

Composition Portfolio

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Doctor of Philosophy

July 2021

Declaration of authorship

I, Gavin Higgins, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it, including the four original compositions, are entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Gavin Higgins

Date: 26 July 2021

Abstract

This thesis consists of a portfolio of compositions, a written commentary, and links to audio-visual recordings of the works submitted. The portfolio comprises four works: a string quintet, a work for brass band, an orchestral piece, and an opera. The works presented in the portfolio draw inspiration from photography, art, socio-political events, and myth.

In this project, I seek to address questions around the relationship between: i.) the composer, the musicians and audience; and ii.) the composer and collaborator, by broadly examining the development of key compositional techniques and creative processes at play in my work. Specifically, I look at:

1. The use of tonality and melody in my music as common-ground access points, and how, by drawing on musical conventions and a diverse range of influences, I create a musical language that is both accessible and unique;
2. new approaches to orchestration, looking specifically at how texture and timbre can be used to highlight dramatic narratives and demystify abstract musical ideas. I also provide insight into the creative art of orchestration from the composer's viewpoint which is currently lacking in substantial academic research;
3. the role extramusical inspiration plays on musical material, and how non-musical ideas can shape every aspect of the work, including harmony, instrumentation, orchestration, and structure;
4. how collaborative approaches to creativity can inform one's practice and broaden the scope and potential of the work. I look specifically at the creation of an opera — *The Monstrous Child* — and how, through intimate

collaboration with multiple cross-disciplinary creative practitioners, the music is transformed and developed.

These discussions are contextualised with references to a range of composers who have proved influential on my work including John Adams, John McCabe, Harrison Birtwistle, Jonathan Harvey, and Leonard Bernstein, looking at the application of tonality, melody, and orchestration in these composers' work and drawing conclusions on their continued use in my own music.

I also draw conclusions on how extramusical inspiration informs my musical language and how collaborating with trusted practitioners, embracing alternative perspectives, and drawing inspiration and knowledge from others, has enhanced and informed my creative process, making collaboration a necessary and integral part of my creative practice.

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| List of figures | vi |
| Acknowledgments | ix |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1 – Harmonic and melodic observations in <i>Gursky Landscapes</i> | 8 |
| Chapter 2 – Dramatic narratives: Orchestral colour in <i>The Book of Miracles</i> | 37 |
| Chapter 3 – The role of inspiration on the creative process: <i>A Dark Arteries Suite</i> | 60 |
| Chapter 4 – Creativity through collaboration: Making an opera | 85 |
| Conclusion | 111 |
| Appendix 1 – <i>Dark Arteries, Part 1., Under the Ground, We Scream</i> (bars 33–61). | 116 |
| Appendix 2 – Scores and recordings in portfolio | 123 |
| Bibliography | 124 |

Figures

All musical examples are written in concert pitch

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Fig. 1. The harmonic series on D. | 11 |
| Fig. 2. Mvt. 1., <i>Dolomites, Cable Car</i> (bars 1–4). | 12 |
| Fig. 3. Mvt. 2., <i>Les Mées</i> (bars 97–100). | 14 |
| Fig. 4. Mvt. 2. (bars 1–5). | 15 |
| Fig. 5. Mvt. 2. (bars 10–13). | 15 |
| Fig. 6. Mvt. 2. (bars 125–129). | 15 |
| Fig. 7. Mvt. 2. (bars 944–148). | 16 |
| Fig. 8. Mvt. 4., <i>Utah</i> (bars 1–3). | 17 |
| Fig. 9a. Note row. | 17 |
| Fig. 9b. Mvt. 5., <i>Kathedrale</i> (bars 1–4). | 18 |
| Fig. 10. Mvt. 5. (bars 57–52). | 18 |
| Fig. 11. Mvt. 5. (bars 71–82). | 19 |
| Fig. 12. Act 1. Scene 3. <i>The Monstrous Child</i> (bars 198–208). | 21 |
| Fig. 13. <i>Cloudcatcher Falls</i> (bars 1–3). | 22 |
| Fig. 14. Mvt. 1. (bars 17–19). | 22 |
| Fig. 15. Mvt. 1. (bars 64–73). | 23 |
| Fig. 16. Mvt. 2. (bars 46–57). | 24 |
| Fig. 17. Mvt. 2. (bars 59–73). | 24 |
| Fig. 18. Mvt. 4. (bars 11–19). | 25 |
| Fig. 19. Mvt. 1. (bars 1–4). | 27 |
| Fig. 20. Mvt. 1. (bars 5–7). | 27 |
| Fig. 21. Mvt. 1. (bars 9–11). | 27 |
| Fig. 22. Mvt. 1. (bars 20–26). | 28 |
| Fig. 23. Mvt. 1. (bars 39–48). | 28 |
| Fig. 24. Mvt. 1. (bars 52–54). | 28 |
| Fig. 25a. Mvt. 1. (bars 72–77). | 29 |
| Fig. 25b. Mvt. 1. (bars 82–85). | 29 |
| Fig. 26. Mvt. 5. (bars 43–47). | 29 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Fig. 27a. Note row and its eight rotations. | 32 |
| Fig. 27b. Opening bars of Mvt. 3., <i>Kamiokande</i> . | 32 |
| Fig. 28. <i>The Book of Miracles</i> (bars 1–4). | 42 |
| Fig. 29. (bars 275–280). | 43 |
| Fig. 30. (bars 395–400). | 44 |
| Fig. 31. (bars 416–417). | 45 |
| Fig. 32. (bars 307–320). | 47 |
| Fig. 33. (bars 54–60). | 49 |
| Fig. 34. (bars 665–671). | 50 |
| Fig. 35. (bars 124–148). | 52 |
| Fig. 36 (bars 124–148). | 53 |
| Fig. 37. (bars 115–120). | 54 |
| Fig. 38. (bars 105–111). | 55 |
| Fig. 39. (bars 200–213). | 55 |
| Fig. 40. (bars 462–473). | 56 |
| Fig. 41. (bars 474–481). | 57 |
| Fig. 42. <i>A Dark Arteries Suite</i> (bars 1–10). | 66 |
| Fig. 43. (bars 18–22). | 67 |
| Fig. 44. <i>Dark Arteries</i> (bars 40–47). | 68 |
| Fig. 45a. Original melody | 68 |
| Fig 45b. Flugelhorn and tenor horns (bars 24–37). | 68 |
| Fig. 46. <i>A Dark Arteries Suite</i> (bars 108–117). | 69 |
| Fig. 47. (bars 82–87). | 70 |
| Fig. 48. (bars 48–53). | 71 |
| Fig. 49. (bars 189–195). | 72 |
| Fig. 50. (bars 279–278). | 73 |
| Fig. 51. (bars 295–306). | 74 |
| Fig. 52. (bars 395–398). | 75 |
| Fig. 53. (bars 328–333). | 76 |
| Fig. 54. (bars 337–340). | 76 |
| Fig. 55. (bars 445–450). | 77 |
| Fig. 56. (bars 328–332). | 79 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Fig. 57. (bars 242–246). | 79 |
| Fig. 58. (bars 264–269). | 80 |
| Fig. 59. Transcription of <i>Lilja</i> . | 91 |
| Fig. 60a. Act 1. Scene 2. | 94-95 |
| Fig 60b. Act 2. Scene 7. | 95 |
| Fig. 61. Act 1. Prologue (first sketch – 2018). | 98 |
| Fig. 62. Act 1. Prologue (bars 19–42). | 99-100 |
| Fig. 63. Act 1. Scene 1. (bars 38–46). | 103 |
| Fig. 64. Act 2. Scene 6. (bars 228–238). | 104 |

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mark Bowden, for his advice, support, and encouragement during my time at Royal Holloway, particularly during the pandemic year. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Kwabs for his patience and time spent reading, editing, and advising me over the course of my PhD, your support has been invaluable. Thank you to Mark Baldwin, Paul Hoskins, and the Rambert Dance Company for commissioning a ballet for brass band, despite the logistic difficulties that entailed. To the team at the Royal Opera House — Francesca Simon, Tim Sheader, Paul Wills, Howard Hudson, Kasper Holten, John Fulljames, Sarah Crabtree, and the wonderful cast and backstage team — in particular the outstanding Marta Fontanals-Simmons — thank you for helping make my little opera. And finally, I want to thank all the wonderful musicians who I have had the pleasure of working with over the past six years: David Cohen, the Piatti Quartet, the Carducci Quartet, Helen Vollam, the Aurora Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, my friends at the Tredegar Town Band, Ian Porthouse, Jessica Cottis, Mark Austin, and the late Alexander Vedernikov — thank you for your dedication and commitment to my music.

Introduction

In *Music and Inspiration*, Jonathan Harvey states: 'If music is communication, then the identity and nature of the second party involved in the communicative process — the audience — is crucial.'¹ In this thesis I have sought to address questions around the relationship between: i.) the composer, performer, and audience; and ii.) the composer and collaborator. I examine my own creative practice in the context of contemporary musical practitioners and explore how abstract musical ideas can be demystified through the imaginative use of tonality, melody, orchestration. I also discuss how extramusical inspiration and collaborative processes can shape and inform my creative practice.

Each listener brings their own experiences and expectations to a performance; as Adam Ockelford states in *Comparing Notes*: 'Every listener will process and understand the musical message that is sent in a slightly different way'.² However, the continued use of tonality, melody, and inventive instrumentation across a diverse range of musical genres — classical, pop, jazz, and folk music — suggest a universality to these elements that transcends genres.

Despite this, and in part as a consequence of serialism, some classical composers became unmoored from the musical norms that dominated classical and romantic music, as George Benjamin admits:

In our time ... composers have undoubtedly lost all conventional harmonic bearings. That may be unfortunate. Before, there was an immediate and profound communication between music and listener.³

¹ Harvey, Jonathan, *Music and Inspiration* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 83.

² Ockelford, Adam, *Comparing Notes: how we make sense of music* (London: Profile Books, 2018), 295.

³ Benjamin, George, *George Benjamin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 25.

Yet, the ubiquity of harmony, melody, and instrumental colour, and the increasing proliferation of composers currently incorporating these elements into their work — such as John Adams, Mark Simpson, Nico Muhly, Anna Meredith — suggest their continued importance as valuable expressive and communicative tools. Their use can highlight musical form, but also suggest a certain time, place, or event. The Neuroscientist Daniel Levitin says:

Composers know these associations and use them intentionally. Our brains know them, too, through a lifetime of exposure to musical idioms, patterns, scales, lyrics, and the associations between them. Each time we hear a musical pattern that is new to our ears, our brains try to make an association through whatever visual, auditory and other sensory cues accompany it; we try to contextualize the new sounds, and eventually, we create these memory links between a particular set of notes and a particular place, time, or set of events.⁴

Levitin goes on, stating, ‘certain chord progressions are part of every musical tradition, and even by the age of five, most children have internalized rules about what chord progressions are legal, or typical of their culture’s music’⁵. Referencing the cognitive studies of music psychologist Carol Krumhansl, he suggests this innate understanding of one’s musical culture is ingrained in the average listener ‘through passive exposure to music and cultural norms’⁶. By exploiting these musical ‘cultural norms’ — Western musical conventions — it’s possible to create a new contemporary musical language that is also accessible to a broad audience.

I am also interested in the way non-musical processes can influence and shape musical material and form. Specifically, the role extramusical

⁴ Levitin, Daniel, *This is Your Brain on Music* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), 39.

⁵ Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music*, 40-41.

⁶ *Ibid.* 40.

inspiration plays in the creation of a work and how cross-disciplinary collaboration can inform and enhance composers' creative practice.

What inspires a composer is personal and its influence can manifest itself in their music in tangible ways, as Jonathan Harvey suggests: 'The composer's involvement in responding to and shaping the initial stimulus is always evident. External stimuli become part of the internal psychic reality'.⁷ Extramusical inspiration can define the sound and structure of the work, and shape musical elements such as harmony, structure, and instrumentation. It also provides a means through which the audience can connect with the musical material.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration can shape and impact a work in myriad ways. Since composition tends to be a solitary process, working collaboratively can inform one's creative practice, the views and opinions of the collaborators offering valuable insight and alternative perspectives. Collaborative partnerships however are complex, can take many years to develop, and often necessitate accommodating opposing views. Composer John Williams describes his relationship with Steven Spielberg as 'the result of a lot of very compatible dissimilarities'⁸; Bernard Herrmann's 'emotional impulsivity constituted a Conradian alter-ego that moved Hitchcock's cinema into a new darker dimension'.⁹ Therefore, when the combined talents of the creative team complement each other, collaboration allows for the work to be elevated beyond what is achievable by the individual.

⁷ Harvey, *Music and Inspiration*, 40.

⁸ Keegean, Rebecca, 'John Williams and Steven Spielberg mark 49 years of collaboration', in *Los Angeles Times* <<http://latimes.com>>.

⁹ Sullivan, Jack, 'Bernard Herrmann: Hitchcock's secret sharer' in *Partners in Suspense: Critical essays on Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. Steven Rawle and K.J. Donnelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 14.

This commentary is broadly divided in two parts: Chapters 1 and 2 analyse technical aspects of my creative practice, exploring how abstract musical thought can be demystified using tonality, melody, and orchestral colour. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the role extramusical processes have on my work and how they shape and influence aspects of my music.

In Chapter 1 I look at the use of tonality and melody in my string quintet, *Gursky Landscapes* (2018). I explore how I use these elements as a common-ground access point for the listener and how the ubiquity of tonality and melody allows me to develop a musical language that is both idiosyncratic and accessible.

The employment of tonality and expressive melodic lines in my work is in part a consequence of my early musical and cultural influences, specifically music from the brass band tradition. The works of composers such as Gustav Holst (*A Moorside Suite*, 1927), Herbert Howells (*Pageantry*, 1934), Eric Ball (*Resurgam*, 1950), and Wilfred Heaton (*Contest Music*, 1973) that drew on the tradition of ‘marches, solos, popular arrangements’ and ‘operatic selections with traditional ingredients’¹⁰ dominated my youth. But the music of contemporary composers such as Harrison Birtwistle (*Grimethorpe Aria*, 1973), John McCabe (*Images*, 1978), Judith Bingham (*Prague*, 1996), and Torstein Aagaard-Nielsen (*Aubade*, 2003) pushed at my assumed formal tonal boundaries and opened my ears to new sonic possibilities.

Later I was drawn to composers whose music contained aspects of lyricism, tonality, and drama. Specifically, the music of John Adams with his ‘billowing clouds of Wagnerian harmony’ and ‘present-tense American romanticism’¹¹; Mark-Anthony Turnage with his ‘openness to popular

¹⁰ Hindmarsh, Paul, ‘Building a Repertoire’ in *The British Brass Band: a Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 246.

¹¹ Ross, Alex, *The Rest Is Noise* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), 558–559.

music'¹²; and the music of Thomas Adès, which features 'a kind of scintillant or slippery tonality, supported by melodic lines that pick out concatenations of triads'¹³ have shaped my own views on the continued application of tonality and line as expressive communicative tools. In this context I analyse the use of tonality in the work and how triadic and tertiary harmony is employed and developed to create an accessible contemporary musical language.

Specifically, I look at the creation of a tonally infused sonic landscape made from the natural harmonics available on the open strings, and how I build complex chords from simple major and minor triads. I explore the use of chorales in my work and examine how moments of explicit tonality are used as both an evocation and a structural device. Conversely, I discuss how chromaticism and the free application of note rows are used in the context of a tonally-centred harmonic language.

Finally, I examine the use of repetitive melodic motifs in the piece as a means of building a memorable melodic framework, and briefly discuss the allegorical role of the soloist in my music, signposting the works musical and dramatic narratives.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the role orchestration plays in my work as a powerful communicative tool, and how orchestration can be used to demystify abstract musical ideas and draw the listener into the works broader themes and dramatic narratives.

Many books are dedicated to the craft of orchestration, discussing technical aspects of instrumental writing in detail. But very few comment on the creative art of orchestration or how it is used by composers as a

¹² Wroe, Nicholas, 'Mark Anthony-Turnage: A Life in Music', *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com>>.

¹³ Griffiths, Paul, *Modern Music and After* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 371.

means of musical expression. In his book of lectures, *Music and Imagination*, Aaron Copland proclaimed, ‘what a pity that Ravel never wrote a treatise on orchestration!’¹⁴ and indeed, there is only a slim selection of texts and essays written by composers discussing their own orchestrational craft. Orchestration is a key tenet of my musical language, with textural, timbral, and instrumental choices weighted equally with harmonic, structural, and melodic elements. In this chapter I discuss textural and timbral choices used in *The Book of Miracles*.

I examine my use of harmonically static textures, homophonic textures, arpeggiated textures, and tutti orchestral textures and discuss how they are used to underpin and highlight the works dramatic and musical narrative. I also discuss timbral choices in the piece, specifically looking at the musical interaction between solo trombone and orchestra and how, through timbral invention, I create a melodic dialogue between the soloist and groups of instruments.

Chapter 3 examines the role extramusical inspiration plays in my work and how non-musical ideas, events, and narratives can shape harmonic, melodic, structural, and orchestrational decisions. Looking at the concert suite of my ballet, *Dark Arteries*, I discuss the legacy of the British mining industry, and specifically the 1984-85 miners’ strike, and how the topic influenced the works musical material.

I provide background into the relationship between the mining and brass band communities and give context for the work as both a ballet and concert suite. I also look at the works themes — social, political, industrial, and geographical — and how they influenced the structure of both the full-length ballet and concert suite.

¹⁴ Copland, Aaron, *Music and Imagination* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 37.

I discuss the way the mining landscape and industry are expressed through melody, texture, and orchestration; I look at how themes of conflict intrinsic to the topic — heritage vs progress, community vs government — are reflected in the musical material; and finally, I address ideas of community and legacy within both the mining and brass band traditions by engaging in a nostalgic and explicitly tonal language.

In Chapter 4 I discuss how collaborative approaches to creative thinking inform my practice. Looking specifically at the creation of my opera, *The Monstrous Child*, I explore how, through cross-disciplinary collaboration, both the musical score and my creative practice were shaped and developed.

Through email and text correspondence with director, librettist, and other members of the creative team I discuss various stages of the creation of the opera. I look specifically at how we adapted a literary work for the stage; how the opera's structure, characters, and music developed through cross-disciplinary collaboration; and how the process of collaborating has enhanced my own creative practice.

In this thesis I will examine how the use of tonality, melody, and orchestration in my work are used as powerful communicative tools to demystify abstract musical thought; how extramusical inspiration informs and shapes all aspect of the work including harmony, structure, and instrumentation; and how collaborating with cross-disciplinary artists can inform my own creative practice.

Chapter 1: Harmonic and melodic observations in *Gursky Landscapes*

'In each chord there are associations, memories that one can reject or exploit.'¹

'[Melody is] the clearest and most tangible recollection of music which we possess, and the form in which we assimilate it.'²

A century after Schoenberg began developing his method of serial techniques and the start of what Leonard Bernstein referred to as the 'Death of Tonality'³, tonality and melody within contemporary classical music persists. Arnold Whittall notes that, post 1900, prominence was given to 'dissonant chords and tonality-challenging compositional techniques' and since then:

historians and theorists of music have attempted to explain how common-practice harmony, and the tonal system that underpinned it, have adapted and survived, rather than simply vanishing forever.⁴

He goes on to say:

[The] equilibrium between symmetrical and asymmetrical harmonic qualities that remained a compositional force in leading figures from later times like Messiaen, Shostakovich and Britten ... are no less relevant to more recent composers like John Adams and Thomas Adès.⁵

He continues:

¹ Benjamin, George, *George Benjamin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 13.

² Bie, Oscar, 'Melody', trans. Theodore Baker, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (1916), 402.

³ Bernstein, Leonard, *The Infinite Variety of Music* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2007), 13.

⁴ Whittall, Arnold, 'Tonality In Crisis? How Harmony Changed in the 20th Century', *British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk>>.

⁵ Ibid.

When Western art music since 1900 is thought of as a whole, the total absence of any aspect of tonality or tonal structuring is rare enough to be deemed the result of an avant-garde rather than modernist aesthetic stance.⁶

I use tonality and melody in my own work freely and intuitively. In this discussion I use the Grove Music Online definition of tonality, which describes it as the ‘systematic arrangements of pitch phenomena and relations between them’ and the ‘orientation of melodies and harmonies towards a referential (or tonic) pitch class’⁷. My definition of melody includes both explicit solo instrumental lines and linear sequences of notes which might be generated through serial techniques such as rotational arrays. The expressive and communicative potential of these techniques are at the root of my musical aesthetic.

John Adams, in his book *Hallelujah Junction*, provides his own opinion on the prevalence of tonality in classical music, saying:

The expressive potential was obvious. But tonality also gave the composer the ability to create large, unified architectural forms whose balanced internal tensions, like the beams and supports of a grand cathedral, made possible musical statements that were both varied and unified. Thinking about things historically, I began to confirm a suspicion that I’d had for a very long time, that atonality, rather than enriching the expressive palette of the composer, in fact did just the opposite. When I surveyed the music of other cultures both geographically and historically, nowhere could I find a coherent, meaningful musical system that wasn’t tonal at its root.⁸

He goes on to discuss the composition of his orchestral work, *Harmonielehre* (1985):

[*Harmonielehre*] was a statement of belief in the power of tonality at a time when I was uncertain about its future. I needn’t have worried,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hyer, Brian, ‘Tonality’, *Groves Music Online* <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>.

⁸ Adams, John, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (UK: Faber and Faber, 2016), 104.

as the huge success of popular music and our growing awareness of other non-Western traditions were already making it clear that tonal harmony was in no danger of demise.⁹

My feelings towards the use of tonality and melody within my own work echo these sentiments. Their application in my music provides the listener with a universal point of access: its effectiveness as a powerful means of expression is proven by its continued prevalence across numerous musical genres (such as jazz, pop, folk). Though compositional methods such as serialism do serve a purpose in my work, it is this universal ‘power of tonality’ that John Adams speaks of which I explore.

In this chapter I will analyse two key features of my technique, looking specifically at my approach to harmony and the use of expressive melodic line in *Gursky Landscapes* (2017–2018). *Gursky Landscapes* was commissioned by David Cohen and premiered at Cheltenham Music Festival by David Cohen and the Carducci Quartet. The work is inspired by five photographic images from different periods of Andreas Gursky’s output.

1. Harmonic observations

a.) The inherent tonality of harmonics.

My musical language has, at its core, a basis in tonality. Sometimes tonality functions in a traditional sense — written in a clear key, e.g. B \flat minor in the second movement of *A Dark Arteries Suite* (Fig. 57) — and at other times I take a freer approach to the application and use of triadic and tertian harmony, with chords based on, or constructed around, major and minor triads though not functioning in a traditionally tonal fashion.

⁹ Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 129.

In the first movement of this work, tertian harmony is explored using harmonics. In the opening bars I exploit the natural harmonics found on each string — for example D, F♯, A, and C on the cello’s D string (Fig. 1) — exploring the intrinsically triadic nature of the series to establish a loose tonal underpinning of the movement. As such, much of the harmonic and melodic material in this movement is drawn from pitches and intervals found in these opening bars.

Fig. 1. The harmonic series on D.



To clarify, when the lower partials of the harmonic series are sounded together a dominant-seventh chord is produced — on the D string a D⁷ chord is heard — itself containing a major-third, two minor-thirds, a perfect-fifth, a diminished-fifth, and a minor-seventh. All of these intervals can be manipulated to create a wider range of intervallic relationships — for example, major-thirds when inverted sound a minor-sixth — and it is from these intervals that chords and melodic lines are developed.

The overtones of the harmonic series have been used as a basis for composition in the work of spectralist composers such as Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail. In their compositions, ‘rather than an arbitrary basis in the composer’s imagination, spectral music finds a natural grounding in the physical qualities of sound, its “spectrum” of overtones as objectively analyzed by an unprejudiced machine.’¹⁰ However, the functionality of the harmonic series at the beginning of this work is less focused on the objective analysis of the upper partials of the series, instead using the

¹⁰ Taruskin, Richard, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 500.

lower audible partials and responding intuitively to their inherently triadic nature and glassy timbre.

As such the use of natural harmonics is both musical and dramatic; it is a means to suggest and explore the works deeper tonal structures whilst exploiting the timbral qualities of natural string harmonics to evoke the works dramatic narrative; the image of a cable car disappearing into a vast wall of cloud hugging the mountainside.

Within the first bar an eight-note chord is built: a perfect-fourth on cello and viola (G and C), minor-seventh on viola and violin II (E and D), major-seventh on cello and violin II (B \flat and A) and finally a major-third on violin II and violin I (D and F \sharp) is added, from which the solo cello line emerges on a G. The resultant chord is a D-major triad over a C⁷ chord, foreshadowing the more explicit tonality which dominates the piece.

Fig. 2. Mvt. 1., *Dolomites: Cable Car* (bars 1–4).

The image shows a musical score for the first four bars of the first movement of 'Dolomites: Cable Car'. The score is written for five instruments: Solo Violoncello (Vc.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The tempo is marked as 'rall.' with a metronome marking of 104, which then changes to 92. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8. The Solo Vc. part features a melodic line with various dynamics (mp, pp dolce, mp, p, mp) and includes fingerings (IV, III, I) and a 'pizz.' marking. The Vln. I and Vln. II parts play sustained chords with dynamics ranging from pp to mp. The Vla. and Vc. parts provide harmonic support with sustained notes and dynamics from p to mp. The Vc. part includes an alternative fingering '[alt.]' and a dynamic of p.

Excluding the momentary fall to E \flat in bar 10, each note of the progression (from bar 1 to letter A) is playable as a natural harmonic on either violin, viola or cello. In the absence of having multiple instruments available to

play the requisite number of harmonics, these pitches are represented as a mixture of natural harmonics, artificial harmonics, and notes played conventionally — the double-stopped D and B \flat on violin 2 in bar 4, for example, could be played as natural harmonics on the cello. Through the careful distribution of harmonics and combination of double-stopped notes the natural harmonic colour of the opening chord is sustained throughout this section, creating the illusion of a chord progression made entirely from natural harmonics.

Apart from the fall to E \flat , every note in this passage is derived from the harmonic series of each string, resulting in twelve pitches in total. Despite using all pitches within the chromatic scale, there is a strongly implied sense of tonality underpinning this section. There are two reasons for this: i.) the triadic basis of the harmony and the use of consonant intervals (for example thirds and perfect-fifths) inherent in the harmonic series, and ii.) the use of a pedal B \flat which underpins the harmony and anchors each chord to a central pitch.

Each consecutive chord hovers around this pitch (the flattened seventh-partial harmonic found on the C string) which is heard in every bar throughout this section, i.) as part of the accompaniment — as a seventh-partial natural harmonic or played conventionally (sometimes spelt as an A \sharp) — and ii.) repeatedly returned to in the solo cello melodic line.

At the end of the movement (the last quaver of bar 81) the chord from bar 1 returns momentarily (the root of the chord changed from G to F), before finally moving to a higher chord at bar 84 (an E-major triad over a D⁷ chord) as the solo cello ascends leaving the movement suspended — a reference, if you like, to the cable car in the image. The triadic harmony and natural harmonic sonic that begins the movement also ends it, succinctly framing the harmonic and dramatic structure.

b.) Tonal foundations: Tertiary and triadic harmony

I have discussed how the triadic basis for much of the harmony in this piece draws from the harmonic series. But harmony built on triadic chords permeates this piece in two other ways: i.) as static chords, rooted on or around a triad — for example the climax in the second movement (Fig. 3.) built on a C-major triad in cello (C and G) and viola (E):

Fig. 3. Mvt. 2., *Les Mées* (bars 97–100).

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Solo Vc., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The score covers bars 97 to 100. At the beginning of bar 97, there is a 'rit.' marking and a dynamic of *mp*. At the start of bar 98, there is a box labeled 'E' containing the instruction 'Lots of bow' and a rhythmic pattern 'n V n V n V'. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 120. The Solo Vc. part has a *fff* dynamic and 'Lots of bow' instruction. The Vln. I and Vln. II parts also have *fff* dynamics and 'Lots of bow' instructions. The Vla. and Vc. parts have *fff* dynamics. The score shows various musical notations including notes, rests, and slurs.

And ii.) using rhythmic intervallic repetitions, resulting in a kind of rhythmic-tremolo chord. The second movement, *Les Mées* — inspired by the image of a field of solar panels in the French Alps — is dominated by rhythmic repetitions of simple intervallic cells (thirds/sixths and fourths). The movement opens with a repeated pattern of minor-thirds (C to E \flat and G to B \flat) played on both cellos a fifth apart, the implied harmony sounding a Cm⁷ chord (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Mvt. 2. (bars 1–5).



The occasional rising-falling gesture, in both pitch and dynamics, suggesting the wave-like shape of the solar panels in the original image, provides subtle harmonic changes, with the combined cello lines alternating intervals of thirds and fourths as the line rises, and thirds, fourths, and sixths as it falls, for example bars 10–12 (Fig. 5). But despite these harmonic deviations the opening passage of this work is clearly rooted in C-minor.

Fig. 5. Mvt. 2. (bars 10–13).

Tonal harmony, heard as a result of repeated ostinato figures, dominate this movement. For example, at bar 124 a repeated pattern of alternating sixths in the cello and fifths in viola result in an 1st inversion E⁷⁽⁺⁴⁾ chord (Fig. 6):

Fig. 6. Mvt. 2. (bars 125–129).



These patterns of shifting chords continue till the end of the movement, underpinning the solo cello cadenzas, with harmonic changes at bar 133, 144, 164, before finally returning to the original pattern of alternating minor-thirds — parallel fifths in cellos — transposed up a fourth in this final iteration.

All of these chords are built on triads or tertiary harmony. For example, the seven-note chord heard at bar 144 is built on top of a C-major arpeggiation in the cello part (Fig. 7):

Fig. 7. Mvt. 2. (bars 944–148).

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Solo Vc., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The score is in 6/8 time and begins at bar 144. The Solo Vc. part is marked *ff espr.* and features a seven-note chord. The Vln. I and Vln. II parts play arpeggiated patterns with a *f* dynamic. The Vla. and Vc. parts also play arpeggiated patterns with a *f* dynamic. The Solo Vc. part has a *pp* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Later, in the fourth movement, *Utah*, I exploit the use of repetitive intervallic patterns once more but here, rather than the incessant rhythms of the second movement, a slower subtly shifting harmonic backdrop is created. The movement opens with perfect fifths, heard as natural harmonics (D, A, and E) on violins (Fig. 8) but a major-sixth (B and G \sharp) is added at the bass, the resultant chord sounding a second-inversion E⁷⁽⁺⁴⁾:

Fig. 8. Mvt. 4., *Utah* (bars 1–3).

♩ = 132 gently lulling

con sord

pp

Vln. I

con sord

pp

Vln. II

Throughout this movement the seven-beat rhythmic pattern set up in the violins continues unchanged, though the harmony is subtly altered by adjustments to the bass and top notes. Despite this, all of the chords are anchored around a pedal of perfect-fifths (D and A) which are found in almost every bar and root the shifting harmony to a kind of centre of tonality.

c.) Tonal departures

The third and fifth movements are a departure from the tonal basis of the harmony found in the rest of the work. The central movement, *Kamiokande*, is driven by a pizzicato note row (Fig. 9a) the first six notes of which are loosely drawn from the melody heard in the opening bars of the final movement (Fig. 9b):

Fig. 9a. Note row.

B♭ C D E F G A

The B♭ starting note of each row provides a tonal centre for the movement and, though the odd triad does appear (a D-major triad in the final bar for example), the resulting vertical harmony is a consequence of the note row rather than intuition.

Fig. 9b. Mvt. 5., *Kathedrale* (bars 1–4).

In the fourth movement, *Kathedrale*, the harmony is far more chromatic, with chords emerging from clusters as the line gradually descends through the ensemble into close-harmony chords. However, there are moments in the movement where tonal triadic harmony reasserts itself, the movement becoming more explicitly tonal as the work comes to an end. At bars 48–52 (Fig. 10) a simple two-part counterpoint based around major and minor thirds/sixths — sometimes displaced by an octave — is heard on violins and solo cello with the passage finally resolving onto a Dm¹³ chord at bar 52:

Fig. 10. Mvt. 5. (bars 57–52).

This movement is effectively a slow descent from the high B \flat of the violins to low E and F \sharp on scordatura cello, the harmonic structure moving gradually from clusters, to something once again more tonal at the bottom of the cello register. This return to tonality is heard most clearly at the end of the work, at bars 71–83 (Fig. 11), where both cellos move sequentially downwards, alternating between the intervals of major/minor sixths. Despite the fifth missing, the major/minor relationship is clearly heard:

Fig. 11. Mvt. 5. (bars 71–82).

The image shows a musical score for two cellos (Solo Vc. and Vc.) in Mvt. 5, bars 71–82. The tempo is marked 'molto s.t.' and the metronome marking is 48. The Solo Vc. part starts at bar 71 with a dynamic of *pp* and *espr.*, moving to *mp* and then *dim.*. The Vc. part starts at bar 71 with a dynamic of *pp* and *espr.*, moving to *mp* and then *dim.*. Both parts feature triplets and a scordatura sign (S \sharp) at bar 76. The Solo Vc. part continues to bar 76 with a dynamic of *pp* and *pesante*. The Vc. part continues to bar 76 with a dynamic of *pp* and *pesante*. The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat.

In this work the note B \flat is important and, as such, is returned to frequently. Thomas Adès calls this a ‘fetish note’, which refers to the idea that ‘certain specific pitches become fetish objects, which are returned to and rubbed by the composer all the time’.¹¹ i) The pitch is established in the opening bars of the first movement, ii) provides a tonal centre to the note rows used in the central movement (*Kamiokande*) — each row beginning on a B \flat — and iii) is the first pitch heard in the final movement on two violins. As such, this note subtly underpins the harmonic structure of the entire work, marking the palindromic nature of the piece and suggesting a centre of tonality throughout.

¹¹ Service, Tom, *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 48.

d.) Explicit tonality: chorale themes

George Benjamin's observation that 'In each chord there are associations, memories that one can reject or exploit'¹², that is the idea that certain harmonies or melodies can be suggestive to the listener, resonates with me. However, the composer's association with a chord or melody will not necessarily translate to the listener as Jonathan Harvey discusses:

A sequence of musical logic may throw up a chord which, as I write it down over some thirty seconds, suddenly reminds me of a moment in a Monteverdi opera, for instance. Thus that moment, for me, will always contain pathos, love, death or whatever the Monteverdi reference might have contained. Music thus has an ability to make complex, wide-ranging connections, often in a more economical and poignant way than language.¹³

Later confessing:

The listener to my music is, of course, entitled to object here that whatever the associations of a particular moment for me, there is no guarantee at all that these associations will be transmitted to him or her.¹⁴

Though the listener's personal experience when engaging with my work is unique to them, the use of a more explicitly tonal language will inevitably evoke musical associations, even being suggestive of time and place — think of the tango and salon music from Adès' *Powder Her Face* (1995) or the Advent plainsong in MacMillan's percussion concerto, *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* (1992).

¹² Benjamin, *George Benjamin*, 13.

¹³ Harvey, *Music and Inspiration*, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

Throughout my portfolio I use chorale themes¹⁵, often employing a more explicit tonality, to allude to something distant or unattainable, old or nostalgic. For example, in *The Monstrous Child* the theme for Baldr — Hel’s unobtainable love interest — takes the form of a chorale, reappearing in different guises throughout the opera (Fig. 12):

Fig. 12. Act 1. Scene 3. *The Monstrous Child* (bars 198–208).

The musical score for Act 1, Scene 3 of *The Monstrous Child* (bars 198–208) is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 198–202) features Hel's vocal line with the lyrics "O-din's son said my name..." and a piano accompaniment for Cello and Strings. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *mp gobsmacked*, *tr*, *pp*, *p espr.*, *mp*, and *mf*. The second system (bars 203–208) continues Hel's vocal line with the lyrics "O-din's son knows my name, said my name. My name in his mouth." and the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *tr*, *pp*, *mp espr.*, and *mf*. The score is written in 3/4 time and includes various musical notations such as trills, triplets, and dynamic markings.

Another example can be found in the second movement of *The Book of Miracles: Parhelia*, a chorale theme scored for solo strings is heard, here though, it is used to evoke something celestial: the image of a mock sun (see Fig. 31).

In *Gursky Landscapes* chorale themes are used specifically as a musical representation of the distant and unmoving mountainous landscape as seen in three of the images. The shape of the chorale is partly inspired by

¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper ‘chorales’ refer to homophonic material that uses explicitly tonal harmony: ‘hymn-like’.

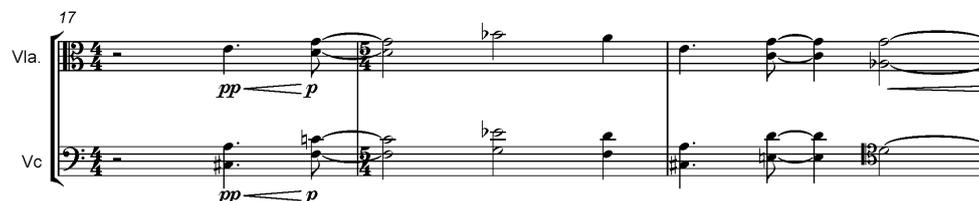
the opening bars of John McCabe’s Lake District inspired work, *Cloudcatcher Fells* (Fig. 13), itself inspired by a mountainous landscape. With its ‘undulating construction’, Paul Hindmarsh writes, the opening melody ‘could be viewed as a musical paradigm of a mountain landscape — as viewed from a distance perhaps or underneath a huge sky.’¹⁶

Fig. 13. *Cloudcatcher Fells* (bars 1–3).



The chorale theme in *Gursky Landscapes* reappears throughout the work, but is initially hinted at in the first movement (*Dolomites, Cable Car*) on viola and cello at bars 14–19 (Fig. 14), and then again in the violins at bars 32, 38 and 48, suggesting the mountain range of the title:

Fig. 14. Mvt. 1. (bars 17–19).



The undulant melodic line, utilising the rising minor-third and falling minor-second and fourth, marks out the broad shape, but the chorale is also harmonised with a series of simple chords. This is the first explicitly tonal passage of the work. That is to say, a chordal progression where major/minor relationships are clearly heard. It is only at the end of this movement (bars 64–80) the chorale returns, fully developed (Fig. 15), in viola and cello with violin 2 joining in at bar 70:

¹⁶ Hindmarsh, Paul, ‘The Music for Brass and Wind’, in *Landscapes of the Mind: The Music of John McCabe*, ed. George Odum (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited and Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 2007), 142.

Fig. 15. Mvt. 1. (bars 64–73).

The musical score for Figure 15 consists of two systems of staves for Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

System 1 (Bars 64-68):

- Vln. II:** Rests throughout, marked "con sord." (muted).
- Vla.:** Melodic line starting in 3/4 time, moving to 5/4 at bar 66, and back to 3/4 at bar 68. Dynamics: *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*.
- Vc.:** Accompanying line in 3/4 time. Dynamics: *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*.

System 2 (Bars 69-73):

- Vln. II:** Sustained notes, marked "con sord." (muted). Dynamics: *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*.
- Vla.:** Melodic line continuing from the previous system. Dynamics: *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*.
- Vc.:** Accompanying line. Dynamics: *p*, *mp*, *mp*, *mf*.

In Gursky’s photo, the dolomites are hidden under a veil of mist but remain a dominant, imposing feature in the image. As such, this *sul tasto* ending draws inspiration from the image, the chorale now muted and veiled.

Mountains appear far more visibly in two of the other photographs. In the second movement, *Les Mées* — inspired by Gursky’s vast image set against the backdrop of the French Alps — one finds an ecstatic version of the chorale theme moving between violins and viola at bars 46–58 (Fig. 16):

Fig. 16. Mvt. 2. (bars 46–57).

Musical score for Violins I and II and Viola, bars 46–57. The score is in 6/16 time. The first system (bars 46–51) shows Violin I and II with dynamics *f*, *pp*, and *f molto espr.*, and Viola with *pp* and *f molto espr.*. The second system (bars 52–57) shows Violin I and II with dynamics *2* and *f molto espr.*, and Viola with *2* and *f molto espr.*.

And cellos and viola at bars 59–73 (Fig. 17):

Fig. 17. Mvt. 2. (bars 59–73).

Musical score for Solo Violoncello, Viola, and Violoncello, bars 59–73. The score is in 6/16 time. Solo Vc. has dynamics *f*, *pp*, and *f molto espr.* with a fermata. Vln. has dynamics *pp* and *f molto espr.*. Vc. has dynamics *f*, *mp*, and *f molto espr.* with a fermata.

This call and response— shared between violins and viola, viola and cellos — continues until the climax at letter E. Compared to the first movement, and reflecting Gursky’s vast landscape, this is a wholeheartedly more invigorating iteration of the chorale theme.

Another version of the chorale is also heard in the fourth movement, *Utah*, inspired by Gursky’s ‘largely out of focus’ image ‘evoking a casual

photograph taken from a moving vehicle'.¹⁷ Once again the chorale theme is associated with the distant mountains (the Wasatch Range) seen in the background of the image, but here the line and harmony has been altered, each fragmented statement ending with a downwards glissando as the mountains blur and vanish in the background (Fig. 18):

Fig. 18. Mvt. 4. (bars 11–19).

The image shows a musical score for two staves: Viola (Vla.) and Violoncello (Vc.). The score is for measures 11 through 19. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music consists of fragmented, descending melodic lines. Dynamic markings include *ppp*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *ppp* with an accent (>). There are also triplets marked with a '3' and a slur. The final measure (19) features a glissando indicated by a downward arrow and an accent, ending in *ppp*.

When discussing the framing of these mountains in his image *Les Mées*, Gursky said he ‘liked the fact you that you could see the old world in the background, the mountains — and the modern world, the plant, up front.’¹⁸ I also explore similar ideas in my own work with the juxtaposition of older, familiar musical ideas set within a modern framework. This rub of the old and the new is exploited in *A Dark Arteries Suite*, in which I re-imagine the musical, historical, and cultural heritage of brass bands with a contemporary gaze. Or in *Gursky Landscapes*, where tonal chorales, used to represent the unmoving, eternal mountain ranges seen in images, interject throughout a more contemporary sound world.

Tonality is a pervasive attribute in my work. Explicitly tonal passages are used most notably for dramatic and evocative purposes — such as the use of chorales mentioned above. But in music that is more chromatic in nature, the free application of triads or tertian harmony imply centres of tonality. As such, in striving for an intrinsically lyrical and expressive musical language

¹⁷ Rugoff, Ralph, ‘Andreas Gursky: Four Decades’ in *Andreas Gursky* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2018), 18.

¹⁸ Berning Sawa, Dale, ‘Andreas Gursky on the photograph that changed everything’, *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com>>.

that has an immediacy and directness, tonal elements have become an inherent and distinguishing characteristic of my musical aesthetic.

2. Melodic observations

My compositional process often begins with short melodic cells, from which much of the musical material is drawn. As such, melody is a means through which the listener can directly access the harmonic, structural, and dramatic intentions of the music. Furthermore, melody is often the most enduring part of a composition, able to engrain itself in the listener's memory long after the piece has finished.

Composer Nicholas Maw said melody has 'the power of entering the listener's inner life, and being imprinted on his memory.'¹⁹ It is this 'power' of melody to ingrain itself immediately into the listener's subconscious, to evoke memory, time, and place, and to speak to an audience directly that makes its application so useful as an expressive tool.

a.) Repetitive melodic motifs

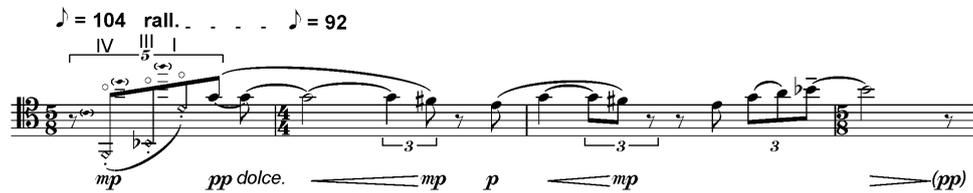
Despite each movement of *Gursky Landscapes* being self-contained, various cells of thematic material are developed throughout the work, melody and line serving both an expressive and structural purpose. For example, the cello line heard at the opening of the first movement.

The main melodic features of this movement are found in the first four bars (Fig. 19), presented as three short but expanding motifs based around the intervals of a minor-second and a minor-third: a falling minor-second

¹⁹ Whittall, Arnold, 'Nicholas Maw and the Music of Memory', *Tempo*, Vol. 63, No. 250, (2009), 6.

(G–F \sharp), is followed with the addition of a rising minor-third (E–G–F \sharp), and completed by an ascending phrase that reaches a B \flat (E–G–A–B \flat):

Fig. 19. Mvt. 1. (bars 1–4).



This melodic idea is heard in fragments throughout this opening section, interrupted by a rising pizzicato that traces the shape of the chord which underpins it. For example, at bar 5 this gesture is echoed on false-harmonics (Fig. 20):

Fig. 20. Mvt. 1. (bars 5–7).



At bars 9–10 (Fig. 21) this melody is developed further with a minor-sixth leap (E–C) followed by a whole-tone fall (echoing the minor-second motif heard earlier) to the B \flat , the phrase completed once again with an ascending three-note gesture (A, B \flat , C):

Fig. 21. Mvt. 1. (bars 9–11).



This fragmented melodic idea is developed throughout this movement, heard more urgently and fanfare-like at letter B (Fig. 22):

Fig. 22. Mvt. 1. (bars 20–26).

Then, from letter C (Fig. 23), it reaches higher at each iteration, culminating at bars 40–47 with incessant repetitions of the falling minor-second motif (G \flat –F):

Fig. 23. Mvt. 1. (bars 39–48).

At bars 52–54 (Fig. 24) and bars 82–83 a reiteration of the melodic cell returns, B \flat /A \sharp present both times:

Fig. 24. Mvt. 1. (bars 52–54).

Finally, at the end of the movement, the ascending melodic gestures are expanded, each iteration extended by a note each time (Fig. 25a) until an entire eight-note scale is heard (bars 72–85) (Fig. 25b):

Fig. 25a. Mvt. 1. (bars 72–77).

Musical score for Fig. 25a, Mvt. 1, bars 72–77. The score is in bass clef, 3/4 time, and features a melodic line with trills and triplets. Dynamics include *p*, *mp dolce*, and *mp*. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Fig. 25b. Mvt. 1. (bars 82–85).

Musical score for Fig. 25b, Mvt. 1, bars 82–85. The score is in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 92$. It features a melodic line with trills and triplets. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

These *ascending* melodic gestures seen in the first movement are mirrored in the final movement with a slowly *descending* melodic line. This melody is initially heard in counterpoint on violins one and two (Fig. 9b) and is further developed at bars 43 (cellos and viola) (Fig. 26) and 53 (on solo cello, viola, and violin one), the flourishes fleeting and delicate, reflecting the play of the light in the image.

Fig. 26. Mvt. 5. (bars 43–47).

Musical score for Fig. 26, Mvt. 5, bars 43–47. The score is in treble clef, 4/4 time, and features a melodic line with trills and triplets. Dynamics include *pp*, *mp dolce espr.*, and *mp*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the instruction "straight through".

While the first movement draws inspiration from the image of a cable car as it ascends into a wall of mist, the final movement plays with the idea of light descending onto miniature human figures beneath a wall of stained glass. The ascending gestures of the first movement and the long descent

seen in the final movement — both movements containing the most explicitly lyrical and soloistic cello lines — suggest a quasi-palindromic structure to the piece. Despite the five movements being somewhat disparate it is these overriding melodic ideas which unite them.

Moreover, the repetition and development of melodic cells throughout the piece — including the chorale theme heard in numerous movements — ingrain them in the listeners memory and, therefore, make the music immediately accessible on first listen. Adam Ockelford enforces this point in his book *Comparing Notes*:

Given the lack of semantic meaning of musical motifs, such unmissable reiteration assists the ear as it strives to make sense of abstract narratives in sound — particularly on a first hearing, when memorability is key.²⁰

He compares motifs and musical themes to ‘snatches of melody that are audible in the foreground’, which by implication articulate the ‘background structure’, since it is ‘melodic detail that initially attracts the ear, and that subsequently resides in memory like a tag to call to mind or identify a given work.’²¹

As such, the use of repeated, restated, and developed melodic cells throughout this piece, provides the listener with a point of access. Familiarity of expressive and memorable melodic lines, therefore, make their application useful, ensuring the listener can immediately connect emotionally with the works deeper musical structures.

²⁰ Ockelford, *Comparing Notes*, 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

b.) Free application of note rows

As discussed in the previous section, my approach to melody and line is somewhat intuitive, focusing on lyricism and repetition, with memorability an essential element. But occasionally I call on serial techniques to generate melodic or linear material that is more unpredictable and less expressive. In the first (Fig. 47) and third (Fig. 55) movements of *A Dark Arteries Suite* for example, angular note rows are used to explore ideas that are mechanical (the mining industry) or violent (the 'Battle of Orgreave') in nature.

The central movement of *Gursky Landscapes — Kamiokande* — is driven by a single pizzicato line that moves throughout the ensemble, composed with a relaxed version of Stravinsky's hexachord rotation (rotational arrays) method — the rotation of note-rows that 'contains similar pitch material differently configured', where 'each rotation transforms its predecessor'²² — my approach to which is summed up by Colin Matthews: 'I don't like technique to be too audible, or too binding. If I'm using a series, then if the note doesn't sound right I'll change it.'²³ In my own work the *sound* is most important and if the music doesn't *sound* right I change it to suit my tastes. So, my use of serial techniques is a means to end, a way of generating melodic/linear material that is unpredictable rather than a formal, structural device which I adhere to strictly.

In *Kamiokande* I've used a nine-note row (see Fig. 9a) that is rotated a further 8 times, each row starting on the same note — B \flat (Fig. 27):

²² Ayrey, Craig, 'Stravinsky in analysis: the anglophone traditions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 213.

²³ Griffiths, Paul, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980's* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 103.

Fig. 27a. Note row and its eight rotations.

The image displays a single musical staff containing eight horizontal lines of music, each representing a different rotation of a note row. The notes are represented by stems and flags, with various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) placed above or below the stems. The rotations are numbered 1 through 8 on the left side of the staff. The first line shows the original row, and subsequent lines show the row shifted up or down by one or two notes, with corresponding accidentals adjusted to maintain the same intervallic relationships.

Though I follow the order of notes in each rotation — the movement ends once the full set of rotations completes — I freely repeat certain melodic cells found in each row (Fig. 27). Despite the use of a serial technique here, the perpetual reestablishment of the note B \flat as a tonal centre and the free repetition of melodic cells, contribute to the melodic nature of this line whilst retaining the sense of unpredictability inherent in the rotational technique.

Fig. 27b. Opening bars of Mvt. 3., *Kamiokande*.

The image shows two lines of musical notation for the opening of a movement. The first line contains measures 1 through 8. Above the staff, a bracket labeled 'Row' spans the first two measures. A bracket labeled '1st melodic cell' spans the first measure of the second line. A bracket labeled '(1st)' spans the first measure of the third line. A bracket labeled '2nd melodic cell' spans the first two measures of the fourth line. The second line of notation starts at measure 9 and continues to measure 12. A bracket labeled '(2nd)' spans the first two measures of this line. A bracket labeled 'Row' spans the first two measures of the third line of this section. A bracket labeled '(1st.)' spans the first measure of the fourth line of this section. The notation ends with 'etc.'.

The use of serial techniques in my work is rare but dramatically and harmonically useful when expressivity and lyricism is undesired.

c.) Narrative melody: the allegorical role of the soloist

My preoccupation with music that feature soloists — and by association, the extensive use of explicit melody — dominates this portfolio. My compositions often begin with simple with melodic ideas from which the musical material is developed. Much of the material in *The Book of Miracles* for example, is drawn from the trombone's opening melody. Conversely, the music associated with the character Hel in *The Monstrous Child* is developed from the melody heard in her opening aria (Fig. 62). The use of a soloist therefore serves both a musical and dramatic purpose, functioning as a 'narrator' of the works musical and dramatic material.

In the ballet *Dark Arteries*, the flugelhorn has numerous solos, including large cadenzas at structurally significant moments in the work. The flugelhorn adopts an allegorical role throughout the piece, driving the musical narrative and highlighting the main melodic material. In *The Book of Miracles* the trombone takes on an unequivocal soloistic role. However, the trombone's melodic material is often shared between the orchestra, the orchestral material itself often an extension of the soloist's melodic lines, questioning the archetypal constructs of the concerto.

In the concertante work *Gursky Landscapes* the solo cello part is frequently written in explicitly soloistic terms, at the forefront of the texture and driving the development of the material. While the outer movements are led by lyrically expressive solo lines, the inner movements see more of a dialogue between the soloist and ensemble. *Gursky Landscapes* is ultimately an ensemble piece. However, the soloistic nature of the solo

cello part highlights the melodic material and musical narrative throughout the work.

Melody is an integral feature in my work. It provides the initial musical stimulus for the piece and is a powerful communicative tool I use to connect the listener directly to the works dramatic and musical material. As such, the use of a soloist is the primary conduit for melody within my work.

3. Conclusion

In *Leaving Home*, Michael Hall suggests that Schoenberg, in his seminal book *Harmonielehre*, published around the time he was 'abandoning tonality himself', seemed to assume that 'tonal harmony would continue to be the basis of music in the future'.²⁴ Writing in 1966 at a time when he believed the 'famous gulf between composer and the audience' was 'not only wider than ever' but had 'become an ocean'²⁵, Leonard Bernstein too recognised,

It can be no mere coincidence that after half a century of radical experiment the best and best-loved works in atonal or 12-tone or serial idioms are those works which seem to have preserved, against all odds, some backdrop of tonality ... in all of these works there are continuous and assertive spectres of tonality that haunt you as you listen. And the more you listen, the more you are haunted. And in the haunting you feel the agony of longing for tonality, the violent wrench away from it, and the blind need to recapture it.²⁶

He goes on to predict that 'we will recapture it' [tonality] and 'come back to it in a new relationship, renewed by the catharsis of our agony.' But in

²⁴ Hall, Michael, *Leaving Home: A Conducted Tour of Twentieth-Century Music With Simon Rattle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 235

²⁵ Bernstein, *The Infinite Variety of Music*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

truth, tonality never really disappeared from classical music, as Julian Johnson notes: 'It is an astonishing thought that the rapturous lyricism of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* is exactly contemporary with the angular modernisms of Boulez's *Second Piano Sonata*.'²⁷

Living composers such as Anna Meredith, Nico Muhly, Mark Simpson, Jóhann Jóhannson, and David Bruce freely exploit tonality within their own work in vastly differing ways. As such contemporary classical music is now, as it has been since the 1940's, an extremely broad field, as Arnold Whittall notes: 'Composers born around and after 1940 confirm the failure of twentieth-century music to follow a single, progressive track away from tonality.'²⁸ The continued proliferation of tonality and melody in classical, jazz, and pop music suggest these means of musical expression have an enduring quality.

Discussing the direction of his musical language after the completion of *Phrygian Gates* (1977), John Adams says:

I needed to find a musical language that could contain my expressive needs, a language that was formally and emotionally much more malleable, much more capable of a sudden change of mood, one that could be both blissfully serene and then violently explosive within the same minute.²⁹

Adam's distinctive use of tonality and melody provide him with the tools to create engaging and popular compositions. Equally, tonality and line are integral features of my music, the expressive and dramatic potential of these elements make them an important part of my musical language. My re-imagining of tonal chorales for example — and their placement within a

²⁷ Johnson, Julian, *Classical Music: A Beginner's Guide* (Great Britain: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 166.

²⁸ Whittall, Arnold, 'The concerto since 1945', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 169.

²⁹ Adams, John, 'John Adams Reflects on His Career' in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2006), 22.

contemporary soundscape — allows me to play with the listeners' perception of musical association and memory.

Conversely, melodic cells are the catalyst for the musical material in my work, melody itself being the most tangible and immediate access point for the listener. As such, the use of soloists in these works are the means through which the melodic ideas — and therefore the work's harmonic, structural, and dramatic material — is made most explicit.

Having embraced the universality, immediacy, and what Adams calls the 'pure expressivity'³⁰ of these elements in my musical aesthetic, tonality and melody are imbued — both philosophically and technically — into my creative practice. As such, tonality and melody in my work provide an access point for the listener. They are the means through which I can connect with the audience on common ground in meaningful dialogue. Whilst respecting the proven expressive and dramatic functionality they offer, I aim to push at the boundaries and functionality of these elements, engaging the listener emotionally and intellectually in work which is at once contemporary and familiar.

³⁰ Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 101.

Chapter 2: Dramatic narratives: Orchestral colour in *The Book of Miracles*

Orchestration is composition. All other musical ideas eventually become unimportant — swallowed whole or pounded into sediments like the ground beneath us.¹

The invention of beautiful orchestral effects cannot be taught ... it belongs to those precious gifts which the composer, at once a poet and an inspired calculator, must have received from nature, similarly to talent for melody, expression, and even for harmony.²

1. The art of orchestration

The art of orchestration is a much-misunderstood aspect of the compositional process. A wealth of practical manuals on the craft of scoring for the orchestra exist: books by Hector Berlioz (expanded by Richard Strauss), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Charles-Marie Widor, Walter Piston, Ertugrul Sevasy, Alfred Blatter, Samuel Adler or Charles Koechlin's four-part *Traité de l'orchestration* provide thorough guides to instrumental writing. But, as Alan Belkin points out in his online orchestration book, 'the main subject none of these books covers systematically is how orchestration expresses and enhances musical form.'³

The composer Gardner Read states, there is 'an unconscionable dearth of analysis of the creative orchestrational styles that distinguish one period from another and one composer from another.'⁴ There are even fewer examples of composers discussing personal approaches to orchestration in their own works. As such 'innovation in orchestration and genius in the

¹ Feldman, Morton, 'Remarks on Orchestration', *Orchestration: an Anthology of Writings*, ed. Paul Matthews (New York: Routledge, 2006), 202.

² Belioz, Hector and Strauss, Richard, *Treatise On Instrumentation*, trans. Theodore Front (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 406.

³ Belkin, Alan, 'Orchestration — Introduction: why this book', *Alan Belkin Music* <www.alanbelkinmusic.com>.

⁴ Read, Gardner, *Style and Orchestration* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979), 2.

handling of shape and colour are generally undervalued in broadly analytical studies of music.⁵

Along with this lack of analytical discussion, the prevalence of high-profile orchestrators such as Conrad Pope and Steve Bartek, or composers like Ravel — whose ‘orchestral virtuosity’⁶ allowed him to orchestrate piano music ‘as if the music were originally conceived in terms of the full symphony orchestra’⁷ — has perhaps helped to foster the impression that orchestration is a task separate to the compositional process itself, something a composer does once the music is written. However, instrumental, timbral, and textural decisions are integral to my compositional process, treated with as much importance as other musical aspects, as Alfred Blatter states:

Orchestrational decisions must come with, and as an integral part of, the musical ideas. If one becomes thoroughly familiar with the instruments ... then one’s own musical ideas will spring from that colorful well as surely as from the wells of line, shape, harmony, rhythm, or pitch. That is as it should be, for the best orchestrators do so seemingly instinctively and not self-consciously.⁸

Blatter’s thoughts are echoed by Walter Piston, who opens his guide to orchestration with the following: ‘The true art of orchestration is inseparable from the creative act of composing music. The sounds made by the orchestra are the ultimate external manifestation of musical ideas germinated in the mind of the composer.’⁹

⁵ Russ, Michael, ‘Ravel and the orchestra’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

⁶ Read, *Style and Orchestration*, 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸ Blatter, Alfred, *Instrumentation and Orchestration — 2nd edition* (Boston: Schirmer, 1997), 422.

⁹ Piston, Walter, *Orchestration — sixth impression* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1973), vii.

Gardner Read expanded on this in *Style and Orchestration*, suggesting one's orchestration is not only an intrinsic part of the compositional process 'inextricably bound up with the conception, content, and purpose'¹⁰, but provides listeners with the most direct insight to a composer's true voice: 'A composer's orchestration is far more than just a personal stamp; it is, quite literally, the quintessence of his musical thought, expression, and artistic personality.'¹¹

In my work, orchestrational ideas are developed hand-in-hand with harmonic, structural, and melodic elements. My approach is summed up by George Benjamin when he states: 'When I compose, I usually write straight into full score, I don't orchestrate ... I think of the sound as I write the note. The thought of a specific instrument inspires a specific kind of line ... So the sound is essential.'¹² I do not orchestrate in the traditional sense — starting with a piano score and then orchestrating for a chosen ensemble or orchestra — but rather I compose into 'full score', using the constraints of the instrumentation as a starting point, with musical ideas composed *for* those instruments, their sounds inspiring the musical material.

2. Introduction to *The Book of Miracles*

The Book of Miracles is inspired by the recently discovered 16th century illuminated manuscript, the *Augsburg Book of Miracles*. Over the course of 123 colour plates the book depicts 'wondrous and often eerie phenomena'¹³ ranging from Old Testament stories and contemporary events to fantastical beasts and miraculous signs. The piece is in four-movements, the third an extended cadenza. Each movement is sub-titled as such: 1. *Comet*, 2. *Parhelia*, 3. *Eclipse*, and 4. *Revelation*.

¹⁰ Read, *Style and Orchestration*, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² Benjamin, *George Benjamin*, 28.

¹³ Annon., 'The Book of Miracles', *Taschen* <<https://www.taschen.com>>.

Though notable trombone concertos exist — Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1877), Christopher Rouse (1991), Mark-Anthony Turnage (2004), James MacMillan (2016) for example — their numbers compare poorly next the wealth of concertos written for violin, cello and piano. On violin concertos specifically John Adams remarks: ‘Who has not gone to a concert hall to hear a familiar concerto only to be confounded by the disappointing reality of the actual sound, with a tiny violin barely able to maintain itself against the fabric of the full orchestra?’¹⁴ A trombone poses no such issue, so it is surprising how underused it is in concertos. Historically the trombone has not been viewed seriously as a solo instrument, sometimes ‘caricatured as a one-dimensional instrument.’¹⁵ But the virtuosity of modern players, improvements to the design and development of the trombone, and the directional nature of the trombone make it an effective though under-used concerto instrument, its stentorian sound the perfect vehicle for this work.

But what of the orchestra’s role? Simon P. Keefe states: ‘At the heart of orchestral involvement in concerto is the issue of *how* they interact with the soloist(s), of what the interaction of the protagonists represents in anthropomorphic terms.’¹⁶ In *The Book of Miracles*, the orchestra is often written in symphonic terms but *led by* the soloist. The solo-orchestra relationship, therefore, is not one of conflict or struggle, but of dialogue, back-and-forth interaction, and parity. As such the orchestra functions as an equal partner to, and at times an extension of, the soloist.

In this chapter I will look specifically at two aspects of orchestration in my trombone concerto, *The Book of Miracles* — texture and timbre — and how orchestrational choices shaped the dramatic structure, harmonic, and melodic aspects of the piece.

¹⁴ Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 174.

¹⁵ MacMillan, James, ‘RCO Trombone Concerto MacMillan’ (April 21 2017), *YouTube*, added by Concertgebouworkest <<http://youtube.com>>.

¹⁶ Keefe, Simon P, ‘Theories of the concerto from the eighteenth century to the present day’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

3. Textural observations: texture as a dramatic tool

a.) Harmonically static textures

Textural choices in this concerto are not merely the resultant sound of melody, harmony, and rhythm combined, but are purposefully constructed to highlight the dramatic and structural elements of the piece. As will be seen, textural sonorities in this work are also somewhat descriptive and evocative — suggesting celestial visions and imagery for example — and thus shape the musical narrative. At the beginning of the piece a repeated semiquaver cluster is heard on first violins shadowed by trills on the viola, moving between *sul ponticello* and *sul tasto* bowing. Above this, second violins hold pedal harmonics on A and F# — shadowed by harmonic glissandi on cellos — whilst a crotchet pulse is played on celesta (Fig. 28.).

The result is a blanket of shimmering, pulsing sounds, heard ‘as though from afar’ — the image of a comet soaring through the sky ever present in this movement. Despite the harmony remaining static throughout this passage, orchestrational adjustments create subtle textural changes. At letter A for example: violas return with an alternating semiquaver pattern, the crotchet pulse is taken over by the glockenspiel, whilst celesta and harps move to a triplet pattern. At letter B, a final textural shift happens: first violins move to measured finger tremolos, celesta and harps change from triplet to semiquaver patterns, crotchet triplets are heard on crotales and double bass harmonics, and sleigh bells — playing a quaver pulse — are added. All these sounds are linked by their timbral qualities — high, bright, and resonant — but the subtle changes to pitch, rhythm, and timbre prevent this from becoming a solely textural backdrop, but rather a shifting texture that responds to the evolving trombone melody.

Fig. 30. (bars 395–400).

III. ECLIPSE

colla parte

$\text{♩} = 90-100$ Mysteriously

3 Fla.
Ob.
Cl.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tpt.
3 Tbrs.
Tba.
Wind Ch. (Temp.)
Wind Ch. (1)
(2) T. 4
(3) Tub. B.
Hp 1
Hp 2
Cel.
Solo Trn.

$\text{♩} = 90-100$ Mysteriously

non vib. circular bowing* bend pitch**

Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
Cb

Later, at the climax of the cadenza (bars 416 to 417), this sound world returns. Shadowing the rising trombone line, an eleven-note chord is built up on violas, cellos, and basses (Fig. 31.). Played *con sord, sul tasto* and with no vibrato, the chord slides into view, blurred with harp and string

glissandi. At the peak of the trombone's ascent the violins enter with *col legno tratto* trills, whilst wooden wind chimes and air sounds on brass are re-introduced.

Fig. 31. (bars 416–417).

The musical score for bars 416-417 is divided into two systems. The first system (bars 416-417) includes:

- Wind Ch. (Timp.):** Features a glissando from bar 416 to bar 417, marked *mp*. A note in bar 417 is marked "To Timp."
- Wind Ch. (1.):** Similar glissando, marked *mp*.
- (2) T.T.:** Marked *p*.
- (3) Rain St.:** Includes "Rain stick" and "gentle turn" markings.
- (4) B.D.:** Marked *mp*.
- Harp 1 & 2:** Both parts play chords marked *pp non cresc.*
- solo Tbn.:** Features a melodic line starting in bar 416, marked *mp*, and a more active line in bar 417, marked *f declamatory* and *dim.*

The second system (bars 418-419) includes:

- Vn I & II:** Both parts play trills marked *pp col legno tratto*.
- Va:** Features five parts with various dynamics and markings:
 - 1. *con sord. s.t. senza vib.*, *p*, *mp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - 2. *con sord. s.t. senza vib.*, *p*, *mp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - 3. (no gliss.), *p*, *mp*, *pp*
 - 4. *con sord. s.t. senza vib.*, *p*, *mp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - 5. (no gliss.), *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *p*, *mp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
- Vc:** Features five parts with various dynamics and markings:
 - desk 1 *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *pp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - desk 2 *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *pp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - desk 3 *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *pp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - desk 4 *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *pp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
 - desk 5 *con sord. s.t. non vib.*, *pp*, *pp*, *freely glissando*
- Db:** Marked *pp*.

Tempo markings include *accel.* (♩ = 84) at the start of bar 416, *rall.* in the middle of bar 416, and *♩ = 84* at the start of bar 417.

Underpinning this is a bass drum roll, entering on the final iteration of the horns low B \flat (bar 402). The outer movements fully utilise the full orchestra, but here the combination of these elements creates a unique sonic landscape. The reduced orchestral forces and the unusual textural choices — wind sounds and various string techniques — create a sense of ecliptic otherworldliness. The thinned-out texture provides the acoustic space for the cadenza to be heard in, what is after all, the ultimate moment of heightened tension in any concerto.

These static textures are employed throughout the work at particularly dramatic moments. The held nature of the harmony underpinning the feeling of tension is broken only by equally dramatic orchestrational choices (the sudden tutti orchestral chord at bar 45 for example, or the extended trombone cadenza that rises from a pedal B \flat to a high C trill at bar 402).

b.) Homophonic textures

The string texture heard at the opening of the second movement, *Parhelia*, is more harmonically and rhythmically complex than the static textures discussed previously. Whereas the beginning of the concerto is consistently high and bright — based on tight clusters of three or four notes — here, the huge gulf in pitch between the bass instruments (cellos and basses) and the high chordal lines on violins and violas, suggests a great expanse.

Pedal tones (in major-thirds) on cellos and basses played with circular bowing, create a blanket of overtones on which the solo trombone melody (played with cup mute) enters. This is answered by the strings, alternating between chorale-like material — played by two solo violins and two solo violas — and denser, thicker chords on muted tutti strings and celesta — the homophonic, hymn-like material here suggests something heavenly

and celestial (Fig. 32.). This solo, call, and answer pattern (trombone, solo strings, tutti strings) is repeated and developed throughout this section (bars 310 to 347).

Fig. 32. (bars 307–320).

II. PARHELIA

The musical score for Figure 32 is divided into two systems. The first system covers bars 307 to 320, and the second system covers bars 314 to 320. The score includes parts for Trombone (Tbn), Violin I (Vn I), Violin II (Vn II), Viola (Va), Violoncello (Vc), Double Bass (Cb), and Cello (Cel). The music features a solo trombone line and string parts with various dynamics and performance instructions.

System 1 (Bars 307-320):

- Tempo/Character:** $\text{♩} = 72$ Mysteriously, $\text{♩} = 92$ freely, **D1** $\text{♩} = 98$ Poco più mosso, con rubato.
- Instrumentation:** solo Tbn, Vn I (1 solo, altri div), Vn II (1 solo, altri div), sole Va (1 sola, 2 sola), Va (altri div), Vc (circular bowing*), Cb (circular bowing*), Cel.
- Dynamics:** *pp*, *ppp*, *pp*, *mp*, *espr*, *mf*, *p*, *p dolce espr*.
- Performance Instructions:** *senza sord*, *1. solo*, *1. sola*, *2. sola*.

System 2 (Bars 314-320):

- Tempo/Character:** *rall.*, $\text{♩} = 92$.
- Instrumentation:** solo Tbn, Vn I (1 solo, altri div a 3), Vn II (1 solo, altri div a 4), sole Va (1 sola), Va (altri), Vc, Cb, Cel.
- Dynamics:** *pp*, *mp*, *p*, *p dolce espr*, *mp*.
- Performance Instructions:** *rall.*, *(con sord.)*, *1. solo*.

At figure G1, this pattern is echoed, but now the trombone solo is answered by the lower strings — played *con sord, sul tasto* — with subsequent rising arpeggiations from low woodwind and horns (and later with trumpets added). This new melodic and harmonic material — the close harmony of the previous section replaced by more tonally infused chords — and the addition of brass and bassoons create a warmer texture.

Though these two passages are gesturally and structurally alike, their sonic and dramatic effects differ significantly. Much like the representation of the comet in the first movement, the ‘mock sun’ is seen here both from afar and near, distance and perspective expressed through orchestration.

c.) Arpeggiated textures

There are many examples in my work of arpeggiated textures — single lines or chords broken up in free arpeggio-type patterns — which are orchestrated as a means of creating harmonic, melodic, and textural interest. For example, in the third movement of *A Dark Arteries Suite* (Fig. 55.) or the third movement of *Gursky Landscapes*.

The first example in *The Book of Miracles* is found at letter H (Fig. 33.). This ‘melodic’ line is then affected timbrally, shared around the orchestra on strings — both plucked (second violins) and bowed (first violins), with harp harmonics picking out points of rhythmic interest — and shadowed in the flutes and clarinets. Inner melodic lines are heard on muted brass, single-reed woodwind, and bass clarinet.

Fig. 33. (bars 54–60).

The image displays a page of a musical score for an orchestra, covering bars 54 to 60. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Oboe 2, Clarinet 1 and 2, Bassoon 1 and 2, Contrabassoon, Horn 1 (with a 13-a-2 marking), Trumpet 1 and 3, Trombone 2, Bass Trombone, Harp 1 and 2, Piano, Violin 1 and 2, Viola, Violoncello (Cello), and Double Bass. The score is marked 'Lightly' at the beginning of the section. Various dynamics such as *mp*, *p*, *pp*, *mf*, and *f* are used throughout. Performance instructions include 'mp playful', 'p semplioce', 'con sord. (harmon)', 'muted on', and 'pizz'. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs, and uses a variety of articulation marks like slurs and accents.

The comet's tail — the play of light and colour as it trails behind the comet in the image — is defined here through orchestration, the harmonic pedals in viola, cello and bass not only supporting the harmony but adding a bright, glassy quality to the texture.

Fig. 34. (bars 665–671).

The image displays a page of a musical score, specifically focusing on bars 665 to 671. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left include Flute 1 & 2, Piccolo, Oboe 1 & 2, Cor Anglais, Clarinet in B-flat 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Contrabassoon, Horns 1 & 2, Trumpets 1 & 2, Trombones 1 & 2, Bass Trombone, Tuba, Snare Drum, Tom-tom, Glockenspiel, Cymbals, Bass Drum, Percussion (including Tam-tam), Harp 1 & 2, Celesta, Solo Trombone, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including driving semiquaver patterns in the brass and woodwinds, and ascending arpeggiated lines in the strings. Dynamic markings such as *ff*, *f*, *sfz*, *p*, and *mp* are used throughout. A section marked 'Q2' is indicated at the top right of the score. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

Another example is found at bars 653 to 671, though here, the accented brass — reinforced with driving semiquaver patterns on woodwind and strings — create an aggressive texture. By the third iteration of this gesture — three ascending arpeggiated lines played in quick succession — the

culminative effect is cacophonous, violently leading into the climax of the movement (Fig. 34.).

The examples above approach arpeggiated textures in different ways — light and fleeting (*Comet*), heavy and violent (*Revelation*). However, if one transcribed the aforementioned examples for piano and played them at the same dynamic, gesturally they would feel related, with the only noticeable difference coming from the harmony. It is through the orchestration of that material, therefore, that the subtleties of internal melodic lines or the clash of dissonant harmony are fully realised.

d.) Tutti orchestral textures

Rather than simply accompanying the soloist, the orchestra is used extensively in this work. But full orchestral tuttis are reserved for dramatic or structural moments of significance. For example, the first orchestral tutti comes at end of bar 45. After roughly two and a half minutes of a high, harmonically static texture the full orchestra explodes out of it. For the first time the breadth and range of the full orchestra is unleashed.

Structurally, this moment marks the true beginning of the piece, bridging an extended introduction — where the harmony and texture are static — and a more harmonically and sonically varied section of arpeggiated textures, where the soloist and orchestra are more integrated.

Tutti orchestral textures are also found at letter Y to Z — and again in the fourth movement from letter M2 to O2 — a chorale in brass with melodic lines on violins and high woodwinds build to a climax at letter Z and N2 respectively. The texture here has a ‘cinematic’ quality, the result not so much of the harmony but of orchestrational choices: melodic lines played by tutti string sections in unison; the harmonic and dynamic dove-tailing of

chords in the brass; timpani and bass drum accenting harmonic structures; the addition of tam-tam and tubular bells at the climax. These two climaxes frame the dramatic structure of the concerto, much like the ‘Hollywood-style orchestral climaxes’¹⁷ of Magnus Lindberg’s Clarinet Concerto (2002).

A different kind of tutti texture — intense and frenetic — is found at letter O (Fig. 35.). Syncopated semiquaver and triplet motifs, heard on flutes, oboes, clarinets, glockenspiel, harp, and celeste, are shadowed with high, sustained chords in the violins.

Fig. 35. (bars 124–148).

The musical score for Figure 35, covering bars 124 to 148, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 124-148) includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Piccolo (3), Oboe 1 and 2, Clarinet 1 and 2, Glockenspiel, Harp 1 and 2, and Celesta. The second system (bars 149-168) includes parts for Violin I and Violin II. A section marker 'Ecstatic' is placed at the beginning of the first system. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including syncopated semiquaver and triplet motifs, and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *sf*, *f*, and *sfz*.

Underneath this, a blazing two-part melody is played on cor anglais, bassoons, horns, violas, and cellos (Fig. 36.), whilst the trumpets, trombones, tuba, basses, and percussion punch through with *staccatissimo sforzando* stabs.

¹⁷ Whittall, ‘The concerto since 1945’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, 172.

This is a development of the woodwind, celesta, and string material found in the opening passage from bar 24 onwards, the comet seen ‘from afar’. Here however, it’s as though the comet has come into full view and is seen up close. Once more the idea of perspective is explored, the drama and intensity of the comet seen up-close fully realised by the orchestration.

Fig. 36. (bars 124–148).

The image displays a page of a musical score for a concerto, specifically bars 124 through 148. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Woodwinds:** Flute (Fl.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl.), Bassoon 1 and 2 (Bsn 1, 2), Contrabassoon (Cbsn), Horns (Hn), Trumpets (Tpt), Trombones 1 and 2 (Tbn 1, 2), Bass Trombone (B. Tbn), and Tubas (Tba).
- Brass:** Trombones 1 and 2 (Tbn 1, 2), Bass Trombone (B. Tbn), and Tubas (Tba).
- Other Instruments:** Timpani (Timp.), Snare Drum (2) (Tamb.), Bass Drum (3) (Tub. B.), and Bass Drum (4) (B.D.).
- Strings:** Violins (Va), Violas (Vc), and Double Basses (Db).

The score is marked with a tempo of 145 and a dynamic of *Ecstatic*. The woodwind parts feature melodic lines with dynamics such as *f blazing*, *sfz*, *mp*, and *sfz*. The brass parts include *f*, *sfz*, *mp*, and *sfz*. The string parts are marked with *f con forza, searing*, *mp*, and *sfz*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

4. Timbral choices: melodic dialogue

With this being a concerto for a brass instrument, melody is one of the primary means of musical expression in the piece. However, the physical requirements of the trombone — the player needing to breath and rest — means taking a more imaginative approach to long melodic lines. As such the solo-orchestra interaction in this work sees a dialogue in which melody

and line is shared, expanded, and developed between the two. An example of a simple shared melodic line is found at bars 20-22, where the line is shared between solo trombone and bass clarinet. Or at bars 115–121 (Fig. 37.) where the line moves from solo trombone, to horns, to bass clarinet and pizzicato cellos, and finally back to trombone, the sound of multiple instrumental groups sharing a single line suggestive of *klangfarbenmelodie*.

Fig. 37. (bars 115–120).

The musical score for Figure 37 consists of four staves: Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Horns (Hn.), solo Trombone (solo Tbn.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The music is in 3/4 time and spans from bar 115 to 120. The B. Cl. part begins with a *sfz* dynamic and includes a *solo* marking in the final bars. The Hn. part features a *a2* marking and dynamics ranging from *sfz* to *mp*. The solo Tbn. part starts with *mf* and ends with a *f* dynamic. The Vc. part is marked *pizz.* and has dynamics of *mp* and *f*. The melodic line is shared and developed across these instruments, with various articulations and dynamics.

At other points the orchestra takes over entirely from the soloist. For example, at bars 108–122 (Fig. 38.), the horns completing the melody:

Fig. 38. (bars 105–111).

The musical score for Figure 38 consists of two staves: Horns (Hn.) and solo Trombone (solo Tbn.). The music is in 3/4 time and spans from bar 105 to 111. The Hn. part begins with a *a2* marking and dynamics of *p*, *mf*, *f espr.*, and *p*. The solo Tbn. part starts with *mf* and includes dynamics of *sfz* and *mp*. The melodic line is shared and developed across these instruments, with various articulations and dynamics.

More interesting though are the moments where the soloist and orchestra are in direct dialogue with each other, for example bars 204 to 218 (Fig. 39.). The melodic line is shared back and forth between the soloist and orchestral trombones; the small differences between the individual players sounds create a subtly shifting timbral colour. As such, this unidiomatic

melody which leaps around and is difficult to execute on a single trombone, can be performed:

Fig. 39. (bars 200–213).

The musical score for Figure 39 consists of three systems of staves. The first system (bars 200-204) features a Tbn. part with a *ppp* dynamic and a solo Tbn. part with a 'straight mute' and dynamics ranging from *mp* to *f*. The second system (bars 205-209) includes Tbn. 1, Tbn. 2, B. Tbn., and solo Tbn. parts, with dynamics like *f*, *mp*, and *sfz*. The third system (bars 210-213) continues the ensemble parts with dynamics such as *f*, *mf*, and *mf*. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

An example of contrapuntal dialogue comes at letter W1 (Fig. 40.). Here, the three tenor trombones converse with each other in a raucous fanfare. Though each instrument is playing a version of the same simple melodic line — spanning a major-fourth — and the four instruments share a collective trombone timbre, the interest comes from the use of flutter tongues, glissandi, vibrato and rhythmic displacement. Once again, the subtle differences in the sounds of individual players and the distance between the soloist (standing in front of the orchestra) and trombone section (at the back of the orchestra) create an interesting sonic and visual narrative.

Fig. 40. (bars 462–473).

The musical score for Figure 40 consists of three systems of staves for Tbn. 1, Tbn. 2, and solo Tbn. The first system covers bars 461-465, the second covers bars 466-470, and the third covers bars 471-473. The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, including frequent triplets and quintuplets. Dynamics are marked with *ff*, *mp*, *f*, *ffz*, and *sfzp*. Performance directions include *vibr.*, *flz.*, and *bell up* for Tbn. 2. The solo trombone part often plays a more melodic line, while the orchestral parts provide a dense, rhythmic accompaniment.

This fanfare-like motif is later developed into a repeated rondo theme on all four trombones, heard for the first time at bar 474 (Fig. 41.), and again at bars 543 to E2, and at Q2 to 678. The rhythmic speed, though, is increased — dominated by triplet-quavers — the motif moving back and forth between the solo and orchestral trombones. Whereas the example from the first movement (Fig. 39.) saw a polite interplay between the solo trombone and orchestral trombones — a sharing of the melodic line one at a time — here, the clashing of glissandi and independent melodic lines heard together create a cacophonous distortion of the melody.

Fig. 41. (bars 474–481).

The musical score for Figure 41 consists of two systems of staves. The first system (bars 474-481) includes staves for Tbn. 1, Tbn. 2, and solo Tbn. The second system (bars 477-481) includes staves for Tbn. 1, Tbn. 2, B. Tbn., and solo Tbn. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line shared between the soloist and the ensemble. Dynamics include *ff blazing* and *mp*. Articulations include *senza sord.* and *ff blazing*. The score includes triplets and slurs.

The reasons for sharing the melodic line between soloist and orchestra then are both practical and musical. Due to the practical limitations of the trombone, solutions to melody needed to be found. As such, impractical melodic lines on a single trombone are made possible through timbral invention. But the relationship between trombone and orchestra is also philosophical.

Arnold Whittall notes, composers ‘who have contributed most positively and substantially to the concerto genre are those for whom the ‘romantic’, theatrical rhetoric of the one against the many remains a valid, vital concept.’¹⁸ In this piece however — and this portfolio more generally — I have explored the interaction between soloist and ensemble not in antagonistic terms, but as a dialogue between the two. The interplay between solo trombone and trombone section, for example, frames the relationship between melody and line, timbre and texture, as an exchange of musical ideas rather than a battle for musical supremacy.

¹⁸ Whittall, ‘The concerto since 1945’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, 170.

5. Conclusion

In *Music and Imagination* Aaron Copland states, 'a deliberately chosen sound image that pervades an entire piece becomes an integral part of the expressive meaning of that piece'¹⁹ and for me, orchestration is fundamental to understanding the deeper meaning and intentions of a composer's music.

As such, issues of orchestration have preoccupied much of my creative output. In my compositions for brass band I have sought out evermore innovative ways to create varied soundscapes from an ensemble whose instrumental timbre blends so effectively. In a work like *A Dark Arteries Suite* these ideas have been pushed to their limits, a wide range of mutes, percussion and instrumental techniques utilised to create an original brass band sonic.

Instrumentation also influences the musical material itself. In my opera *The Monstrous Child*, due to limited pit space, the instrumentation was restricted to ten players. As such, musical material was developed as a result of — and alongside — orchestrational decisions. Had a larger ensemble or orchestra been made available the musical material would have, undoubtedly, differed significantly.

Orchestration is not something I engage with at the end of the composition, but is an integral part of my creative process. As Rimsky-Korsakov states: 'To orchestrate is to create'.²⁰ Orchestrational decisions, therefore, are bound up with the fundamentals of my music — timbre and texture given equal priority to melody, harmony, and structure.

¹⁹ Copland, *Music and Imagination*, 23-24.

²⁰ Rimsky-Korsakov, Nicolay, 'Extract from the Authors Preface (1891)', in *Principles of Orchestration*, ed. Maximillian Steinberg, trans. Edward Agate (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), 2.

In *The Book of Miracles* textural and timbral choices are the means through which the musical drama, structure, and musical ideas are most immediately expressed. The interplay between soloist and orchestra serves both a practical and musical purpose; the core melodic lines which run through the work are made explicit through the diversity of timbral colour and orchestration of line. Conversely, textural choices in this work are not superficial, but point to deeper dramatic elements, signposting points of structural significance, and expressing harmonic changes. It is through texture too, that abstract ideas such as perspective (the comet seen both from afar and up-close) or imagery (from the book of Revelation) are expressed most vividly and immediately.

Morton Feldman said orchestration is both the 'instinctual and outer reality of the composer's musical character. No other idea in the body of the work transcends this.'²¹ In my own work orchestration is used as a means of framing musical, structural, and dramatic ideas for both practical and musical purposes. But moreover, it is the most instinctive and natural aspect of my creative practice and, as such, speaks to deeper truths within my work. Orchestration, then, is the vehicle through which a listener can most immediately access the inner and outer workings of my music; it is no less than the 'instinctual' expression of my compositional voice.

²¹ Feldman, 'Remarks on Orchestration', in *Orchestration*, 202.

Chapter 3. The role of inspiration on the creative process: *A Dark Arteries Suite*

1. Context

In his thesis, *Music and Inspiration*, Jonathan Harvey introduces the role inspiration plays in the creative process thusly:

Composers, performers, listeners and critics share an understanding that ‘inspiration’ may play a part in the creation, or re-creation, of a piece of music ... If the existence of inspiration is generally acknowledged, then so too is its importance.¹

He later asks the question:

Does the sensation of inspiration experienced by the composer have any bearing on the finished piece of music? Is there any relationship between the perceptions of inspiration that may be experienced by the composer, the performer and listener? Is inspiration, ultimately, something that the listener can perceive — and, if not, is it of any real value?²

Harvey acknowledges inspiration does indeed play ‘a part in the creation, or re-creation, of a piece of music’ and that ‘most composers would readily admit that inspiration, at some stage of the compositional process, is a necessary component of a fully satisfying work’.³

Many musical works are inspired by extramusical ideas, their subject matter shaping musical elements. For example, the story of Isabel Gowdie which James MacMillan turned into an orchestral work, *The Confession of Isabel Gowdie*, (1990), a story ‘so vivid that the music could not help but be shaped and guided by some sense of narrative’.⁴ Or the ‘dramatic photograph of a thunderstorm’ that inspired the ‘deep tremors in the

¹ Harvey, *Music and Inspiration*, X.

² *Ibid.*, XVI.

³ *Ibid.*, X.

⁴ MacMillan, James, *A Scots Song: a Life in Music* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2019), 55.

lower registers of the orchestra which depict distant thunder⁵ in George Benjamin's *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* (1980). Or the pounding EDM rhythms in the third movement of Tom Adès' *Asyla* (1997): *Ecstasio*, in which he 'evoke[s] the atmosphere of a massive nightclub with people dancing and taking drugs.'⁶

Drawing inspiration from extramusical influences is an important part of my own creative practice. In *A Dark Arteries Suite*⁷ (2017) — a work conceived as a ballet but represented here in the form of a concert suite — the source material, relating to the British mining industry and specifically the 1984-85 miners' strike, had a direct impact on the work, influencing several factors including the instrumentation and aspects of the musical material. In this chapter I will look at the way the topic has shaped the work.

Dark Arteries (2015) was commissioned by Rambert Dance Company, choreographed by Mark Baldwin, and premiered at Sadler's Wells Theatre by the Tredegar Town Band. *A Dark Arteries Suite* (2017) was premiered by the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain at the Barbican Centre, conducted by Bramwell Tovey.

a.) From Orgreave to Sadler's Wells

In 1984 Margaret Thatcher went head-to-head with the National Union of Mine Workers in what was to be the longest and most bitter industrial dispute in British history: the miners' strike. For the miners the strike was not only about protecting jobs; it was also about protecting their culture and the communities who relied on the collieries. It was a divisive crisis

⁵ Benjamin, *George Benjamin*, 65.

⁶ Walsh, John, 'A Young Man in a Hurry', *The Independent* <<https://www.independent.co.uk>>.

⁷ The full-length ballet lasts forty minutes.

that pitted family member against family member, miner against miner.

When interviewed in the Guardian, a police officer from Yorkshire remembers:

The miners were good blokes, Scabs [those who crossed the picket lines] were too and so were we ... this was a Working Class War. Miners and police often came from the same families. I have generations of coal miners in mine ... In the end we all lost.⁸

Running parallel to the strike another community linked to the pits was also under threat. The British brass band movement is unique within the music world, both in terms of its geographical roots (originating in the coalfields of the North, Wales and Scotland) but also 'in social terms, the brass band movement was essentially working-class'⁹, the 'overall 'flavour' of the movement [being] decidedly working-class'¹⁰. As such, the brass band is a symbol of British working-class musical culture:

Brass bands could be regarded as one of the most important aspects of British art music as well as popular music in the nineteenth century. One of the achievements of the brass band movement is that it created the first mass involvement of working-class people in instrumental art music, not just in Britain, but possibly anywhere.¹¹

The attitude 'widely prevalent in the Victorian period, which held music and, in particular, art music to be a force for moral and positive good among working people'¹² resulted in a rapid proliferation of brass bands throughout the UK:

⁸ Bannock, Caroline, 'Miners' strike 30 years on', *the Guardian* <<https://theguardian.com>>.

⁹ Gammon, Vic and Sheila, 'The Musical Revolution of the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *The British Brass Band: a Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147.

¹⁰ Russell, Dave, 'Cultural Change and the Band Movement', in *The British Brass Band*, 80.

¹¹ Herbert, Trevor, 'Nineteenth-Century Bands: The Making of a Movement', in *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in 19th and 20th Centuries* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), 7.

¹² Herbert, *Bands*, 21.

The British brass band, unlike the brass bands of other countries, developed in a relatively short space of time into a fixed genre. By the 1880s it had assumed most of the characteristics — musical, technical and idiomatic — that make it distinctive today.¹³

As such there were reported to be so many bands in existence by the 1800's that Enderby Jackson, the self-proclaimed inventor of the modern brass band contest, remarked 'almost every village and group of mills in the north of England had its own band.'¹⁴ Thirty years on all the pits have closed and while they are 'no longer the exclusive preserve of working-class men,'¹⁵ brass bands continue to thrive both in the UK and internationally.

The cultural significance of mining and brass bands has been popularised in films such as *Brassed Off!* (1996), *Billy Elliot* (2006), *Pride* (2014), and Bill Morrison's docudrama, with music from Jóhann Jóhannsson, *The Miners' Hymns* (2010). It has also been explored by Turner Prize Winner Jeremy Deller in *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) — an historical re-enactment caught on film; *The History of the World* (1997) — a flow chart linking the politics of acid house music to brass bands, suggesting 'there are social and political echoes and points of confluence between these two musical movements that date from different eras'¹⁶; and its offshoot project, *Acid Brass*.¹⁷ However, a surprisingly small amount of music has been written that is directly inspired by the mining industry and its links to brass bands — *Grimethorpe Aria* (1973) and *Salford Toccata* (1989) by Harrison Birtwistle, *Winds of Change* (2000) by Brenton Broadstock, and *In Pitch*

¹³ Herbert, Trevor, 'Brass bands and other vernacular traditions', in Trevor Herbert, Arnold Myers and John Wallace (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 179.

¹⁴ Herbert, *Bands*, 23.

¹⁵ Craine, Debra, 'Why it's time for brass bands to change their tune', *The Times* <<http://thetimes.co.uk>>.

¹⁶ Wilson, Andrew, 'The History of the World', *The Tate* <<https://www.tate.org.uk>>.

¹⁷ *Acid Brass* was a project born out of Deller's *The History of the World*. In it, he invited the Williams Fairey Band to perform arrangements of Acid House tracks such as KLF's *What Time is Love* and A Guy Called Gerald's *Voodoo Ray*.

Black (2011) by Lucy Pankhurst are notable exceptions — and in the world of dance, apart from Gary Clarke’s *COAL* (2016), it is a largely neglected topic.

I grew up in an ex-mining community and began my musical training in the local brass band. As such, the mining industry and its music proved to be a creatively stimulating impetus for my work. The use of the brass band in this context is obvious, but the topic has influenced some of the fundamental elements of my work in other ways.

2. Thematic structure

In *Dark Arteries* themes of social, political, industrial, and geographical identity are explored, with the structure of the work dictated by a loose chronological ordering of events: i.) Landscape — the coalfields of Britain, ii.) Industry — industrial coal mining, iii.) conflict — the miners’ strike, specifically the ‘Battle of Orgreave’, iv.) community — the human consequence of the colliery closures, and v.) Legacy — what remains of this culture.

The full ballet is structured in three parts, with movement titles taken from David Peace’s book *GB84*.¹⁸ Part 1. ‘*Under the ground, we scream*’ — Landscape (slow), Industry (fast); Part 2. ‘*Salt. Dirt. Blood.*’ — Conflict (fast); and Part 3. ‘*These scars across your heart.*’ — Community (slow), Legacy (slow). However, in the concert suite I will discuss herein (*A Dark Arteries Suite*), the main themes have been condensed and some edits have been made. For the purpose of the concert suite and in order to fashion a coherent musical structure, parts two and three have been swapped

¹⁸ Peace, David, *GB84* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

around: *'These scars across your heart'* is here framed as a traditional slow middle movement, whilst the fast *'Salt. Dirt. Blood.'* concludes the suite.

3. Landscape and industry

The exploration and evocation of landscapes — both natural and symbolic — and man's place within it, have frequently provided inspiration for my music (the vast images by Andreas Gursky in *Gursky Landscapes* for example). In *Dark Arteries* the mining landscapes of Britain loom over the work, explicitly and indirectly. In *Grimethorpe Aria* (1974), written for the Grimethorpe Colliery band a year after the industrial action of 1973, Birtwistle suggests a 'devastated landscape revealed by gradually dissipating fog'¹⁹. In both *Grimethorpe Aria* and *Salford Toccata* (1989) he demonstrates a 'sympathy for and affinity with the sounds of industrial northern working-class music-making.'²⁰ This same industrial landscape forms the backdrop to *Dark Arteries*: the coalfields of South Wales, Northern England, and Scotland. Haunted by the history of industry, these bleak mining landscapes are particularly evocative to me, the sounds of the brass band inexorably bound up with those places.

This landscape is explored at the beginning of the work. Played on four Eb and Bb basses (tubas) a melodic counterpoint is heard at the bottom of their range in the pedal tone register (Fig. 42).

¹⁹ Barnett, Rob, 'The History of Brass Band Music — Vol.6: New Adventures', *Musicweb International* <<https://musicweb-international.com>>.

²⁰ Cross, Jonathan, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 7.

Fig. 42. *A Dark Arteries Suite* (bars 1–10).

♩ = 52, poco rubato, mysteriously

Tbns. cup mutes *mp* *ppp*

E♭ Bass *ppp* *pp* *mp*

B♭ Bass *ppp* *pp* *pp* *mp*

7

Tbns.

Euph. *ppp* *pp* *mp* *mf* + Bar. *mf*

E♭ Bass *p* *mf*

B♭ Bass *p* *mf*

The theme slowly ascends through the band before the trombones, accompanied by muted cornets, emerge from the texture with the first statement of the chorale theme (Fig. 43) heard repeatedly throughout the piece. This rising line — shifting from the dark hues of low brass to the brighter sounds of trombones and cornets — suggests the sight of miners emerging from the pit into daylight. But it also hints at the dichotomy at the core of this piece, what lies below ground — darkness and coal — and life above ground — communities and lived experience.

Fig. 43. (bars 18–22).

The musical score for bars 18–22 is written for four parts: Soprano Cornet (Sop. Cnt.), Solo Cornet (Solo Cnt.), 2nd and 3rd Cornets (2nd & 3d Cnt.), and Trombones (Tbns.). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 52, poco rubato, mysteriously. The Soprano and Solo Cornets are instructed to use cup mutes. The 2nd and 3rd Cornets also use cup mutes, while the Trombones are instructed to be open. The score features a variety of dynamic markings: *pp* (pianissimo), *p dolce* (piano dolce), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *mp* (mezzo-piano). Performance instructions include *f nobilmente, distant*, *mp sim.*, and *f espr.*. The music consists of melodic lines with triplets and slurs, set against a harmonic accompaniment in the lower parts.

This section is condensed in the suite, but in the full ballet the imagery evoked here (and revisited at the end of the ballet) represents this bleak landscape (see appendix 1): undulating lines of cup muted cornets suggest the mist covered valleys and slag heaps of South Wales (Fig. 44), and the trombone chorale that rises out of the texture suggests the image of a headstock, an overt symbol of the mining industry, looming out of the mist, the landscape itself shaped by industry.

The evocation of landscape in this piece is not literal, it is intangible and suggestive, calling on the imagery of the coalfields to engender a musical response. In the words of John McCabe I am ‘expressing my response to the landscape’²¹, the imagery suggesting ‘what I sense to be the character of the place in musical terms.’ The sounds of industry however are much more clearly defined in this work.

²¹ Thomas, Christopher, ‘The 4BR Interview — John McCabe’, *4Barsrest* <<https://4barsrest.com>>.

Fig. 44. *Dark Arteries* (bars 40–47). See appendix 1.

(cup mutes)

Sop. Cnt. *p dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Solo Cnt. *p dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Rep. Cor. *dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Flug. *p dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp* *pp* *p dolce espr.* *p sim.*

44

Sop. Cnt. *p* *mp > pp*

Solo Cnt. *p* *mp > pp*

Rep. Cor. *p* *mp > pp*

Flug. *p*

As discussed in chapter one, melody is a core element of my work. As such, much of the material in *Dark Arteries* is drawn from a simple melodic line (Fig. 45a. see flugelhorn in appendix 1), first heard briefly in the suite at bar 24 on flugelhorn and solo horn (Fig. 45b).

Fig. 45a. Original melody.

p espr.

Fig. 45b. Flugelhorn and tenor horns (bars 24–37).

24

Flug. Solo Hn. *p espr.* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mf*

From bar 102 to figure J this melody is heard and developed on tenor horns. Unlike the other iterations of this melody however, the metallic buzzing of mutes — cornets played with harmon mutes, the mute’s inner tube extended to create a buzzing timbre; and trombones played with harmon mute ‘tube in’, moving between open and closed sounds— is in complete contrast to the expressive melodic line heard on tenor horns (Fig. 46).

Fig. 46. *A Dark Arteries Suite* (bars 108–117).

The musical score for Figure 46 consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers bars 108 to 112, and the second system covers bars 113 to 117. The instruments are Solo Cornets (Ct.), Flugel/Tenor Horns (Flug. T. Hn.), and Trombones (Tbns.).

System 1 (Bars 108-112):

- Solo Ct.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *p*, *f*, and *ff*. It includes a section labeled "harmon mute (tube extended)" and "ff buzz." with a *p* dynamic.
- Flug. T. Hn.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *f*, *p*, and *ff*. It includes a section labeled "soli" and "mp espr." moving to "mf espr."
- Tbns.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *f*, *p*, and *ff*. It includes a section labeled "harmon mute" with a *p* dynamic.

System 2 (Bars 113-117):

- Solo Ct.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *p*, *ff*, and *pp*.
- Flug. T. Hn.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *pp*, *p*, *mf espr.*, and *espr.*. It includes a section labeled "harmon mute" with a *p* dynamic.
- Tbns.:** Features a melodic line with dynamics *f*, *p*, and *f*.

Added to this are passages of incessant double-tonguing on back-row cornets, tremolandos and trills on baritones, and a rhythmic syncopated bass line. The overall effect is noisy and mechanical, the sounds of industry harmonised.

The first movement, 'Under the ground, we scream', is inspired by the sounds of industry and so metal percussion (tin cans, dustbins, metal bars, crotales etc.) is used extensively, alluding to the sounds and rhythms of machinery. For example, at letter F (Fig. 47) metal percussion is used in conjunction with the rhythmic quaver lines in the cornets.

Fig. 47. (bars 82–87).

The musical score for Figure 47, covering bars 82 to 87, is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled as follows:

- Sop. Cnt.:** Soprano Cornet part, starting at bar 82 with a dynamic of *f*. It features a melodic line with various ornaments and dynamics, including *<sfz* in bar 83.
- Solo Cnt.:** Solo Cornet part, starting at bar 82 with a dynamic of *fp*. It features a rhythmic quaver line with dynamics *f* and *<sfz*.
- Rep.:** Repetition part, starting at bar 82 with a dynamic of *f*. It features a rhythmic quaver line with dynamics *f* and *<sfz*.
- Crot.:** Crotales part, starting at bar 82. It features a rhythmic quaver line with a dynamic of *f* in bar 83.
- Perc.:** Percussion part, starting at bar 82. It features a rhythmic quaver line with a dynamic of *sfz*. In bar 83, it includes 'Tin cans' and 'Brake drums'. In bar 86, it includes '+ Metal bin'.

A more explicit example of industrial influences is found at bar 48 (Fig. 48). A pattern of mechanical ascending quavers is heard in euphoniums and baritones with staccatissimo interjections from muted trombones and tin cans. The ascending ostinato patterns unevenly judder, the accented

syncopations forcing the pattern to continually restart, like the cogs of a machine.

Fig. 48. (bars 48–53).

The musical score for Figure 48 consists of three staves: Tbn. (Tuba), Euphs. Bar. (Euphonium Baritone), and Perc. (Percussion). The time signature is 4/4. The Tbn. part is marked "straight mutes" and features dynamic markings of *sfz*. The Euphs. Bar. part has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Perc. part is marked "Tin cans" and has a dynamic marking of *f*. The score shows complex rhythmic patterns with syncopations and rests.

This motif returns at the end of the movement alongside an assortment of junk percussion — such as paint cans, metal bars, tin cans, and brake drums — underpinning an extended flugelhorn cadenza (Fig. 49). This passage is the most explicit realisation of the sounds of industry, but also accentuates the theme of conflict at the core of this work: the industrial (rhythmic) and the humane (melodic).

Fig. 49. (bars 189–195).

The musical score for Figure 49 consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers bars 189 to 195. The top staff is for Euphonia (Euphs.) and Eb Bass, marked 'muted' and starting at bar 189 with a dynamic of *mp*. The percussion part (Perc.) includes 'Paint cans', 'Metal bar (M)', 'Tin cans', 'Brake drums', and 'Metal bar (L)'. Dynamics range from *p* to *pp*, with a '2nd time (pp)' marking. The second system covers bars 193 to 195. The Flugelhorn (Flug.) part starts at bar 193 with a dynamic of *mp molto espr.* and includes a tempo marking '(♩ = 56 rubato)'. The Euphonia and Eb Bass part continues with a dynamic of *mf*. The percussion part continues with a dynamic of *pp*.

4. Conflict

Themes of conflict are intrinsic to the source material — heritage vs. progress, community vs. government, the old vs. the new, working-class culture vs. middle-class indifference. As such, conflict is ingrained in the musical material itself: lyricism vs. pulse, tonality vs. non-tonal music, traditional traits vs. contemporary sonics.

Sometimes this musical conflict is thrown into stark relief. For example, the expressive flugelhorn cadenza at letter L accompanied by chugging mechanical sounds mentioned before (Fig. 49). Or, more broadly, the conflict between tonal and non-tonal music, or lyricism and pulse, which is explored throughout the work — e.g., the horn melody (see Fig. 46) set against staccato rhythms in basses for example, or the explicit tonality of

the second movement with dissonant tubular bell and crotale interruptions (Fig. 50).

Fig. 50. (bars 279–278).

The musical score for Figure 50, covering bars 279 and 278, is arranged in six staves. The top two staves are for Soprano and Solo Contralto, both marked *mf dolce* and *mp*. The Flute part is marked *mf dolce* and *mp*, with a *p* dynamic and a *mf dolce* dynamic with a triplet of eighth notes. The Trombone part is marked *mp*. The Crotale and Tubular Bell parts are marked *p* and *mf* respectively. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

However, the most explicit example of the influence of conflict is found in the third movement, *'Salt. Dirt. Blood.'* Images and film footage of police officers attacking picketers with truncheons at the 'Battle of Orgreave' proved a powerful inspiration for this movement: two tribes — the miners and the police — pitted against each other. As such, the battery of drums that open the movement — four players on two sets of bongos, tom-toms, and bass drums — take on an antagonistic role (Fig. 51).

Dramatically this passage of un-pitched drumming is significant in that it is the only moment in the piece that does not feature any brass instruments, serving as a stark antithesis to the harmonic and melodically driven material that dominates the rest of the work. The overall effect here is of something hostile and intimidating, unique in brass band repertoire for its duration and in that it features only un-pitched percussion.

Fig. 51. (bars 295–306).

295 Bongos

Perc. 1

Rack toms, Bass drum, Kick drum

Perc. 2

Bongos

Perc. 3

Rack toms (higher pitched than perc. 2).

Perc. 4

299

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

303

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

The use of chromatically complex chords — from rhythmic three-note clusters to hammered thirteen-note chords (Fig. 52) — suggests the most harmonically dissonant part of the work thus far. The cumulative effect of this relentless dissonance comes to a head at letter CC (Fig. 55) where a series of sustained arpeggios are played in succession, resulting in the most aggressive and violent moment in the piece.

Fig. 52. (bars 395–398).

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Cornets (Cnts.), Trombones (Tbns.), Baritone/Euphonium (Bar. Euph.), and Eb Bass/Bb Bass. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The Cornets part features a melodic line with accents and a dynamic marking of *fffz*. The Trombones part has a harmonic accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *fffz*. The Baritone/Euphonium part has a harmonic accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *fffz*. The Eb Bass/Bb Bass part has a harmonic accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *fffz*. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Texturally too, this movement contrasts vividly with the dry, dispassionate industrial sounds of the first movement and the traditional brass band scoring of the second movement.

At letter T, for example, a wild fanfare is heard on the cornets (Fig. 53). The combination of flutter-tonguing and plunger mutes, however, turn these fanfares into something more visceral. The growling sounds of the cornets — the plunger mute simulating sounds ‘similar to the human voice’²² — used in combination with horn rips and trombone glissandi, are a crude musical representation of the heightened emotions of the incident.

²² Jones, Trevor, ‘Trumpet Plunger Mutes’, *Trevor Jones Brass & Woodwind Ltd.* <<https://www.trevorjonesltd.co.uk>>.

Fig. 53. (bars 328–333).

Line and melody are also turned on their head in this movement. The falling minor-second gesture seen throughout the work — for example, the extended horn melody in the first movement (Fig. 46), the flugelhorn cadenza (Fig. 49), or the expressive soprano cornet and euphonium duet in the second movement (Fig. 58) — is found here too. But rather than expressive and aching it has become incessant and relentless.

Fig. 54. (bars 337–340).

This motif is seen first at letter U in horns and low brass (Fig 54) but is heard persistently throughout the movement — at letter X on cornets, with horns joining at 388, heard distantly on muted horns at letter Z, at

letter AA on harmon muted solo cornets, and in the closing bars of the movement (bar 475 to the end) — like repeated truncheon blows to the head.

Fig. 55. (bars 445–450).

The musical score for Figure 55, covering bars 445 to 450, is a complex orchestral arrangement. It begins with a 'CC Ringing' marking and a rehearsal mark at bar 445. The score is written for a large ensemble, including:

- Sopranos (Sop. Cnt.)
- Solo Cornets (Solo Cnt.)
- Repeating Cornets (Rep. Cnt.)
- Second and Third Cornets (2nd Cnt., 3rd Cnt.)
- Flugs (Flug.)
- Solo Horns (Solo Hn.)
- First and Second Horns (1st Hn., 2nd Hn.)
- First and Second Baritone (1st Bar., 2nd Bar.)
- First and Second Trombone (1st Tbn., 2nd Tbn.)
- Bass Trombone (B. Tbn.)
- Euphonium (Euph.)
- First and Second Basses (E♭ Bass, B♭ Bass)
- Percussion 2 (Perc. 2) with 'to Tam-tam' instruction
- Percussion 3 (Perc. 3)
- Percussion 4 (Perc. 4) with 'Tubular bells | hard mallets' instruction

The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of dynamic markings such as *f*, *fp*, *sfz*, and *p*. The percussion parts are particularly prominent, with Perc. 2 and Perc. 4 playing a rhythmic pattern of repeated notes. The brass instruments, especially the cornets and horns, play a melodic line with frequent accents and dynamic shifts. The woodwinds and strings provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation.

The sonic explored throughout this movement contrasts vividly with the music that precedes it. The warmth and lyricism of the second movement

is replaced by stark dissonance and a relentless *moto perpetuo*, this being my attempt at coming close, musically speaking, to the feelings of anger and violence experienced during the Orgreave clash. But in the broader context of brass band repertoire itself there is a conflict too. The musical material — tonally, structurally, and texturally — pushes at the traditional boundaries of brass band scoring and orchestration.

5. Community and Legacy

I have discussed how my approach to harmony and melody in this work is often underpinned by the idea of conflict inherent in the source material. But I also tap into the musical heritage of traditional brass band repertoire to explore ideas of community and legacy, central tenets of the brass band movement itself.

To this end, the use of an explicitly tonal language in the second movement is particularly evocative, drawing on the musical customs — the inherently expressive qualities that define much of the repertoire — which are deeply ingrained within the collective psyche of the brass band movement. The ‘creative potential in drawing inspiration from the musical traditions out of which brass band music has evolved’ and the ‘poignant mix of tragedy and nostalgia’²³ found in so much original music written for the medium (hymns, song arrangements, slow melodies²⁴), is explored in this movement, an elegy to the people of the mining communities.

The movement begins veiled and distant: a hymn heard on muted cornets and trombones (Fig. 56) over a horn pedal, the players alternating fingerings in free-time, producing a shimmering sound:

²³ Hindmarsh, Paul, ‘Building a Repertoire’, in *The British Brass Band*, 274.

²⁴ ‘Slow melodies’ are pieces of music — sometimes arrangements of opera arias or songs — that feature a solo instrument, usually the principal cornet.

Fig. 56. (bars 328–332).

Musical score for bars 328–332. The score is in 3/4 time and features four staves: Solo Cnt., 2nd/3rd Cnt., Hn., and Tbn. The Solo Cnt. part begins with a '328 bucket mute' instruction and includes dynamics of *pp*, *p dolce*, *pp*, *pp*, and *mp dolce espr.*. The 2nd/3rd Cnt. part is marked with a bucket mute. The Hn. part includes a 'muted' instruction and a 'sim' (sustained) instruction with a '3' marking. The Tbn. part includes a '(cup mute)' instruction and dynamics of *p*, *pp*, *p*, and *mp dolce espr.*.

The movement then moves into an elegy in the key of B \flat minor, a lulling accompaniment on low brass underpinning an expressive flugelhorn solo (Fig. 57). The title, ‘*These scars across my heart*’, suggests this is music about loss, grief, and memory. As such, the minor key and expressive melodic lines reference the sentimental and nostalgic music that dominates brass band musical literature.

Fig. 57. (bars 242–246).

Musical score for bars 242–246. The score is in 3/4 time and features four staves: Flug., Euph., Eb Bass, and Bb Bass. The tempo is marked 'Gently, ♩ = 45 - 50'. The Flug. part includes dynamics of *mp molto cant.* and *p*. The Euph. part includes a '(bar.)' instruction and dynamics of *p espr.*, *mp*, and *p*. The Eb Bass part includes a dynamic of *p*. The Bb Bass part includes a dynamic of *p*. The score also includes a '(+euph.)' instruction.

The flugelhorn plays an allegorical role in the ballet, with several significant solos marking the broad structure (though these have been reduced significantly in the suite), but the use of flugelhorn here is poignant. Traditionally, the cornet is the preferred solo instrument in the band, but the flugelhorn’s dark, plaintive tone — the sound somewhere between

that of the cornet and tenor horn — make it particularly appropriate for the work’s dramatic and expressive purposes.

Fig. 58. (bars 264–269).

The image shows a page of a musical score for a brass and woodwind ensemble, covering bars 264 to 269. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Sop. Cnt. (Soprano Cornet), Solo Cnt. (Solo Cornet), Rep. Cnt. (Replica Cornet), 2nd Cnt. (2nd Cornet), 3rd Cnt. (3rd Cornet), Flug. (Flugelhorn), Solo Hn. (Solo Horn), 1st Hn. (1st Horn), 2nd Hn. (2nd Horn), 1st Bar. (1st Baritone), 2nd Bar. (2nd Baritone), 1st Tbn. (1st Trombone), 2nd Tbn. (2nd Trombone), B. Tbn. (Bass Trombone), Euph. (Euphonium), Eb Bass (E-flat Bass), Bb Bass (B-flat Bass), and Perc. 2 (Percussion 2). The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, mf, f, mp, p), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (mute out, open, tutti, open). A box labeled 'P' is placed above the first staff at the beginning of the excerpt.

At bar 262 (Fig. 58) this melodic line is taken up by euphonium and Eb soprano cornet in octaves (the usual timbral pairing being a Bb cornet and

euphonium), once more drawing on common place musical traditions of brass band music. As such, these solos which sit high in the instruments' registers — performed with idiosyncratic vibrato synonymous with brass bands — are particularly evocative, the sound recalling memories of British working-class culture from our collective subconscious and being so suggestive of time, place, and people.

All that remains of a once thriving mining industry in the UK is the brass band movement, a musical and social community in its own right where the preservation of its historical, cultural, and musical legacy is taken seriously. *Dark Arteries* holds a unique place within the brass band musical legacy being 'the world's first brass band dance work.'²⁵ By drawing inspiration from the traditions of brass band music, whilst pushing at the tonal, textural, and structural boundaries of music written for the medium, *Dark Arteries* seeks to 'challenge the genre while paying tribute to its origins.'²⁶

Furthermore, the intimate engagement with the ex-mining communities whose stories inspired the piece — local brass bands performing the piece in Wales, northern England, and Scotland²⁷ — served a musical and social good, celebrating those communities and their legacy and bringing their stories to a wider audience. As critic Tom Davoren commented: 'Let's hope that we don't have to wait another two decades ... to experience a band entering into a meaningful collaboration that reaches an audience beyond the goldfish bowl of the brass band movement.'²⁸

²⁵ Anon, 'Rambert — with Tredegar Town Band and the Rambert Orchestra', *Sadler's Wells*, <<http://sadlerswells.com>>.

²⁶ Craine, 'Why it's time for brass bands to change their tune', *The Times* <<http://thetime.co.uk>>.

²⁷ When *Dark Arteries* was toured throughout the UK, a local brass band was used for each performance: the Fairey Band, Carlton Main Frickley Band, Whitburn Band, and the Tredegar Town Band who also premiered the piece.

²⁸ Davoren, Tom, 'Dark Arteries', *Brass Band World*, No. 245 (2015), 35.

6. Conclusion

Many composers use extramusical inspiration as musical stimulation, but these are not always driving factors of the compositional process as George Benjamin discusses:

My pieces have pictorial allusions, but they don't always start out like that. Often I only know what a piece is about half-way through, when a certain image keeps coming back to me and getting involved in the piece.²⁹

For other composers, external influences impact their work far more subtly. Here, Mark-Anthony Turnage discusses how Bacon's art influenced *Three Screaming Popes*:

I became obsessive about them in a sense — their use of colour, and also the life that's in them. I wanted to write a very colourful, lively piece, but whether that's based directly on those paintings, I don't know — they are just what stimulated it.³⁰

Personally, using extramusical inspiration as a point of departure is an integral part of my creative practice. In *Dark Arteries* the mining industry and brass band music have influenced the work in numerous ways: both purposefully — the sounds of industry carefully and deliberately realised through orchestrational choices — and intuitively — e.g., feelings of grief and loss suffered by ex-mining communities explored through traditional brass band tropes that are subconsciously ingrained in my musical aesthetic.

Whether or not a listener hears these influences is contestable, but perhaps it is not so important. The fact is every aspect of the piece — instrumentation, structure, harmony, and melodic choices — are

²⁹ Griffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities*, 27.

³⁰ Clements, Andrew, *Mark-Anthony Turnage* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 24.

instinctually and deliberately shaped by the themes and ideas present in the source material itself.

Jonathan Harvey discusses the innate reality of extramusical influences on a composer's craft and the nuanced complexity of those influence as such:

Even when specific sources of inspiration may be identified for a particular piece of music, these elements are never simply transcribed: the composer's involvement in responding to and shaping the initial stimulus is always evident. External stimuli become part of the internal psychic reality: one catches a glimpse of oneself in things that excite or have significance for one.³¹

Going on to say:

From my point of view, [external experiences] subsequently form part of the particular 'flavour' of the work concerned. Experience can stimulate composition in a variety of ways. For example, thinking about extra-musical subjects that are exciting will often generate music, which then becomes associated with that 'excitement'.³²

The musical and dramatic intentions of my music are driven by extramusical inspiration. Although those inspirations may not be transparent to the listener, they inform every aspect of the piece. An event such as 'the Battle of Orgreave' for example, inspires a kind of forceful, violent music and dissonant harmony. The sounds of industry inspire syncopated rhythms and metallic sounds. The stories of mining communities inspire elegiac music that draws on the tradition of hymns and slow melodies imbued in brass band repertoire.

Inspiration, therefore, is more than musical stimulus. It unexpectedly and unconsciously ingrains itself in the work, informing every aspect of the music from harmony to structure to orchestration.

³¹ Harvey, *Music and Inspiration*, 40

³² *Ibid.* 41.

Chapter 4: Creativity through collaboration: Making an opera.

In *Creative Collaboration*, Vera John-Steiner states: ‘Generative ideas emerge from joint thinking, from significant conversations, and from sustained, shared struggles to achieve new insights by partners in thought.’¹ In my own work, an increasing engagement in collaborative projects has resulted in several cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Composition is often a solitary pursuit, so involvement in these projects has challenged, transformed, and enhanced my own creative practices, as John-Steiner discusses:

Social, cultural, historical, and biological conditions together contribute to the realization of human possibility. Central to such an approach is the principle that *humans come into being and mature in relation to others*.²

She goes on to challenge the concept of the solitary artist — the ‘individual ‘genius’ working in isolation from the world’³ — stating, ‘this stance [collaboration] contrasts with the classical view, the development of the autonomous, rational individual’ and that, ‘in the course of intense partnerships, new skills are acquired’ and as such, ‘the collaboration context provides a mutual zone of proximal development where participants can increase their repertory of cognitive and emotional expression.’⁴

As an artist who spends much time working alone, the idea of creative growth through collaboration — sharing ideas, perspectives, and expertise

¹ John-Steiner, Vera, *Creative Collaboration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

² John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, 187.

³ Barret, Margaret S., ‘The Scattering of Light: Shared Insights into the Collaborative and Cooperative Processes that Underpin the Development and Performance of a Commissioned Work’, In *Collaborative Creative Thought and Practice in Music* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2016), 17.

⁴ John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, 187.

across disciplines — appeals to me. In short, collaborations have broadened my working methods and provoked me to re-evaluate my own creative practice. But interdisciplinary relationships are complex and can be difficult to navigate.

The collaborative relationships of artists, musicians, composers, and choreographers etc. — such as John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Stravinsky and Diaghilev, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears — are well documented, with a plethora of research examining the personal and professional impact of the process on artistic practices. These relationships can be both harmonious and acrimonious. Take Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann for example:

Herrmann's brooding intensity and harmonic asperity are indelibly linked with Hitchcock's mature work. Their personalities were dramatically opposite ... Yet the two were deeply simpatico: both had an uncompromising professionalism, a contempt for mediocrity, a dark sense of irony, an exuberant enthusiasm for eating and drinking, and a loathing for the Hollywood establishment matched by a longing for its approval.⁵

In spite of their opposing personalities — 'Hitchcock regal and controlling, Herrmann notoriously moody and prone to ranting outbursts'⁶ — Herrmann was a 'catalyst for energies darker and riskier than Hitchcock's cool sensibility normally permitted.'⁷ Herrmann was Hitchcock's, 'risky alter-ego, a 'secret sharer' who took his cinema into darker places than it had gone before, tying the two artists together in ways that enhanced their careers even as it threatened their sense of identity.'⁸

⁵ Sullivan, Jack, 'Bernard Herrmann: Hitchcock's secret sharer', in *Partners in Suspense: Critical essays on Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. Steven Rawle and K.J. Donnelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 14.

⁶ Sullivan, *Hitchcock's secret sharer*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

Equally, collaborative relationships can be congenial and highly compatible.

On his collaborations with Martin Crimp, George Benjamin says:

Martin Crimp and I have done three operas together, which are different as well as being very similar. The differences are interesting; they give flexibility to our creative relationship. The similarities mean that we have confidence in each other, that we understand each other. To have the luck, the joy of finding a great writer who accepts writing their first opera libretto for you, and then a second and a third... I would be mad to reject that out of a simple desire for change.⁹

However, not all cross-disciplinary collaborations are intrinsically exclusive. Composers such as Mark-Anthony Turnage or Thomas Adès, writing over eight operas between them, have worked with a different librettist on each project. Or Birtwistle who, though working with librettist David Harsent on four operas (*Gawain* – 1991, *The Minotaur* – 2008, *The Corridor* – 2009, *The Cure* – 2015) with whom there was ‘never a cross word’,¹⁰ has written a further seven operas with different librettists. It is clear collaborative relationships are distinct and individual to each artist, carefully nurtured and developed over time.

I have engaged in numerous cross-disciplinary collaborative partnerships, some successful and some less so. But my first foray into opera began in 2015 when I started work on *The Monstrous Child* with author Francesca Simon. Opera is a very broad medium and as such is hard to define. In simplest terms: ‘Opera is a type of theatre in which most or all of the characters sing most or all of the time.’¹¹ Writer Robert Cannon goes further, describing modern opera as ‘a dramatic form whose primary language is music. A successful opera must work both musically and

⁹ Labouret, Tristan, ‘Sir George Benjamin: Real music doesn’t fall from heaven’, *Bachtrack* <<https://www.bachtrack.com>>.

¹⁰ Harsent, David, ‘Poet David Harsent and composer Harrison Birtwistle have worked together for over 30 years’, *The Royal Society of Literature*, <<http://rsliterature.org>>.

¹¹ Abbate, Carolyn and Parker, Roger, *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years* (London: Penguin Random House, 2015), 1.

dramatically; to understand opera means understanding both elements, and how they interreact.¹² I believe opera is fundamentally theatre driven by music. As such, the best operas are musically and dramatically engaging, both elements equally weighted. Due to the large number of people required to make an opera — beyond the core creative team of composer, librettist, and director — it is a truly collaborative art form.

In this chapter I will explore the collaborative process of working on *The Monstrous Child* — looking firstly at the composer-librettist relationship and the role other voices played in shaping the work — and how collaboration has challenged and enhanced my own creative practice.

1. Nurturing a collaborative relationship: composer and librettist

In 2015 children's author Francesca Simon approached me about turning her latest novel, *The Monstrous Child*, into an opera. I was familiar with Francesca's young adult books inspired by Norse mythology: *The Sleeping Army* (2012) and its sequel, *The Lost Gods* (2014). *The Monstrous Child* — the story of the Norse goddess Hel, who is half-corpse, half-goddess, and how she brings about the end of the world — inhabited this same Norse fantasy world.

I was struck by the book's innate operatic qualities. A nod to the Ring Cycle is clear — sharing characters and story with Wagner's epic. But there are resonances of other operatic tropes in the novel too: the use of myth (e.g., *The Minotaur*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*), themes of unrequited love (*Tristan and Isolde*, *Madame Butterfly*), the outsider (*Peter Grimes*, *Death in Venice*), and death and rebirth (*The Ring Cycle*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*). My own fascination with Norse mythology piqued my interest in this story

¹² Cannon, Robert, *Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

and Francesca's proposal serendipitously coincided with ongoing conversations between myself and the Royal Opera House, who ultimately commissioned the work.

Working on *The Monstrous Child* was both our first time collaborating and writing an opera. In the early stages of the collaboration time was spent becoming acquainted with each other's creative process, motivations, and sharing ideas. I introduced Francesca to examples of what I considered to be successful (and unsuccessful) operas and libretti. Conversely, Francesca introduced me to editions of key works of literature that would help me better understand the world of Norse Mythology — notably *The Penguin Book of Norse Myths* by Kevin Crossley-Holland, the *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda*.

We immersed ourselves in the medium as a means of finding common ground, attending numerous opera performances which provoked discussions about pacing, drama, duration, libretti etc. At one production I pointed out the surtitles box, suggesting it would be useful to think of each phrase of the text needing to fit within it. Francesca, who had written picture books, drew a comparison between the two: 'The words need to allow space for the illustrations'¹³ and libretti need to be short, unfussy, and succinct to allow the music to speak. On libretti, Robert Cannon notes: 'Many of the great librettists were playwrights and poets in their own right and often provided beautiful lines and verses. But it is also generally the case that the finest poetic work does not always suit musical setting',¹⁴ adding,

'This does not deny the vital role of the libretto and its words. It is to emphasise that, as in the theatre, they play a particular part and can

¹³ Simon, Francesca, 'How I turned the Monstrous Child into 'Wagner for teens'', *The Guardian* <<http://theguardian.com>>.

¹⁴ Cannon, *Opera*, 320.

work in different ways: one element in the process of creating meaning'.¹⁵

Francesca's comparison to picture books was astute. She understood the role of libretto in opera and what was required by the composer. This streamlining of text provided the space for my music to evolve naturally and a mutual understanding of our prospective roles was established. These early interactions — sharing knowledge, expertise, and shared experiences — paved the way for a close working relationship that proved integral to the success of the collaboration.

In her essay, *The Emotional Dance of Creative Collaboration*, fashion designer Helen Storey states:

I believe a high level of mutual intimacy lies at the heart of successful collaborations and bigger collaborations don't require less intimacy, but more of it.¹⁶

This concept of intimacy in collaboration is echoed by Fred Lerdhal and Ray Jackendoff in the preface to their seminal book, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*:

The ideas really took wing only in collaboration: neither of us could have done this work without the other ... we met weekly, hammering out ideas over kitchen tables, pianos, and typewriters. The give-and-take was unusually close; it would be pointless to try to disentangle who thought up this rule or wrote that paragraph¹⁷

Intimacy was an important part of our collaboration too. Whilst working on *The Monstrous Child* we were in regular contact, communicating via text,

¹⁵ Ibid., 320

¹⁶ Storey, Helen and Joubert, Mathilda Marie, 'The Emotional Dance of Creative Collaboration', in *Collaborative Creativity: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy Meill and Karen Littleton (London: Free Association Books, 2004), 47.

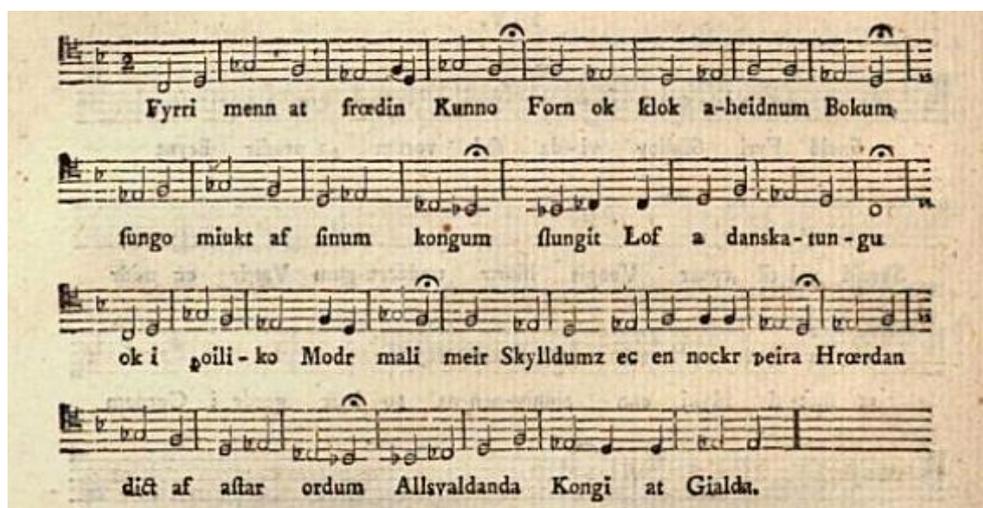
¹⁷ Lerdhal, Fred and Jackendoff, Ray, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), xiii.

email, phone call, or meeting in person. Our collaboration was not dissimilar to some historic composer-librettist processes in that sense. Discussing her relationship with Benjamin Britten whilst writing the libretto to *Death in Venice*, Myfanwy Piper says:

It took a little over two and a half years from our first conversation to the first night at Snape ... and although we were not working on it all the time during these months, I do not think it was ever out of our thoughts, nor did we cease to discuss it.¹⁸

The process of writing *The Monstrous Child* took years (2015 to 2019) and, despite working on other projects, we discussed the opera daily. In the early stages we focused on the libretto — considering plot, characters, and pacing — but later turned to music. For example, after discovering a fourteenth-century Icelandic tune called *Lilja* (*The Lilly*, Fig. 59). I was keen to incorporate some aspect of it into the score to provide a musical link to the Norse inspired narrative.

Fig. 59. Transcription of *Lilja*¹⁹



I sent a recording of the song to Francesca, who responded:

¹⁸ Piper, Myfanwy, 'The Libretto', in *Benjamin Britten: Death In Venice*, ed. Donald Mitchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 46.

¹⁹ de Laborde, Jean-Benjamin, *Essai sur la Musique Ancienne et Moderne: Tome Second* (1780), 406. Accessed at Google Books <<http://books.google.uk>>.

Email correspondence: Dec/08/2015

FS: the music is great — she could of course hum it, as if she is trying to remember it?

GH: I can imagine it working like Miles 'Malo' song in turn of the screw ... It doesn't need to be directly related to the drama but a kind of quiet, reflective look into Hel's mind — it might make her a bit 'human' if you see what I mean? So for example, the moment when you have her humming in the kitchen, she might be humming this tune — and then pick it up later after she's lying on her bed depressed.

Around the same time Francesca discovered texts to two Icelandic lullabies: *Bíum Bíum Bambaló* and another recorded by W.H. Auden and translated as, 'Sleep, you black-eyed pig / Fall into a deep pit full of ghosts.'²⁰ Combining, re-writing, and adding to these texts she wrote her own lullaby. Likewise, I combined part of the melody from *Lilja* with my own newly composed music which I set to Francesca's words. Over a series of text messages we fine-tuned this folk melody. For example, this conversation about the end of a phrase:

Text correspondence: Jan/09/2016

GH: Both ends are the same except the second one goes down a third at the end via an extra note. So there would be one more syllable. I could also add another note or two at the end if needed, i.e. [*sends three audio recordings], for example.

FS: The third feels slightly more complete as well as more ominous. Does that make sense?

GH: Yes, it's just where the harmony goes, but it's essentially the same. I might do three verses and end with that one, so the first two are more open ended.

FS: Yes! Third feels like THE END. Do you prefer 'get lost in the forest'? Though vowels nice in Woods.

GH: Have a play around and see what you think. But basically it's just the last two lines I need, 'bium, bium, bambalo' fits fine. 'Get lo-st in

²⁰ Auden, W.H., *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 154.

the Wo-ods'

FS: That's 7 syllables. Do you want 7?

GH: Three more syllables in there might be good.

FS: Howling woods?

GH: [sends audio recording] Though that's also a bit clumsy.

FS: That doesn't flow so well.

GH: Nope. But the end could work. Have a play. But that's the melody I'd like if possible! Here are both versions one after the other [sends audio recordings]

FS: I like the first a lot! Get lost in the woods and don't come back! Simple and powerful!!

And so on...

This kind of back-and-forth dialogue — focussing on word stresses and rhythms, composing new melodic fragments, and offering alternatives — became typical of our interactions. And so, despite working separately, our regular interactions saw us collaborating in real-time. The creation of this song and the structural and dramatic placing of it — first heard in scene 2 when Angrboda sings it as a lullaby to her monstrous children (Fig. 60a) and again in scene 7, half-sung, half-hummed by Hel as the world is destroyed around her (Fig. 60b) — arose through intimate collaboration.

The use of stylistically incongruous songs in opera — here a folk-like lullaby — is addressed by Abbate and Parker in *A History of Opera*: 'Songs-within-the-opera are time-honoured, and are usually ... set apart musically and formally — simple and hyper-melodious in relation to the surrounding context'²¹ and in such instances 'beautiful singing and well-formed melody

²¹ Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 538.

become antiquated styles: inserted songs can, in other words, constitute a brief aesthetic vacation — for composers as well as listeners.²²

Fig. 60a. Act 1. Scene 2.

♩ = 80
91 Somewhat freely Allarg. A tempo ♩ = 80

Cl. Hn. mute *p* *pp* *p*

Tbn. B. Cl. *p* *pp* (tbn.) *p*

Pno. Piano *p* *pp* *p*

Ang. *mp dolce semplice*
Bi - um bi - um bam - ba - ló bam - ba - ló og

Vln. *p* *pp*

Vla. *p espr.* *mp* *pp*

Vc. *p* *pp*

Cb. alt. *p* *pp*

97

Cl. Hn. *p* *pp*

Tbn. B. Cl. *p* *pp*

Pno. *p* *pp* *p* *pp l.v.*

Ang. di - lli di - lli dó. Good - night good-night you

Vln. *p* *pp* *pp*

Vla. *pp espr.* *mp* *p* *pp*

Vc. *p* *pp*

Cb. *p* *pp*

²² Ibid., 538.

101

Ang. black eyed. pigs fall in a pit of ghosts and don't come back.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Fig. 60b. Act 2. Scene 7.

Hel. *pp melancholic* Hmm bam-ba-ló Hmm di-llí-dí-llí-dò. bi-um bi-um bam-ba-lò Good

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Though it was not part of the original novel or libretto *Bíum Bíum Bambaló* became a key musical and dramatic device in the opera. It not only provides a moment of respite in scene 2, but the stylistic clash of both music and text alerts the audience to the dramatic significance of this music. It is a moment in the opera that we discovered together through collaboration.

The composer-librettist relationship is key to the success of new opera. Francesca understood the music may demand more or less text at times. Equally my approach to the music remained flexible as the story developed. As individual creatives we constructively provoked, challenged, and questioned each other with the understanding we were serving the work, not our individual creative whims. This shared vision, as Vera-Steiner suggests:

Is crucial to successful collaboration, but it is not always sufficient. For a partnership to be truly creative — to change a discipline and transform a paradigm — multiple perspectives, complementarity in skills and training, and fascination with one's partner's contributions are also essential.²³

As such, the integrity of our collaborative relationship, and success of the project, relied on an intimate and un-precious work ethic. This openness to new ideas and perspectives gave us the freedom to be fully creative.

2. Establishing Hel's voice

Reducing a novel to a two-hour piece of theatre is challenging. Translating Hel's 'sarcastic, teenage, yeah whatever, eye-rolling voice'²⁴ into musical theatre was our central concern as Kasper Holten, ROH Director of Opera, posited:

Email correspondence: 22/09/2015

KH: It will be hard to get the beautiful, original tone of the novel to work as live theatre, but that is a great and exciting challenge. We need very much to retain the p.o.v. with Hel, and her wonderful inner narrative, her tone of voice, at the same time as making it work as drama and not just a monologue, of course.

We realised much of Hel's charm came from these sarcastic jokey asides and so sought to exploit them. As such, we transferred many of Hel's monologues from the novel directly into the libretto. Lines such as, 'You'd think after my brother the snake was born they'd have stopped at one'²⁵ became pivotal in framing the character. Or as Francesca notes, 'she's

²³ John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, 64.

²⁴ Simon, Francesca, 'How I turned The Monstrous Child into 'Wagner for teens' ' <<http://theguardian.com>>.

²⁵ Simon, Francesca, *The Monstrous Child* (London: Faber & Faber & Profile Books, 2017), 3.

banished alive to Niflheim, the fog world of the dead, to spend eternity with rotting corpses. Without her flippant asides, it could be unbearable.²⁶ Hel speaking in the first person in the novel is not a problem but establishing this voice musically and dramatically was a challenge. Taking Mozart operas such as *Così fan tutte* as a model — in which the characters frequently speak directly to the audience — Hel breaks the fourth wall throughout, commenting on events as they happen, narrating her own story, and talking to the audience directly. But how to channel her sarcastic tone through sung melodies?

I took Janáček's idea of 'what he called *nápěvky mluvy* — literally "speech-tunelets"²⁷ — vocal lines following speech patterns — and his belief that 'speech melodies revealed subliminal thoughts and emotions unexpressed by the words alone'²⁸ — as a model. To capture Hel's sarcastic voice, these asides needed to feel conversational and natural.

Expressive material is reserved for when Hel is either *in* the scene — i.e. bar 101, Scene 6, when she talks with Modgud, or is lost in fantasy — bar 89, scene 5 when she fantasises about Baldr. Conversely, each time she talks to the audience, or is commenting on a scene, the vocal line is conversational, recitative-like, using a smaller range of notes. In a sense, two musical voices are established: the sarcastic and jokey, and the emotional and reflective. Defining Hel's voice musically was a product of collaboration with librettist, director, and singer Marta Fontanals-Simmons. Take the opening passage, originally imagined for soprano and written thusly (Fig. 61):

²⁶ Simon, 'how I turned The Monstrous Child into 'Wagner for teens' ' *The Guardian*.

²⁷ Taruskin, Richard, 'Music in the Early Twentieth Century', in *The Oxford History of Western Music volume 4* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 425.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 426.

Fig. 61. Act 1. Prologue (first sketch – 2018).

$\text{♩} = 120$ C. Freely
Dramatic

Hel *f* I am Hel, go-ddess of the dead. Wel-come to my dis - gus - ting king - dom. (B.D.)

Hel Not the wel-come you were ho-ping for? Too bad! You're not the first pe-ople to die, so get o - ver it.

Hel *mf* What did you ex-pect? Ca-na-pas? This is the Hall of the dead, the hall of the

Hel dead. It stinks. It's cold. Al-ways night al-ways win - ter. What do you

Hel *rall.* think it's like for me, a li-ving go-ddess, - bu-ried here for e - ter - ni - ty,

Pno. *pp*

Hel *p cresc poco a poco* for e - ter - ni - ty for e - ter - ni - ty for e - ter - ni - ty with you?

Pno.

Hel *Più mosso f angrily* I ne-ver asked to be Hel's queen. So shut up and lis - ten. Hear the truth, not the lies you know,

Pno. *f mp sfp sfz*

Hel the sa-ga the vic-tors tell. Hear the truth, hear the truth. we've got all the time in the world.

Pno. *sfp sfp sfp sfz*

$\text{♩} = 120$

33 *mf* your pee-ling fa-ces and ma-ggots dri-pping from your heads. *cresc.* *rall.* *rall.*

36 *f* I ne-ver asked to be Hel's queen. So shut up and lis-ten. *sfz* *f* *sfz* *A tempo* ♩ = 54

39 *f* fierce and grandiose once again. Hear the truth not the lies you know, not the sa-ga the vic-tors tell. *sfz*

41 Hear the truth, hear the truth... We've got all the time in the world. *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz*

Having decided we would not use surtitles for this production, clarity of text was important, as George Haggett notes: 'Higgins's tendency to mimic speech-rhythms in sparingly orchestrated passages of recitative, punctuated by witty outbursts of instrumental colour, yields sung dialogue of such clarity that surtitles are neither present nor missed.'²⁹ The lower pitched mezzo-soprano voice, therefore, seemed more appropriate for a 'depressed teen.'³⁰ But equally, Marta's involvement in the opera as not only performer but co-collaborator — the part written *with* her and *for* her — was pivotal in defining Hel's character.

²⁹ Haggett, George K., 'Gavin Higgins and Francesca Simon, *The Monstrous Child*', *Tempo*, Vol. 73, No. 290 (2019), 76-78.

³⁰ Simon, 'How I turned *The Monstrous Child* into 'Wagner for teens'' *The Guardian*.

3. Structural issues and dramatic narrative

The Monstrous Child lasts 100 minutes in total and so structural considerations and decisions on dramatic narrative were integral to its effectiveness as a piece of theatre. Speaking on operatic narrative, Cannon states:

While some kind of narrative is basic to most operas, its manipulation creates very different kinds of experience. The initial stage in this was the departure from traditional notions of the narrative as a simple, linear reflection of the way events occurred in 'reality'.³¹

He continues: 'Each of these narrative types required the right balance between a compressible sequence and an equally comprehensible disruption as part of the creation of dramatic meaning.'³²

Finding a balance between plot and drama was essential for this opera. In the novel the story follows a linear narrative, but Kasper Holten questioned whether we could play with the sense of time and place and tell the story in a non-linear way:

Email correspondence: 22/Sep/2015

KH: My only provocation at this point would be: should it feel so much like a straightforward narrative, with scenes in different locations? Or should it - like the new start - feel more like a piece that moves backwards and forwards in time, grouped around themes? What if it all fundamentally felt like a monologue for her, as she is waiting to see Odin, but during her narrative, scenes and situations can suddenly play out, in glimpses, flashes, longer or shorter, but jumping back and forth in a more surprising, quirky way. Somehow, that would be a dramaturgical parallel to her own quirky voice in the book, wouldn't it?

GH: I think the idea of the story zipping round, that time is almost irrelevant to her could be interesting. I just wonder how we achieve

³¹ Cannon, *Opera*, 321-323.

³² *Ibid.*, 323.

this with clarity. You're right, the book is essentially a monologue and your idea of playing up the asides and having Hel talk directly to the audience feels right to me. It's kind of charming, despite her angst. It will help retain the voice we hear in the book. I think we need to think about balancing the humour with the heartbreak and how we make this world. This is something for me to think about musically as well, i.e. the music for when she is talking to the audience vs. the music when we are 'in' the action.

FS: I'd be keen to hear more, Kasper, about what you mean by a thematic narrative? I am musing on ways to convey her freedom from time while keeping the story-telling clear.

KH: what I meant, it feels as if the narrative - especially in act 1 - is told quite chronologically through a series of scenes all set in a Location. Would it be a different and more interesting dramaturgy — although obviously also more difficult! — to think of it as a narrative, where she can jump back and forth and shorter scenes come to life. I realise this COULD also do precisely what I was warning about, making it all her words and not showing in dramatic scenes what happened. Maybe the answer is somewhere in between.

FS: But we need to be careful that the form doesn't submerge the story...

These discussions ultimately pushed us away from pursuing a strictly linear narrative, framing the opera with Hel as the narrator of her own story and viewing the audience as the newly arrived dead in the underworld. So Hel's opening monologue — 'I am Hel, goddess of the dead, welcome to my disgusting kingdom. Not the welcome you were hoping for? Too bad!' (Fig. 62) — becomes an induction to Nifelheim (in same fashion as Rowan Atkinson's famous 'welcome to Hell' sketch, which saw him play 'the role of the devil ... clipboard in hand, welcoming the newest group of recruits to his fiery abode'³³) before we are forced to listen to her saga.

As such, the opera begins in the present; looks back over her childhood, kidnap, and banishment to the other otherworld; then comes back to the

³³ Lambert, Sheena, 'Why I will be Keeping the Faith', *The Irish Independent* <<http://independent.ie>>.

present in scene 6. This shifting of time, Hel narrating *on* and being part of the story, allowed me to approach the music in contrasting ways. For example, when looking back at her birth Hel is distant from the action, so the music is overly dramatic and playful — shrieking vocal lines, grinding bass motifs, colourful orchestration (Fig. 63):

Fig. 63. Act 1. Scene 1. (bars 38–46).

The musical score for Act 1, Scene 1, bars 38–46, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 38–42) is marked *Poco meno mosso*. It features a vocal line for Angr. [S.1.] with lyrics: "hrgh - ugh! hrgh - ugh - agh! Breathe." The orchestration includes woodwinds (Cb. Cl., B. Cl. 2, Hn., Tbn., Cim.), strings (Vln., Vla., Vc., Cb.), and percussion (Cim.). The second system (bars 43–46) is marked *A tempo (♩ = 53)*. The vocal line continues with lyrics: "Pu - sh. Pu - sh. High-ugh - agh!". The orchestration remains consistent, with various dynamics and articulations throughout.

In contrast, scene's 6 and 7 focusses on Hel's real-time internal struggle and so the music represents her emotions explicitly, suggesting what the text cannot. For example, the feeling of sickness in Act 2. Scene 6. as reality sinks in, the music now lurching and queasy (Fig. 64):

Fig. 64. Act 2. Scene 6. (bars 228–238).

Y Nauseous - Colla voce

228

Cl. 1. nat. *ppp* *nat.* *mp*

B. Cl. *ppp* *nat.* *mp*

Hn. *ppp* *nat. (mute)* *mp*

Tbn. *ppp* *nat. (mute)* *mp*

Hel. *p* *mf* *mf* *sfz* *ppp* *mp*

Bal - dr does-n't love me. Bal-dr ne-ver loved me.

Y Nauseous - Colla voce

Vin. *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

Vla. *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

Vc. *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

Cb. *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

233

Cl. 1. *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

B. Cl. *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

Hn. *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

Tbn. *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

Hel. *mp* *sobbing* *pp* *espr* *mf* *molto espr.* *pp* *f*

I am for - go - tten. I was ne - ver re - mem - bered. Sul D con vibr. nat.

Vin. *mf* *p* *f* *p* con vibr. nat.

Vla. *mf* *p* *f* *p* con vibr. nat.

Vc. *mf* *p* *f* *p* con vibr. nat.

Cb. *mf* *p* *f* *p* con vibr. nat.

Telling the story this way, with much of it told as memory seen through Hel's shifting perspective — moving between past, present, place, and her fluctuating emotions — freed me creatively to explore a range of musical styles and moods. From the dry staccato rhythms of scenes 1 and 2, to the romantic eroticism of her fantasy in scene 5, the music embraces the full emotional spectrum of Hel's story. Kasper's suggestions provoked us to explore alternative narratives, and this gave us the freedom to build on the original text in musically and dramatically engaging ways.

4. Finding a common language

Cross-disciplinary collaboration can be challenging since a shared language is required to communicate ideas. Here, Helen Storey discusses this issue when working with her scientist sister on a project:

We had to create a new language for the audience, but we also keep on creating a unique new language to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration, since no one party carries the other world's language fully. For example, when I was working with my sister Kate she had no idea how exhausting it was going to be to explain all the things that she took for granted to somebody who knows nothing about science, which was me at the time. We ended up developing a middle language somewhere between the different disciplines.³⁴

Unlike the libretto — which can be universally understood — musical ideas are difficult to communicate through words. The piano reduction of the score proved an inadequate medium through which to portray the full range of the music. Exacerbating these difficulties was the fact neither Francesca nor director Tim Sheader, could read music fluently. As such, many questions arose around the score. For example, Tim questioned the dramatic intentions and pacing of the third interlude, 'Ragnarok':

³⁴ Storey and Joubert, 'The Emotional Dance of Creative Collaboration', in *Collaborative Creativity*, 45.

Email correspondence: Jan/03/2019

TS: Page 176, bars 176-80, what does this signify?

GH: It doesn't signify anything, it's just more of that music from the page before.

TS: Was just wondering what the dramatic intention was as it's a pause in the narrative that needs staging and I couldn't figure out what to do.

There was a dramatic problem to solve compounded by the shortcomings of the piano reduction in representing my musical intentions and a lack to text to provide clues. The conversation continued:

Email correspondence: Jan/04/2019

TS: Currently (in my thinking at least) she says I'm going to hibernate with hate until the end of the world and then at figure 44 I was crashing into the end of the world. This isn't satisfying; to say it and then it just happens. SO I'm suggesting 44 into 45 is Hel's rage and trauma and we have a little time with her hibernating BEFORE it all kicks off ... So we see the desperate teenager and then she stomps to her corner and falls into her gloom sleep during 45. The walls fissure and by 46 we see the snake and wolf appearing out of cracks/slashes and crumbling walls Her actions DO bring on Ragnarok. I don't quite know what alterations that asks of the music yet - possibly none. But does that sound like a shape?

GH: Perhaps those stage directions are a little misleading. There's only so much one can do with a band of 10, so this interlude was never going to be literally Ragnarok - if I had a full orchestra, fine, but I had to be more inventive with the line-up we have. Really this interlude is the preamble - the Wolf and Snake escaping; the gods readying themselves for battle; the dead leaving Niflheim etc. It's the march to battle in a way. And that final bit, where the organ lets rip and the horns blast their fanfares, THAT is the start of the battle. But either way I don't think it's useful to think of this quite so literally, it's more emotion/anger/violence/driving towards something inevitable and destructive as opposed to the 'literal' battle of Ragnarok.

TS: Resources were dictating the staging too. I'm just keen to stage something fun before we enter the final aria ... But we are getting to same page here I think.

Questions about my dramatic intentions forced me to find better ways of communicating my musical ideas and, over the course of the project, we found ways to communicate which were mutually comprehensible. For example, I made MIDI audio files, avoided musical jargon when discussing the work, and used the expertise of conductors and producers to aid discussions.

But it became apparent questions around the music often indicated deeper structural issues needed addressing. That is to say, in the act of finding a common language, musical and dramatic problems were discovered. As a result of the conversation above the tempo was increased, bars were cut, and bolder orchestrational choices were made, and this made the scene dramatically more effective.

Inter-disciplinary collaboration challenges artists to articulate ideas clearly. But the process of developing a shared language gives a deeper understanding of each other's practices and, therefore, the work itself.

5. Creative input from others: questions of ownership

In the acknowledgments of her novel, *The Testaments*, Margaret Atwood recognises that:

Every published book is a group effort, so many thanks are due to the wild posse of editors and first readers on both sides of the Atlantic who have helped with this thought experiment in countless ways, from *I love that!* to *You can't get away with this!* to *I don't understand, tell me more.*³⁵

Likewise, the creation of an opera is a 'group effort'. It could be assumed creative roles are neatly defined — the composer writes the music, the librettist writes the text etc. In reality however, interdisciplinary

³⁵ Atwood, Margaret, *The Testaments* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), 418.

collaborations are complex. Many creatives were involved in the production of *The Monstrous Child*, influencing the work in numerous ways. For example, I asked John Fulljames (associate director of opera, ROH) about the possibility of finding coloratura sopranos and bel canto tenors:

Email correspondence: Feb/14/2017

GH: Oh and also, I was thinking about the voices. How likely is it to find a soprano that will be happy to belt out a top E or F? ... Two of the tenor voices are rather high and agile at times also (something like those Rossini tenors).

To which John proffered some sage advice:

Email correspondence: Feb/15/2017

JF: Nothing's impossible — but it narrows the field, and very extreme writing also reduces the potential for repeat performances. I think it would be good to get you to try material out on real voices so you can get a sense of stamina issues and of text audibility issues.

This guidance challenged me to re-evaluate my original ideas and, in effect, changed the intrinsic quality of the vocal writing. Some parts remained virtuosic — such as Angrboda's birth aria (see Fig. 63) — but others were rethought. The rapid runs and flourishes in the tenor 1 part (Loki) were reduced; Soprano 2 (Nanna), which I had originally conceived as coloratura soprano — in the style of the nightingale in Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* (1914) — was simplified. These practical conversations had a direct impact on the musical material, constructively tempering my creative decisions, and challenging me to find workable alternatives.

However, numerous others contributed to the project: Paul Wills (designer), Jessica Cottis (conductor), Mark Austin (assistant conductor), Sarah Crabtree (Producer) as well as friends, colleagues, and musicians

who asked questions, posed provocations, and advised on the opera, shaping it in myriad ways — this begs the question of creative ownership.

Director of the Creative Collaboration Research Group at the University of Queensland, Margaret S. Barrett, discusses this:

Even in contexts where creative practices seemingly arise from the efforts of one individual, for example, the composer working alone in his studio, consideration of such factors as the constraints provided by the commissioning body, the traditions of the genre within which the composer works, knowledge of the individual characteristics of the performers who will premiere the work, and, the nature and location of the premiere performance illustrate the ways in which individual creative thought and practice are shaped by social and cultural factors beyond the individual.³⁶

Most of the works in my musical oeuvre were written in isolation with little input from external voices. But *The Monstrous Child* benefited from a team of collaborators. Since theatre brings together multiple creative disciplines, this is not unusual. But I was surprised at the extent to which others would help to shape the development of the work, both directly (e.g., singer Marta Fontanals-Simmons or conductor Jessica Cottis who gave musical and technical advice) and indirectly (friends and colleagues acting as sounding-boards or offering their opinions throughout the process).

I believe contemporary opera is first and foremost a form of theatre, albeit one where music is central; and theatre is an intrinsically collaborative art form. Unlike other works in this portfolio, which exist as musical pieces in their own right, *The Monstrous Child* cannot be fully appreciated without considering the theatrical elements. Though I claim ownership over the music, the success of the opera is a result of its combined disciplines. The suggestions, questions, and provocations from creatives who worked on,

³⁶ Barrett, Margaret S., *Collaborative Creative Thought and Practice in Music*, 18.

and were invested in the project, profoundly influenced my musical choices in ways that are difficult to quantify.

Conclusion

John-Steiner says, the ‘trust between collaborators often contributes to the heightened self-confidence needed to overcome the weight of artistic traditions.’³⁷ In addition, ‘partnerships can support a person’s willingness to take risks in creative endeavors, a process considered critical by many researchers of creativity.’³⁸

Mutual trust was key to the success of our collaboration — trust in each other’s skills (as composer, writer, director, designer etc.) and trust in each other’s creative decisions. Equally, this was a collaboration of firsts: the first time Francesca had written a libretto, the first time Tim had worked on a brand-new opera, the first time I had written for voices, the first time ROH had commissioned any of us; so an amount of risk was inevitable. The sharing of risk — opening ourselves to new ways of creative thinking — allowed us to create something genuinely new together, whilst broadening our individual creative practices, as John-Steiner suggests:

Transformative contributions are born from sharing risks and challenging, appropriating, and deepening each partner’s contribution. Individuals in successful partnerships reach beyond their habitual ways of learning, working, and creating. In transforming what they know, they construct creative syntheses.³⁹

The creative team were treated as equals, open to critique and challenge and so the process remained malleable, organic, and respectful

³⁷ John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

throughout. Equality of creative roles and a need to be creatively vulnerable is, as Helen Storey states, essential to a successful collaboration:

The important thing I find about collaboration is the necessity to be mutually vulnerable and there can be no high arguments of who is more important than the other. Whether you are the instigator of the project or not, there has to be a levelling of personality that goes on. There has to be an authentic acceptance of this fact, because you both decide to be equal in it. Then you have to take each other to the edge of what you individually thought you were capable of.⁴⁰

Working collaboratively encouraged me to think of creativity, not as a solitary pursuit, but a communal process that benefits from the expertise of others. Tim's experience as director informed my approach to musical drama and pacing; Francesca's skill with story writing informed my thinking around dramatic narrative, text setting, and structure. As experts in our prospective fields, the vulnerability in *not knowing*, yet wanting to learn from others — embracing the differing perspectives inter-disciplinary collaboration affords, incorporating those ideas into our own working methods — can elucidate and inform one's own creative practice. Working in some amount of isolation is desired, if not needed, for composition, but isolationism is something I am keen to avoid.

Over the course of this portfolio I have moved increasingly towards a more collaborative way of working. From composing in total isolation on *Gursky Landscapes*, engaging with a single performer or choreographer on *The Book of Miracles* and *Dark Arteries*, to collaborating with a team of creatives on *The Monstrous Child*, this move away from isolationist creativity has benefited my process. As such collaboration is now a desired and necessary part of my creative practice.

⁴⁰ Storey and Joubert, 'The Emotional Dance of Creative Collaboration', in *Collaborative Creativity*, 47.

Conclusion

In this commentary I have explored the relationship between: i.) the composer, performer, and audience; and ii.) composer and collaborator. I have examined how tonality, melody, and orchestration are used in my music to communicate abstract musical ideas, and how collaborative projects and extra-musical influences inform and enhance my own creative practice

In a letter to the artist Wassily Kandinsky, Schoenberg wrote, 'One must express *oneself!* Express oneself *directly!* Not one's taste, or one's upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge, or skill. Not all these *acquired* characteristics, but that which is *inborn, instinctive.*'¹ Whilst I agree composers should strive for originality in their art and follow their instincts, experience and musical influences inevitably shape a composer's musical voice. Moreover, all art exists and is understood within the context of that which surrounds it, as Adam Ockelford states:

Works do not exist in isolation, but borrow ideas from hundreds, even thousands of other pieces, through indirect and sometimes direct imitation. So compositions only exist and fully make sense as part of something bigger: a *set* of stylistically congeneric works.²

Musical experience and culture have impacted my own work. My early musical influences — music from the brass band tradition, or the work of contemporary British and American composers — have not only informed my compositional language but are now part of my musical identity. Drawing on those influences I have re-imagined tonality and melody in ways that are both accessible and distinctly unique.

¹ Schoenberg, Arnold, *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures and Documents*, ed. Jelena Hahl-Koch, trans. John C. Crawford (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 23.

² Ockelford, *Comparing Notes*, 295.

My research opens a discussion around the idea that *all* creativity is original, even when deliberately and purposefully drawing on music which precedes it. I have discovered that the influence and incorporation of specific strands of music within my own work have shaped my compositional voice in unexpected and original ways. My approach to tonality and melody is not so much about postmodern eclecticism, but rather a re-imagining of them as a means of directly connecting with my audience. In this context my approach to, and exploration of, tonality and melody, refracting them through my own unique perspective, gives me new insights into its continued application within contemporary music.

The proliferation of tonality and melody in the music of living composers (such as Mark Simpson, Dobrinka Tabakova, Thomas Adès, John Adams, and Mark Anthony Turnage) proves their usefulness as expressive tools. By embracing the ubiquitous nature of these elements in my own work, I aim to engage the audience in a meaningful dialogue that considers and embraces our shared collective musical experiences.

Orchestration serves as a powerful communicative tool. It is the means through which musical ideas are most immediately and deliberately presented, and the quickest way for the listener to access the deeper musical elements in my work. Furthermore, orchestration is personal; it is the instinctual representation of my musical voice. Samuel Adler understood the personal nature of orchestration when he said:

The art of orchestration is of necessity a highly personal one. The orchestral sound of Wagner, for instance, is vastly different from that of Brahms, even though these two composers lived at the same time. In this regard, orchestration is similar to harmony, melody, or any other parameter of music. It is, therefore, imperative that one acquire the basic skills of the art in order to make it personal at a later time.³

³ Adler, Samuel, *The Study of Orchestration: Third Edition* (W.N. Norton & Company: USA, 2002), 3.

In depth discussions around the ‘highly personal’ art of orchestration from the composer’s point of view are lacking from academic research. Gardner Read states, there is ‘an unconscionable dearth of analysis’⁴ of creative orchestration and so, discussions around my personal approach to orchestration as a means of musical expressions are necessary and timely. This discussion provides unique insight and commentary into the art of orchestration, and thus contributes to this field of research.

In this thesis I have explored new approaches to orchestration that build and expand on existing ideas of symphonic writing. In my works for brass band I push at the limits of sonic possibilities. On my early work, *Destroy, Trample, as Swiftly as She* (2011), Christopher Thomas commented, ‘not since hearing John McCabe’s *Cloudcatcher Fells* for the first time has this writer been so excited about the textural possibilities of the brass band — a door to a new vista has surely been opened’⁵, and in *A Dark Arteries Suite* I continue to push the medium into new sonic territories. In *The Book of Miracles*, the use of the historically neglected trombone as a soloist is unusual in a concerto context. This work explores the full expressive and virtuosic range of both trombone and orchestra, and how the orchestra, through textural and timbral invention, interacts and responds to the soloist. A such *The Book of Miracles* is a substantial and significant addition to both the trombone concerto and orchestral repertoire.

Inspiration plays an integral role in my creative practice. Extramusical inspiration not only provides the initial stimulus for my music, but also influences fundamental aspects of the work, defining the structure, instrumentation, and harmonic and melodic material. The use of the brass band in *Dark Arteries* for example, and the harmonic, melodic, and

⁴ Read, *Style and Orchestration*, 2.

⁵ Thomas, Christopher, *Brass Band World*, No. 211 (2012), 23.

structural choices in the work are the direct consequence of the subject matter itself: the British mining industry and the music intrinsically bound up with it. But fundamentally, the use of extramusical stimuli provides me with another way of connecting with the audience, by drawing on familiar or shared experience and exploring the dramatic narratives at the core of my work. For many composers, inspiration plays a key part in the creation of their work, but it is a topic infrequently discussed in substantial or analytical detail. As such, discussions around its role in my work, and the way inspiration can tangibly effect and shape my music, meaningfully adds to this field of research.

Collaboration is an important part of my creative process and, as such, working with cross-disciplinary artists profoundly informs and enhances my own practice. In *The Monstrous Child*, the intimate collaboration between the creative team — composer, librettist, director, and designer — and the input of other creative practitioners shaped and transformed the work in unexpected ways. By trusting each other's creative expertise and knowledge, and understanding we were each serving the work and not our individual creative needs, we were able to elevate the opera beyond what was achievable alone. This sense of shared ownership and desire to learn from each other's processes was key to the success of the project.

My research into the collaborative process examines the intersection between creative ownership, shared vision, and individual artistic desires. It is an illuminating exploration of how to engender productive collaborative relationships through effective communication and mutual support, discussed from the creative's viewpoint. By showing how *The Monstrous Child* was developed and shaped through personal correspondence, and how collaboration impacted the fabric of the music itself, this debate expands on and adds to academic literature in the field of collaboration.

Despite often working alone, composition for me is a collaborative process between myself, the performer or interdisciplinary artist, and the audience. I feel my job as a composer is less about myself, the individual creator, but rather the role I play in that collaborative relationship. On receiving the first Aspen award, Benjamin Britten said he found,

nothing wrong with offering to my fellow-men music which may inspire them or comfort them, which may touch them or entertain them, even educate them — directly and with intention. On the contrary, it is the composer's duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings.⁶

The instinctive and intuitive nature of my compositional process comes from this same desire to connect with those performing and listening to my music. It is ultimately questions around, and an interest in, this collaborative approach to music — between the composer, musician, and audience — that drives my creative practice.

⁶ Britten, Benjamin, 'On Receiving the First Aspen Award', *Aspen Music Festival* <<http://aspenmusicfestival.com>>.

Appendix 1. Dark Arteries, Part 1., Under the Ground, we Scream, bars 20-61.

4

20

Sop. Cor. *cup mute*
pp *p dolce*

Solo Cor. *cup mutes*
pp *p dolce*

Rep. Cor. *cup mutes*
pp *p dolce*

2nd Cor. *cup mutes*
pp *p dolce*

3rd Cor. *cup mutes*
pp < p dolce

Flug. *soli with trbs. (non vibr.)*
mp nobilmente

Solo Hn. *mf* *f* *p*

1st Hn. *p* *ppp*

2nd Hn. *p* *ppp*

1st Bar. *f* *p* *ppp*

2nd Bar. *f* *p* *ppp*

1st Tbn. *soli*
mf < f nobilmente, distant *mp* *mp sim.*

2nd Tbn. *open*
mf < f nobilmente, distant *mp* *mp sim.*

B. Tbn. *open*
mf < f nobilmente, distant *mp* *mp sim.*

Euph. *cresc poco a poco*
f *pp*

Ei Bass *cresc poco a poco*
f *pp*

B. Bass *cresc poco a poco*
pp

Perc. 2 *mp*

Perc. 4 *susp cyms*
pp *p*

B

Musical score for orchestra and choir, measures 27-30. The score includes parts for Soprano, Solo, and Repeat Choir; Flute; Horns (Solo, 1st, 2nd); Baritone; Trumpets (1st, 2nd, Bass); Euphonium; Basses (E♭, B♭); Percussion (1-4); and Trombones (1st, 2nd, Bass). The score features various dynamics such as *mf*, *dim.*, *p*, *f*, *ppp*, and *mp*, along with performance instructions like *f espr.* and *(sim. no vibr.)*. The music is written in 4/4 time and includes triplets and slurs.

D

♩ = 54 - 58 poco rubato

7

38

Sop. Cor. *mp* *p dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp*

Solo Cor. *mp* *p* *p dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp*

Rep. Cor. *mp* *p* *dolce espr.* *mp > pp* *p* *mp*

2nd Cor. *dim.* *pp*

3rd Cor. *dim.* *pp*

Flüg. *ppp* *solo* *p dolce espr.*

Solo Hn. *ppp*

1st Hn. *ppp*

2nd Hn. *ppp*

1st Bar. *ppp*

2nd Bar. *ppp*

1st Tbn. *ppp*

2nd Tbn. *ppp*

B. Tbn. *ppp*

Euph. *pp*

E♭ Bass *ppp*

B♭ Bass

Perc. 1 *mf* *mp*

Perc. 2 *pp*

Perc. 3 Tubular bells *mp*

Perc. 4 *susp cyms* *p*

43

Sop. Cor. *pp* *p* *mp > pp* *p*

Solo Cor. *pp* *p* *mp > pp* *p*

Rep. Cor. *pp* *p* *mp > pp* *p*

2nd Cor. -

3rd Cor. -

Flug. *p sim.* *p*

Solo Hn. -

1st Hn. -

2nd Hn. -

1st Bar. -

2nd Bar. -

1st Tbn. -

2nd Tbn. -

B. Tbn. -

Euph. -

E♭ Bass -

B♭ Bass -

Perc. 1 -

Perc. 2 -

Perc. 3 *mp* *mp*

Perc. 4 -

49 **E** **A tempo**

Sop. Cor. *mp* *pp* *pp* *open* *mp > pp* *mp*

Solo Cor. *mp* *pp* *pp* *open* *mp > pp* *mp*

Rep. Cor. *mp* *pp* *pp* *open* *mp > pp* *mp*

2nd Cor. *pp* *cup mutes*

3rd Cor. *pp* *cup mutes*

Flug. *mp espr.* (solo)

Solo Hn.

1st Hn.

2nd Hn.

1st Bar. *p espr.* *mp* *pp* *p espr.*

2nd Bar. *p espr. < mp* *pp*

1st Tbn. *pp* *cup mute*

2nd Tbn. *pp* *cup mute*

B. Tbn.

Euph. *p espr.* *mp* *pp* *p espr.*

Ei. Bass *p espr.* *mp* *pp* *p espr.*

Bi. Bass

Perc. 1

Perc. 2 *large susp cym.* *mp* *medium susp cym.* *mp*

Perc. 3 *shared* *mp*

Perc. 4 *Tubular bells* *mp*

55

Sop. Cor. *pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Solo Cor. *pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Rep. Cor. *pp* *pp*

2nd Cor. *p* *mp* *pp*
1o. open *pp*
2o. open *pp*
open

3rd Cor. *pp*

Flug. *mp molto espr.* *cresc.* *f molto espr.* **Ten.**

1st Hn.

2nd Hn.

1st Bar. *p* *mp > pp*

2nd Bar.

1st Tbn. open *p*

2nd Tbn. open *p*

B. Tbn.

Euph. *p* *mp > pp*

E♭ Bass *p* *mp > pp*

B♭ Bass

Perc. 1

Perc. 2 large susp cym. *mp*

Perc. 3 *mp*

Perc. 4 *mp*

Appendix 2. Scores and recordings in portfolio

Gursky Landscapes (2017-2018)

For string quintet – Performed by the Piatti Quartet and David Cohen: 24 mins.

The Book of Miracles: Trombone Concerto (2019)

For trombone and orchestra – Performed by Helen Vollam, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alexander Vedernikov: 30 mins

A Dark Arteries Suite (2017)

For brass band – Performed by the Tredegar Town Band, conducted by Ian Porthouse: 18 mins

*Dark Arteries** (2015)

For brass band – Performed by the Tredegar Town Band, conducted by Ian Porthouse: 33 mins.

*The Monstrous Child*** (2015-2019)

Opera for ensemble and 8 singers – performed by the Aurora Orchestra, conducted by Jessica Cottis. The role of Hel was sung by Marta Fontanals-Simmons: 100 mins.

*Recording only

** Score only

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