb,D) with F# as seventh pitch.

A new texture emerges at bar 14, as mentioned earlier in relation to Ex. 3, consisting of twelve discreet lines of semiquavers articulating the initial phrases of the plainchant. See Example 7.

The vertical organisation of this dodecaphonic texture uses the same septatonic triadic patterning in the wind parts as the opening chord but at T7 (C major/D minor + C#). The significance of this pairing of dyads only becomes apparent at the end of the work in the Easter Bells climax where six pitches spell out the triads of D major and E minor (D,F#,A/E,G,B), a combination of the key (only finally achieved) of Christ triumphant - D major - allied to the original key of the Veni Veni plainchant - E (minor) - in religious imagery, mankind united with God.
Ex. 6: *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, opening bars in full score
Ex. 7: *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, full score bars 14-6
Ex. 8: Veni Veni Emmanuel, triadic constructions - bars 1, 14 and bells

But the hexatonic bells at the end of the work lack one pitch when compared with the opening septatonic chord, and in the transposition of the paired dyads this would be Eb, a pitch which has already been heard prominently in the work as a middle pedal from bars 426 to 489. MacMillan must surely have been aware of this ‘missing pitch’ link between the opening septatonic chord and the hexatonic bells when he deployed the ‘Berg-plagiarised’ Eb as the unison crescendo poco a poco in the second Transition. We hear the pitch seeking a resolution or, metaphorically, seeking out the Divine Presence to complete itself. So, while this long pitch might at first seem just a MacMillan cliché, it actually has a very clear structural function in the work in that, and this is important, it is just a half a step – the Neapolitan – to the ‘desired’ D major of the final key of the Divine Presence, as embodied in the statement of the Ubi Caritas plainchant.

The importance of the Ubi Caritas plainchant
The semiquavers which dominate bars 14-24 (see Ex. 7) continue to articulate the first statement of the Veni, Veni plainchant all the way through to the end of the first phrase of the refrain, but at bar 17, in the midst of the mass of sound in which the plainchant is encased there is a small, almost unnoticeable gesture on the trombone – a rising semitone glissando E to F.

It is heard again at the recapitulation of section one in the build up to the Easter Coda where it is more complete, although still based on E and on trombone, and still containing glissandi, as well as added grace notes glissandi, all of which serve to suggest, in the religious context of the work, an uncontrolled, slightly comic ‘human’ element. However at this point in the work the astute listener should recognise the thematic shape despite these distortions, because the ‘pure’ version was heard twice in the central Gaude section, where it ‘translates’ as the Maundy Thursday plainchant Ubi Caritas.

This plainchant is used symbolically to signify the Christ figure. In the Gaude Gaude section it is heard in A major which turns out to be the dominant of the key which forms the Easter climax where it represents the figure of Christ triumphant.
Companion to Recent Scottish Music

Ex. 9: Veni Veni Emmanuel - versions of the Ubi Caritas plainchant

By presenting the Ubi Caritas plainchant in distorted form (Ex. 9aà 9c) MacMillan makes his theological point clear: humanity can only sing the song imperfectly, it is distorted and uncontrolled, but recognisable. Therefore solo violin (Ex. 9b), in ‘purity’ of tone, high up in its register, represents Jesus, and the trombone, with its comic overtones, humanity.

The final section of the work functions as both a recapitulation and climax. MacMillan brings back the heartbeat rhythm representing humanity, as he says, ‘pounded out by the soloist and the timpanist’ and it is paralleled in the pitch domain by the trombone’s distorted Ubi Caritas. This becomes the emotional climax of the work where the thumping heart of humanity is answered by the ‘pure’ Ubi Caritas containing within it the assurance that ‘Where Love and charity are, there God is’, (Ex. 9d) rising over the lower brass representing humanity chanting ‘Rejoice, Rejoice’. This juxtaposition triggers the Easter bells which conclude the work, recalling the symbolic gesture at the Gloria in the Easter Vigil Mass.

While the placing of the Ubi Caritas plainchant at the climax ‘makes sense’ structurally, it is not just ‘dropped in’ as a musical Deus ex Machina. It is, above all, the resolution of what has gone before. It is symbolically a ‘second coming’ for the Ubi Caritas plainchant which appeared for the first time in the Gaude Gaude section, and now, for the second time, at the climax, ‘translated’ into D major.

D major is the culminating tonality of the work, it is the goal to which the work has been ‘striving’ and MacMillan makes the progression to this ‘key’ sound right by manipulating the voice leading within longer term planning in the following way:

A Sense of Climax

After the central Gaude section, nothing is ever quite the same again. So when the Dance is recapitulated in the Dance Chorale (bar 490) there is a new ‘inner core’ (from bar 498) which contains the fully formed and harmonised version of the Veni Veni plainchant which has permeated the whole work up to this point in various distorted, fragmented and repetitive forms. The Veni plainchant is initially heard in G (minor), but 4 bars before the refrain (bar 542) the high trumpet enters and forces a shift of tonal centre for the refrain driving it a tritone away to C# (and hence the earlier tonal juxtapositions), where, as it turns out, it now ‘fits’ with the Dance tonality underneath. This is achieved by the trumpet holding the high B which then becomes a middle pedal for the repeat of the refrain (bar 546). See Example 10.
Richard E McGregor: ‘Transubstantiated into the musical…….’

Ex. 10: *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, full score with high B pedal, bars 542-6
The refrain thereafter proceeds as expected until the penultimate pitch – the same B, at the top of the violin register – gets stuck, and fails to resolve to the final pitch which would be C#. The lack of resolution reflects MacMillan's 'liturgical journey' – mankind seeks, but cannot find, resolution through its own striving, and chaos, in the form of the repeat of the Introit returns (bar 565). As soon as the distorted Ubi Caritas is heard on trombone (bb. 570-2), the violins, try to break away from the B pedal with semitone glissandi up to and away from the C, latterly with typical MacMillan instruction 'screaming'. Nevertheless, although this is the chaos of the opening section recapitulated it is different from the first simply because underneath it all we hear the voice of mankind, as personified here by the trombone, trying to 'sing' the Ubi Caritas.

At last the Coda, which MacMillan labels Coda - Easter, arrives (bar 581), and the second violins (with ob. 2 and clarinets) finally reach the C# which they have been struggling to achieve. Once there they then obsessively mark it, molto espressivo, in quavers with grace notes, as though knocking at the door (bar 582). MacMillan's marking for the string parts, once again, is 'screaming', perhaps to suggest mankind's increasing desperation for the Second Coming.

Eventually resolution is effected unequivocally at bar 587 onto the D, which has been the goal since the B pedal was introduced 44 bars earlier, and this is the cue for the concluding statement of Ubi Caritas in D major four bars later in violins 2 tutti. Mankind is united in the presence of God.

Why has MacMillan chosen D as the ultimate goal? No doubt in part simply for its traditional semiotic reading of 'liveliness and rejoicing' and 'gay, brilliant, alert' as Rameau and Lavignac respectively asserted. As a key it was strongly hinted at in the Gaude Gaude section because of the essentially ambiguous tonality of the refrain ostinati ('Rejoice, Rejoice') as B minor or D major.

However even with the arrival of the 'pure' Ubi Caritas all is not resolved. The ubiquitous B which started this tonal progress is stubbornly present until at last as the final pitch – E – of the Ubi Caritas sounds, it gives way. This makes sense, retrospectively, of the E upper pedal (bar 88ff, and discussed further in the next section) which appeared in flute in the Heartbeat section and of the E as starting pitch of the distorted Ubi Caritas. It is, as well, a resolution of sorts since E was the opening pitch of the Veni Veni plainchant in its original form. In effect the B 'comes to rest' in Christ. MacMillan's theological reasoning is clear: humanity has been striving to achieve resolution but this resolution is only present when God is there. Hence the bells.

Earlier in this article I noted that six of the bells form two contiguous triads, but in addition, the first four pitches (D, A, B,
Richard E McGregor: ‘Transubstantiated into the musical…..’

F#) are the bass pitches of the harmonised ‘Rejoice, Rejoice’ ostinati – the Easter bells represent mankind in harmony with God – the blessed assurance. In this context can it then really be an accident that the second time the Ubi Caritas is heard in the Gaude section it is just a bar after the Golden Section (bb. 375-6) – surely a metaphor for the presence of God within the heart of created order. MacMillan flags this ‘second coming’ within the Gaude Gaude section with the sound of a ‘Mark Tree’, effectively wind chimes, but in the context sounding not unlike the Sanctus bell. Ubi Caritas is therefore to be interpreted as a musical metaphor of God in Christ.

Discussion of two problematic areas in the work

Pedals and Tonality
In his 1992 review of the first performance at the Proms, David Wright lists a series of complaints about the work which he details as: the ‘low voltage impact’, ‘passages … sanitised by their very conventionality’, ‘the nature of some of the ostinati’ and ‘the tendency to anchor elements of the structure on extended pedal notes’.

The suggestion implicit in Wright’s comments is that the pedal notes are only used to anchor a harmonic texture so as to keep the listener ‘secure’ while more complex detail happens above (or below). But while this might be true in some cases it does not explain all uses of pedal notes in the work, and neither should the different harmonic functions be all lumped together simply because they sound similar.

Criticisms of MacMillan’s use of pedal notes centre on the view that they are almost unnecessarily structurally supportive. It is true that the unison Eb lasting from bar 426 to 490, then the B inverted pedal from 542 to 599 (including two small ‘distortions’ that take place en route as the music seeks the climax), account for nearly 20% of the work, but I have already explained their purpose.

There are other structurally important pedal notes throughout the work. For example, at the very opening of the Introit there is already a pedal note in the bass – C – and despite the fact that the overall texture is aggressively cacophonous, it is not there to anchor the listener, or even to ‘root’ the musical edifice – it has a much more important harmonic function. It successfully creates expectation but not because it is the dominant of the F major component of the septatonic chord which dominates this first part (Ex. 8): unless the listener is very harmonically aware it is unlikely to be perceived as such. Rather its specific purpose is to lead to the first statement of the Veni Veni plainchant in its highly compressed form which bursts out in the cacophonous twelve-note cluster form at bar 14. It returns in the recapitulation of the Introit section but there reduced to just 5 bars so as to give the music greater momentum towards the climax.

The role of pedal notes and their relationship to the prevailing tonalities in the work is summarised in Example 12.

The opening pedal note is succeeded some 26 bars later by a high C# for 24 bars. With the benefit of hindsight we know this to be the leading note of the D major of Ubi Caritas which does not truly resolve here but leads to the Heartbeat sub-section. This is followed some 25 bars later, at bar 88, by eleven bars of flute on high E – hocketting heartbeats – which, as I suggested earlier, we finally understand at bar 595 (9 bars before the end) when the E comes to rest as a long held pitch as we hear, for the first time in the whole work, the last two pitches of the opening line of Ubi Caritas – DDDEE – with the words ‘ibi Deus est’ - ‘there God is’.

But there is more. That hocketting E at bar 88 is underpinned by a tonal shift to Db which, although brief, is harmonically significant. We hear it again as a harmonic shift in the bass leading to the first statement of Ubi Caritas in the Gaude section – where, enharmonic C#, it is the third of the key of A major for the plainchant above.

A significant example of the connection between pedal notes and tonality, specifically the idea of paired juxtaposed tonalities occurs in the Dance sections of the work. In the first Dance section MacMillan uses two tonalities juxtaposed against each other, in this case G# (minor) for the hocketting main idea, derived from ‘O Come, O Come’ (bar 127), and D (minor) for
Ex. 12: *Veni Veni Emmanuel* – pedals and tonalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introit - Advent</th>
<th>Heartbeat</th>
<th>Dance – Hocket</th>
<th>Transition: Sequence I</th>
<th>Gaude, Gaude</th>
<th>Transition Sequence II</th>
<th>Dance-Chorale</th>
<th>(final section)</th>
<th>Coda Easter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematic</strong></td>
<td><em>Veni, Veni Emmanuel</em> hinted E (minor)</td>
<td>Flute hocket on e(^{111})</td>
<td><em>Veni, Veni</em> on G(^{#}) (minor) and D (minor)</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas et Amor</em> (twice)</td>
<td><em>Veni, Veni</em> VERSE complete on G (minor)</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas</em> distorted on trombone on E (with Heartbeats Rhythm)</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas et Amor, Deus ibi est.</em> on D maj, ends on E (as below)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trombone (hints at distorted <em>Ubi Caritas</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Harmonic**   | C pedal          | D\(^{#}\) maj 4 bars | D\(^{#}\) upper pedal (6 bars) | (F (minor) in Marimba) | bar 399 point of tonal agreement (D maj /B\(^{mm}\)) reverse F (minor) on Marimba + B (minor) Modal (Gaude ‘chant) | E\(^{#}\) unison then middle pedal | B inverted pedal | C\(^{#}\) emphasis as leading note | resolves on E |
|                | C\(^{#}\) inverted pedal |             |                | D\(^{#}\) major Chord (c. 4 bars) |                      |                        |               |                |             |

Not all thematic references to *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* are included

Golden Section bar 375/376

Ex. 12: *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, summary of pedal and other harmonic devices
a smoother contrasting idea (bar 142), whose connection with the chant is not at all clear. When the Dance is recapitulated with the complete plainchant Chorale (bar 498), the Chorale itself is based on G (minor) – a minor third higher than hinted at in the opening Introit. The contrasting tonalities are present in the recapitulated Dance but entirely given over to the solo percussion. The vibraphone solo expresses the tonal conflict by opposing a much faster elaborated version of the G (minor) Veni chant with a version of the same based on C#, as can be seen from this example:

Ex 13: Veni Veni Emmanuel, vibraphone part bb. 499-505

thereby re-establishing C# as an important tonal focus as it was for a time in part of the Heartbeat and Gaude Gaude sections. When the refrain is reached, the plainchant Chorale is eventually drawn into this tonality, switching from G to C# preparing a leading note function for C#. In short, the pedal function of the C# is finally understood as the culmination of a series of harmonic moves throughout the work.

The Role of the Percussionist

It will have been noticed that comparatively little has been made of the role of the solo percussionist in the work. This anomaly was noted by early reviewers since it was obvious that the main thrust of the musical and theological argument is carried by the orchestra. The ‘problem’ then is that the role of the percussionist in the work is ambiguous, if this is indeed a concerto. This is not quite how David Wright puts it, but it is, in essence, the main ‘issue’ to be faced when discussing the work.

It is a mistake to view the composition as a concerto in the traditional sense. It is, rather, a work which features a solo percussionist who is, as MacMillan puts it in the preface to the score ‘an equal partner’ with the orchestra. The two partners converse, sometimes they agree and sometimes they do not. Conflict is not envisioned here in the way that it arises in the concerto as a genre, and there is certainly no attempt on MacMillan’s part to equate the percussionist throughout as the ‘voice of humanity’ to underpin the ‘liturgical journey’. That is why the percussion part is largely a decoration, a counterpointing, a re-inforcer, and at times an opposer, but in none of these roles to the exclusion of the others for any length of time. For example, the percussionist has a specific role to play in the Heartbeat section which is primarily conditioned by the need for the music to contain the Heartbeat rhythm in a strongly characterised form. Likewise the performer also has a vital structural role to play at the climax although once again it is to express the religious subtext, that is, the expression of the beating heart of humanity, rather than to demonstrate the virtuosity of the player.

Although the Heartbeat motifs do give some prominence to the percussionist, at other times the role is essentially to increase the texture either by adding to it, or by doubling other instruments. Thus in the first section Introit the percussionist adds to the chaos by having independent arabesque-like passages which are sometimes harmonically ambiguous through use of the pentatonic scale, one of its rare occurrences in the work. On the other hand for the rest of the first section the percussion part largely doubles the other instruments, usually wind and brass. In the Dance sections, although rhythmically more elaborate at times, the prime function of the percussion is to give weight to the dance rhythms and to articulate the accents, again rather
than specifically to show off virtuosity.

Apart from the lead up to the final climax at bar 546, it is really only in the central Gaude Gaude section that the percussion part develops an independent life, detached from the tripartite ‘Rejoice’ ostinato, so independent in fact that at first it is perhaps difficult to recognise that the part is based round repetitions of the motivic cells that have already been heard earlier. Moreover, the tonal centres of the ‘Rejoice’ ostinati are at T7 and the juxtaposed percussion at T1, directly expressing the harmonic relationship which has underpinned the harmonic structures throughout. So, although it may be problematic to define the percussion role exactly it is certainly the case that its thematic and harmonic content is always clearly relatable to the surrounding textures.

Such are the separate strands which make up Veni Veni Emmanuel. It is now time to bring these back together and examine the effect of the work as a whole.

**Musical sense and metaphorical significance**

I began this study by re-articulating the metaphors that MacMillan employs to describe his use (‘transubstantiation’) of the pre-compositional stimulus on the one hand, and the spiritual (‘liturgical’) journey which Veni Veni Emmanuel takes from Advent to Easter.

MacMillan has not tried to personify the instruments, and specifically, the percussion, as the ‘voice’ of humanity. Nor has he attempted, for the most part, to use the percussion part to embody conflict and resolution in the manner which would be expected in a traditional concerto model. In fact, in a sense, the identity of the percussionist has been sacrificed to the metaphor. Although it is possible to suggest that the solo percussionist ‘represents’ humanity in the metaphorical world of Veni Veni Emmanuel, if this were truly the case throughout then the orchestra would always represent the metaphorical other, that is, the Divine. Clearly this does not happen in this composition, and nor could it, since it would make the music impossibly two dimensional.

In the ‘spiritual’ scenario which MacMillan has created there will always be contradictions since the metaphor simply cannot be translated literally or absolutely into the musical substance. Despite the superficial similarities between MacMillan and Messiaen (viz. spiritual, Catholic, metaphorical), the composer’s spiritual metaphors are not literal – no flying angels here – and his pitch generation processes are not continuously ordered – no modes of limited transposition or their like here. Rather what MacMillan means by ‘transubstantiated’ as it applies to the plainchant in Veni Veni Emmanuel is just this: the plainchant has become the new work, and as Chart 1 (Appendix 2) showed, the fragments of the plainchant are not transformed into, nor do they build up to, the final fully harmonised apotheosis. There is no sense in which the plainchant grows into its full form. It is primarily through the structure and the pitch/tonal manipulation that the ‘liturgical journey’ is effected.

In the simple ABA₁ macrostructure the final A₁ is both a variation and a culmination, and the non symmetrical shape, the lopsided arch, means that however the work is broken down, whether into 5, 7 or even 9 subsections, the tonal substratum will always be felt underpinning the musical journey as it does in ‘traditional’ tonal music. Despite the criticisms, the tonal progression that MacMillan achieves is one of the principal reasons contributing to audience comprehensibility.

If the fragments of the Veni Veni Emmanuel plainchant which are used throughout cannot of themselves suggest the ‘journey’, neither can the plainchant Ubi Caritas because it is only used symbolically, as the personification of God in Jesus. If we take this ‘liturgical journey’ too literally we will certainly be conscious of missing big liturgical events such as the Nativity and the Passion.

It seems then from a critical standpoint that neither the ‘transubstantiation’ not the ‘liturgical journey’ metaphor really works absolutely, but in this composition they work sufficiently for a meaning to be inferred. In the end it is how the music communicates and how the processes operate that really matters. What I have therefore tried to do in this analysis is to demonstrate the depth of thinking which underpins MacMillan’s writing and how he translates his musical ideas into practice.
locally and through longer term planning. What emerges is a complex series of levels of musical meaning, some of which can be translated or inferred back into the ‘programme’ of the work, and some of which cannot.

However the real ‘message’ of this work does not lie in expectation (‘O Come O Come Emmanuel’) but in fulfilment (‘Where Charity and Love are there God is’). It is therefore not really the plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* which is transubstantiated in this work: the embodiment of the work lies literally and metaphorically in the plainchant *Ubi Caritas*.

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**Endnotes**


6 I use brackets here to represent the idea that the tonality is not strictly minor but having both minor and modal elements. Whereas when the key is given unbracketted I am suggesting that it is unequivocal e.g. D major.

7 MacMillan himself describes it in the Composer’s Note in the score as a five part structure, presumably grouping the ‘Introit-Advent’ and ‘Heartbeat’ sections together, taking the Coda as a separate section, and not counting the Transition Sequences. Adding the two Transition Sections back in gives a 7 part structure, but, splitting the ‘Introit-Advent’ and ‘Heartbeat’ sections, and taking notice of the fact that before the Coda there is a compressed repeat of the opening Introit at bar 565 gives a 9 part structure. Thus the work can be thought of as in 3, 5, 7 or 9 parts depending on how one views it.


9 I use the term juxtaposition in a general way here to include both immediate opposition of the tonalities but also in the longer term within a subsection, and even across sections.

10 See Appendix 2. Since the motifs with which MacMillan works are usually only two or three pitch cells it might appear at first as though his choice of pitches was rather random. It is exactly the perception of this sort of thematic fragmentation of motifs derived from the plainchant that is the key to understanding the work. As mentioned earlier MacMillan has been influenced by Maxwell Davies and others in the manipulation of small thematic fragments. In this work the early emphasis on motivic fragmentation makes the strongest possible contrast with extended thematic statements that dominate aspects of the texture in the build up to the climax in the ‘recapitulation’.

11 Or, ‘God is there’ which is probably MacMillan’s preferred translation.

12 Its presence was signalled by the composer in the ‘Raising Sparks’ interview, op. cit., p. 22.


14 Wright, op. cit.


16 David Wright op. cit.
Appendix 2: *Veni Veni Emmanuel* - plainchant 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel'

Ve-ni ve-ni Em-ma-nu-el cap-ti-vum sol-ve Is-ra-el

Qui ge-it in ex-si-li-o pri-va-tus De-i Fi-li-o

Gau-de gau-de [Em-ma-nu-el] nas-ce-tur pro te Is-ra-el

Ubi Caritas et Amor

Ub-i Ca-ri-tas et a-mor, De-us i-bi est.

Appendix 1: the plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel*
Appendix 2: Table 1 Veni Veni Emmanuel - Veni Veni plainchant use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>Section of plainchant</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Transposition Level</th>
<th>Harmonic Juxtaposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introit-Advent 1-57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>‘O Come…’ – first phrase</td>
<td>All semiquaver Movement</td>
<td>Pan chromatic – wind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>‘And ransom…’</td>
<td></td>
<td>T4 – trumpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/18</td>
<td>‘That dwells in lonely exile…appear’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pan chromatic wind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>‘Rejoice, rejoice…’</td>
<td>b.22 first hearing of shortened ‘rejoice, rejoice’ which will become ‘heartbeat’</td>
<td>T4 – trumpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>‘O Come…’</td>
<td>Minim cantus – adapted</td>
<td>T5 – brass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>‘Emmanuel’</td>
<td>Pitches d, f, c</td>
<td>T5 – brass (trumpet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>‘And ransom…’</td>
<td></td>
<td>T5 – trumpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34/5</td>
<td>‘That dwells…’</td>
<td></td>
<td>T9 – strings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-58</td>
<td>‘O come…’</td>
<td>Minim cantus</td>
<td>T0 – horn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-52</td>
<td>‘O come…’; ‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Fragmented extracts</td>
<td>Wind (see particularly clarinet at 52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Anticipation of Heartbeat rhythm</td>
<td>Percussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartbeats 58-126</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-</td>
<td>‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Heartbeat section</td>
<td>Percussion and low pitched instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-</td>
<td>‘O come…’; ‘Emmanuel’</td>
<td>Bars 58-9 and extended; 65-68 and extended</td>
<td>Viola T0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-65</td>
<td>‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Heartbeat rhythm</td>
<td>Wind T0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-97</td>
<td>‘Rejoice’ at T7 or ‘Israel’ at T0</td>
<td>Rhythmic diminution across 14 bars</td>
<td>Horn and brass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88ff</td>
<td>‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Anticipation of Gaude, Gaude</td>
<td>Strings T6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-9</td>
<td>‘Rejoice…’</td>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>Brass T0 (trumpet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Chart of the use of motivic derivations from the plainchant throughout the work (beginning)
Appendix 2: Table 1 *Veni Veni Emmanuel* - *Veni Veni* plainchant use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>‘O Come..’</td>
<td>Brass T3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127-286</td>
<td>Heartbeat rhythm is implicit in the quavers of this section and in some of the percussion figurations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127-141</td>
<td>‘O Come...’</td>
<td>Trumpet T4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170-199</td>
<td>Brass + Strings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142-169</td>
<td>Least relatable section in the whole work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-219</td>
<td>‘Rejoice...Israel’</td>
<td>Wind/Brass T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several repetitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220-59</td>
<td>‘O come .. Emmanuel’</td>
<td>Strings T4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>261-82</td>
<td>Repeat of 173-99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>298-303</td>
<td>‘Shall come...Israel’</td>
<td>Violin T6/T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>305-10</td>
<td>‘Israel’; ‘-manuel’</td>
<td>Strings (violin 1) T10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309-10</td>
<td>‘-manuel’ or ‘man’</td>
<td>Brass (trumpet) T4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>314</td>
<td>‘O come...’</td>
<td>Strings T10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘-manuel’ or ‘man’</td>
<td>Brass (trumpet) T4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>318</td>
<td>‘O Come...’</td>
<td>Trumpet T4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Rejoice...manu-’</td>
<td>Brass + wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>324-333</td>
<td>‘Isra..’</td>
<td>String (violin 1 T10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘O come...’</td>
<td><em>Cor anglais</em> → Trumpet(brass) T10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>353ff</td>
<td>‘Rejoice, Rejoice’</td>
<td>Chord sequences in 3 groups, moving at different rates T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeating chord sequences through whole section: Heartbeat related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Chart of the use of motivic derivations from the plainchant throughout the work (continued)
Appendix 2: Table 1 *Veni Veni Emmanuel* - *Veni Veni* plainchant use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar Range</th>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Percussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>359</td>
<td>‘O Come’</td>
<td>Elaborated statement</td>
<td>Percussion T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>363-5</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas</em></td>
<td>Violin on A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>376-384</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas</em></td>
<td>Violin 8ve higher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379-389</td>
<td>‘Isra..’ (i.c. 9,10 = B♭, G,F) $\rightarrow$ ‘shall come to thee’ (i.c. 9,10)</td>
<td>Repeated <em>ostinato</em> Semiquaver sextuplets repeated</td>
<td>Percussion T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percussion T0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-4</td>
<td>‘O come..’</td>
<td>Extended over D pedal</td>
<td>Percussion T5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>421-4</td>
<td>‘O come…’ reverse</td>
<td>See structure chart – percussion retrograde</td>
<td>Percussion T1R (from 359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Sequence II</strong> 432-89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>457ff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Varied repeat of 240ff At T1 of original</td>
<td>Strings T5 interspersed with wind and brass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>464ff</td>
<td>‘Rejoice, Rejoice’</td>
<td>Wind T7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>470-1</td>
<td>‘O Come’</td>
<td>Rhythmic reference to Transition I</td>
<td>Strings (violin 1) T5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>469-477ff</td>
<td>‘O Come’</td>
<td>Percussion probably based on T0, T1, T5 (bar 484)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>‘Emmanu-’</td>
<td>Wind (flute) T7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dance Chorale</strong> 490-580</td>
<td>Heartbeat idea continues in flutes + vibraphone</td>
<td>As before, heartbeat motif is implicit in the quaver movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>490-8</td>
<td>‘O Come’</td>
<td>(Repeats 506 = 226; 513= 497)</td>
<td>Trumpet/Vibraphone then strings T9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>506-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>498-506</td>
<td>‘O Come…appear’</td>
<td>Harmonised plainsong complete (long notes) and semiquaver counterpoint in vibraphone. Tritone distance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(phrase 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarinets/horns T3 (based on G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vibraphone – whole refrain in diminution with elaboration at T9 (on C♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(phrase 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>530-45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(phrases 3/4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(not refrain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>546-62</td>
<td>‘O Come…Emmanuel’</td>
<td>Dance rhythm</td>
<td>Strings T9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Chart of the use of motivic derivations from the plainchant throughout the work (continued)
### Appendix 2: Table 1 *Veni Veni Emmanuel - Veni Veni* plainchant use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(same)</th>
<th>‘Rejoice...Isra-’</th>
<th>Long notes</th>
<th>Brass and wind T9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>Heartbeats in Bass drum (more percussion added from 569)</td>
<td>Varied repeat of opening bars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo 565-80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>570-2</td>
<td><em>Ubi Caritas</em></td>
<td>Anticipation (see commentary)</td>
<td>Trombone on E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coda – Easter</strong> 581 – end</td>
<td>Heartbeats continue in percussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>585-600</td>
<td>‘Rejoice, rejoice’</td>
<td><em>Ostinato</em></td>
<td>Trombones/bassoon T0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>591-99</td>
<td><em>Ubi caritas</em></td>
<td>Violin 1 on D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>601</td>
<td>‘Rejoice’ (pitches)</td>
<td>Bells</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Chart of the use of motivic derivations from the plainchant throughout the work (conclusion)
‘Purification by Fire’:
The Commissioned Works of the Scottish International Piano Competition
Stephen Broad

The Scottish International Piano Competition (SIPC) was founded in 1986 as the Scottish Piano Competition, with 25 young pianists with Scottish connections embarking on concert careers.¹ In the twenty years and five further competitions that have followed, the competition has gradually grown in scope and ambition, opening to European competitors in 1990 and to the rest of the world in 1993. By the most recent competition in 2004, 38 pianists from 5 continents were taking part in what had become a major international competition, sponsored by Yamaha and Blüthner and affiliated to the World Federation of International Music Competitions.²

One aspect of the competition has remained unchanged since the competition’s inception – the compulsory performance of a new work. In the first competition, the work chosen by the organisers was a recently composed Sonata by Martin Dalby, then head of music at BBC Scotland. Since 1990, however, the SIPC organisers have commissioned a new work for each competition from a Scottish composer.³

Of course, the SIPC is by no means alone in requiring the performance of a new or specially-commissioned work – many of the world’s piano competitions (such as the Van Cliburn and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium competitions) do so, and there is also the long tradition of soli de concours composed for conservatory competitions. But as a case study, the commissioned works of the SIPC present the opportunity to explore some facets of the ‘compulsory test piece’.⁴ Here, I will consider the rationale for new music being a component of the competition, look briefly at the music that has been written for the SIPC and consider some characteristics the commissions share. Finally, I will look at some of the implications of the inclusion of new music in the competitive process of a piano competition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Graham Hair</td>
<td>Wild Cherries and Honeycomb (from: Twelve Transcendental Concert Studies on Themes from the Australian Poets)</td>
<td>Canberra, Aust: Southern Voices, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>John McCabe</td>
<td>Evening Harmonies (Study No. 7 – Hommage à Dukas)</td>
<td>London: Novello, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Edward Harper</td>
<td>Ballad</td>
<td>Glasgow: Scottish Music Centre, 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The Commissions of the Scottish International Piano Competition

The form of the SIPC is largely typical of international piano competitions: competitors apply for entry to the competition by submitting recordings and testimonies. These are sifted by the judges, and between 30 and 40 are chosen to take part: these
competitors are then sent the commissioned work, about eight weeks before the competition commences. The competition itself involves three stages: the first two are solo recitals, the third, a concerto final. The repertoire for the first round is restricted to certain composers – and all competitors must play either J. S. Bach or Domenico Scarlatti, and either Mozart or Chopin. A maximum of 12 competitors are admitted to the second round, and it is at this stage that the commissioned work is performed, with an otherwise free choice of repertoire in a programme of at most 55 minutes. Four competitors are admitted to the concerto final, and, in accordance with World Federation of International Music Competitions rules, prizes are subsequently awarded on the basis of all performances. The exception to this is a special prize awarded for the performance of the commissioned work.³

The purpose of the commissioned work is twofold: to enrich the contemporary literature; and to challenge the contestant to acquire and shape music he has never heard played⁶

Joseph Horowitz's rationale for the commissioned piece in the Van Cliburn competition is equally relevant to the SIPC, but it should be seen in the light of the SIPC committee's explicit support for musical life in Scotland.

The Scottish pianist Frederic Lamond (1868 – 1948), who was one of Liszt's last pupils, takes pride of place in SIPC brochures, and the first prize carries with it the Frederic Lamond Gold Medal. The competition literature across the span of the six competitions makes clear the organisers' belief that the competition should support and celebrate the musical life of Scotland – encouraging Scottish musicians (as explicitly expressed in the first competition, and now carried on in masterclasses for young Scots, which accompany the main competition); bringing international performers to Scotland; and providing inspiring listening for audiences, both during the competition itself and in a raft of pre-arranged engagements in Scotland that await the prize-winners.

The competition brochures of the SIPC give little away as to the rationale for the inclusion of a specially commissioned work, but it is clear that it is, in part, an outlet for the competition committee's desire to support Scotland's musical life. Since the popular audience for the competition is likely to be larger – and perhaps more widely distributed – than new Scottish piano music might usually command, the commissioned work promotes new Scottish music through its high profile, and also reinforces the 'Scottishness' of the competition.⁷

The second part of Horowitz's comment on the Van Cliburn commissioned work is also apposite. The commission creates a single point of musical reference that each competitor will encounter, allowing them to be judged 'like for like' in their performance of music that comes to them without an established performance tradition. To some extent, the challenge posed to the performer is clear – they must prepare a convincing performance of a work for which they have no reference points except their own musicianship, experience as a pianist and the score. A panel that includes the composer will judge the interpretation they give, and it will be judged against the interpretations given of the same piece by the other competitors. The commissioned work also poses a secondary test of all-round musicianship for the semi-finalists: the rest of the repertoire for Stage 2 is a free choice for participants, and so the commissioned work must be situated within a wider programme – the design of which may be used as a basis of judgments by the jury.⁸

The composer, too, is set something of a challenge in the commission. The brief given in 2004 stipulated a range of criteria that shaped the commission:
The Commission

| ‘The piece should be of a character reflecting the composer’s own style and repertoire’ |
| ‘The piece should explore areas which are as demanding intellectually and emotionally as they are technically.’ |
| ‘The piece should be technically pitched at a performer who is capable of virtuosity and flare, but should also require reflective and emotive interpretation.’ |

Table 2: Selected criteria from the 2004 SIPC commission

As we might expect, the composers’ responses to the challenge of writing ‘the compulsory work’ have been varied, but they also share certain characteristics. A detailed analysis of each work is out of the question in an article like this, but it is nonetheless useful to get a sense of each composer’s approach. I will focus here on the most overtly pianistic elements of each work; compare them with each other, and to some works from the piano canon. (I will omit in this discussion Martin Dalby’s Sonata, which, although it was used in the first competition, was not in itself commissioned by the SIPC, and also Rory Boyle’s excellent ‘audience-piece’, commissioned by the 2004 competition as a focus for the young Scottish pianists taking part the accompanying masterclass series.)

Ronald Stevenson’s work for the 1990 competition – the first of the SIPC commissions for the first truly international competition – was Beltane Bonfire, an effervescent work that according to the composer relates ‘by analogy’ to the Scottish spring festival of the Beltane – ‘a druidic act of sun-worship on May Day, when the sun and buds burst and winter is banished’.10

Beltane’s symbology is purification by fire. (There’s also trial-by-fire in The Magic Flute, you’ll remember.) It’s also a token of the interdependency of people, creatures, nature – in a word, ecology.11

Stevenson’s note on the work (from which I have drawn the title of this article) elegantly ties together a range of images that we might associate with the competition itself – Scottishness, or at least ‘Celticness’, by evoking a specifically Celtic festival; the idea of festivity itself; trial (perhaps dangerous trial?); and the notion of ‘interdependence’ (an idea that is reflected in any competition since winner’s position is derived from her position with respect to each other competitor). Stevenson’s note also mentions the more mischievous image of the ‘May Queen’, the Queen-for-a-day who is ‘crowned in hawthorn’ during the Beltane – perhaps a sideways comment on the nature of the coronation that awaits the winner?

The music is exuberant – at the composer’s insistence, in fact, since he gives the work the indication Allegro esuberante. Stevenson’s distinguished career as a pianist-composer – and his authoritative knowledge of Busoni – ensure that the piece is crammed with gestures from the traditions of piano writing. Liszt and Busoni, to be sure (especially in the filigree from m. 15 that Stevenson marks guizzando (flickering) and in the glistening accompaniment to the theme from m. 33, see Figure 1), but also possibly Bartók or Messiaen in the opening bars and their climactic recurrence at m.98.
MM $\frac{j}{\text{c.} 104}$ ossia un poco meno

la melodia forte e sontuosa: gli accompagnamenti pp

con molto Pedale
Stephen Broad: *Purification by Fire*

My riches all went into dreams that never yet came home,
They touched upon the wild cherries and the slabs of honeycomb;
They were not of the desolate brood that men can sell or buy:
Down in that poor country no pauper was I.\(^{18}\)

*Wild Cherries and Honeycomb* moves in a seamless stream of sixteen notes through a series of shorter sections that each have their own distinct character: I. *Presto, ma non troppo pesante*; II. *Giocoso*; III. *Fluido e lirico*; IV. *Con fuoco, ma non troppo pesante*; V. *Tempetoso*; VI. *Brillante, con slancio*; VII. *(secco e leggiero)*; VIII. *Molto energetico e con fuoco, ma non troppo pesante*; IX. *(con poco pedale)*; CODA *(sospirando)*. In addition to coping with the considerable technical challenges presented throughout, the performer also has the problem of dealing with many subtly modulated turns of mood. Hair gives detailed performance indications – especially of dynamic and articulation – though he restricts himself mainly to notations that describe the music, rather than the technical aspects of performance (there is very little pedalling marked, for example – only when it is absolutely necessary to point up a moment's pedal amongst otherwise *secco* passagework).

In conversation with the author, Graham Hair informally compared the piece with Ravel's *Jeu d'eau* – and certainly the aural connection with Ravel is unmistakable, whether it is with *Jeu d'eau* or with works like *Gaspard de la Nuit* (whose *Scarbo* is briefly alluded to in the eighth section, see: Figure 2 and Figure 3).

A small shadow of *Scarbo* may also be perceived in the commission for the 2001 competition: *Evening Harmonies (Study No. 7 – Hommage à Dukas)*, by John McCabe, whose first notes create a minor ninth in the bass that is reminiscent of the striking rising semi-tone that opens Ravel's piece.\(^{19}\) What follows is quite different, however. In his note, McCabe explains:

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Figure 2: Hair, *Wild Cherries and Honeycomb*, m.108

Figure 3: Ravel, *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit* mm.556-558
The music particularly exploits several kinds of pianistic sensibility and pays tribute to two composers whose music means a great deal to me.

One is Liszt, obviously – the title comes from one of the finest of his *Études d'exécution transcendante*, the lovely *Harmonies du soir*, from which I have almost borrowed a couple of musical gestures and one tempo marking (as well as the overall shape, though worked out very differently). The other is Dukas, hence the acknowledgement in the subtitles – in particular, his beautiful *Prélude élogique* for piano, his *Poème dansé* for orchestra, *La Péri*, perhaps above all his masterly opera *Ariane et Barbebleu* [sic], are a constant source of inspiration.

McCabe’s borrowed tempo indication is *Più lento con intimo sentimento*, and he also borrows the corresponding texture from Liszt at this point too – a monody against which are set dry grappeti-like spread staccato chords (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Other Liszt influences are found in the opening gesture (in which McCabe expands Liszt’s octaves into a minor 9th) and the rapidly repeated notes. Though the harmonic language is different, there are also hints in the dazzling ‘bell-like’ chords of Messiaen’s piano writing – perhaps related to Messiaen and McCabe’s shared love of *Ariane*, filtered through the sonorities of the piano?

‘Bell-like’ is McCabe’s own indication in the score – a further borrowing from Liszt, who used the expression in an early version of his *Harmonies du soir*.

The connection with Dukas is a little more difficult to pin down, and despite the fireworks of the central section, this seems like the most contemplative of the commissions, with the sense of narrative generated through the carefully controlled thematic and textural transformations. The piece ends with a simple but effective use of sympathetic resonance, upon which is laid a fleeting echo of earlier music.

Edward Harper’s *Ballad* of 2004 draws on material that Harper had used the previous year in work for orchestra, organ and school choirs: *The Voice of a City*.
The material of the piano piece is taken from the fourth movement, a setting of a sad evocation of unrequited affection which I found in an anthology of poems by Edinburgh school children.24

The most recent of the SIPC commissions, it begins with a simple and delicate moderato introduction of sustained repeated chords, before launching into a vigorous toccatta-like central section, the texture of which builds gradually to a long fortissimo passage marked con tutta forza. Harper uses alternating and strongly accented groups of two and three quavers in this central section to striking effect. The final part of the Ballad is slower and more lyrical, with a chorale-like element set off with other lines that contrast texturally (at first, poco agitato staccato chords against sustained chorale chords, making use of the sostenuto pedal; later a rippling accompaniment marked molto delicato). Like McCabe’s Evening Harmonies, the Ballad ends with a use of sympathetic resonance, though Harper’s use of this technique is given greater development –the silently held notes change and different resonances are drawn out one-by-one by the other notes that are played.

When these commissions are considered together, it is remarkable how the open brief provided by the SIPC has, in fact, brought forth a set of piano pieces that share many points of contact. Chief among these are the response to the brief, and the ways in which the composers have chosen to notate their music, as well as the approach to texture and the related issue of the composers’ references to historical antecedents. I should like to look briefly at each of these aspects in turn.

The brief requests that ‘the piece should be technically pitched at a performer who is capable of virtuosity and flare, but should also require reflective and emotive interpretation’.25 This is an intriguingly ambiguous remit – at once reminding the composer that the performer will be of the highest technical proficiency, whilst shying away from explicitly requesting virtuosic music (‘capable of virtuosity and flare’) and emphasising instead other aspects of interpretation. Most of the composers have nevertheless responded with music that is clearly virtuosic or contains extended virtuosic passages – even the most straightforward of the commissions (probably Frank Spedding’s Capriccio) is a fairly demanding piece. At the risk of oversimplification, the commissions may be split into two broad camps – those that are unremittingly ‘technical’ and whose musical challenges are integrated within the technical work (Stevenson, Crawford, Hair); and those in which the music turns alternately from (roughly) musical challenges in a ‘simple’ technical context to technical challenges in a more straightforward musical context (Spedding, Harper, McCabe).

None of the composers has explored the possibility of a whole work of demandingly ‘simple’ music (music whose demands are similar to those of the Mozart or Scarlatti that is required in other stages of the competition). Perhaps this is because of ambiguity of the remit; alternatively, the SIPC composers may have considered virtuosic music to be more interesting compositionally (one might imagine that the commission presents an unmissable opportunity for composers to go to town in their piano writing, in the knowledge that the performers – especially those who reach the second round – will have a very high level of technical skill). Whatever the reason, it is clear that the SIPC commissions are all virtuosic music that, in this sense at least, fall squarely within the tradition of soli de concours.

The notation decisions made by the six SIPC composers are also worth examining. The most striking aspect of the notation is that, in general, the pieces are notated with great precision – each composer gives copious directions to the performers and even in the most sparsely notated work (Frank Spedding’s Capriccio), there is a range of performance indications underlining the unfolding character of the music: scorrevole, ben articolato (m. 1); scherzando (m. 12); cantando, nervoso (m. 17) etc.

This may simply reflect a shared aesthetic orientation amongst the SIPC composers, but once again (and with the same caveats as to oversimplification), it is possible to discern across the commissions two flavours of notation, the use of which might, I suggest, affect how performers approach the challenge of performing the new work. The first of these is the notation of what might be called ‘the music itself’ – that is to say, the description of the composer’s conception of the music: articulations and inflexions, ‘character’ indications, and pointers to the cantilena or
In addition to these representations of ‘the music itself’, there are also indications from the composer of how, in mechanical terms, it should be approached. Naturally, these two are closely related (some will consider the distinction spurious), but distinct approaches can, I think, be perceived among the SIPC composers.

The notation of pedaling gives the best case-in-point (though fingering, and elements of phrasing and articulation could also provide examples). Some – such as John McCabe – have restricted themselves to only the most essential pedal indications. One gets the impression from the sparse pedal indications in McCabe’s score that these are there for clarity in ambiguous cases, and that pedaling elsewhere would be entirely permissible depending on the effect created. At the other end of the spectrum is Robert Crawford, whose pedal notations are so precise that they suggest no room for decision making on the part of the performer (of the first 60 measures in Crawford’s Sonata Breve, only one contains no pedal mark – and the performance notes explain in detail the largely conventional or intuitive notation that he uses). Most composers take an approach that falls between these two extremes – such as Stevenson, who notates the pedaling of a crucial passage (mm. 86-92) in detail, whilst trusting to the musicianship of the performer elsewhere, with general indications like con pedale. Hair’s approach is similar, with key moments notated, and others left to the performer, with the encouragement con pedale.26

There is a certain irony that, in an element of the competition designed (at least in part) to reveal the performer’s autonomy as an interpreter, such detailed specification is given by some of the composers – but of course this is part of the challenge to the performers. The danger that lurks behind the foliage of detail in the commissioned work is that, with limited time available to them, the unwary performer will privilege slavish production of every notated nuance at the expense of cultivating and refining their own insights. Of course, the best will transcend this problem, no matter the detail – but it is another aspect of the challenge that the compulsory work presents.

A wide range of pianistic textures is explored in the commissions of the SIPC, but several distinctive textural ideas recur across the pieces. While it would be simplistic to assume that the given Italian indications can be a surrogate for the sorts of subtle textures that the SIPC composers have conjured up in their music, the recurring use of certain expression is nonetheless notable. Sospirando, for example (used by Crawford and Hair; McCabe uses the related Murmurando); Lontano (McCabe and Spedding); Secco (Harper and Hair); Nervoso (Harper and Spedding); Martellato (Spedding and Crawford); and Pesante (Hair, Crawford and McCabe). Likewise, Harper, Crawford, Stevenson and McCabe all stipulate the use of sostenuto pedal, facilitating the distinctive textures created by the separation of lines that this pedal allows (Hair offers opportunities for its use, too, though he doesn’t require it). However, each stipulated use of the sostenuto pedal is more or less conventional – to sustain a bass pedal note or large chord whilst another line is separately given out. This line might be contrastingly secco (the stock-in-trade of the sostenuto pedal) or merely requiring clarity that would be destroyed if the susten pedal were to be used.

There is, I would suggest, quite a clear textural ‘repertoire’ across the SIPC commissions that, while effectively deployed in the individual pieces, creating drama and contrasts, is nonetheless quite clearly bounded by convention. Texture is clearly pre-eminent among the compositional considerations in these works, and all the composers have made contrasts or modulations of texture a crucial feature of their music. In general, however, these variations fall within well-established traditions of
writing, be they Lisztian bravura, the whisperings of Ravel or the martellati of Bartók or Messiaen.

This leads on to the final point of contact between the commissions that I should like to mention here: their tendency to refer (either overtly or implicitly) to music in the pianistic tradition. Many of these references have been mentioned above, but it is worth reviewing them: the connections between Ronald Stevenson’s Beltane Bonfire and the music of Liszt and Busoni; Robert Crawford’s Sonata Breve being subtitled a ‘hommage to Domenico Scarlatti’; Graham Hair’s reference to Ravel connection with his Wild Cherries and Honeycomb; John McCabe’s overt references to Liszt and his dedication to Dukas in Evening Harmonies. Each reference is to a major plank of the pianist’s repertoire and I would go so far as to propose that these works are united by a conscious decision on the part of their composers to situate them primarily within the history and traditions of piano performance, as distinct from any traditions of composition. (Identifying this trend in the course of the research for this article affected my own response to these works – I moved away from considering them in more or less structural terms towards an approach that prioritised pianistic matters.) This approach might be criticised by some as conservative or reactionary, but I propose that it is these very points of contact with canonical piano works (through textural and gestural references, for example) that make the commissions an integral and convincing part of the competition. The composer joins the performer in the extending and enacting the traditions of the virtuoso.

Tumelty’s critical reaction to performances of Crawford’s Sonata Breve has already been mentioned. The same critic’s comments on the performances of some of the other commissions are possibly even more telling, particularly his reviews of the second rounds of the 1995 and 1998 competitions, which suggest that the commissions for these years produced highly divergent performances. Spedding’s Capriccio ‘brought a bewildering range of interpretations’, whilst Hair’s Wild Cherries and Honeycomb apparently ‘produced an astonishing variety of interpretations’.

Tumelty points to an interesting question about performance traditions in the piano canon, and the role of the commission in the SIPC and other piano competitions. If the SIPC commissions, specially-commissioned precisely so that they have no performance tradition, produce ‘bewildering’ or ‘astonishing’ divergences of interpretation (and this despite the detailed notation), then presumably the other works performed in the same round (usually relatively standard repertoire) are much more convergent in terms of interpretation. Most probably, the competitors’ performances of the repertoire are highly conditioned by established performance traditions.

On the one hand, the commissioned work could be seen as a vital instrument for revealing the competitor’s ability to build their interpretation ‘from the ground up’ – Horowitz’s rationale for the inclusion of a new work in the Van Cliburn competition. From this perspective, the commission would seem to have an important role to play by allowing discrimination between competitors by supposedly revealing their musical autonomy. The notion of a hermetically personal interpretation is highlighted in some other competitions, such as the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition, where competitors learn the new work in a week of enforced isolation at a venue supplied by the competition. A word-that-dare-not-speak-its-name – ‘authenticity’ – springs to mind here, both in the sense that this is supposedly an unmediated response (unmediated, that is, by a long procession of teachers, by countless other performers, by a crushing weight of performance tradition), but also in the related notion of ‘authorship’ and ‘authority’: competitors’ performances of a new work, whether successful or not, are entirely their own – they make what they can of the music. In some key respects, we might expect success in the commissioned work to be a vital test of musicianship.

On the other hand, we might ask how much, in reality, the successful performance of the new work is a determinant of competition success? Is it possible that the finer points of divergence in the canonical repertoire are more important in competition terms than the apparently large variations in the performances of the commissioned works?

Eileen Cline gives an insight into some of these questions in her comments on the position of contemporary music in piano competitions (but note her first clause, which I have italicized):
Except […] in the case of works commissioned especially for a given competition, contemporary repertoire does not seem to function as determinative of performance excellence. When the judges make choices from the repertoire lists, contemporary compositions often are left until last, little is heard of them, or they are not asked for at all. It may be that the judges usually chosen, who often are veterans of the standard-repertoire era, are not comfortable with newer idioms. In a number of the competitions observed, the performance of contemporary compositions was greeted by the jury with much whispering of the nature of ‘Have you heard this before?’ and ‘What do you think of this piece?’ This is likely to be accompanied by much rustling of papers as jurors try to follow the score, and sometimes with falling asleep.\textsuperscript{28}

There seems to be some kind of contradiction here. Cline claims that, from her observations, contemporary music in general is not regarded as a litmus test of ‘performance excellence’. Elsewhere, however, she notes the prevalence of some kind of set contemporary repertoire or new work in piano competitions – and clearly they are there for a reason. The implication must be that a commissioned work is apparently more useful in the competitive process that a competitor-selected contemporary work.

In the SIPC, the composer is available to act as a reference – he has been a member of the jury. Naturally, jury discussions are subject to the confidentiality of Chatham-house rules, but it would be fascinating to know the position of the composer as arbiter of the competitors’ interpretations. Are they judged against the composer’s conception (or conceptions) of the piece, or do the jury reach a majority view on who ‘makes the best of’ the music, whether it happens to be what the composer has in mind or not? Of course, the judges themselves have had ample time to reach their own understanding of the commission, so there need be no consensus. In fact, there is an irony that while the commission seems to offer a chance to judge competitors ‘like-for-like’, commission performances will probably be assessed on very different terms from the performance of other repertoire. Cline’s comments suggest that the presence of the composer, or the panel’s familiarity with the set work, put it in an entirely different position from other contemporary music.

The presence of the composer on the panel provokes an array of questions as to its judgments on the performances, but, happily, there has been considerable consistency in the case of the SIPC. The prize given for the best performance of the new work is very frequently awarded to a high-ranking prizewinner (see Table 3), suggesting that, in the SIPC at least, there is no great tension between the new work’s test of musical autonomy and the other rigours of the competition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1st Prize</th>
<th>2nd Prize</th>
<th>Commissioned work prize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Graeme McNaught</td>
<td>Susan Tomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Daniel Wiesner</td>
<td>Balazs Szokolay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Sergei Babayan</td>
<td>Michael Injae Kim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Giampaolo Stuani</td>
<td>Charles Owen</td>
<td>Charles Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Alexander Kobrin</td>
<td>Katya Apekisheva &amp; Alexander Taylor</td>
<td>Alexander Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Chenyin Li</td>
<td>Marina Nadiradze</td>
<td>Marina Nadiradze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Tanya Gabrielian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Danny Driver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: SIPC Prizewinners

The Scottish International Piano Competition has now added six significant works by Scottish composers to the repertoires of many internationally successful young pianists. The commissions of the SIPC are diverse examples of technically and musically challenging piano pieces that both refer to and are a part of the tradition of virtuoso piano writing. They make stringent demands on the performer, but, I have suggested, are made meaningful in the context of a piano competition.
by virtue of the way they take the canonical piano literature as their starting point. They have played a vital role in the deliberations of SIPC juries through six international competitions – and have been part of each finalist’s ‘purification by fire’.

Endnotes

1 Scottish Piano Competition: 8th-13th September 1986 [competition programme] (Glasgow, 1986), frontispiece. [Item in the possession of Mr Robin Barr]. I am very grateful to Robin Barr (Glasgow), who was the principal administrator of the competition for many years and has generously made items from his personal collection available. I am also grateful to Philip Jenkins, the Frederic Lamond Distinguished Professor of Piano at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama for his insights, to John Thwaites, former SIPC competitor and lecturer in keyboard studies at the RSAMD and to the staffs of the Whittaker Library and the Scottish Music Centre.

2 Scottish International Piano Competition 2004: Competition Brochure (Glasgow, 2004), 20-29. [Item in the possession of Mr Robin Barr].

3 The competition organisers’ implicit definition of a ‘Scottish composer’ is identical with Jamie Syer’s formulation for what constitutes ‘Canadian music’, that is to say a composer working in Scotland or who calls Scotland home.

4 The bibliography for piano competitions and their like is surprisingly small, despite almost endless primary material in the form of popular criticism. Two notable studies are Joseph Horowitz’s *The Ivory Trade*, an engaging account of the 1989 Van Cliburn competition, and Eileen T Cline’s dissertation on piano competitions, which takes a range of social science approaches to explore various aspects of the piano competition, and was based on a close study of 18 international competitions, many of which she observed in person. See: Joseph Horowitz, *The Ivory Trade: Piano Competitions and the Business of Music* (Boston MA: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Eileen T Cline, *Piano Competitions: An Analysis of their Structure, Value, and Educational Implications* (Doc. Diss.: Indiana University, 1985).


7 In this regard, it is not unlike the Sydney Piano Competition, which at the time of Cline’s research, required ‘a contemporary piece written since 1950, by an Australian composer or a composer from the contestant’s own country’ or the Moscow Tchaikovsky which then included a compulsory piece by a Soviet composer. See: Eileen T Cline, *Piano Competitions: An Analysis of their Structure, Value, and Educational Implications* (Doc. Diss.: Indiana University, 1985), 624 & 625.


9 Scottish International Piano Competition: Commission for 2004. [MS item in the possession of Mr Robin Barr].


12 John Thwaites, private correspondence with the author (18 Oct 2006).
Robert Crawford (b. 1925). Studied privately with Hans Gal and then at Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Benjamin Frankel. He had early success with two string quartets, and was a BBC music producer from 1970-1985.


Frank Spedding (1929 – 2000) studied at the Royal College of Music with Bernard Stevens. Twice a winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society's prize for orchestral composition, he joined the staff of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in 1958. Lawrence Glover, a friend and colleague of Frank Spedding, was the much-loved Head of the Piano Department at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and a juror at the first Scottish Piano Competition in 1986.

Graham Hair (b. 1943). An Australian-born composer. He studied at the University of Melbourne, then Elder Conservatorium with Maxwell Davies. He worked in universities and music institutions in Australia (Sydney Conservatorium), UK, Europe (IRCAM) and the USA (Princeton) before settling in Scotland in 1990. He is Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow.

John McCabe (b. 1939). He studied at Manchester University, the Royal Manchester College of Music and Munich Hochschule. He then embarked on a diverse career as pianist and composer, which included seven years as Principal of the London College of Music. He has been prolific and diverse in his output.

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20 John McCabe, ‘Composer’s Note’, *Evening Harmonies (Study No. 7 – Hommage à Dukas)* for Piano (London: Novello, 2001), [n. p.].


22 For Messiaen’s love of Ariane et Barbe-bleue, see: Olivier Messiaen, ‘Ariane et Barbe-bleue de Paul Dukas’, *La Revue musicale*, 166 (1936), 79-86.


26 In his written indications, Hair gives the impression of fraternal collaboration – his exclamation marks (‘secco’), clear flagging of the *hauptstimme*, and written-in confirmation of notes with many leger lines give a clear sense of what is required, while avoiding the almost dictatorial effect of Crawford’s approach.


Dillon’s L’évolution du vol:  
an Evolution of Stylistics or a Flight from National Identity?

Michael Spencer

In his preview of the world premiere of James Dillon’s Oceanos, the concluding part of his Nine Rivers cycle at the 1996 Proms, Antony Bye attempted to contextualise Dillon’s work:

There’s nothing nationalistic or tweely picturesque about this music. Nine Rivers encapsulates our special relationship with land and seascape, along with Dillon’s desire to recapture some of music’s mediaeval magic […] and his need to distance himself from his Anglo-Scottish heritage. (Bye 1996, 77)

These observations, while rather general, focus on two elements that have arguably been important in Dillon’s output since 1976: his relationship with Scotland and a concern with the creative artist’s relationship to a wide range of disciplines – from historical performance practice to twentieth-century philosophy, from contemporary art to scientific concepts such as genetics or astronomy. Dillon says, ‘I am interested in what the Sufis call that fine net of connections between things’.

This paper seeks to outline some of these connections with specific reference to his work L’évolution du vol (1991–93) written for the ensemble Accroche-Note. This work, scored for mezzo soprano, clarinet (doubling Eb clarinet, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet), two percussionists, piano (doubling hurdy-gurdy and harmonium) and double bass, consists of a series of vignettes which may be performed individually, in combination, or as a whole.

With its strange evocation of a range of musical styles, not least the typographical references to Debussy’s Preludes, and an idiosyncratic formal structure, L’évolution du vol deals with the issue of whether style works unauthentically with pre-ordained notions of patterning. Further, the work can perhaps be seen as engaging with what Kenneth White calls ‘the nomadic intellect’ – and as such, may be viewed as Dillon’s re-assertion of the need to transcend national (or any other) stereotypes.

The music of James Dillon has, mainly due to an article published in the 1980s by Richard Toop, been situated in the area of composition called ‘New Complexity’ (Toop 1988, 4–8). Despite the superficially hegemonic and totalising appearance of the term ‘New Complexity’, different commentators mean different things by it. The German composer-philosopher Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf would argue that, along with ‘large amounts of quantitative and qualitative information’, complexity involves an interaction between different levels of semantics, and Brian Ferneyhough states that:

‘The principal defining features [of complexity] might be seen as: discrepancy, incommensurability and the consequent reliance upon ambiguity as mobile mediator between perceptual categories’.

(Ferneyhough 1995, 66)

Toop also suggests, however, that the composers who fall into this category are interested in creating ‘different simultaneous pulses which are usually periodic and, far from seeking to redefine motion at the bar-lines, these periodic groups habitually go across them’ (Toop 1988, 5). This is certainly a characteristic of Dillon’s early works such as ignis noster for orchestra and La femme invisible for chamber ensemble.

On the continent and specially in Germany, however, a change in the music of Dillon post-1990 has been observed by Mahnkopf who suggests that there is a significant (and in his opinion, negative) shift away from complexity in recent times (Mahnkopf 2002, 55). Dillon claims that his early work is an
'attempt to get rid of the residue of pop music/repetition' – 'the beat' – which had been a primary factor in Dillon's early music career. This approach is re-assessed in *L'évolution du vol* which, while not as dense as some of his work, is expected to be played from memory and without a conductor. Indeed, Dillon has said that he imagined something like a gypsy band arriving on a village green, unpacking their instruments and starting to play. In a limited sense, this could be viewed as a dispersal of Scottish identity, just as Ives might use a similar trope to construct American identity.

**Title Ambiguity**

Dillon often uses titles that are ambiguous or open to several readings. The title *L'évolution du vol* evokes a double meaning: 'vol' can mean either 'flight' or 'theft'. If we unpack this example, there are several possible interpretations. First, as regards 'flight', there is a reference to the subject matter of the various spliced and re-organised texts which primarily deal with the notion of 'getting high' – many phrases are taken from recipes for 'flying ointments' concocted by herbalists and witches, as can be seen in the following example from the text from Movement VI.

```
six five turns the hazel
four the rowan wind arbour sun bright chill
tree shadows anoint the moment in time is measured by a child
through the symmetry ice gently heat
curves measure space where silence gaze has the bellfire curvature rung as seven
seven echoes
cross ascent of moon and crow hover
flights infinite outline a trace eye blind with time stride the winding fold of elemental shift glide
a lace of sweet herbs morpholique
wild celery wolfsbane cinquefoil
separated by vision proto in shadow
circle liquid astral light
in the weave of sweet herbs
for the winds hollow breath
haze of southern sky and sweet lustre
sway with the juice I steal a path of fire
between the dynamics of air and an infusion of light resonance
desire manifest amongst stone
time recedes amongst fire it disappears rising before impact
between the dynamics of air and an infusion of light desire manifest
among of stone time recedes
amongst fire it disappears
rising before impact
etched by doubt
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Here, there is also a direct link to Movement III, a duo for tuned percussion, entitled ‘(...l’ascension)’ which could be viewed literally as a series of short ‘flights’, culminating in a very high passage for eight un-pitched triangles. But if we consider ‘vol’ to mean ‘theft’, to what aspects of the work might this refer? Perhaps the theft of other types of music; that is, references to the French Troubadour style, Eastern European folk music tradition, North African drumming, Ravel, jazz (particularly Charlie Mingus in part VII for solo double bass, and [albeit tenuously] to Frank Zappa’s music in the final part).

There are no references to the Scottish music traditions which have surfaced in Dillon’s early work such as *Siorram* for viola, *Birl* for harpsichord or piano and *A Roaring Flame* for voice and double bass. Rather, as the following list demonstrates, Dillon chooses to refer typographically to Debussy’s *Préludes* by printing the title of each vignette at the end of each part and in brackets with ellipses as did Debussy.
Michael Spencer: Dillon’s L’évolution du Vol

I – (…la pensée rêverie) - (…the dream thought)
for harmonium and mezzo-soprano

II – (…l'homme et la vérité) – (…man and truth)
for piano and mezzo-soprano

III – (…l'ascension) – (…the ascension)
for percussion duo

IV – (…l'être-ange) – (…the living angel) [a play on l’étrange/"strange")
for Eb clarinet, hurdy-gurdy, mezzo-soprano

V – (…nuée) – (…blurred)
for bass clarinet and percussion duo

VI – (…descente/désir) – (…descent/desire)
for bass clarinet, mezzo-soprano, double bass

VII – (…le vent, l'arbre et les temps) – (…the wind, the tree and the times [or possibly seasons])
for solo double bass

VIII – (…historiées faces de la danse) – (…historical facets of dance)
[c.f. Hans Holbein the Younger of Augsburg, 41 woodcuts entitled Les simulachres et historiees faces de
la mort (facsimiles published in 1538 by M. and G. Trechsel of Lyon)]
for contrabass clarinet, mezzo-soprano, percussion duo, piano, double bass

Dillon has always been more enthusiastically received in France than in his homeland (as evidenced by
what Conrad Wilson calls the 'Dillon Debacle' which took place early in 2005). This may be a practical
reason behind the connections with French culture that are emphasised here; for example, Debussy, the
French text, the Troubadour evocation – and, indeed, his interest since the early 1980s in the French
spectral composition movement. It may also be significant that the work was commissioned by a French
ensemble, Accroche-Note, though the first performance was actually by Champ d’Action. However,
there is perhaps another reason.

In his essay, ‘The Franco-Scottish Connection’, Kenneth White writes in reference to himself:

It was in France, in fact, that our Scottish-born intellectual nomad was to publish books over the next few
decades. From the French, or from the original English manuscripts, they were translated into other languages,
but did not appear in the English-language countries, with which he felt, intellectually, poetically and culturally,
less and less contact.

(White 1998, 121)

It is my contention that by the 1990s, Dillon was also feeling distanced from the intellectual, poetic and
 cultural climate of Scotland (despite the arguable references to Scottish fiddle tradition at the start of the
Violin Concerto (2000), references that the composer denies).

The Music (and Stylistic References)
The idea of eschewing repetition that is so prevalent in Dillon’s early work (see especially helle Nacht
for orchestra) is reassessed in L’évolution du vol. Dillon says that here, ‘repetition shifts to the area of
change – texture’ and this relates to his belief that memory functions primarily in how we understand
form. One possible interpretation of this is that memory, rather than simply perceiving an already extant
form, provides a filtering device that allows us to create form. Throughout L’évolution du vol, micro-level
paradigmatic cells of texture, often involving rapid changes of performance technique, are distributed in
such a way that they allow for several different interpretations of form.
There are some obvious examples of this such as the formative repetition in bars 33–37 of ‘(…le vent, l'arbre et les temps)’. Here, the double bass reiterates the fast open string/glissando texture that is also notable for the gradual transition to and from sul pont/sul tasto articulations which evoke Jimi Hendrix's ‘Machine Gun’ (Figure 1 opposite). The shift of bowing positions refers back to the opening bars of the movement where the pitch and rhythmic material are less complex, and also refers forward to bars 88–93 where such material is much more detailed. The sections of pizzicato gestures which evoke the music of Charlie Mingus (bb. 15–17; 20–23; 58–60; 83–84) operate in a similar way to the open string/glissando texture.

Another more complex example of this type of formative repetition of texture occurs in Movement III, in which there is an overlapping of various types of tuned percussion instruments (metal and wood). The Table below outlines the temporal morphology of this process.

### Table of Instrumentation Textures in ‘(…l’ascension)’

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<td>(Vibes)</td>
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<td>3 e</td>
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Figure 1

This and all following facsimile excerpts are from Edition Peters No. 7314
Reproduced by kind permission of the Publishers
It is clear that the double vibraphone material, which appears for 118 quaver beats, is the dominant texture compared to the double xylophone and glockenspiel textures (a total of 39 quaver beats). However, the distribution of this texture across the movement, interspersed by the other similar, yet differentiated texture-types, suggests that Dillon is interested in the subtle, sonic differences between the chosen instruments. The result is that the listener is aware of the coherency afforded by the general similarity in tone-quality of the tuned percussion and the distribution of the ‘double-instrument’ textures, but creative interest and variation exist due to the gradual shifting between the double set of four tuned percussion instruments.

The final movement, ‘(…historiees faces de la danse)’ includes examples of canonic repetition between the voice and contrabass clarinet (bb. 31–33; 36–38; 38–41; 44–46) and ‘shadowed’ doubling between the voice and vibraphone with instrumental pitch modification (Figure 2) reminiscent of Frank Zappa’s music of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Aside from these micro-level and formative repetitions of texture within movements, there are also paradigmatic relationships across movements. For example, the piano part from bar 44 in ‘(…historiees faces de la danse)’ (Figure 3) refers back to the varied repetition of the harmonium material that opens the work and the Alberti bass figuration of that part from bar 14, but due to the arpeggio outline, it is also a memory of the second movement which also uses the piano – see Figures 3a and 3b (bb. 44–47 of VIII; bb. 1–2 of I; bb. 16–18 of II). There are other more general connections across the movements: for example, the percussionists, which appear in Movements III, V and VIII play the same instruments as each other in III and V, but not in VIII. The harmonium and hurdy-gurdy both play suspended pedal notes or triads (Movement I: bb. 1–14; bb. 30–36; and Movement IV throughout).

Figure 4 shows a different stylistic reference, this time to North African drumming with two sets of four small drums and a bass drum which are played with the fingers. Whether Dillon is deliberately making a connection between North Africa and its relationship with France through colonialism is unclear. However, the indications to play the drums at the centre and the edge (and with gradual transitions between these two states) can be linked to the double bass writing in Movement VII.

The clarinettist who features in movements IV, V, VI and VIII descends (in opposition to the ‘flight’ of the title? Or perhaps a reference to coming down from the high?) through Eb clarinet, bass clarinet to contrabass clarinet. Through the gradual introduction and omission of members of the ensemble, Dillon sets in motion a particular range of expectations which are then usurped (or occasionally fulfilled), but the apparent disparity between vignettes is balanced by the (mainly textural) cohesion within, and more abstractly, across them.

Weaving her omnipresent way through the work, the mezzo-soprano is, in terms of sonic colour, a unifying factor, and yet, her material, a collage of esoteric texts, is constantly working to distance the listener. This treatment of the text is particularly interesting: it is obviously not a traditional approach to text-setting, nor is it as extreme as Berio’s Circles or Ferneyhough’s Etudes transcendentales, where the text is deconstructed and set either phonetically or in terms of the separation of vowels and consonants. Here, the deconstruction is grammatical (and involves several texts) rather than morphemic, and thus allows particular words/phrases to be foregrounded. (Indeed, Dillon cannot recall the precise methods used to fragment and re-combine the texts, although it is certain that the vocal trope from Movement IV, the first to be composed, comes from Jean Racine).

**The Nomadic Intellect: Evolution Lines**

Let us return to the title of this work once more. In the press release from Peters for L’évolution du vol, Dillon refers to ‘vol’ thus: ‘flight as release, as dream, as drug-induced, as fleeing or theft as spoil, as hidden, as rubato’. The use of ‘fleeing’ is interesting here, since the French would not use ‘vol’ in this context. It could
argued that Dillon has always been attempting in some way to transcend the notion of ‘national stereotype’, despite his insistence in biographical notes on his being Scottish. The idea of avoiding normative associations also relates to his approach to writing music: he says that style ‘works unauthentically with pre-ordained notions of patterning’, which implies a wariness of falling into compositional habits. This also goes some way to explaining his desire to keep the meaning of his titles, and indeed, the form of his works open to interpretation.

In his essay, ‘The Scot Abroad’, Kenneth White alludes to the ‘nomadic intellect’; that is, the long line of Scottish scholars, monks, poets and pilgrims who have sought intellectual and spiritual renewal outside of Scotland (White 1998, 95–114). I would suggest that Dillon belongs to this tradition and that *L’évolution du vol* is an important contribution to the body of work that has come from this historical lineage. It manages to be disconnected and yet unified at the same time and seems to predict the compositional approach that has recently resulted in *The Book of Elements*, eighty minutes of music in five volumes for solo piano. The following comments by Ian Pace about the piano work could refer just as well to *L’évolution du vol*: ‘While the cycle progresses in a linear manner in terms of the durations of the individual pieces, still the whole maintains something of a fragmentary and ambiguous nature, right up to the final gesture … ’

This paradox identified by Pace in the later work, suggests that since *L’évolution du vol*, Dillon has re-assessed his working methods. However, it is not possible to situate the music in one specific cultural space, given Dillon’s attempts to transcend stereotypes and his interest in what the Sufis call ‘the fine net of connections between things’, an interest that significantly impacts on how the music is written, how the text is set and how the work is perceived. The continual re-assessment and renewal of compositional methodology allows Dillon’s music to evolve and develop. Arnold Toynbee, via Kenneth White, would argue that this is vital for the individual artist:

For Toynbee, every culture, initiated by creative individuals and groups, goes through four phases: genesis, growth, breakdown, disintegration. With regard to the final phases, part petrification, part putrefaction, creative individuals, out for renewal, will adopt a strategy of withdrawal and return, withdrawal and return, while at the same time trying, along their own life-paths, to ‘become what they are’ (Pindar’s phrase, *genoi hoiios essi*, adopted by Nietzsche).
Figure 2 (beginning)
Figure 2a (conclusion)
Figure 3a (conclusion)
L’ÉVOLUTION DU VOL

To the artists of Acroche-Note

James Dillon

Figure 3b
Michael Spencer: *Dillon* : L’évolution du Vol

Figure 3c
Figure 4
Endnotes
1 Toop (2002,133) claims that Dillon believed the term had been coined by Nigel Osborne.
2 Dillon goes on to say that for him, this notion related to Boulez's and Stockhausen's position that pop music and repetition were ideologically linked in some way to fascism.
3 I am indebted to Roddy Hawkins for this observation.
4 For example, ‘The Gumbo Variations’ from *Hot Rats* or moments on the album *The Grand Wazoo*
5 See particularly Movement 9
6 ‘une action simple chargée de peu de matière’
7 For further details of this, see my article, ‘Replacing the Dialectic ...’

Bibliography
New Music in Aberdeen

Roger B Williams

The University of Aberdeen has played a significant role in the composition, commissioning and promotion of new music in the City over the last four decades. The former Music Department, which added a B Mus degree to the MA in the late 1970s under the leadership of Reginald Barrett Ayres, had several composers on the full time staff:

Reginald Barrett Ayres was a composer of varied genres, writing operas, instrumental music - including a Double Bass Concerto (premiered on 30th November 1980) - and song cycles which included Biblical Songs (c.1970), and Love Poems of the North –East and Runes of the Western Isles (performed by Neil Mackie and Kathleen Livingstone in January 1981). He also composed church music including Anthems, Carols, and a Mass ‘Et incarnatus est’ (first performed 28th February 1982) and made several significant contributions to new hymnology. In 1972 he requested equipment to set up an electronic studio so that Lyell Cresswell, recently arrived from Canada, could further his work for a Doctorate. Raymond Dodd subsequently supervised the studio which was housed in the former church of St Theresa’s in the 1970s. This facility attracted students to specialise in composition as well as being an invaluable resource for undergraduates. Several works by Raymond Dodd were featured in concerts at the University, amongst which was Dove or Swan? for cello and string orchestra composed in 1980 and performed in November that year, with another performance following a year later. The Concerto for Bassoon and Chamber Orchestra, performed at The Music Hall on November 19th.1995, though extended in conception, proved particularly effective. Peter Inness, a graduate of Edinburgh University, was a diverse composer with works for organ and voices and a movement for string quartet written for the Edinburgh Quartet (first performed November 1978). His Scena for Violin and Piano was performed at a Lunchtime concert in October 1978, Night Thoughts were performed in January 1981, and a piece for three pianos Triplum was performed in November 1984. Cadenzas and Variations for Clarinet and Piano were performed on November 1985 and Another Bagatelle for the wind group Out to Play, performed in May 1993, were good examples of his art.

Roger Williams, with a song cycle – Cinq Chansons - written for Michael Goldthorpe and Martin Parry was premiered at The Purcell Room in London, (1980) and several choral settings, including a Mass for Paisley Abbey(2000). He has continued to have performances of works including Reflexions (2003) for solo guitar, written for Gilbert Biberian, and A Little Suite for solo Bassoon (2008) for Lesley Wilson.

With the former Music Department there was a strong tradition of promoting performances of new music. The groups Gentle Fire and Les Percussions de Strasbourg visited in season 1974-5 performing music by Hugh Davies, Stockhausen, Varèse and Birtwistle. Performance of Messiaen’s A Quartet for the End of Time, and El Cimarron by Henze, together with works by Kagel and Davídovsky were featured in season 1975/6 while the legendary Cathy Berberian with works by Berio, and the Vesuvius Ensemble with a programme of music from the Second Viennese School, visited the following season. Swingle II with Berio’s A-Ronne, and John McCabe with works by Gilbert, Maw and himself, gave concerts in the Autumn of 1977. A visit by the John Alldis Choir with works by Roger Smalley (Missa Brevis), Ligeti, Messiaen, Stockhausen and Holloway was complemented by a visit from Jane Manning and Richard Rodney Bennett with music by Webern, Dallapiccola, Tavener and Bennett. The New Music Group of Scotland visited in 1981 and 1982 with works by Birtwistle, McGuire (Rebirth), Maxwell Davies (Two Instrumental Motets), Judith Weir (Thread! ). They were followed by the Medici Quartet with composers Barry Guy, Britten and Maxwell Davies’ early Quartet in 1981. The avant garde group Electric Phoenix visited with Stockhausen’s Stimmung in 1984, and Lontano’s performance
with Linda Hirst, conducted by Odaline de la Martinez, of Le Marteau sans Maître by Boulez in November
of the same year, were especially notable. Lontano returned in 1988 with the Eight Songs for a Mad King by
Peter Maxwell Davies, and works by Paul Lansky and Edward McGuire. During that year a series of public
interviews were held by Roger Williams with Sir Michael Tippett, Peter Maxwell Davies and Oliver Knussen
in conjunction with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. The Edinburgh Quartet have been regular visitors to the
University, and have performed many new Scottish works, including the Second Quartet by Edward Harper
and works by Kenneth Leighton, Robert Crawford, and others. The Edinburgh Quartet made a return visit in
November 1985 to give an illustrated lecture on Lutyens’s Quartet Op.139, followed by a performance of this
work together with Prokofiev’s Second Quartet.

A commission for orchestra and baritone soloist The Fallen Dog by Lyell Cresswell was conducted by Raymond
Dodd in December 1984.

Inevitably, when the Department closed in the early 1990s, the scale of activity changed, but for the first of the
Quincentenary celebrations in 1995 – the 500th. anniversary of the founding of the University – a significant
number of compositions were commissioned from established composers with Aberdeen connections. These
included a song cycle – a setting of 11 poems by Emily Dickinson Snatches, from Baptised Generations – for
Neil Mackie by Aberdeen graduate Lyell Cresswell. This was performed on a tour of Scotland during that year.
Aberdeen-born composer John MacLeod was commissioned to write his Piano Sonata 3 – a remarkable work
premiered in Aberdeen on 7th. December 1995, but played widely and subsequently recorded by the dedicatee
pianist Murray McLachlan. Two Human Hymns were written by Judith Weir, who originated from the North
East of Scotland, for the Chapel Choir and organ and first performed on 22nd. October, 1995. Anthem Lift Up
Your Heads, with text by Joseph Beaumont and music by Peter Inness, was first performed on the Founder’s
Day Service on February 12th 1995. A set of Variations on Gaudeamus Igitur was commissioned and composed
anonymously, and after its premier in St Machar’s Cathedral in July, was subsequently recorded by former
lecturer Professor John Butt. A celebratory brass Fanfare was composed by music graduate Kevin Haggart,
a March for pipes, specially composed by Pipe Major William Hepburn, was first performed on Founder’s
Day February 19th. 1995. A set of new Scottish fiddle tunes – Air, March, Strathspey and Reel - was written
by law graduate Ewen MacDonald. In 1995 there was a performance of A Solstice of Light by Peter Maxwell
Davis by the celebrated Choir of King’s College, Cambridge, conducted by Stephen Cleobury at St. Machar’s
Cathedral (23rd. April 1995). At this time a highly productive relationship was formed with the Glasgow-based
singing group Cappella Nova, and they gave the world premier of Lament for Santa Sophia by Graham Hair
in a University concert on Feb.25th in St. Mary’s Cathedral Huntly Street in the year 2000.

In 1995 the residency of the Yggdrasil Quartet was initiated with the inaugural concert on February 16th. 1995.
This was a unique project, jointly funded by the Scottish Arts Council, the City of Aberdeen and the University
with assistance from Skene House and Arnold Clark - Volvo. The Quartet was in residence across four
academic years and, in addition to performing standard repertoire, they brought new Scandinavian music to
Aberdeen by contemporary composers Carlstedt, (including world premier of Quartet no.6 on Feb.4th. 1999)
and Jan Leifs. They also played works by several Scottish composers including John Hearne and Edward
McGuire, and gave the Aberdeen premier of Undulations, Quartet no.2, by David Horne (24th. September
1995). This had been written for the Yggdrasil Quartet and first performed at the 1995 Northlands Festival.
Blood Foliage by Magnus Robb was also given its first performance on October 5th. at the Cowdray Hall. The
Quartet made a CD, which included the first recording of the Quartet by Judith Weir, of which they had given
the first performance in Aberdeen at their inaugural concert. The Quartet also premiered the Quincentenary
commission of an extended Quartet by Aberdeen-born composer Martin Dalby (first performed February
8th. 1996). Lyell Cresswell was commissioned to write a Concerto for the Quartet and the Royal Scottish
Roger Williams: New Music in Aberdeen

National Orchestra which was first performed in Aberdeen at The Music Hall on Feb.5th. 1997. In addition to the main seasons of concerts in Aberdeen, the Quartet also toured widely, taking repertoire to venues which they visited as part of their outreach programme. The residency culminated in a joint commission with the Cheltenham International Festival of the Quintet for Trumpet and String Quartet by Peter Maxwell Davies, which was premiered in both cities- in Aberdeen on Feb.25th.1999. The Scotsman judged the Quartet’s staged performance of Shostakovich’s Quartet no.8 at The Lemon Tree as the most original production of the year, and the Scottish Society of Composers gave its annual Award to the Quartet for their contribution to Scottish music.

From the early 1990s the oil company Elf supported music in the University, enabling links to be formed with the Paris Conservatoire which led to exchanges of both staff and students between the two institutions. As part of this exchange Aberdeen witnessed the first UK performance of Incises by contemporary composer Pierre Boulez – at the Elphinstone Hall. This was given by Nicolas Bringuier, one of the finalists of the Piano competition at the Paris Conservatoire. in 1998. Trumpeter John Wallace gave the Scottish premier of Sequenza X by Berio for trumpet and piano resonance (Mitchell Hall, October 27th.1996), prior to a concert in Paris. The University Chamber Choir took new Scottish music by Rory Boyle, John Hearne and the split-choirs, Maori-inspired O Let the Fires Burn by Lyell Cresswell, to the medieval church of St Meri in the centre of Paris, in 1995, following a concert at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Aberdeen. During this period a link was also formed with The Jefferson Performing Arts in New Orleans and Roger Williams conducted the first performance of a short work for voices by graduate John McLeod there in 1992.

Several new compositions have been written for the Chapel Choir, including an anthem in tribute to St.Machar, with text from the Aberdeen Breviary – the first printed book in Scotland – by George MacPhee. And more recently broadcasts of anthems by Roger Williams have been transmitted by the BBC. In concert season 2007/8 the premier of John MacLeod’s Piano Sonata 4 took place in the Mitchell Hall and in the same season the University Choral Society gave the first performance of Magnificat by James Wyness, the University orchestra the premier of a new work for chamber orchestra by Tim Raymond. John MacLeod’s Chronicle of St. Machar was commissioned by the Aberdeen Bach Choir in 1999, and a Suite of movements from the cantata – Machar - Portrait of a Saint – was conducted by Roger Williams at The Music Hall with the Aberdeen Sinfonietta in September 2000.

The merger of Northern College with the University enabled a considerable expansion of new music at the University, and since the re-establishment of a BMus and a full Music Department, it has blossomed. A series of concerts exploring new and acousmatic music under the title Discoveries was initiated by Pete Stollery in October 1993 at Northern College, and there have been 34 of these up to December 2005. After the appointment of the Welsh composer Paul Mealor, there has been a steady stream of his works including the premier of orchestral composition Illumination (first performed November 23rd.2003), and several works for instruments and voices. A student-run New Music Group has become established and has made telling contributions of music including recent concerts of music by John Cage and a performance of Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire.

In the year 2004 Upbeat! was a pilot for the subsequent s.o.u.n.d. festival of new music – now (2009) in its fifth year. This has transformed the availability of new music in the North East of Scotland with the involvement, in various ways, of most of the main concert promoting bodies of the area. New and avant-garde music by composers of national and international repute has been heard with significant electro or acousmatic elements. New performance techniques have been displayed by some of the best contemporary instrumentalists. S.o.u.n.d has both stimulated established audiences and attracted new listeners keen to explore music of today in its many and varied forms. Concerts have been given in both recognised venues and places where new music has
not before been available, such as Thainstone Mart, used for a Discoveries concert in 2005.

In 2004 a new organ was built for the University Chapel of King’s College by the French organ builder Bernard Aubertin – the first by this builder in the UK. This all-mechanical instrument has allowed much new music to be performed – including Ligeti’s totemic work Volumina (2007) – and The Aberdeen Organ Book project has been set up with commissions from a varied raft of composers. Works have linked live organ with electro acoustic sounds by Pete Stollery, with computer generated sounds by Bill Thompson and with a multi media conception by Claire Singer. There have been first performances of works by Simon Willson, John Hearne, Paul Mealor, Jonathan Stephens and Paul Tierney. Further works including one by John MacLeod are in preparation.

More recently there have been composer tributes to Judith Weir and the American composer Morton Lauridsen, and later this year a premier of a new work by James MacMillan Who are these Angels? will be given in the Chapel as part of the 2009 s.o.u.n.d festival in November.

With recent appointments to the Music Department of composers Miriama Young and Geoff Palmer, together with the large number of under-graduates and a significant body of post-graduates, coupled with the ever increasing developments of the s.o.u.n.d festival, new music in Aberdeen and its region has never been in better shape.

Sources for the information in this article have been taken from the Special Collections part of the University library and from Departmental archives. I would like to express my gratitude for the help of the staff at Special Collections.
Experimental Music in Aberdeen: A Field Guide

Bill Thomson

This article presents an overview of the experimental music and sound art ‘scene’ in Aberdeen. It is written from the perspective of a participating practitioner (myself) and therefore will necessarily be somewhat biased and anecdotal. It is not a definitive guide and undoubtedly I will miss some events and artists who were active in the area before I arrived and should otherwise be mentioned. In any case, I will attempt to present in broad strokes the relevant events, artists, and organizations in Aberdeen that are involved in the promotion and production of what I consider experimental music and sound art.

Introduction

The experimental music community in Aberdeen and the Northeast of Scotland consists of a small, yet diverse and enthusiastic network of composers, musicians and sound artists working across the area.

By experimental music I mean any music that is not overtly rock, pop, country, jazz, traditional, classical, dance, or otherwise commercially defined. In my loose definition, this would include free improvisation, noise, drone, live electronics, acousmatic, electroacoustic, historically (20th century) avant-garde music, and to some degree, sound art, including sound installations, sound walks, and other related activities.

Although Aberdeen is somewhat isolated from the larger cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow (and thus estranged from the more experimental musicians and artists within those communities), this has not discouraged a number of individuals and organizations from developing and promoting new and adventurous music in the region.

This is particularly true of recent years with the development of a number of concert series, festivals, enthusiastic promoters, and new postgraduate music programs at the local University of Aberdeen, all of which have served to draw and retain artists to Aberdeen and the North East.

There is still a threat, however, of talent-leakage to larger nearby cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh due to a perceived lack of opportunity for exposure and performance. This is exemplified by the closing of sympathetic local venues such as the well known arts venue, the Lemon Tree in 2007, as well as the Union in 2005, and Dr Drakes in 2004, all of which had hosted experimental music nights on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Regardless of these difficulties however, Aberdeen and the Northeast of Scotland have shown a definite trend towards growth and increased activity with regards to experimental music and sound art over the past several years.

Historical Background

Little is recorded about experimental music in the area prior to the founding of the Electroacoustic Music Studio at Northern College in 1991 by Professor Pete Stollery (http://www.petestollery.com).

It is quite possible that until this time any experimental music (if at all) would have taken place in the former music department at the University of Aberdeen. Dr. Roger B. Williams of the university states that there was a complete electronic studio from the mid-1970s that was used by research and undergraduates over the years. The individuals primarily involved with its development were lecturer Raymond Dodd, and technician Derek Giles. The equipment was modest, consisting of a medium size mixing desk, an assortment of microphones, and some recording equipment. The university was also a studio member of EMAS/Sonic Arts Network.
during this time. The studio was eventually supplanted by the facilities established at Northern College by Pete Stollery when it merged with the University of Aberdeen in 2001.

**Important Persons, Concert Series, and Groups**

As noted above, in 1991 Pete Stollery was appointed as Lecturer in Music Education at Northern College in Aberdeen with the brief to set up and run an Electroacoustic Music Studio and coordinate courses in electroacoustic music for trainee music teachers. In fact, not enough can be said about Stollery’s importance in pushing new and adventurous music in the area. Upon his arrival, a studio built around multiple reel-to-reel tape recorders, primarily for the creation of acousmatic music, was established in 1992 and an opening event featured workshops and lectures by Trevor Wishart, Rob Worby and Jonty Harrison as well as a concert including music by Stollery, Harrison, Wishart and Denis Smalley. This concert is believed to be the first UK electroacoustic music concert to take place north of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Following the success of his 1992 concert, Stollery set up the concert series discoveries, which placed electroacoustic music created by students and schoolchildren alongside music composed by more established figures. The series attracted a great deal of interest and works were submitted from all over the world. As the series developed, many composers were invited to Aberdeen including members of the Scottish acousmatic collective invisiblEARts. Stollery co-founded invisiblEARts in 1996 to perform acousmatic music throughout Scotland and to promote Scottish acousmatic music to a wider audience, both within Scotland and abroad. An archive of pieces performed in the discoveries series can be found at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~wae006/petestollery.com/discoveries.html

Initially the concerts were held on the campus of Northern college, but beginning in the late 90’s, Stollery began hosting these events in more publicly accessible venues such as the Lemon Tree, Marischal Museum, Woodend Barn, and even a cattle auction ring in Thainstone market. In doing so, Stollery was attempting to bring electroacoustic music to a wider audience while also breaking down the barriers between the university and the general public. Exploring unusual performance venues would continue to feature prominently in Stollery’s practice and subsequent involvement with Aberdeen’s sound festival. Stollery also had close connections with the Sonic Arts Network (www.sonicartsnetwork.org), the national UK organisation promoting and supporting electroacoustic music and sound art in the UK. This eventually led to the roll-out in 2006 of the Sonic Postcards project (www.sonicpostcards.org) throughout Aberdeenshire schools. The project involved teaching young people to compose electroacoustic compositions related to their particular sonic environments and to share these via the internet with other schools and communities.

In addition to Stollery’s work, I have also been active promoting experimental music in the Aberdeen area since my arrival in 2004. (http://www.billthompson.org/)

I moved to Aberdeen from Austin, Texas to pursue a PhD in Composition at the University of Aberdeen. Austin is well known for its live music, particularly for blues and jazz, but it has an extremely healthy community of experimental musicians and supportive organizations as well. These include musicians such as Rick Reed, and organizations such as the Austin New Music Coop (http://www.newmusiccoop.org/) and the Austin Museum of Digital Art (http://www.amoda.org/) to name just a few. I was fortunate enough to be involved in the formation and development of many of these organizations, either as a founding member or as a programming director and performer, and although I was excited about beginning my research in the UK, it was difficult leaving behind such a robust community.

Somewhat to my dismay, I discovered that there wasn’t much in the way of a ‘scene’ in Aberdeen for experimental
music at that time (Stollery’s work not withstanding). Rather than waiting for something to happen, I busied myself with the same activities that proved successful in Austin, i.e. hosting events and concert series, locating ‘experimental-friendly’ venues, and seeking out other like minded musicians and artists.

In 2004 I established the quarterly concert series, The Experimental Music Showcase (http://billthompson.org/ems.htm) that featured artists from the US and the UK (including the first ‘phonography’ festival in Aberdeen http://www.billthompson.org/phonographyconcert.htm). I also actively sought out galleries, museums, and churches to host experimental music concerts, as well as collaborating with regional artists and musicians. This included working with the visual arts group FOUND (http://found.surfacepressure.net/) , the noise and improvisation group Mickel Mass (http://www.myspace.com/mickelmass), and artist collectives urbanNovember (http://www.urbannovember.org/) and Limousine Bull (http://www.limousinebull.org.uk/). With urbanNovember, I went on to organize and host the SoundasArt conference (http://soundasart.urbannovember.org/) with the University of Aberdeen in 2006. The conference brought over 100 delegates from across the world to Aberdeen for three days of talks, installations, and performances, including keynote addresses by Christina Kubisch, Rajesh Mehta, Jonty Harrison, and performances by Keith Rowe and Rohan de Saram. Additionally I set up the online community soundasart (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/soundasart/) to encourage discussion of sound art and related topics.

In 2007, the Experimental Music Series eventually evolved into The Burning Harpsichord Series at the Lemon Tree (named after a piece in which I performed and eventually burned a harpsichord on the Aberdeen beach). The series has featured artists such as Keith Rowe, Mark Wastell, Rhodri Davies, and Lee Patterson to name just a few. With the closure of the Lemon Tree in 2008, The Burning Harpsichord Series has migrated to various other venues in Aberdeen and will feature as a prominent strand within Aberdeen’s sound festival in 2009 and 2010.

In addition to performing and organizing events, I have also been active leading educational workshops for adults and children throughout the area. With Pete Stollery’s introduction, I worked as a workshop leader in the Sonic Postcards project, as well as facilitating a similar series of workshops for secondary schools for the Youth Music Initiative, and for Peacock Visual Arts. I have also given a number of circuit bending workshop for young people for Whitespace Arts organization and for adults at Peacock Visual Arts. Currently I am intending to present a project with Aberdeenshire Council to facilitate a series of workshops for teenagers focusing on recording, sound design, circuit bending, improvisation, performance and sound installation.

Other Important People

Mark Lawton, aka FOG (1963-2006), was active as both performer and sound artist in the area, as well as hosting a weekly online webcast of experimental music with David Mutch on Station House Media Unit’s net radio station. In 2007, SHMU (http://www.shmu.org.uk/) received an FM broadcast licence and in honour of Mark Lawton’s work, I host a two hour web/radio program at the station called The Fog dedicated to experimental music (http://thefogonshmufm.blogspot.com/).

Delicate AWOL (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delicate_AWOL) were a British experimental rock band active between 1998 and 2005. Originally from London, they relocated to Aberdeenshire in 2003 and were active in the area recording and performing experimental pop-influence music, including a ‘Fear of Jazz’ experimental improvisation night held at Dr. Drakes in 2003. Although the group eventually disbanded in 2005, core members Caroline Ross and Jim Version continue to make music as the avant-folk/experimental duo Tells. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tells_(band)
Already mentioned in passing, the group Mickel Mass (http://www.myspace.com/mickelmass) and core members Mike Napier and Andy Smith have been active in Aberdeen as both performers and promoters of improv-based experimental music. In addition to headlining numerous events, they have supported and performed with notable experimental groups such as Faust and as Damo Suzuki.

Alan Davidson, performing under the name of The Kitchen Cynics (www.myspace.com/kitchencynics) as well as being a member in numerous local experimental folk groups, is another experimental musician active in the Aberdeen area. His work blurs the boundaries between folk, live electronics, and improvisation and he often organizes events with local musicians and promoters.

Also notable is the artist NOMA (http://www.myspace.com/noma1) who was active in Aberdeen before relocating in Glasgow in recent years. NOMA still performs in Aberdeen however, and has been featured on two Burning Harpsichord events (as has the Kitchen Cynics and Mickel Mass). NOMA's work involves improvisation with live electronics, found objects, and saxophone.

**Venues**

A number of museums, galleries, churches, and venues have supported experimental music concerts over the years. Early on, the Lemon Tree hosted many events and after a period of inactivity, took up the cause again by hosting the experimental music series The Burning Harpsichord in 2007. Additionally, other venues such as The Union (which hosted the Experimental Music Showcase) and Dr Drakes (which hosted Interesting Music Promotion’s (http://www.myspace.com/interestingmusic) Synergy concert series) both supported underground experimental music events until their closures.

Currently (2009), experimental music related concerts within Aberdeen are often hosted by Peacock Visual Arts (http://www.peacockvisualarts.com/) in their main gallery space. These are organized either by the gallery itself, by Interesting Music Promotions, or by independent artists such myself and others. In addition to hosting experimental music related concerts and sound art events, PVA also facilitate workshops that often benefit those working in this field, such as the recent Open Knowledge Network events (http://openknowledgenetworks.com/). Additionally, Peacock’s much anticipated new Centre for the Contemporary Arts (http://www.peacockvisualarts.com/new-building/) is hoped to provide new, cutting edge facilities for the production of new media and sound art related events.

Additional concerts and sound art events in Aberdeen have been held at various places including Marischal Museum, Maritime Museum, St Andrews Cathedral, Cafe Drummonds, and The Tunnels (who host a monthly ‘noise’ concert series.)

**Promoters and Festivals**

One of the most significant developments in experimental music in the region in recent years has been the sound festival (www.sound-scotland.co.uk). sound began as a pilot program in 2004 and has since evolved into a month long festival in November. Its organizers state that the festival aims to ‘present an eclectic but very broad range of new music - classical, traditional, popular, jazz, experimental - to a large and varied public and thus advance the education of the public in the art of contemporary music…The festival is designed to make new and contemporary music more accessible to audiences of all ages and backgrounds.’

sound was established as an initiative of Woodend Arts Association (WAA) (http://www.woodendbarn.co.uk/about-the-barn/woodend-arts-association.html) and the University of Aberdeen, and now comprises a
substantial network of associations that include 34 partners (including 4 local music societies, 2 local music schools, the University of Aberdeen, Woodend Arts Association, Interesting Music Promotions, danceLive, Peacock Visual Arts, Jazz Aberdeen and many others). The festival is unusual in that it both organises and promotes events itself and acts as an umbrella organisation; encouraging music clubs and other organisations to take part by programming concerts, workshops or events that include an element of contemporary music during the period of the festival. Thus, rather than being prescriptive in its programming, sound functions in partnership with local artists, venues, and promoters.

In addition to its work with the sound festival, Woodend Arts Association (http://www.woodendbarn.co.uk/about-the-barn/woodend-arts-association.html) has also been supportive of music and arts (including experimental music) in Aberdeen and local areas for a number of years. Based in Banchory, WAA has also developed the community-based arts venue, Woodend Barn, into a flexible performing arts space with an eclectic programme.

Although supporting a somewhat more pop-orientated sensibility, the Aberdeen based music promotions collective, Interesting Music Promotions (http://www.isthismusic.com/interesting-music-promotions), have also been an important presence in the local area. Established in 2003, they have promoted a number of underground, anti-folk, and occasionally very experimental artists in the area (even giving me my first gig in 2004) in addition to their more popular acts.

**Academic Institutions and Organizations**

In 2001, Northern College merged with the University of Aberdeen (www.abdn.ac.uk/music), which allowed for further studio developments, particularly following a change of premises in 2003 and the creation of a suite of studios and the establishment of postgraduate research programmes in electroacoustic music.

As a result, a number of artists were attracted to Aberdeen to teach and study who might otherwise never have considered moving to the area. As noted, this included myself as well as James Wyness (http://www.wyness.org/), and the recent additions of Dr. Miriama Young (http://silvertone.princeton.edu/~miri/) as Lecturer in Music, and graduate students Claire M. Singer (http://www.myspace.com/clairemsinger), Patrick Keenan, and Ross Whyte.

Other institutions with related programmes include Aberdeen College who offer sound recording and music technology courses as well as Gray’s School of Art at Robert Gordon University whose Photographic and Electronic Media programme include studies related to time-based media, installation art, and to some degree, sound art.

South of Aberdeen in Dundee, the Duncan Jordanstone College of Art and Design, part of Dundee University, (http://fineart.dundee.ac.uk/index.jsp) offers courses in time-based media that include sound art related studies. Dundee University is credited with appointing the first lectureship specialising in sound art in Scotland.

**Trends and Conclusions**

As stated above, there has been significant growth over the past few years in experimental music and related activities throughout Aberdeen and Northeast Scotland. These were developed initially by Northern College and later, the University of Aberdeen with the work of Pete Stollery. With the influx of new artists and composers in the area, in no small part related to these programmes, there seems to have been significant crossover with artists working outside of academia as well as those coming from the visual arts world. This
could be the result of the region having limited resources and the willingness of local artists of all backgrounds to work together to foster a culture beyond the mainstream; but it also reflects the current trend in the art world of genre-blending and the blurring of boundaries between practices. It also seems to be a result of the open policy of community engagement of the University of Aberdeen as fostered by Stollery, and the influx of postgraduate students such as myself, Wyness, and others, whose work is often heard in both academic and non-academic settings. The presence of a substantial number of art students from Gray’s with exposure to courses in time-based media also seems to provide an open minded and enthusiastic community to engage with at concerts and exhibitions alike. This crossover is also encouraged by local galleries and venues (when they manage to stay open) who have been supportive of experimental music, as well as sound art and new media exhibitions. That being said, there is still a significant challenge to promoting new works of any kind, and although there is evidence of continued growth (the sound festival) the local scene has been and is still driven mainly by key individuals (Stollery, Lawton, and myself etc) without whom there would be much less activity in general.

[This article is based in part on an earlier report written for eContact concerning electroacoustic music in Aberdeen. Special thanks to those who spent time filling in the above details.]

**Bill Thompson**

Bill Thompson is a sound artist/composer/performer living in Aberdeen, Scotland. He is a self-described throwback to the 60s and enjoys breaking things to see what they sound like. More information on his activities can be found on his website.  
http://www.billthompson.org
When I arrived in Aberdeen in 1988 to take up the position of Director of Music at the former Northern College of Education, the future of academic music in the city was uncertain. The Music Department at Northern College had been threatened with closure and its staffing resource severely reduced; the Music Department at the University of Aberdeen was due to close – in spite of a long tradition of service to the university and wider community. Change was in the air. Looking back on the past twenty years, it is encouraging to reflect on the healthy range of musical activities (both amateur and professional) that continued to take place in the college and university during this period, including numerous visits by national and international performers and composers. The merger of Northern College and the University of Aberdeen in December 2001 marked the reinstatement of a Music Department to the University, and a revitalised musical presence in the northeast of Scotland.

During the 1990s, The School of Music at Northern College programmed regular performances of contemporary and less familiar music. The establishment of two Centres for Electroacoustic Music and World Musics added a range of new sounds to the familiar diet of western classical music, while a Centre for Music Therapy extended the musical and educational horizons of students and teachers by encouraging links between music in special education and therapy. The new music provision at Northern College included a series of aptly named Discovery concerts, which focused mainly on tape performances of electronically generated compositions. These were delivered in surround-sound settings, often in darkened rooms to help audiences focus, without visual distraction, on the sonic experience. The series included works by staff and students, as well as by visitors from other parts of the UK and the international electroacoustic music scene. The purchase of a Balinese gamelan, set of African Ewe drums, steel pans and samba-salsa instruments opened up a world of musics to the surrounding communities through regular performances, workshops and Gala Concerts.

In March 1990, I invited the internationally acclaimed concert pianist, Elisabeth Klein, to Northern College. Her lectures and recital offered an enriching and refreshing experience of contemporary music, opening the ears of many students to a fascinating world of piano sounds. Elisabeth Klein was born in Trenín, Slovakia in 1911 (then part of north west Hungary). She grew up in Budapest, graduating with distinction from the Franz Liszt Music Academy, and continuing her studies with Béla Bartók during 1934 – 1936. Ms Klein’s two-day residency in Aberdeen included a lecture-recital on ‘Bartók – the man, the music, the teacher’; a lecture-workshop entitled ‘Aspects of Contemporary Piano Music’; and an evening recital of contemporary piano compositions by Brian Chapple, Béla Bartók, George Crumb, Folke Strømholm, Per Nørgård, Arne Mellnäs, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Jonathan Stephens. This chapter focuses mainly on Elisabeth Klein’s lecture-recital, presented to an audience of students, staff and the public on the morning of 13 March 1990.


Bartók – the man

The opportunity to hear one of the last remaining pupils of Béla Bartók reflect on the life, compositions and teaching of the acclaimed composer-performer-folk music collector provided a rare insight into the character of a seminal figure of 20th century music. Elisabeth Klein described Bartók as a private, sensitive individual, whose reserve, formality and lack of small talk reinforced his reputation as unfriendly and remote. A man of high principle, she considered him to be far greater in stature than Kodaly who, though clever and charming, lacked Bartók’s genius. To Bartók, things were either black or white – a character trait that made it difficult for him to compromise over even the smallest details. When he invited Elisabeth Klein to his house for 3pm, he
expected her to arrive at 3pm. He could not stand ‘perhaps’ or ‘wait’; everything had to be ‘yes’ or ‘no’! And his exchanges with her were always formal: she could not greet him casually, with ‘Hello’; for her it had to be ‘Professor Bartók’, and for him ‘Miss Klein’.

Bartók’s personality and approach to composition did not endear him to sections of the Hungarian musical establishment and public. Elisabeth Klein mentioned that Bartók was not allowed to teach the composition class at the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest – contrary to certain reports, which suggest Bartók refused to teach composition. Instead, Kodaly taught composition, while Bartók taught piano. Bartók did not fare so well in the changing political environment as Kodaly, who was able to engage with the different regimes in Hungary and get on with the Nazis and the Russians during the war years. If Bartók had been able to conform, Ms Klein felt he might have been better appreciated and accepted.

Bartók was a very fine pianist, particularly in the music of composers such as Couperin, Scarlatti and Johann Sebastian Bach. Less convincing was his interpretation of the music of Chopin, which (according to Ms Klein) he played in an exact, metronomic style. Bartók attended Elisabeth Klein’s final examination at the Music Academy and informed her that she was ‘quite talented but that her knowledge was poor’. Clearly, she had impressed Bartók, as he invited her to study piano with him. Elisabeth Klein’s studies at the Royal National Academy of Music in Budapest (re-named the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in 1925) had focused on Romantic piano literature, including the works of Liszt. As Bartók’s pupil, she was encouraged to play only JS Bach for two years. After one year, she was invited to play Bartók’s works also – evidence, no doubt, of the growing respect he had for his protégé.

Bartók’s prestigious musical talent was not confined to composition and performance. As an ethnomusicologist, his meticulous research into the folk music and cultures of Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia produced a valuable resource, as well as a model for later ethnomusicological studies. The geography of the area in which Bartók conducted his folk music research was ideal; isolated communities surrounded by mountains provided a protected environment, where cultural traditions had remained largely untouched for generations. Elisabeth Klein painted a fascinating picture of the composer, dressed in a suit, climbing the hills in the mountainous northeast corner of Hungary, laden with recording equipment – to be greeted with suspicion by local residents: “Don’t sing for him, or you’ll have to pay taxes on your voice!” Bartók was captivated by the folk traditions of the communities he visited, and communicated his excitement and delight to Ms Klein on discovering that ‘some of the tunes are more than 1,000 years old!’ He always tried to find the oldest people in the villages he visited, in the hope of capturing the most pure and authentic music of the region. Clearly, the dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of the man were remarkable. Many of the people he visited were extremely poor; they had no electric lights, no instruments (other than those made from animal bones), and very little of this world’s goods. One wonders if memories of those earlier years came back to Bartók in the final years of his life when he, too, experienced poverty and deprivation – not in the mountainous countryside of his homeland, but in the urban environment of a small flat in New York…

Over a period of several years, Bartók collected 10,000 Hungarian folk songs and 4,000 Rumanian / Slovakian folk songs, before the First World War interrupted his efforts. Free from making arduous journeys into the surrounding countryside, Bartók was able to work on the material he had collected; it was during this time that he adapted much of it to his own composition. For Bartók, folk music was his musical mother tongue. He liked the primitive, even though his own music was refined. And it was the peasant songs that appealed to him – not the street songs (which he hated) and the so-called ‘gypsy songs’ employed by Liszt in his Hungarian Rhapsodies. Bartók considered ‘the folk tune to be like a diamond – and the jewel was the most important thing’. Initially, his folk music settings followed the pattern of providing some introductory material, an interlude and a coda – setting the jewel in a sympathetic musical framework. Later, the folk material and his
own compositional style became more closely integrated.

Restrictions on Bartók’s travel during the First World War, as well as the war itself, contributed to his depressive state of mind, which in turn affected his compositional output. Ms Klein spoke movingly of Bartók’s increasing sense of isolation as he failed to get the response he longed for from his own people. Whilst many accepted the popular elements of the folk music he collected (as well as some of his lighter works, such as the Rumanian Folk Dances), there was widespread lack of sympathy among the Hungarian public toward the composer’s musical experiments and his more serious works. Audiences in the UK, Scandinavia and The Netherlands, on the other hand, showed greater interest in Bartók’s creative and experimental work. Even in the late twentieth century, Bartók was appreciated more as an export item than a treasured musical figure in Hungary. The Hungarian Broadcasting Corporation, for example, was uninterested in Elisabeth Klein recording Bartók’s music for Hungarian Radio, preferring other more accessible composers instead; Liszt was more appreciated and performed. The Hungarians, like the Viennese, remained very traditional in their musical tastes.

As the Second World War approached, Bartók encouraged younger musicians to leave Hungary. Elisabeth Klein left the country in 1939, and Bartók departed in 1940 after more than thirty years at the Liszt Academy. He refused to either compromise his beliefs or accept remuneration from the Nazi regime, and he left with little money and few of his manuscripts. One of Elisabeth Klein’s fellow students in Bartók’s 1930s’ class was the pianist, György Sándor, who gave the world premiere of Bartók’s Third Piano Concerto in 1946. Ms Klein referred to a later conversation she had with György Sándor, in which he mentioned how difficult it was for him to help Bartók when he was in New York, because of Bartók’s independence and pride. Bartók would not accept ‘charity’, though Yehudi Menuhin did manage to help him when he was ill, commissioning the Sonata for Solo Violin in 1943. Bartók spent his final years in a two-room flat in East Manhattan, with no piano and – towards the end – unable to pay the rent. His final years were plagued by leukaemia and poverty; he died in New York in 1945.

**Bartók – the composer**

In her lecture, Elisabeth Klein spoke of Bartók’s deep interest in nature, folk music, mathematics, science and language, and the influence these had on his work as a composer. He was intrigued by Eastern philosophy, as were Cage and Stockhausen later. Numbers also fascinated Bartók; he employed the Fibonacci series, the Golden Section and other mathematical structures in his works.

To illustrate her talk, Elisabeth Klein focused on some of Bartók’s slow movements, which she considered to be among his greatest music. She drew attention to three types of slow movement: songs of sorrow, sighing and night. Bartók particularly loved dirges, although he found it difficult to find examples during his expeditions, managing to collect only six songs. In one of the communities Bartók visited, an old lady performed a song that Bartók used as the basis of the first of his opus 9a set of Four Dirges for Piano of 1910, which Elisabeth Klein included as part of her lecture-recital. During the next few years, the effects of war and divorce from his first wife added to Bartók’s growing feeling of isolation, particularly in a Catholic country where divorce was neither approved nor easy. His 1916 Suite for piano, opus 14 was written during this unhappy period. Originally, the Suite had five movements (the number five was a favourite of Bartók, reflecting his love of nature, where the number is common in formations of petals and leaves), but subsequently he removed the third movement. Elisabeth Klein performed the final movement of the Suite, the ‘Sostenuto’, which represents the ‘sigh of wounded soldiers’. As an example of Bartók’s third type of slow music, Ms Klein performed part of the Out of Doors suite of 1926, where the image of a man alone with nature at night is explored in the fourth movement (‘The Night’s Music’) through the noises of animals and other nocturnal sounds.

During the 1920s, Bartók focused on intervals in such works as Mikrokosmos; Ms Klein considered the pieces
that explored major and minor seconds to be the most difficult compositions in all the books of Mikrokosmos. Notwithstanding the composer’s detailed specifications on the performance of his works, which often included precise indications of overall duration, Elisabeth Klein mentioned a recording she possessed of Mikrokosmos 144 in which Bartók took a minute longer to perform the piece than his notation indicates… ‘It was most unusual for him to make such a mistake’, she said – although composers do not always observe their notational instructions when performing their own works.

Many did not understand or appreciate Bartók’s experiments with sounds and textures (such as the harmonics in Mikrokosmos 102). The pieces in Bulgarian Rhythm were more accessible and, Elisabeth Klein observed, ‘probably influenced the irrational rhythms of composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen’. Bartók’s irregular rhythms were not considered by Ms Klein to be so easy for Western musicians to assimilate as for East Europeans, based as they are on the uneven stress patterns of East European languages.

1926 was a productive year for Bartók, with the composition of the Sonata for Piano, the set of five piano pieces entitled Out of Doors, and the First Piano Concerto. Elisabeth Klein attended the first performance of the Concerto, at which some critics observed that Bartók ‘should have twenty-five years in jail for his composition’. Clearly, Bartók was ‘a prophet who was not appreciated in his own land’.

Elisabeth Klein’s studies with Bartók coincided with the composition of Bartók’s Fifth String Quartet in the summer of 1934 – a work completed in one month, after three years of relative silence as a composer. The first performance of the work in the USA did not please Bartók, and he set to work rehearsing his new composition with the recently formed Hungarian String Quartet led by Sándor Végh, later to become one of the leading chamber musicians of the twentieth century. Remarkably, the newly formed String Quartet (which included students) rehearsed Bartók’s Fifth String Quartet four hours each day for five months! Bartók invited Elisabeth Klein to the rehearsals – something she remembered as a tremendous privilege and seminal educational experience. She was impressed by Bartók’s ease in solving all the technical and musical problems of the work. Ms Klein observed that the experience gained through attending these rehearsals taught her more about music and interpretation in five months than she learned in all her years at the Liszt Academy!

Bartók – the teacher
Bartók had a facility with languages, writing in French, German and English. He told Elisabeth Klein, ‘It is no problem to learn a language – just buy a dictionary and learn the grammar!’ Bartók demonstrated his skill by mastering sufficient Turkish in just three weeks to be able to lecture in that language during a visit to the country. He informed Ms Klein that Knud Jeppesen’s book on counterpoint was the best he had read; it was in Danish… Bartók demonstrated great commitment and determination in whatever he did, setting high standards for himself and others. Ms Klein referred to Bartók’s insights into the construction and performance of fugues, which provided his students with a valuable learning experience. ‘He would not allow even the smallest of mistakes to go unchecked!’

As a teacher, Bartók was quite strict and not particularly friendly toward his students. Elisabeth Klein observed that such an approach did not make him a good pedagogue, as such, for a good teacher should take care of his pupils. Bartók’s teaching skills were more evident in his writing and composition than in his personal exchanges with students. Mikrokosmos contains many compositional experiments and acts as a tutor for pianists, encompassing varying levels of technique and musicianship. Bartók’s Bagatelles Opus 6 of 1908 is another educational work, and one that impressed Bussoni. The work requires the performer to concentrate on the contrapuntal aspects of the music; Elisabeth Klein observed that by thinking in two parts, the music becomes less difficult to understand and perform. Bartók notates the first Bagatelle unconventionally, with four sharps in the right hand and four flats in the left hand – although the musical result is quite tonal. Elisabeth
Klein explained that Bartók was not interested in atonality, but liked to experiment with bitonality and polytonality. She noted that Bartók’s circle of fifths included indications for modulation, in which he demonstrated one could move fairly easily from C to F sharp, as this simply divided the octave in two, cutting the circle of fifths in half. Bartók enjoyed counterpoint, an interest that stemmed from his love for the music of the eighteenth century – in particular, the compositions of JS Bach. Mikrokosmos 124 – ‘Staccato’ derives its inspiration from the music of Bach, employing such baroque techniques as motivic inversion and diminution. Bartók was fond of staccato, informing Elisabeth Klein that ‘if you can play real staccato (dry, with no pedal), then you are a good pianist’.

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

A diverse musical career

Elisabeth Klein’s long career as performer and teacher lasted well into her eighties. From the outset of her career, she became well known for her authentic performances of Bartók’s music. Danish Radio recorded all of Bartók’s piano works with Elisabeth Klein, providing a valuable document from a pianist who had gained important insights from her years of study with the composer. After focusing on the classics and the music of her compatriot, Bartók, during her early years, a turning point came in her career in 1962 with a widely acclaimed performance of the Second Piano Sonata of Boulez; in 1966, she received the Danish Radio Music Prize for her interpretation of this work. From this period onwards, Elisabeth Klein devoted much of her life to contemporary piano music, as performer, lecturer and (for many years) as a Professor at both the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen, Denmark and the Academy of Music in Oslo, Norway, where she influenced a generation of performers and composers. She toured widely in Europe, the Middle and Near East, and the Americas, giving concerts, making radio and television broadcasts, and lecturing on various aspects of twentieth century music. Elisabeth Klein gave many first performances of works; her commercial recordings (of which there are over twenty records / CDs) include notable interpretations of compositions by Stockhausen, Bartók, and many Scandinavian composers. Those who wrote works specifically for her include Ruth Bakke, Magne Hegdal, Gudrun Lund, Arne Nordheim, Per Nørgård, Jonathan Stephens, and Folke Strømholm. Her articles on JM Hauer, Webern, Cage and Boulez provide valuable insights into the works of these composers.

Elisabeth Klein’s open-minded and imaginative approach to the study and performance of often technically and musically demanding works was an inspiration to the Aberdeen audience in March 1990. Throughout her long career, she maintained a genuine interest in exploring new repertoire by both established and younger composers. In her early and middle career, Ms Klein championed the works of Bartók and many avant-garde composers (giving seminal performances of works by Stockhausen and Boulez); latterly she became an important advocate for Scandinavian and women composers.

The Press review of Elisabeth Klein’s 14 March 1990 recital in Aberdeen summed up the event in the following way:

Magical touch of world-class pianist

Elisabeth Klein is one of the world’s foremost exponents of contemporary piano music. For the last two days she has been lecturing, performing and demonstrating for students and the public at the Northern College School of Music by invitation of the school’s head of music, Dr Jonathan Stephens. The culmination of her Aberdeen visit was the recital in the Northern College Theatre at Hilton last night. Bartók’s Allegro Barbaro is quite well known though his Rumanian Christmas Carols are less so. Last night’s powerful and sympathetic performance was warmly received, but the remaining works must have been as new to most of the audience as they were to me.
Brian Chapple’s Tribute to Lennox Berkeley, a meditation with muted, almost pallid harmonies, received its first performance. In A Little Suite for Christmas by the American composer George Crumb, “extended piano” techniques were used whereby strings were struck, stroked, plucked or damped directly by the hands. The result was a clarion of bell sounds with a hint of the Indonesian Gamelan Orchestra. Canticle of the Holy Night, with its reference to the Coventry Carol, was most effective.

Per Nørgård’s music for the film “Babette’s Feast” was instantly popular and the humour of Schizofoni by Arne Mellnäs, with its momentary quote from Beethoven’s Pathétique Sonata and the piano lid shut on cue, struck home. Finally, Elisabeth Klein played a work specially dedicated to her by Dr Jonathan Stephens. In his Dance Fragments (1986), a multiplicity of piano styles flash before the listener like a rapid change of scenery on a train journey. Elisabeth Klein’s sympathetic interpretation must have helped with “her magical touch and her personality which brought the music vividly to life”.

**A personal reflection**

I first met Elisabeth Klein in the mid-1970s, while working on my doctorate in composition and musicology. At that time, she was already at an age when many people think of retiring. Her invitation for me to write a work for her was a great honour for a young composer; Elisabeth Klein performed my 6 Piano Pieces (1977) several times and used the work in her teaching at the Music Academies in Denmark and Norway. During the next quarter-century, we kept in touch regularly. In 1986, I dedicated a second work to Elisabeth Klein – Dance Fragments for Piano. Our last meeting was at her home in Oslo, Norway in November 1999, while I was a visiting lecturer at the Norwegian State Academy of Music. She died in 2004.

Elisabeth Klein was a remarkable woman – a gifted pianist, insightful teacher, and great encourager of young composers and performers. Active as a performer and teacher well into her eighties, her enthusiasm for exploring new music by established and less well-known composers was infectious and a challenge to many younger musicians. Those in the audience for her lectures and recital in Aberdeen in March 1990 witnessed an inspirational and unique performer who never lost her enthusiasm for the fascinating structures and colours of contemporary piano music.

Elisabeth Klein’s memorable visit to Aberdeen in 1990 was, indeed, a breath of fresh air. I count it a privilege to have known this modest and creative musician.

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February 2009

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