Form and freedom: the marriage of musical systems and intuition.

A commentary with accompanying compositions submitted to the faculty of the School of Arts, Brunel University in fulfillment of requirements for the degree of PhD in music composition research

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At several points in this commentary, I have referred to the music and theoretical writings of the late James Tenney, with whom I studied for several years in Toronto and whose ideas seem to grow more important to me the longer I work as a composer. That my own music so little resembles Tenney's in most respects speaks of the broad relevance, potency and applicability of his ideas.

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Abstract

This thesis includes an Introduction, which explains some of the ideas and procedures involved in a series of compositions I produced during the period from October, 2008 through November, 2011, a discussion of the works themselves individually and in roughly the same chronological order in which they were composed, and a summary of Conclusions which may be drawn. Included as an Appendix are texts for reference while listening to the vocal works. Complete scores of the works with representative recordings make up the main body of the thesis, except in the case of the solo piano suite *Equilibria*, where the score is included but the work remained unrecorded at the time of submission. Ideas discussed include some which unite or distinguish the processes of musical improvisation with/from more methodical modes of composition. Also the theme of musical collaboration is considered in contrast to the notion of the composer who works – or appears to work – in isolation. Research into traditions of music is regarded as important to compositional practice overall. Among the Conclusions is that my own orientation to these ideas places me in the category of post-minimalist composers. Throughout this discussion I have involved commentary from other relevant and important thinkers, critics and composers.

Introduction

This commentary will explain some of the ideas and procedures involved in a series of compositions I produced during the period from October, 2008 through November, 2011. I will emphasize those ideas that are persistent throughout the works, though the compositions themselves are quite different from each other. Primarily, the music and this commentary constitute an inquiry into some special characteristics of the process of formal composition as practiced by an experienced improviser, where the object has been first to create a secure framework in which a freer, more "improvisational" mode of composition can then take place. This approach affirms that a cohesive clarity of form and a sense of spontaneity are both desirable qualities in a piece of music. Most of the works discussed below share this approach, but applied and achieved in various ways.

With the aim of establishing a context for this work within the landscape of contemporary music, the commentary includes a short discussion of post-minimalism in music. In the works discussed, certain strict compositional methods are shown to be derived from minimalism, whereas other features of the music fall clearly outside, or "post-", minimalistic influence. A clarification of various senses of the term improvisation and ideas around the relationship(s) between improvisation and formal composition also make up part of the discussion. Finally, in assessing my own artistic practice, the great degree to which the work was collaborative struck me as significant. Accordingly, I will discuss various types, levels and degrees of musical collaboration, from music that is entirely improvised by groups of two or more musicians and is therefore collaborative in its essence, through to music that appears to be entirely the work of a sole composer but which I consider collaborative on a certain level.

The consideration and comparison of improvisation and formal composition offer one way of unifying a field of musical practice across the immense and bewildering diversity of styles, traditions and genres that characterizes contemporary musical life. This is clear, for example, in Derek Bailey's book *Improvisation: its nature and practice in music*

(1992) where the author examines the practice of improvisation in each of: European classical organ-playing and the Baroque *continuo*, flamenco, Indian classical music, rock and roll, contemporary composition, jazz and free improvisation in the book's several chapters. Bailey's book, inclusive as it as is of so many styles and traditions, deals with improvisation understood as music performance without benefit of a notated score or parts and which relies primarily on performers rather than composers.

In a section on improvisation and composition, Bailey comments on the relationship between the two from the improviser's point of view:

> The debate about how composition can best utilize improvisation, while of interest to the composers concerned, is of only peripheral interest, not to say irrelevant, to some players. (Bailey 1997: 79)

One way in which composition can utilize improvisation is via research, by examining the practice of music improvisation to determine ways in which it might inform or nourish composition. The view put forward in this commentary is that definitions of "composition" and "improvisation" are in fact porous and their practice can be seen to overlap in most cases.

As Derek Bailey points out, improvisation in some form – basso continuo, ornamentation or cadenzas, for example – was a constant characteristic of European classical music until 1800, and even Richard Wagner embraced improvisation, conceptually at least, so long as it was only the composer himself who did the improvising:

> As Wagner puts it in The Destiny of Opera, the 'most perfect form of art' would be a "mimetic-musical improvisation of consummate poetic value fixed by the finest artistic judgement". (Peters 2009: 91)

Certain developments in 20th century music such as, for example, serialism applied to virtually all musical parameters, have required an even greater "fixity" or prescriptive specificity in the composed score than has ever been the case in all of music's history

until now. Concurrent with the trajectory of serialism in European-American "serious music", was the rise of jazz as the most potent locus of improvisation in music and the American art form *par excellence*. By the end of the 20ᵗʰ century, therefore, the debate, dialogue or relationship between composition and improvisation remained very polarized despite the efforts of some musicians and theorists.

Although improvisation will be an important reference point in this discussion, almost no actual improvisation is involved in the performance of the works to be discussed (with certain exceptions). Rather, a focus of the discussion will be on relative degrees of pre-planning and schematization of form versus a quasi-improvisatory, intuitive or spontaneous mode of note-to-note composition in each project. Accordingly, I will use the term improvisation here in a special sense referring to the way a composer can be said to be improvising if and as they compose without having prepared the note-to-note method of a work's composition. Where such preparation has taken place, I will describe it in detail as an opposite and complementary sort of activity to improvisation. In seeking to align compositional and improvisational principles and practices, I have often looked especially for ways in which preparation can facilitate an improvisatory mode of note-to-note composition later in the process, and the compositions presented here feature various solutions to this particular problem.

If we disregard what particular tool is in a musician's hands at a given moment – whether it's a pencil, computer, baton, violin or saxophone – the most significant distinction between composition and improvisation has to do with time: composition is a longer, more considered process, while improvisation is held to be instantaneous. The composer, as they write, is often looking back at past ideas in the music or forward at some idea planned for the future, while the improviser must stay as much as possible "in the moment". Here again, a beneficial view of music-making might include both orientations, so that we can imagine an instantaneous mode of composition on one hand, and a considered, even well prepared mode of improvisation on the other. Although he was often dismissive or derisory in his comments about improvisation *per se*, Morton

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Feldman's example is apposite: He emphasized that the activity of composition must always strive for alert listening, for being present in the moment. He often compared the composer's working state of mind to that not of an improvising musician but of a tennis player, who must always be supremely alert to their opponent's movements (Feldman 1985: 173). In this way, the game "develops" independently of either player's preparation or intentions or, rather, the best preparation the composer can undertake, like the improviser or the tennis player, is to train their powers of concentration, perceptive skills and quick responses. This is not unlike the practice of the "action painters" Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, whose work and ideas Feldman embraced, but it is also similar to that of jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker, whose work he did not.

I will be concentrating in this discussion on the composer's practice and point of view – especially on the degree to which improvisation bears on composition at various levels – but an important implication of the various relationships I will describe between composition and improvisation is that, even in the "freest" improvisatory situations, the improviser applies principles and strategies that can properly be called compositional. In other words, even where no formal planning has taken place, the improvising musician might bring to their activity an internalized and more or less conscious set of organizing skills and tendencies that ensures the coherence of the music on some or all levels. There are, in this sense, both improvisatory and compositional aspects in various degrees and relations to be found in all music.

In the works discussed here and in all my work to this point, I have tended to consider improvisational and compositional aspects both separately and together in order to gain a rounded view of what I'm doing and to gain the benefit of both orientations, bringing them as much as possible into a coordinated, fruitful correlation.

Gavin Bryars is a notable example of a composer with a deep background in improvisation. His music was in my mind especially during the composition of these works (*The Life of Things* and *Asleep In a Field)* for the Latvian Radio Choir – a group

with whom Bryars has himself collaborated. After working very intensively in an improvising collective that included the percussionist Tony Oxley and guitarist Derek Bailey for some years, Bryars chose very decisively in the mid 1960's to end his involvement with improvisation and concentrate exclusively on fixed composition. For Bryars, the two orientations, that of the improviser and of the composer, were incompatible, as he explained in an interview with Derek Bailey:

> "One of the reasons I am against improvisation now is that in any improvising position the person creating the music is identified with the music. The two things are seen to be synonymous... And because of that the music, in improvisation, doesn't stand alone. It's corporeal. My position, through the study of Zen and Cage, is to stand apart from one's creation. Distancing yourself from what you are doing. Now that becomes impossible in improvisation. If I write a piece I don't even have to be there when it is played. They are conceptions. I'm more interested in conception than reality. Because I can conceive of things that don't have any tangible reality. But if I'm playing them, if I'm there at the same time, then that's real. It's not a conception." (Bailey 1993: 115)

In my own compositional practice, I am quite aware of the "distanced" attitude Bryars describes. The early phases of a composition require precisely the setting aside of personal, expressive "content" in order to focus on the conceptual, formal aspects of the music. At a later point, when the structural underpinnings of the works are well established, expressive content takes its part in the process. It is worth noting that any short sample of Bryars' music will be immediately recognizable as his, so there must be a sense in which the distance between the composer and his "conceptions" has closed after all. The same may be said of the music of John Cage himself. There is, apparently, a degree of conflation of the person creating the music with the music itself even in Bryars' and Cage's case. Nonetheless, the "distancing" serves to avoid the intrusion of unwanted or extraneous elements into the music, the musical habits or mannerisms of an individual composer which can work against the conceptual integrity of the music.

Closely related to improvisation, the idea of collaboration is one that runs throughout the works to be discussed. I will explain how the collaborative aspect of improvisation has

affected my compositional practice, considering degrees and types of collaboration and their specific importance to each work. The various collaborative relationships discussed below include: composer/co-composer(s), composer/performer, composer/text author, composer/performer/producer/audience, and internalized, "virtual" versions of these relationships that the composer has held in mind as guidelines during the creative process.

These ideas about musical collaboration – both real and virtual – relate to the frequent question of for whom we compose, famously answered by Milton Babbitt in his essay *Who cares if you listen?* (1958). For Babbitt, avant-garde music is composed in the name of and for the benefit of the advancement or progress of music itself, and any consideration of the audience, performers or even fellow composers must be set aside. His essay was a plea for an academic, institutional refuge for practitioners of advanced, specialized music in the face of public indifference or opprobrium. My own stance is that, to some extent, the composer/improviser internalizes an audience – albeit sometimes an ideally informed and sympathetic one – in order to be able to "hear" or imagine their music with some degree of objectivity as they compose. Here, the distinction between myself (the composer) and them (the audience) is redundant. Even as I sit alone in my room composing, I know that the entire process will eventually involve many other people, perhaps has already involved them, and this knowledge is essential to my practice as a musician. For me, composition is collaborative by its nature. Other creative intelligences besides my own are always contributing to the process. This situation, I believe, no less accurately describes that of Milton Babbitt in his institute of advanced musical research.

But the issue of collaboration in music becomes quite complex. I would like to comment here on another point of distinction – a socio-political one – between musical processes which involve a composer or composers as such and those that do not. The basic question here is: Does the composer occupy a position of power? In situations where roles such as composer, performer, conductor or soloist are filled by separate individuals,

commentators have noted a division of labour analogous to that in industrial/post-industrial society at large, with its attendant hierarchies and injustices. One of the most frequently cited authors in this connection is Elias Canetti, whose influential book *Crowds and Power* includes a lengthy analysis of the power structure inherent in the symphony orchestra, wherein the conductor appears as a sort of authoritarian overlord (Canetti 1962: 394-6).

Regardless of one's view of this matter, I'd like to point out that truly collaborative arrangements are indeed possible that include composers, performers (including conductors), and finally also organizers and audience, in ways that are not necessarily hierarchical at all but that merely bring people with various skills and degrees of interest together, working toward a shared goal. Such, in any case, is my admittedly somewhat utopian view. Although such relationships as conductor-orchestra have doubtless had a distinctly "vertical" quality throughout the past two centuries, it may be more useful – especially in the development of new music – to deëmphasize the authoritarian/heroic aspect of the conductor's role in favour of its aspect as coordinator-interpreter: The conductor coordinates the musical efforts of musicians in articulating their collective (the orchestra's and the conductor's) interpretation of a composer's work. Contrasting varieties of the division of labour are described by Eugene Holland in commentary on Gilles Deleuze, *Studies in Applied Nomadology*:

> The technical division of labour arises from the level of complexity of tasks, skills and knowledges involved in a given process of production; but it does not in itself entail any hierarchy of status or power among specialists participating the process. The social division of labour, by contrast, involves distinctions of prestige or power that have nothing intrinsically to do with the skills exercised or level of participation in the process. (Holland 2004: 24)

The "technical" versus "social" types respectively can clearly be seen operating in jazz and other styles of improvised music on one hand versus the traditional model for the performance of 19th century symphonic music on the other. In my view, most substantially sophisticated music requires the coordinated effort of individuals with

different strengths and abilities. The technical division of labour is necessary and appropriate. An improviser recognizes that they contribute to the music-making process as one of many participants. An improvisation-orientated composer retains this attitude. As the composer respects and recognizes the roles of other "specialists", the composer's role itself has become less specialized and more inclusive of a broad range of "tasks, skills and knowledges."

If conductors have occupied positions of conspicuous authority in the world of music, then so also have composers. Lydia Goehr, in her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (2007), presents the view that music history for the past 200 years has been dominated by a canon of masterworks – a dominance that more recently has begun to erode/evolve into a more inclusive, holistic model taking into account the broader, more complex cultural and socio-historical fabric in which those "masterworks" arose. Along with this change in thinking, the definition of a composer and the composer's role in the musical process and in society has changed, becoming more broadly defined. Invaluable to the 21st century composer's skill set, for example, are the strength of mind to pursue an individual line of musical inquiry as well as the willingness and ability to welcome others into the process, and the recognition that their musical aims will require constant revision and refreshment throughout their productive life. In other words, while "practice-led research" has become an important principle in the arts and humanities, the arts themselves have also, and in a very important way, become "research-led practice". The book *The Apollonian Clockwork* by Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger contains a chapter called "Purcell, Pergolesi and the others" which praises certain composers in the history of European music for their approach to composition and their philosophy of music: Along with innate talent, technical ability, etc., their familiarity with the style characteristics and techniques of the artists who preceded them enabled them, in turn, to be innovators, to point the way forward, representing the avant-garde of their day (Andriessen, Schönberger 1989: 65-67). In this comparison, the authors are actually describing Igor Stravinsky's approach to musical history and the composer's creative task and, implicitly, also that of Louis Andriessen. They are pointing out the

importance of research to the creative process of the contemporary composer.

In Theodor Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1947), I read a not only a deep animosity to the ephemera of contemporary pop music and to the workings of the music industry, but a reluctance to address musical diversity to the extent that contemporary musical life and cogent criticism require. As argument in favour of Stravinsky and against Adorno's critique of Stravinsky, I have included the reference to Andriessen and Schönberger's work above. (The tendency to welcome into a new work style elements derived from anywhere in the landscape of musical history has been identified as characteristic of post-minimalist attitude, and will be discussed below, but this tendency is already present in Stravinsky throughout his career.) Gary Peters suggests that Adorno's attitude toward improvisation was more complex than often assumed. In his *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (2009), Peters points out that Adorno's main criticisms of improvised music – and we must remind ourselves here that he was responding to mid-20th century jazz – were that it did not deliver on claims that it was a music of individual freedom of expression, that performers were bound by the conventions of jazz style and a restricted and banal sense of form and rhythm (Peters 2009: 75-89). It is clear, looking at the historical development of jazz since the advent of free improvisation, that many musicians in fact agreed with Adorno, and that music developed along lines that seemed to address his critique, i.e. that improvised music sought to free itself from exactly those constrictions Adorno had attacked. I mention Adorno and Peters on the subject of improvisation because their discussions of the dynamics of form and freedom in music speak very directly to my own orientation as a composer.

Concerning research as such, I was reminded frequently as I wrote this commentary of how extensive and various the concerns and implications of even a single piece of music can be. Among the many things one might want to say about music, it has been a challenge to identify and maintain a sufficiently narrow focus. That is why, while references to some large events of cultural and musical history were essential to the discussion, I have only referred to them in the most general way. On the other hand,

where I haven't assumed prior familiarity on the reader's part, some specific ideas have been treated in substantial detail. I have drawn information and references both from several years of accumulated practical experience as a composer and improviser and from active research and creative work undertaken during this project. That my research has been mostly "practice-led" will be clear in frequent references to the real-life situations in which the ideas to be discussed arose, i.e. what kind of music I was writing, how and why, and with whom and in what ways I was collaborating as I wrote it.

In describing my work *Asleep In A Field* below, I will mention how my research has included a revisiting of the principles and central works associated with American musical minimalism. But first I must summarize my own understanding of what constitutes minimalism in music and venture a tentative description of the stylistic *milieu* of my own practice, a variety of post-minimalism.

Minimalist music ensures moment-to-moment continuity by basing compositional methods on *process*. Some process is heard to be operating as the music unfolds, and the clear perception of this process is essential to a listener's understanding and enjoyment. Such processes exist on several musical levels but importantly, on the highest architectonic level, they may define and articulate the form of the music. That is, a piece may be perceived as finished when a process has run its course. Examples of such processes are: repetition combined with slowly evolving variation using polyrhythmic layers and "phasing" techniques as in the case of Steve Reich or featuring additive rhythms as in Philip Glass's music, or subtle reconfigurations of repeated sounds as in the later works of Morton Feldman. Music composed using this approach avoids dramatic gestures or interruptive events, so that the process heard in the music should be *continuous*. The key difference between such music and serial music, stochastic music, or aleatoric music, all of which also involve the use of more-or-less strict processes, is that minimalism's processes are on display, as transparently and simply as possible. They seem to be operating *as we listen* rather than concealed in some earlier stage of the music's construction known only to the composer. Minimalist music is unadorned,

featuring "clean" structural features and quasi-motoric pulsation, and while feelings of ecstasy, exhilaration or awe are often reported by listeners, no personal expressiveness on the part of the composer intrudes on the music's apparent transparency, simplicity and sense of natural unfolding. These, to repeat, are only my own associations with the term "minimalism". For a fuller discussion, I recommend Keith Potter's book *Four Musical Minimalists* (2000).

The term post-minimalism has been applied to many tendencies in music of the past twenty-five years which seek to move beyond minimalism by embracing minimalist ideas while using these ideas alongside non-minimalist elements. The composer and music critic Kyle Gann compiled a short list of tendencies that, for him, characterized works of American post-minimalism:

> "...a number of precedents and typical characteristics for the style I call postminimalism: a reliance on minimalism's steady beat, diatonic tonality, and even formal archetypes, but an inclusiveness bringing together ideas from a daunting array of musical sources. Within its smooth exterior, post-minimalism is a big melting pot in which all the world's musics swim together in unobtrusive harmony." (Gann, 2001)

I am not convinced that diatonicism and a steady beat are necessary in order for a piece of music to be heard as post-minimalist, or even minimalist for that matter, but Gann's point that such music may have an almost global set of musical references and resources is important. Whereas the rejection of all then-contemporary schools of musical style, and a close focus on basic sound materials were defining aspects of minimalism, post-minimalism turns once again outward to the world, as composers draw ideas from any source available to them. (Thanks to the internet, the mp3 audio file format and YouTube, that means almost any music that has ever been recorded, anywhere in the world.) In this respect, Steve Reich's well-known engagement with, for example, African music or the Jewish cantorial tradition, can be seen to have pointed the way.

In my own work, I recognize post-minimalism to the extent that my music embraces minimalist ideas but uses them alongside non-minimalist elements. Especially important to me has been the minimalist notion of a single device which drives an entire work, supporting and guiding its moment-to-moment procedures and defining its overall form. Within this approach, I have found room to explore non-minimalist elements such as a certain degree of dramaturgically inspired gesture, some allowance for personal expressivity – both my own as composer as well as, in some works, that of improviser-participants in performance – and an intuitive freedom in note-to-note composition. Wide listening to music of epochs and cultures other than my own has always been important to me.

Whereas Kyle Gann restricts his discussion of post-minimalist music to its American representatives, Brazilian composer and writer Dimitri Cervo explores the term with special reference to European composers Louis Andriessen, Arvo Pärt, and Gavin Bryars, and to American composer John Adams, whom Kyle Gann declines to mention.

> "Therefore if Post-Minimalism is a valid terminology, it has to be used to refer to a body of works produced by different composers from different countries, starting in the late 70s. The common aesthetical feature of these works is that they depart from Minimalism in some aspects (technical, stylistic, aesthetical, or altogether), but eclectically mix it with other techniques, other stylistic elements, reaching original artistic results, but in which Minimalism is still felt." (Cervo 1999: 5)

He makes a further, useful point about the relationship of Minimalism to European Modernism:

> "The main aesthetical difference between Minimalism and Post-Minimalism is that Minimalism was born as a son of Modernism, with a mode of composition that is radical, systematic, and exclusionist. Minimalist works are born from a kind of systematic mode of composition in which the process is almost an end in itself. Minimalism is also a highly original and "pure" mode of composition, it does not admit mixture with other compositional techniques, and does not borrow features from other compositional styles and aesthetics.
>   Contrarily the Post-Minimalism aesthetic is not exclusionist and expresses itself

through a more inclusive mode of composition, where the mixture of the minimalist elements with elements and techniques from other styles and aesthetics are welcome and employed as legitimate compositional resources within a certain musical discourse." (Cervo 1999: 4)

One figure who comes to mind in many connections here is Kevin Volans, a composer trained in the best traditions of European Modernism (I am thinking here of Volans' time studying and working with Karlheinz Stockhausen), who has also confirmed his own connection with minimalism (especially in the 1994 piano duo *Cicada*), but whose works since 2000 (especially the orchestral works including concertos) share many of the above characteristics of post-minimalism. During a visit Volans made to Toronto in 1989, I heard him give a talk where he described the influence of Morton Feldman's ideas in his own work, especially Feldman's advocacy of an intuitive rather than systematic approach to composition. At the time, I found this a startling and revelatory idea: I had been assuming a great deal more "systematization" in the work of these composers than was in fact the case. Perhaps for me, an improviser, it would not be such a great leap to formal composition after all.

In this Introduction, I have outlined some important concerns I have had had during the composition of the following portfolio of works, which I will now describe one at a time. As regards my main theme of "form and freedom", the issue of how to achieve the aimed-for balance remains. Each work has involved the invention of strategies to "marry" strict form with freely-flowing, intuitive and quasi-improvisatory note-to-note composition. Some strategies are continued and developed from one work to another and some are unique to a specific work. In the descriptions that follow, I have tried to analyze and explain the process in each case.

The Life of Things

This piece was written for the Latvian Radio Choir, a group well known for its highly refined sound and virtuosic technique. One issue, therefore, was: how and how much to exploit the performers' abilities. Although virtuosity as such has not been among my chief interests as a composer, I relied here on a less "showy" sort of virtuosity, the ability of the singers and especially sections of singers to execute unprepared harmonic shifts and "awkward" or "unnatural" voice-leading, while maintaining balance and timbral blend within and between sections of the choir. The issue of voice-leading was particularly important because I had chosen in this piece to employ a very traditional 4-part polyphonic texture in a deliberate engagement with historical (i.e. European Renaissance) varieties of choral writing.

Meanwhile, I had chosen a text by Wordsworth – an excerpt from *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* (1797) that I had long loved and found very evocative. The choice of text was motivated by a long-standing interest in the idea of unity-in-duality, e.g. stasis/motion, which I consider of fundamental musical and philosophical importance. One line from the text, "…we see into the life of things" seemed to embody this idea. The text further evoked a world of ideas and allusions to Romantic transcendence and Natural Science that served as a background as I wrote the music. An additional reason for this choice was that the performing group was the Latvian Radio Choir, and Latvian music and culture in general are very Nature-oriented. In this, I was making a sort of overture to the performers, a seductive ploy. This was an example of one sense in which I employ a special notion of collaboration with performers in the composition process, during which the creative aims and motivations of all parties are brought to bear. A more authentic, face-to-face form of collaboration occurred later in the process, when the conductor and choir had rehearsed a first draft of the piece and I was motivated by their responses and my own to revise the piece considerably (see below).

Finally, there was also a more contemporary motivation to his piece: stasis-in-motion is a

quality I had much enjoyed in the music of many composers of American minimalism. *The Life of Things* was one part of an on-going reacquaintance with music and methods that had been close to me for most of my life, since I first heard Terry Riley's *In C* (1964) around 1980. Further research into this topic involved reading Keith Potter's *Four Musical Minimalists* and Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music*. Even more, I was drawing on ideas gained during earlier studies with James Tenney. In particular I wanted to employ a type of "available-pitch" technique. This approach is well exemplified in Tenney's series of *Forms I-IV* (1993) for large groups of pitch-sustaining instruments, where players are given a set of "available pitches" from which to choose and instructed to play only one that is not already sounding. The pitch sets change according to clock time and a scheme of ranges and dynamics that describes a simple shape or "form" according to Tenney's definition (Tenney 1970: 1-3). In the latter two works mentioned, the available-pitch technique was incorporated into a set of computer algorithms, which then generated the parts given to live performers.

I designed for *The Life of Things* a series of pitch sets ranging from 4 to 9 elements with from 0 to 4 common elements between adjacent sets. The sets were composed intuitively, without reference to any over-all unifying principle such as the harmonic series, and prior to any melodic setting of the text. Each set is sustained for a considerable period (from 20 seconds to about 2 minutes), and the harmonic changes from one set to the next are the primary articulators of form in the piece. These changes I further strengthened with changes in meter, rhythmic density, tempo and dynamics. Since the harmonic shifts vary in terms of numbers of common tones between adjacent sets, the shifts are sometimes quite gentle, sometimes more jarring. For more jarring changes, I relied on the choir to execute the "unprepared" vocal shifts mentioned above.

My approach to prosody in polyphonic texture for voices was first of all to parse the text into a series of sections – divisions which would later correspond with harmonic shifts in the music – and then to construct a "false counterpoint"[1] of four rhythmic layers by recording my own voice in four readings of each section of the text. My readings were

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then transcribed rhythmically and pitches assigned according to the available-pitch approach, so that the current harmonic complement of pitches was always as fully represented as possible. While my "reading" assured the horizontal integrity and comprehensibility of the text, rhythmic relations between voices were largely aleatoric, as I had deliberately not been monitoring accumulating voices as I overdubbed successive readings.

All these aspects of the design of *The Life of Things* were intended to result in the quality of stasis-in-motion that was what the music was basically "about". The same aim was realized by much different means later in my piano piece *Equilibria*. Apart from this fascination with stasis-in-motion, I do not claim much actual similarity in aims or methods with the American minimalists from whom I have nonetheless learned much.

The above process resulted in a complete draft of the piece by December, 2008, which was then set aside until just before the rehearsal period some 16 months later. At that point, as a result of hearing the piece in rehearsal and in consultation with choir director Sigvards Klava, I edited the piece quite severely, reducing its overall duration by about 20% (from 11 to 8 minutes approximately). I adjusted voice-leading (after all) to reduce unevenness. Although the singers could negotiate their intervals with no difficulty, often the deliberately oblique voice-leading had the effect of compromising the quality of harmonic stasis I wanted within each sustained section of the music. Dynamic indications that I had originally written quite generally – applying overall to longer sections of the music, with fairly few *crescendi* or *diminuendi* – were made more frequent and more precise. Finally, I also relaxed the austere continuousness of the 4-part texture by subtly adjusting for occasional homophonic coincidence between the parts, and some *divisi* to deepen the sound of individual sections within the choir. This final phase of the compositional process of *The Life of Things* is a good example of the collaborative aspect of my approach. It was very clear that conductor Sigvards Kļava's experience in choral music and his abilities as an interpreter could contribute to the artistic success of the work, and some of the final revisions were made with his suggestions in mind.

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Asleep In A Field

The next piece, *Asleep In A Field*, was conceived as a companion piece to *The Life of Things*. Also for the Latvian Radio Choir, it was eventually performed on the same programme and treats some of the same ideas in its extra-musical aspects. The process of its composition was, however, quite substantially different and the resulting piece has a very different quality. While I had made *The Life of Things* using a scheme which strictly circumscribed the quasi-improvisational content, *Asleep In a Field* was written using a much looser approach.

In this work, the text played an even more important role in determining the eventual shape of the piece. Continuing my interest in nature philosophy after *The Life of Things*, I decided to concentrate on the notion of circularity as closely related to, but essentially separate from the stasis-in-motion of the previous work. I had heard of such a thing as circle poetry, and began my search for an appropriate text by simply looking on the internet for "circle poems". I got lucky on the first try: listed was an anthology of circle poems by author/editor Alec Finlay, a contemporary poet, publisher and installation artist based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A couple of the poems were available for perusal on Alec's website, enough for me to be sure that I would find what I wanted in one of his books. I duly ordered and received three published collections of circle poetry and chose several of them to incorporate into the text for *Asleep In A Field*. It was fortuitous that most of the poems in Finlay's collection were on the theme of circularity in Nature, and so made an even more appropriate follow-up to *The Life of Things*.

Circularity in music suggests many ready forms and techniques such as round, rondo, passacaglia – even the ABA of the basic sonata is circular – but these very traditional formal models were rejected in favour of a more exploratory approach. I decided to set my circular texts in a way that highlighted the particular quality they had of retaining meaning regardless of where one stops or starts: the extra impact of the poems is that this

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meaning may slightly change with each "rotation", exploiting the nuances of English syntax.

In my practice, strict planning has sometimes led directly to intended results in the particular work at hand, and sometimes has had greater value as research into resources and general formal ideas of the work. This fact speaks especially to my concern with the relation between conscious, deliberate planning and intuitive writing. After many sketches of possible schematic/statistical plans for *Asleep In a Field* based on controlling complexity of texture (a range between monophony and 8-voice polyphony), temporal density, and rate of harmonic change, etc., these plans were discarded and I devised a much looser approach based on an ordering of the poems and a sequence of textures alternating between 1) monophony/polyphony (1-8 voices), 2) "clouds" of sustained notes chosen from "available pitch" sets (as in *The Life of Things*), and 3) hockets. In the hocketing and polyphonic sections I was particularly concerned that the inter-permeation of separate poems – up to 4 of which were assigned to different voices in the ensemble – be clearly heard, so that text-elements became related in a way independent of the contexts/meanings they had in their original settings (i.e. the individual poems, which are included as an appendix below). This shuffling together of the combined poems had the effect of both blurring but also magnifying their meanings in striking ways: "decay turning by leaves over the earth we the roots earth grow live turning live in turning", or: "light what changes after dark change dims dum the de- day light…"

Pitches were organized as a series of available pitch sets, where adjacent sets might have a greater or lesser number of common elements – a procedure similar to that used in *The Life of Things*. This approach has become increasingly important to me because it combines and balances contradictory/complimentary qualities of harmonic change in the music, providing for both continuity *and* unpredictability.

Further features of the ensemble's virtuosity were highlighted in *Asleep*: Each singer in the Latvian Radio Choir is a viable soloist and this piece is written for an ensemble of

eight voices rather than a 12-voice, 4-section chamber choir as in *Life*. A far greater degree of rhythmic complexity was required in *Asleep*, as well as dynamic control in high vocal ranges.

Although nothing in *Asleep* is improvised in the normal sense, the opening soprano solo and many other passages in the piece were simply written without deliberate preparation of form or materials aside from text. I had intended the music to have an improvisational, organic quality and am satisfied that this was achieved. It is one example of an approach that I think of as "the composer improvising." In retrospect, the strict procedure used in composing *The Life of Things* may have prepared me to seek a freer, more intuitive approach in *Asleep In A Field*. Both pieces were well received in the premiere performance but *Asleep In A Field* more so.

Strategy

This is the only work in the present survey that has a music-theatrical aspect. In writing it, I drew on experience from previous projects including two chamber operas and a choral "secular oratorio" (*Fruits of the Earth*, 2003). More than in earlier work, however, *Strategy* was designed to function also as a concert piece. Crucial to stage-ability was the ensemble's willingness to learn the entire work from memory, and their ability to combine moderately demanding musical material with directed movement on the stage and actual choreography. The ensemble that commissioned the work, *Putni*, is a semi-professional 8-member female vocal ensemble with some unevenness among the performers' vocal abilities, so I avoided making any particularly virtuosic demands in the score (although their memory work was virtuosic enough in itself.)

My idea was to set an abridged version of the famous ancient Chinese manual of military strategy, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, for women's voices. For contemporary readers interested in applying military strategy to, say, business management, mergers and acquisitions, etc., the purely poetic attractions of the text may be lost or undervalued. My

aim was to redress this imbalance by emphasizing the poetry of *The Art of War* at the expense of its more utilitarian aspect. This was how I chose a particular translation. In his translation, Prof. John Minford was clearly at pains to preserve or emphasize Sun Tzu's nature- and love-imagery, and I chose passages from the text that most displayed these characteristics. In addition, the choice to set this material for women's voices in particular was made deliberately to address the fact that the realm of corporate finance is clearly dominated by men. I was writing this work in the midst of a series of global-scale financial crises. One idea often proposed in public discussions at that time was that, had a greater proportion of innately risk-averse women been among the directors of banks, such a catastrophe would have been avoided. The main discovery made during the rehearsal process for the première of *Strategy* was that I had been unable to communicate my text-critical intentions to the musical director, designers or stage director. To give myself a measure of credit, it is likely that my collaborators were culturally unprepared for what I wanted. In a word, what was missing was *irony* or, in more precise theatrical terms, a version of the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect) so that the audience is drawn to ask themselves why these singers are singing this particular text in this particular way, and are thus engaged on an additional, more critical level. I had hoped for a staging that would capitalize, so to speak, on the dissonance between interpretations of the text. But this did not happen in the première production. I suspect that Brechtian thinking and style attributes have not taken hold in the theatrical practice of some post-Soviet countries. Collaboration, of course, also has its limitations.

Having completed a distillation of the original text based on intuitive choices as to the text's musicality and appropriateness to my purposes, I proceeded with a rhythmic mapping of the text. When setting text for singers, I have most often taken a strictly syllabic approach for two reasons: to preserve as much as possible the intelligibility of the text in performance, and out of a preference for natural speech rhythms over melisma. I find that the choice of exactly where to extend a syllable is rarely as clear these days as in the "amen's" of renaissance polyphony. Lately, though, I have been developing an approach to melisma with which I am comfortable. In *Strategy*, melismatic passages are

very few and quite short but carefully chosen in the text and effective in the musical context. My rhythmic settings were eventually adjusted based on later decisions concerning metre and tempo.

In preparing a plan for pitch material in *Strategy*, I employed an approach similar to those in earlier projects of mine. This was a particular application of the idea of *gamut* as it was familiar to me from John Cage's descriptions of his process in such works as *Construction in Metal* and the *Concerto for Prepared Piano*. In these works, Cage prepared a limited collection of various sounds, which would then be available for use in the composition according to yet other, different methods. It was this idea of the limited-numbered collection of sounds that interested me here. I created a *gamut* that was also a closed set, defined by its own intrinsic rules. Thus, the set's formal integrity would ensure a similar integrity to the work as a whole. I started with the notion (inaccurate and out-dated as it is) that much Chinese music is based of types of pentatonic scales. This would be an opportunity to acknowledge in *Strategy* the Chinese origin of the text. However, I was definitely not interested in orientalist imitation. Instead, my approach was statistical: I calculated how many 5-note, 1-octave scales were possible that did not include contiguous semitones and contained no interval larger than a perfect fourth. There are 27 such scales. One way of using the *gamut* is to ensure that each element would sound an equal number of times. I chose to have each pentatonic scale sound once only, but for a sustained time at each sounding, so my piece would have 27 sections. The text was then divided into 27 sections of roughly similar length, each with its assigned scale. The next task was to determine an order for the 27 scales. This was accomplished by categorizing the scales according to the size of the constituent intervals and the degree of variegation of intervals within the scale. By shuffling as much as possible between categories, I could ensure a maximum degree of change of harmonic character between adjacent sections even as the number of common pitches between sections was kept as high as possible. In addition, the interval of a perfect 4th, as the largest interval allowed in any of the scales, was considered most "energetic" and scales containing the 4th were placed as statistically more frequent at and around the second "golden section" point of

the composition, i.e. the 17th of the 27 sections.

With pitch materials and a rhythmic setting of the text prepared for each section, basic melodic ideas and gestures were sketched for all 27 sections. Some use at this point was also made of the three form-categories "arch", "ramp", and "ergodic" as described below in the part of this commentary about my piano piece *Equilibria*.

As I made a final "pass" through the piece, the high degree of preparation to that point and the relatively simple and straightforward nature of the concept allowed me to write the piece from beginning to end without interruption and with minimal subsequent revision. In this respect, *Strategy* represents the achievement of a long-held goal: substantial preparation actually eases the final stage of the process and facilitates an almost improvisation-like degree of spontaneity in note-to-note composition.
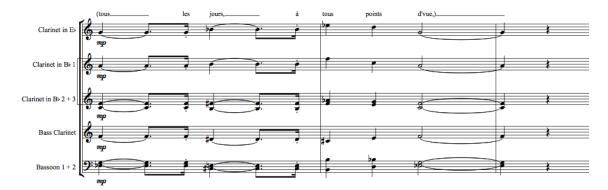
The première performance was of the relatively high standard I had expected based on my familiarity with the vocal ensemble's ability. The piano part required some degree of virtuosity and the originally intended performer had to be changed for that reason. I myself participated as performer and was able in this role to lend the piece a further cross-genre quality with my somewhat hybrid style as a saxophonist (I can play in tune and with fairly good rhythmic accuracy, but my tone and manner of articulation are far from "classical".) A final discovery was that a strong sense of ensemble precision between the singers and the instrumental group was not quite possible without a conductor, so the saxophonist-composer was required also to conduct in several passages. This was a clear example of the expanded skills and responsibilities sometimes required of a composer. In future performances, an actual conductor will be able to give the music an enhanced expressive flow.

Every Day

In *Every Day*, I applied my feeling for prosody and experience in musical settings of text to instrumental composition by basing this work for the Riga Professional Wind Orchestra on a verbal text. I aimed to ensure a kind of continuity throughout all the melodic ideas of the piece by creating each new idea as a different setting of one and the same phrase of text – a thematic continuity based on the strongest, most consistent prosodic qualities of the text. In assessing the final results, I feel this strategy worked well, but it has led me to wonder in a more general way about the importance and implications of a composer's tendency to want to create apparent continuity in his music. Up to this point, I had usually been more interested in exploring utterly/somewhat discontinuous melodic material while ensuring formal integrity on other levels. A renewed interest in types of motivic continuity also arose as I wrote *Nightscapes*, discussed below. Part of the reason for changing this approach in *Every Day* was practical: the piece was intended to have some relation to wind orchestra music as a genre, and to speak to an audience more acquainted with traditional music in this genre than with any kind of avant-garde. I decided that melodic continuity, if not actual "development" in the classical sense, would help in this. The idea also arose naturally once I had decided to use Emile Coué's famous mantra as an inspiration for the piece.

Every Day takes its name from the famous phrase coined in 1920 by French pharmacist/psychologist Émile Coué: "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better." (Coué 1922: 32) or, in the original French: "Tous les jours, à tous points de vue, je vais de mieux en mieux." Coué had his patients repeat this phrase to themselves, mantra-like, many times each day in order to cure themselves of any malady. He is credited with the discovery and first successful use of what became known as the placebo effect.

The following examples illustrate how similar rhythmic settings of the mantra were realized in the score. These are just three of some twenty-plus instances:

Ex. 1 from *Every Day*, mm.4-6, showing "virtual text"

Ex. 2 from *Every Day*, mm.39-41, showing "virtual text"

Ex. 3 from *Every Day*, mm.177-183, showing "virtual text"

A 5-part formal plan in *Every Day* is articulated not only melodically (using 5 different "text-settings") but also via tempo and pitch-set. Available pitches at any point are from a decaphonic set derived from the natural overtone series up to the 18th partial. This, allowing for equal-temperament "rounding-off" of pitches and free octave displacement, yields the chromatic scale minus pitches 6 and 10 (the perfect 4th and major 6th above the fundamental.) Given this set, I have derived subgroups based on types of chords - mostly 3- or 4-note chords that are familiarly tertial or quartal. The avoidance of any sense of harmonic functionality is guaranteed by the absence of the perfect fourth over the fundamental, although there is nonetheless a "tonality" centered on the current fundamental pitch, which sounds most often pedal-fashion. Each section is built on such a set but the sets "modulate" by upward fifths through the sequence Eb-Bb-F-C-G to give

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an overall sense not of continuous dominant-tonic "resolution" but rather of a sort of harmonic levitation.

Pursuing an interest in orchestral percussion, I enhanced the importance of the percussion section in this piece compared with earlier work of mine for large ensemble. The dotted rhythms derived from my underlying "mantra" idea run throughout the piece, and are frequently given in pure rhythmic form by the percussion (see Example 3 above). Pitched percussion from timpani through glockenspiel also participate in the harmonic scheme of the piece.

As in *The Life of Things*, the collaborative input of the première's conductor, Andris Poga in this case, was very helpful at the next-to-final draft stage of the process. As it happened, this conductor was also a trumpet player who was able to give me good advice and suggestions especially regarding the brass section. Here I am once again pointing out not only the value of collaboration in the process that results in "one" composer's work, but also the multiplicity of roles required of any musician, in this case conductor-instrumentalist.

The final version of *Every Day* features some quite traditional style attributes, despite my fairly conceptual approach as I began to write it. The "mantra" idea remains, although in a form perhaps unrecognizable as a mantra in the common sense. (A mantra is such only if simply and persistently repeated over a period of time - my mantra in Every Day is repeated only in a very particular sense of the term repetition – "variation" is closer.) On this occasion, both I and the medium/genre of the wind orchestra seemed to resist a piece based on persistent, unvaried repetition.

Truth in Darkness

Truth In Darkness was my fifth work for voices *a capella*, a type of composition that imposes its own particular discipline. The physicality of singing imposes specific technical requirements or tendencies in the composed musical text that performers will judge as more or less effectively and appropriately written. These, of course, are examples of rules-that-are-meant-to-be-broken. The rules and tendencies I am referring to are well known features of the European polyphonic tradition: voice-leading, a balancing of the weight of material among voices, careful use of *tessitura*, phrasing based on natural human breath-lengths, etc. As I wrote this piece, I was living in Latvia, a place where the choral tradition is very strong. Latvian music for choir combines a fairly strict academicism with a National Romantic emphasis on folk sources. This orientation has been utterly consistent among the Latvian composing fraternity. Its influence has become a feature of both the choral and instrumental output of these composers throughout the 20th century until today as evidenced in works by the best-known young Latvian composers: Eriks Ešenvalds, Santa Ratniece, and Andris Dzenītis. During my years (1998-2012) in Latvia, my choral work responded to my environment most often in a welcoming, positive way, but sometimes antagonistically. Of the works discussed in this paper, *The Life of Things*, *Asleep in a Field*, and *Truth In Darkness* are friendlier toward the Latvian point of view, while *Strategy* was written from a deliberately different perspective.

Truth In Darkness was composed for a symposium on music for vocal ensemble, where it was performed by the female vocal group "Luar". The piece was required to have a sacred text and I chose an excerpt from the 51st Psalm in a version from the Modern English Bible for its compactness, evocative moods and images, and for the clarity/simplicity of its rhythmic construction.

During the preparatory phase of the process, I arrived at a formal scheme for the music by first preparing the text. The rhythmic structure of the text, as I analyzed it, consists of

6 units each of 2 lines, the first of 3 feet, the second of two. After I had my prosodic plan, the first sketch was a simple melodic setting, arrived at more-or-less intuitively. The melody repeats a rising 5th motive through several transpositions, and the overall effect is modal-chromatic. In a vertical expansion of the melody into four voices, I have used a type of heterophonic texture so that the music sounds like one melodic line expanded and embellished rather than any kind of counterpoint. The fact of having all female voices seemed to suggest this approach rather than either a polyphonic or a chorale-like texture. I later decided I didn't want the piece to end on the words "thou hast broken" and so repeated the first 4 lines, ending with "teach me wisdom". Thus the whole structure could be described as 8 x (3+2), including a traditional recapitulation. The piece is quite tiny at just over 3 minutes. Starting with a simple melodicization of the text, I gradually and carefully chose parts of it to expand, by elongating and/or repeating musical ideas and text as required. In this, I was happy to allow the text to suggest musical ideas, even though – as in *Strategy* – I've recently been interested in deliberately "inappropriate" or felicitous combinations of text and music. In *Truth In Darkness*, for example, "whiter" is set on all white notes, and "whiter then snow" is generally long and sustained while "let the bones dance" features dance rhythms and clear repetition, and so on.

Even though direct contact with the performers was limited during the composition process, I still took a sort of collaborative approach in the sense that I was aware of, and considered at every step the performers' level of ability and the circumstances in which the music was to be performed. *Truth In Darkness* is one of the very few pieces I have written off-the-cuff, as it were, i.e. with no formal planning aside from the rhythmic setting of text. Neither was improvisation involved on any level except that of intuitive setting down of musical ideas on paper.

SimfoNiMo

In many of these works, I am describing various types and degrees of collaboration. Even where my own role is that of "composer", the participation of other specialists is always welcome at (almost) any point in the compositional process. This is why I have been drawn to those modes of music making where it is understood from the outset that many roles are involved. In the contemporary scene, electronic music appears to occupy the opposite position, where the individual composer is most solitary in their work. Among electronic musicians, however, the DJ is atypical: their work is collaborative and improvisational on many levels. The contemporary DJ uses a much broader array of electronic means than just the turntables and sound system with which the artform began in the early 1980's. The popularity of DJ-ing and the expansion of the DJ's role into that of DJ-producer has driven a swift advance in the sophistication and availability of the most advanced tools in electronic music.

Here I'd like to discuss briefly three samples from a programme of music I prepared in 2009-10 for symphony orchestra, DJ and solo alto saxophone (improvising). The group NiMo – my partnership with DJ Monsta (a.k.a. Uldis Cīrulis) – was approached by the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra to prepare and perform an "alternative" concert programme that would appeal to a younger audience. The project afforded me an excellent opportunity to develop my orchestrational ideas and abilities: for example, transcribing Skulte's work for *Bolero* (discussed below) was an especially instructive exercise, as I came to admire its effective use of the full range of orchestral woodwinds. The experience gained during the SimfoNiMo project as a whole prepared me well to undertake further works for orchestra. SimfoNiMo was also an invaluable forum for combining disparate areas of artistic practice: formal composition for large ensemble, improvisation, and non-classical styles such as jazz and hip-hop. The three pieces discussed (there were seven in the full programme) display a range of approaches to combining these disparate elements.

The SimfoNiMo project as a whole was an extremely worthwhile and informative exercise in collaboration on several levels, revealing both positive artistic possibilities and also some potential pitfalls. As I prepared material for *SimfoNiMo*, I had the benefit of a sympathetic and collaborative/consultative relationship with the conductor, a young man (Andris Poga) whose character and manner of working were a far cry from Canetti's description (see above). Regarding the symphony orchestra as an institution, I was not without misgivings. Despite my interest in symphonic music, I was wary of its internal politics and tradition-bound attitudes. And, in the event, there were in fact some grumblings from certain elements in the orchestra about our music, and our project has clearly retained the nature of a sideline activity rather that being in any way integrated into the orchestra's view of itself. That said, the majority of musicians were enthusiastic, the programme has been repeated at least once, and a new one along similar lines commissioned for next season. As a composer working with a symphony orchestra – both the ensemble and the organization – I kept in mind the goal of our work and its reward: the particular satisfaction of playing a special role in a large, collective effort.

Zones

In the work *Zones* and in all the other material prepared for SimfoNimo, one aim was to gain greater familiarity with, and fluency in large-scale orchestration. I chose to arrange two of Giovanni Gabrieli's (1555-1612) *Canzoni* based on their extroverted, exuberant quality as works originally intended for outdoor performance. As the first to use both dynamic indications and specific instrumentation in his compositions, Gabrieli stands at the historical beginning of orchestration itself. The *Canzoni* feature consistent pulse and stylized dance rhythms typical of the time, which lent themselves to our DJ's electronic dance beats and sequences.

The process began with selection of two specific works, *Canzona a 4 "La Spiritata"* (1608, nr. 1) and *Canzon XII* (published 1615). A decision was then made to use the two Gabrieli works to "bookend" an episode of newly composed music, yielding a sort of A-

B-A: Gabrieli-Gotham-Gabrieli, in which my own music formed a darker, slower "middle movement". The way the piece leaps forward and back across the centuries is part of its attraction. *Canzon XII* was originally intended for brass instruments, and its dramatic ending allowed me to indulge in an almost cartoonish, exaggerated "big orchestral finish" featuring full symphonic brass.

My collaborative partner DJ Monsta, meanwhile, was preparing electronic sequences based on MIDI versions of the *Canzoni* in which the Renaissance dance-rhythms of the originals were combined with contemporary acid-jazz, hip-hop and drum-and-bass techniques. Here, the notion of "dance" offered a way to connect two styles of music across the centuries. In *Zones* and thoughout the SimfoNimo programme DJ Monsta was often called upon to work far outside the standard rhythmic vocabulary of the hiphop DJ. Although current systems such as Ableton certainly allow occasional-to-frequent metric shifts, it's clearly the case that contemporary popular dance- and club-music rarely call for anything more than can be mapped onto a basic 4/4 metre-with-a-backbeat template.

As a study in orchestrational technique, I judge *Zones* to have been quite successful in terms of its effectiveness in performance and practical play-ability. In the conceptual scheme of the piece, more might have been done in terms of bringing the Gotham elements into closer conversation/confrontation with the Gabrieli but, as mentioned above, their separateness turned out to be an effective enough choice. The middle section – my first composition for symphony orchestra – suggests promising ideas to be developed in future pieces. My approach to integrating improvisation in the solo saxophone part with through-composed material in the orchestra was to notate changing pitch-groups in the solo part that were harmonic distillations of what the orchestra was playing at a given point. The notation combines specific pitches with jazz-style chord symbols. The soloist may choose to use precisely this set of pitches with the assurance that each improvised note also sounds in the orchestra, or use the set simply as a framework, adding further pitch material improvisationally. The following example illustrates how this looks in the score at the transition point from the Gotham episode to

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Canzon XII.

Ex. 4 from *Zones*, mm. 156-160, showing improvising solo part and transition from original episode to orchestrated Gabrieli *Canzon*

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James In Peril

In this case, the task was to arrange an existing work for small jazz group for the symphony orchestra plus solo DJ and improvising alto saxophone. Here, the most significant discovery was that a simple arrangement process turned out not to be possible: In a positive way, the symphonic resources began to take over in determining content, requiring the extension of the existing material into new areas. It was not enough to "thicken" the melodic lines of the original and assign these to the orchestral sections. Some substantial development of the material was needed for the music to sound "right" or appropriate to the orchestral setting. The simple and, perhaps, obvious lesson drawn from this experience was that larger musical means require a greater richness and complexity of musical ideas.

Working very quickly, I had resorted to a technique more typical of contemporary popular electronic music than of orchestral music: simple cut-and-paste. The creatively positive aspect of this was that it helped the orchestral parts to aesthetically meld with the DJ's electronic looping samples. In one case, however, "looping" in the instrumental parts yielded a viola part that was simply too repetitive to be comfortable for the players. This situation led to a productive exchange between composer and the leader of the viola section. Our solution in rehearsal was to allow, once again in the manner of the DJ-producer in his mixing studio, for the part to enter and exit the overall texture improvisationally by assigning the section leader as sub-conductor. This type of collaboration was quite new for the players, but it transformed a negative aspect of the material into a positive, even exciting one.

Bolero

Our conceptual aim in *Bolero* was to achieve an optimally seamless extension/adaptation of an existing symphonic work from the 1950's — an excerpt from Latvian composer Adolfs Skulte's 1955 ballet score *Brīvības sakta (Badge of Freedom)* — into our own contemporary style/practice. The project involved research into Adolfs Skulte's work, sourcing the manuscript, transcribing from Skulte's original, and then devising a formal scheme to extend the original. My adaptation of Adolfs Skulte's music involved: 1) separation of foreground from background in certain passages of the original, 2) replacement or extension of those passages to accommodate our "intrusions". Once we had identified passages in the original where a foreground melody could be removed and its accompanimental figure in the orchestra extended, these passages were excised from the piece as a whole and used as accompaniments for provisional "demo"-style scratch solos by the DJ. DJ Monsta chose to structure his improvisations as a series of two-measure phrases, as if he were playing call-and-response with himself. The initiating phrases were then transcribed into (approximate) rhythmic notation for the "DJ" part in the score. (In fact, the DJ had memorized his parts from the outset, and would vary them substantially in performance.) The responding phrases were then also transcribed, given a simple melodic profile and arranged for orchestra using close-voiced, modal-chromatic pitch-sets, as illustrated in the following example. This entire process resulted, quite successfully, in the effect of having the DJ perform an improvisational "duel" with the orchestra. This technique one can easily imagine extended and explored to much greater lengths and to great effect in future work.

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Ex. 5 from *Bolero*, mm. 73-80, showing added or altered parts for high woodwinds, trumpets, DJ, violins

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The above passage also illustrates a relatively complex process involving both improvisation (recorded by the DJ, then transcribed/arranged by the composer; as well as "live" solo improvisations from saxophone at different points in the piece), and at least three layers of collaboration: the NiMo team of composer and DJ with composer Skulte (or more precisely, with Skulte's composition), composer with DJ, and the composer-DJ-conductor team with the orchestra. The extra-musical collaborative elements should not be forgotten, i.e. essential roles played by symphony management, publicists, etc. The project thus gained a type of participatory momentum in which the audience were eager to share when the time for live performance finally arrived.

Equilibria

I decided in this piece, my only piano solo composition to date, to revisit a certain combination of ideas that had arisen in a work for mine from 1994 called *Spirit of St. Louis*, written during a period of study with James Tenney. The two ideas combined in the first movement of that piece were 1) to interpret in my own musical language Tenney's notion of *ergodic* form in music and 2) to use metric notation to achieve a rhythmic texture that was both constantly interesting and completely static. In his 1969 essay "Form in 20th century Music", Tenney explained what he meant by ergodic music:

> …a relatively static — or statistically homogeneous — condition, creating a large-formal shape that I shall call *ergodic* (borrowing a term from mathematics). (11)

Or earlier, referring to the implications of statistically homogeneous music for the music's form:

> …the effect here is as though looking at a landscape through an open window — the perceptual boundaries are defined "arbitrarily" (by the window frame), rather than being inherent or "intrinsic" to the process ("landscape") itself; music that ends this way often begins this way also, and we might call it a "windowed" form of closure. (11)

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I maintained statistical control of the music in *Equilibria* in two ways, one strict and the other relatively loose and intuitive. I took a strict approach to the use of metre: The music is structured in groups of measures, each with its own metric marking. In each group of measures, a given metre occurs once and once only. The ordering of metres in each section is random. Here, for example, is the metric scheme I devised for the fourth part of *Equilibria*, showing individual bar-lengths as numbers of 8th-notes, along with the first few bars of its realization:

IV.
3, 5, 6, 7, 4, 2
6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 7
3, 6, 2, 7, 5, 4
3, 2, 6, 4, 5, 7
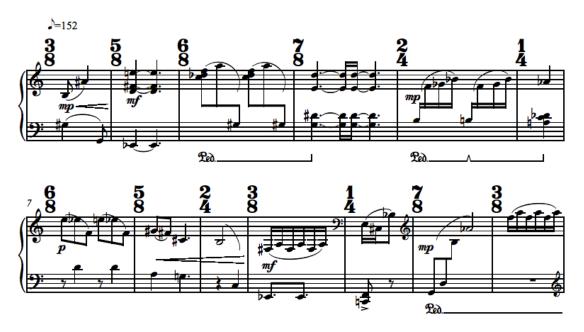4, 6, 2, 3, 5, 7
4, 5, 3, 7, 6, 2
4, 6, 3, 7, 5, 2
5, 4, 3, 6, 7, 2
4, 5, 6, 2, 3, 7
2, 7, 5, 4, 3, 6

Ex. 6 – metric scheme of *Equilibria, part IV*.

Ex. 7 – realization of Ex. 6 above

I took a less strict approach to pitch material. So that pitch-based aspects of the music should not confound the statistical sameness required by ergodic form, I used a "free atonal" approach in note-to-note composition once the strict metric-formal scheme had been established. A final related aspect to my method in *Equilibria* was that each separate measure also displayed characteristics of one of the three basic formal types described by James Tenney in the essay already quoted. The three types are:

1) "arch" form – the model of departure and return typical of many standard formal types in European music
2) "ramp" form – in which parametric change occurs in a given direction, with no implied return to an original state
3) "ergodic" form – as described above

I adapted the "arch"-form idea to include repeating figures, i.e. a persistent, periodic return to an original state. How I applied these formal ideas in a somewhat microscopic

way is apparent in Ex. 2 above where, for example, measure 1 has a single, clear directionality within it ("ramp" form), measure 2 is entirely static ("ergodic" form), measure 3 contains repeated material ("arch" form) and so on. Like the ordering of metres, changes among the three form-types from measure to measure were random.

From a research perspective, not only did *Equilibria* afford an opportunity to employ the above compositional methods, it was also an instrumentational study of the piano. The piece was written, in part, to address the absence in my *oeuvre* to date of any music for solo piano. Why was this the case? One simply feels the weight of the extraordinary amount of music already composed for this instrument. Generally, the object is to find a personal approach to writing for some instrument with which the composer may have very little practical experience. In the case of the piano, I preferred not to consider the wealth of sonic possibility the piano offers, much less to respond to the piano's "culture" – its immense and rich repertoire. *Equilibria* takes a contrary stance: it focuses on a small, quite austere set from among the piano's capabilities. What makes the piece pianistic is that, after all, it is this instrument which has turned out to be the best one with which to explore the compositional ideas in *Equilibria*. Incisive, clear attacks, timbral homogeneity, precise dynamic control, the two hands=two voiced texture are all basic characteristics of the piano, and all were employed to desired effect in *Equilibria*.

Stand, Spin, Jump

Stand, Spin, Jump is the only improvising piece included in this commentary. It was composed for the duo One + One, consisting of Anna Veismane (piano, melodeon, vocal) and Timo Kinnunen (accordion). Any individual musician can take the role of "Anna" or of "Timo", so long as "Anna's" instrument is capable of producing the bell-like sound explained in the legend below. The piece is included in this commentary as an example of how I have applied certain notions about form in music to a purely improvisatory situation.

Legend:

"Bell" - An instrument with percussive and harmonic capabilities (e.g. piano. vibraphone, guitar) plays a single bell-like chord containing both triadic *and* dissonant intervals, *sforzando*, letting it then be heard to decay before proceeding with the improvisation.

"Stand" indicates that the improvised material should be static and unchanging throughout the section of the piece where this symbol occurs. The static quality may be acheived by literally sustaining a sound or by playing an unpatterned, quasi-chaotic sequence of a few or many sounds which maintains a certain character such that the static effect is clear.

"Spin" means any repeated material such as understood by the terms "riff" or "ostinato". The repetition may be precise and strict or relatively free, so long as the circular nature of the music is clearly heard.

"Jump" or "vector" indicates that the improvised music should maintain a single, clear gestural direction, such as high-to-low, quiet-to-loud, sparse-to-dense, etc. throughout the section of the piece where this symbol occurs. If the gesture exhausts itself (if some limit is reached) before the section is over, the player remains silent until the next section.

The three terms "stand", "spin" and "jump" are simplified, playful versions of the basic form-types "ergodic", "arch" and "ramp" in Tenney's terminology, as discussed above with reference to *Strategy* and *Equilibria*. For the improvising performers, I have included in the Legend explanations of these ideas in the clearest and most practical terms. In addition, "stand", "spin" and "jump" are deliberate references to physical movements, and are intended to emphasize that the improvisation should have a gestural quality. In this piece, I was testing the idea that indications of which of the three types should be played and how to change among them would be enough information for an experienced improviser to base their performance upon.

The additional elements in *Stand, Spin, Jump* are indications given as plain instructions in the score itself regarding whether the player should play (predominantly) long or short sounds during each section of the piece. These controls on the relative durations to be used in the improvisation imply a quantitative, descriptive and statistical approach to

composition. The bell functions very simply to initiate the sections and to demarcate them from each other, but I was also interested in whether the simple instructions to play a "bell-like chord containing both triadic *and* dissonant intervals" would be enough for me as the composer of an improvised piece to get what I wanted from the performer.

The first performance of *Stand, Spin, Jump* went very well, but not so well that it wouldn't be expected to improve with repeated performances. One misconception commonly held by less experienced improvisers is that improvisation does not require rehearsal. Although these were experienced improvisers, two hours' rehearsal was still not adequate to overcome the strangeness of the demands *Stand, Spin, Jump* made on the players: an uncomfortable combination of strict limitations on, for example, the duration of sounds to be played in a given section with completely free choice in other parameters. This type of discomfort – that of freedom constrained – is common to improvising situations, and I view it as a very positive, fruitful creative challenge. One could also argue that such a situation is closely analogous to real life.

As *Stand, Spin, Jump* was heard in a programme otherwise consisting entirely of through-composed pieces, it was clear to me that most if not all in the audience remained unaware of how little in my work had actually been written down, and this was quite gratifying.

Nightscapes – a chamber symphony

This piece was written for the chamber orchestra Sinfonietta Riga, to be included in their concert series "Zoom In", which includes specially commissioned works in the chamber symphony *genre* alongside well-known 20th century examples by such composers as A. Schoenberg and J. Adams, and slightly lesser-known works by N. Roslavets, H. Eisler and T. Adès. There was initially, therefore, a particularly important research element to the project. The questions to be answered were: What is symphonic form? How had the largely 18th and 19th century symphonic tradition been extended during the 20th? What is the relationship of the chamber symphony to the "full" symphony? And finally, what proposal can I offer by way of a 21st century chamber symphony? These questions are clearly huge and have already (except the last one) been the subject of much scholarship, but a certain degree of familiarity with these issues was required in order for me to be sure that what I was writing would in fact turn out to be some kind of symphony.

Particularly informative regarding the historical trajectory of the symphony was Lydia Goehr's 2007 book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* in which the author examines why European music has been thought of in terms of a collection of masterworks and how, since the year 1800, symphonies, especially those of Beethoven, and among Beethoven's symphonies especially the 5th, have become the accepted standard by which musical works and "masterworks" have been judged (Goehr 2007: 89-119).

As I began work on the chamber symphony, my listening included some very well known 20th-century symphonies by Shostakovich, Mahler, Messiaen, Sibelius, Nielsen and Stravinsky, as well as the chamber symphonies mentioned above. In these works I heard composers' various responses to, and ways of participating in the symphonic tradition. My impression has been that Mahler's symphonies represent the strongest link from the 19th to the 20th century forms of the symphony, while Shostakovich, Sibelius and Nielsen demonstrate the continued vitality of the form in a purely 20th century context, and

Stravinsky argues for a somewhat loosened definition of what a symphony might possibly be.

In one very general sense, symphonic form is simply a solution to the problem of how to structure a relatively long-duration work for large instrumental forces. Typical aspects of the symphonic solution are 1) the multi-movement form that divides the duration of the symphony into separate parts that contrast and complement one another, 2) a collection of techniques and strategies to ensure cohesion among and within the contrasting sections. The large-ness of a symphony requires sturdy construction in the same way as an ocean liner, a passenger jet or a skyscraper. Part of the particular meaning of chamber symphonies has been as a response against 19th and 20th century industrial, technological, political and architectural gigantism.[3] Hence, along with the smaller numbers of musicians required for their performance, chamber symphonies are also most often of shorter duration and comprise fewer movements. This is true of the Schoenberg and Adams examples, while Hanns Eisler's *Kammersinfonie, Op. 69* (1940), a relatively short work at 20 minutes' duration, is divided into five movements. Roslavets' work retains full symphonic chronometric proportions: almost an hour in duration, divided into 4 movements. On the other hand, in Thomas Adès' early *Chamber Symphony* (1993), the intimate chamber scale of the work is emphasized in its dramatically shorter overall duration. Adès further highlights the laconic, concentrated quality of his work by choosing to retain the traditional 4-movement structure so that individual movements range from 2 to 6 minutes in length. I was led to consider the following proposition: Perhaps chamber symphonies, as smaller works not requiring an ocean liner's inner girding, offer the composer more freedom in their construction.

What's in a name? While most of Stravinsky's works in the symphonic genre bear some resemblance to the traditional symphonic model at least in terms of scale, there is also the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920), which bears none. Why then choose the title? In a way that was typical of Stravinsky, he was reverting to an earlier, more general and strictly etymological meaning of "symphony" in order to gain a critical distance from its

usual current meaning. But this earlier, etymologically precise definition of symphony as simply "together-sounding" has become important in many instances of 20th century symphonies and chamber symphonies. The various small constellations of wind instruments in the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* do indeed "sound together" in a way that was very new and influential in relying on various registral and rhythmic interlocking techniques rather than on standard orchestrational procedure. More often, however, 20th-century symphonies have been so named in order to point up some kind of continuity – either close or critically distant – with the 19th century symphonic tradition.

The question of structural integrity throughout the duration of a work like a symphony is also a matter of "sounding together". The symphonic tradition has relied on the use of "themes" and "motives" to ensure durational cohesion, especially within movements, as well as a carefully constructed harmonic framework. James Tenney offers an explanation, in late 20th-century terms, of how this device, rooted in the 18th century and therefore deeply ingrained in the European musical tradition, has continued to function despite all the upheavals in musical practice and thinking during the 20th century. Human perceptual faculties will tend to divide any longer-duration sequence of sounds into component elements such as phrases, or what Tenney called "clangs", a term equivalent to "aural gestalt" (Tenney 1964: 22). According to principles of gestalt psychology as adapted to musical analysis, a particular phrase, melody, musical gesture, fragment or clang will function as a "motive" or "theme" depending on whether and how it is repeated, varied or otherwise perceptibly related to later phrases, fragments, etc.

Having gained a working understanding of what a symphony might be, the next phase of research/preparation was concerned with the "how's" of creating one. I undertook to create durational cohesion by a number of methods including quasi-motivic "development" on several structural levels as well as a somewhat organized harmonic scheme. The term "development" appears in quotation marks because in much of my work, along with many other contemporary composers, I have sought alternatives to 18th and 19th century models of thematic development. "Development" suggests a certain

unidirectionality of time and the notion of progress toward a goal, a culmination, dramatic dénouement, or the resolution of all questions and problems. The directionality of time and the notion of progress are two ideas that came under attack in almost every field of inquiry during the 20th century, beginning with physics and leading to other scientific areas, the fine arts, philosophy and critical theory. Composers have had to consider carefully their understanding of and orientation toward the primary dimension in which music exists – time. My research led me to revisit some of the writers, composers and thinkers whose have most formed my own attitudes toward time in music, and to investigate many more recent or less familiar (to me) ideas in this area.

One way to deal with time – the "horizontal" dimension in music – is to simply demote it and focus on the other axis: the "vertical". Morton Feldman, as a follower of John Cage, was well acquainted with Cage's horizontal approach to structure in his compositions of the 1940's, an approach based on durations of successive sections which eschewed any narrative or developmental relationship between them: "Structure in music is its divisibility into successive parts…" (Cage 1973: 62). But, in the early '60's, Feldman began referring to "vertical structures" although without fully explaining at the time what he meant. Analysis of the work *Vertical Structures*, however, reveals what he may have had in mind: By emphasizing certain pitch-classes at certain registers throughout an entire work and deliberately not sounding other pitches in other registers, Feldman arrived at a structural division of the vertical dimension of music into parts possibly analogous to Cage's horizontal divisions.[4] In this approach, Feldman also anticipated some ideas of the so-called "Spectralists", which became much more widely understood and practiced only in the 1980's. In the following quotation, Feldman emphasizes his focus on verticality in music with special reference to orchestration and therefore to timbre, another hallmark of spectralist thinking.

> For me composition is orchestration, and so what leads me to begin a composition is a weight, an orchestration, which is new for me. Though my music sounds pretty much the same to many people, it's very different to me with the change in orchestration; because my compositional impetus is in terms of the vertical quality, and not what

happens in terms of the horizontal scheme. (Feldman 1972: 758-759)

In *Nightscapes*, I decided to take a more "vertical" approach to motivic continuity. Material for each movement of the symphony was prepared as a complementary set of ideas – melodic, gestural, harmonic – all of which were harmonically (i.e. vertically) related to each other. The ideas were then available for inclusion in the music in no pre-planned sequence but rather intuitively, as a perceived need or opportunity arose. This was my solution to a related issue, the question of dramaturgy in music.

The question had arisen as I considered what exactly dramaturgy in music might be, and why it seemed still to be a current idea in Europe while John Cage's anti-dramatic music had virtually vanquished considerations of dramaturgy from contemporary music in North America. I had frequently heard references to dramaturgy among my Latvian composer-colleagues whereas the term was almost never used in connection with contemporary music (outside of music theatre) in Toronto. Heinrich Schenker described the traditional position regarding dramaturgy in European music:

> The sonata represents the motifs in ever changing situations in which their characters are revealed, just as human beings are represented in a drama... the motif lives through its fate, like a personage in a drama. (Schenker 1980: 12, 13)

According to Alfred Brendel, this is the way Beethoven thought of his Sonatas and, therefore, the way they should be played.

> If we attempt to define the drama of Beethoven's sonata form more precisely, we are bound to notice that it is a drama in which the character of the principle theme predominates… The principle theme reigns like a king surrounded by his court. (Brendel 1976: 40)

It is clear that European composers (and I admit to generalizing about both camps here) still considered dramaturgy important also in contemporary music of the late 20th century in this statement by Gérard Grisey, asked about his early influences: "I would name

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Stockhausen for the sense of the dramaturgy, the sense of form and time." (Grisey 1996)

When Schenker, over 100 years ago, refers to the dramaturgy of the sonata, or Brendel describes his interpretative approach to the Beethoven Sonatas, these writers' meaning may be perfectly clear, but to gain a sense of Stockhausen's or Grisey's approach to dramaturgy is not so easy. Are there "motives" in the latter cases, which live through their fate like characters in a drama? Once a motive has become a tiny cell which undergoes constant transformation as in Webern and all music of and following the Vienna modern school, or the idea of the motive has been exploded leaving only a particular sequence of intervals the permutations and combinations of which generate ever more new motives as in serialism, do we still recognize Schenker's "personage in a drama"? There must be a contemporary sense of the term dramaturgy that refers not to a character's progression through a *narrative* sequence of situations, but to a *mobile* set of situations, which may occur in any sequence. And as for the "characters" themselves – they may have much more the nature of dynamic relationships or tendencies than consistently recognizable *dramatis personae*.

My solution in *Nightscapes* does indeed set up a sort of cast of characters, but these are set out onto the stage with no preconceived scheme as to what will happen to them – who enters first, who next, what interaction will they have? Here is another way in which a type of improvisation finds its way into the compositional process. I call this approach improvisation rather than calling it, say, an aleatoric approach to form because the composer, after all, makes moment-to-moment choices and decisions as to the appearance and interaction of the (for want of a better term) motives, whereas aleatoric music seeks to remove such decision-making from the role of the composer.

In previous works my preparatory schematizations dealt with structure in the Cagean sense, i.e. as a sequence of durations. For example, I have described above how harmonic changes were the primary factor in articulating the form of *The Life of Things*, each pitch set sounding for a period of time before changing into another pitch set, and so on.

Writing *Nightscapes*, however, my strategy was quite different. Having decided on a form for the chamber symphony as a series of four movements with a "scherzo" in the second place and a slow movement in third, I knew only approximately how long I wanted each of the movements to be. As regards the early stages of the compositional process, durations and their division would be only a very general indication of the planned form of the work. Instead, in order to prepare a vertical structure (in Feldman's sense) for each movement I prepared a collection of harmonically related motifs for each movement, with the pitch EE as a consistent harmonic reference point throughout. Types of "relatedness" to EE ranged from direct harmonic alignment via the harmonic series to deliberately calibrated degrees of dissonance, these choices being made intuitively as I composed the motifs. No decision was yet made about which motif would sound first, which second, or whether one should be a primary motif, another secondary, etc. When actually sounding, the EE pitch most often appears as a pedal-point migrating through the low-pitched instruments, and shifting sometimes step-wise through DD and CC as far as BB-flat or upwards to FF-sharp. Because a pedal-tone will always imply a certain harmonic context for the pitches sounding above it, these changes in the predominant bass-register pitch create relatively large-scale structural divisions in the music, but these were not pre-planned as in *The Life of Things* or *Strategy*. In general, the harmonic language of *Nightscapes* is modal-chromatic, allowing me to change freely between various degrees of harmonic complexity: pentatonic, heptatonic, 10-element scales (as in *Every Day*), and free atonal writing. In dealing with this range of harmonic complexity as the piece progressed, I was particularly interested in: 1) setting up a modal-heptatonic situation which then would dissolve chromatically, and 2) finding vertical aggregates which displayed harmonic stability and a high degree of chromatic saturation, as in the ending of the 4th movement:

Ex. 8 The chromatically enhanced E-major chord at the end of

Nightscapes - a chamber symphony, 4th movement

In his essay *Form in 20th Century Music* (1970), James Tenney sought to update the general understanding of musical form to include 20th century works where motivic development and functional harmony were no longer the chief determinants of form. He proposed a hierarchical model ranging from individual sound-elements (e.g. notes) through phrases and motives ("clangs") and sequences of phrases, and finally to the entire work, with similar criteria determining formal character at each level (Tenney 1970). This approach led Tenney to apply ideas such as the morphology of single sound-elements to larger forms, i.e. at higher hierarchical strata, in his own works such as those in the series titled *Forms I-IV*. As an example of how this approach may supplant cadences or motivic recall as methods of arriving at an ending he suggests "an abrupt decrease in complexity — a 'settling down' to a more static condition" (11) similar to the acoustic phenomenon of timbral simplification in the decay of a note played on an acoustic instrument. In *Nightscapes* as in several of my other compositions, this idea has been very important.[5] Examples of its use in the present collection include the endings to *Asleep In A Field, Every Day,* and *Strategy*. As explained elsewhere in the essay *Form*, this is an issue of form vs. content: the radically slowed-down rate of change in any or all the musical parameters (content) has the effect in musical perception of the approaching closure of a larger-scale section of the music (form).

A larger piece of music implies a greater number of people involved in its creation – more instrumentalists in performance, the conductor, as well as the broader web of specialized roles and relationships referred to elsewhere in this commentary – but in the case of *Nightscapes*, my sense of collaboration remained largely internal. That is to say that my knowledge not only of the history and theory of symphonic music but also of the particular ensemble, its conductor, its history and performance philosophy, informed my work. For Morton Feldman, orchestration was a paramount concern, as is clear in the quotation above, and he exhorted his students always to "Know thy instrument". The creative process of *Nightscapes* included a notable occasion when my interests in orchestration/instrumentation and collaboration came effectively together: In my chamber symphony I wanted the harp to have a large, almost soloistic role, but the harp is a unique instrument in many aspects of its operation and I was obliged to learn through research to write properly for it. Although several texts in orchestration described the harp's technical aspects well enough, it was only when I was able to meet and consult with the performer who would eventually play the part that I gained the information and confidence needed to compose that important part of my piece.

In several of my works up to *Nightscapes*, the creation of a strict scheme at an early phase of the work's composition was an essential feature of my *modus operandi*. But, despite the many interesting discussions regarding form and freedom it may provoke, it's still only one approach, one that stands in contrast with, for example, the intuitive methods of a Morton Feldman or a Kevin Volans. I have described a certain type and amount of preparation undertaken as I wrote *Nightscapes*, but this was of a less strict variety than was involved in, say, *Strategy*. In any case, the symphonic form is one where, to the degree we accept it and engage with it, some formal issues are already solved at the outset within the traditional symphonic scheme: i.e. that the music should comprise several movements of instrumental music, of a relatively long overall duration, etc. Within this characteristic framework, symphonic form seemed to require a kind of free-wheeling attitude, one where anything was allowed that contributed to the work. In

other words, having worked through the various other projects described above, I felt able, in *Nightscapes,* to spend less time preparing the form and relatively more simply writing the music - but only because the *genre* of the chamber symphony called for this approach. In a passage written without a great deal of planning or specific intention but that I now think of as somehow self-referential – the "symphony" recognizing itself – an episode of Mahler-*pastiche* suddenly appears in the middle of the slow movement of *Nightscapes*.

Ex. 9, above – An episode of Mahler-*pastiche* from the third movement of
Nightscapes – a chamber symphony

I was testing the extent to which "healthy habits" gained during more tightly-focused, disciplined projects would remain in operation if I permitted myself to write without the safety-net of a prepared formal plan. Based on this experience, I would suggest that the very strict formal techniques in which Kevin Volans was trained early in his career have, in part, permitted him to create music of strong formal clarity using more intuitive methods later on. In my own case, moving back and forth between more and less methodically constructed work is a feature of my ongoing approach to composition. *Nightscapes* represents a situation where I was able to set aside, to a certain extent, the *invention* of a formal plan as part of the compositional process. In future work, I look forward to reinstating the formal-schematic phase of my method.

Conclusions

This commentary has explored methods used in the creation of several compositions. I have explained an approach in which careful preparation of materials and formal schemes early in the process leads to a greater sense of freedom and intuitive choice in the later phases of a work's realization. The types of preparations employed have ranged from arithmetical to text-based, or from graphic to purely musical, and several combinations of these. In addition, some of the individual projects weighted the preparatory phase more heavily, some less, relative to the later phase of actual note-to-note composition. In this way, the commentary can be seen as an overview of an extended research effort into this question: To what degree, and in what ways might early schematization – or the deliberate creation of rules – lead to later freedom in the process of composition? Or, more generally: In the case of musical composition, what types of relations between form and freedom can be inferred? Where the preparatory strategies employed correspond to, or have been derived from, techniques exemplified in the works of the American minimalists, the resulting contemporary works may be called post-minimalist.

Furthermore, I have suggested and described similarities and equivalences between

improvisation as such – i.e. performance without a written part ever having existed – and an intuitive mode of composition. An early decision as a composer was that I wanted my written music to sound at least as spontaneous as if it had been improvised. This choice was based in part on my own experience as an improvising performer. Through this research, I have discovered two complementary ways in which such an artistic aim can be realized: 1) the careful preparation of a formal plan that can both ensure formal cohesion in the work and also accommodate quasi-improvisational composition later in the process and 2) the cultivation of a certain "improvisational state of mind" which takes over one the formal groundwork has been laid, but which can function within the self-established "rules" laid out in the formal plan. Taken together, the creation of a scheme and the ability to compose "freely" within it comprise my approach throughout the work presented here.

This research has also been an occasion for personal artistic development in some other areas. I have arrived at a personal approach to form as such, greater experience in orchestration and appreciation of orchestration as an articulator of form, and a clearer sense of my relationship to various traditions of music-making including European concert-music, the American and European *avant-gardes* of the 20th century, jazz and some others among the plethora of rapidly-evolving contemporary popular styles. As we struggle to gain a firm contextual foothold in this only-too-rich and complex world of musical practice, we must resist overly "easy" categorizations and periodicization that commonly feature in studies of music history and musicology. Nonetheless, if I were to identify my work with a category of contemporary musical practice, then the "label" that best corresponds to what I do and how I think would be "post-minimalism".

While I have an abiding respect for artists of the *avant-garde*, my own work has tried to consolidate and, possibly, to build upon the rapid gains made during the great musical explorations of the late 20th century rather than to blaze new trails. In this sense, also, the work described in this thesis can be seen as post-minimalist, this movement being, in my view, one of synthesis and consummation of already-existing musical aims and methods.

My approach assumes that an inexhaustible set of potential musical discoveries exists at any point, based on recombinations, freshly observed correspondences and relationships between historico-musical entities up to that point.

Returning to an issue discussed in the section on *Nightscapes* above, there is another sense of the term dramaturgy – used both in music and the theatre – that is closer to "research". In the interpretation of repertoire, it refers to a performer's knowledge of any existing performance practice that has built up around a piece so that each new interpretation contributes to a discourse on that piece. Likewise, each newly composed piece participates in a discourse, perhaps founding a new line, but always continuing and broadening the general knowledge of and engagement in music, referring and responding to related musical ideas, pointing up correspondences. Thus, in the course of their work, the composer's attention is drawn outside and beyond the basic materials and methods of composition, to the broader context in which their work will be heard and will have meaning.

The conviction I first gained as an improviser that collaboration and, in general, the social dimension of music is fundamental to music's nature, has not weakened in my composer's practice but rather remains stronger than ever. The works discussed here were created in the context of a web of social, cultural, historical and interpersonal impulses and competencies, a web that extends to include listeners past and future. That said, I don't think music should try to address the listening habits or abilities of all listeners. Neither should it limit itself by aiming at too specific an audience – one knows that a piece of music will always be heard in some context, while recognizing that one can never anticipate all the ways in which the music might be perceived by a listener. I have tried to ensure the strength of my work through objective measures and methods, but have also aimed to set the music out into the world by including as musical content allusions, propositions, responses and invitations to engage. It is participatory music.

In closing, I offer more questions – the same questions I would encourage young

composers to ask themselves and to keep asking as their experience accumulates: What in the wide world of music is most important to me? And what in my work might have any measure of significance in that world and in the world at large? I have come some way toward answering these questions during the course of this research and look forward to future work with a bolstered sense of place and purpose.

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Notes

[1] By "false counterpoint" I mean a technique whereby several concurrently-sounding but independently perceptible voices are rendered using *other than* the traditional procedures associated with European church polyphony.

[2] This idea is clearly related to the 12-tone technique and other forms of basic serialism, but applied here in an unusual way such that the music sounds in no way "serial".

[3] I am referring here to the widely-held idea that "small is beautiful" as opposed to "bigger is better". *Small is Beautiful* is the title of a 1973 book by British economist E.F. Schumacher, which became increasingly popular during the anti-globalization movement of the past two decades.

[4] I made this analysis as a project in James Tenney's undergraduate music theory class at York University, circa 1980.

[5] The short passage preceding the double bar line in Ex. 5 above, from *Zones*, is an example of this. Here, a sense of closure is achieved by an increase in repetition and harmonic stasis in the orchestral parts.

List of Appended Scores

The Life of Things (2009) for chamber choir SATB. Duration: 09:17

Asleep in a Field (2009) for vocal ensemble SSAATTBB. Duration: 11:42

Strategy (2010) for female voices SSA, alto saxophone, piano, and contrabass.
Duration: 17:45

Every Day (2010) for wind orchestra. Duration: 12:15

Truth in Darkness (2010) for female voices SSAA. Duration: 03:21

Zones (2009) for symphony orchestra, solo alto saxophone (improvising) and DJ.
Duration: 09:37

James in Peril (2009) for symphony orchestra, solo alto saxophone (improvising) and
DJ. Duration: 05:33

Bolero (1955, 2009) for symphony orchestra, solo alto saxophone (improvising) and DJ.
Duration: 04:48

Equilibria (2011) suite for piano. Total duration: 09:24

Stand, Spin, Jump (2011) for improvising duo. Duration: 07:42

Nightscapes - a chamber symphony (2011) in four movements. Total duration: 24:13

Appendix: texts of the vocal works

The Life of Things
Text excerpted from *Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth, 1797

...that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Asleep in a Field
Text excerpted from *turning toward living: An Anthology of Circle Poems* by Alec Finlay, 2004. Used by permission.

...in beans grow in ideas grow...
...you will be found asleep in a field...
...everywhere is here is...
...unseen is the way...
...light after dark dims the day...
...who asks in the end who answers in the end...
...pure light held within...
...becomes what was is and...
...dream after...
...change what changes...
...in the fall apples in the summer peaches...
...dum dum - de dum - de dum dum dum - de dum - de dum - dum dum de dum - de dum
- dum dum de dum - de dum - ...
...we live by leaves...
...turning over the earth...
...not hidden dreamed...
...man dreams butterfly dreams...
...the dark light...
...you are you and I am me and we are we and...
...winds open hands hold the...

...roots grow in decay...
...we are each of us as...

Truth in Darkness
Text excerpted from Psalm 51, New English Bible version (1970. New York: Oxford University Press)

yet, though thou hast hidden the
      truth in darkness,
through this mystery thou dost
      teach me wisdom.
Take hyssop and sprinkle me, that
      I may be clean;
wash me, that I may become
      whiter than snow;
let me hear the sounds of
      joy and gladness,
let the bones dance which
      thou hast broken.

Strategy
Text excerpted from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, translation by John Minford. Used by permission.

I. Making Plans

...a grave affair of state,
a place of life and death,
a road to survival and extinction,
a matter to be pondered carefully.

There are Five Fundamentals:

The Way - to be of one mind, to live or die but never to waver.
Heaven is Yin and Yang, cold and hot, the cycle of seasons.
Earth is height and depth, distance and proximity, ease and danger, open and confined ground, life and death.
Command is (1) Wisdom, (2) Integrity, (3) Compassion, (4) Courage, (5) Severity.
Discipline is organization, chain of command, control of expenditure.

Who has the Way?
Who has the ability?
On whose side are Heaven and Earth?
Whose discipline is more effective?

Who is stronger?
Who is better trained?
For whom are rewards and punishments clearest?

Settle on the best plan,
Exploit the dynamic within,
Develop it without.
Follow the advantage,
and master opportunity.

A Way of Deception:
When able, feign inability.
When deploying, appear not to be.
When near, appear far.
When far, appear near.
Lure with bait; strike with chaos.
Be prepared:
If he is strong, avoid him.
If he is angry, disconcert him.
If he is weak, stir him to pride.
If he is relaxed, harry him.
Attack where he is unprepared, appear where you are unexpected.

II.**Forms and Dispositions**

The Skilful Strategist
Cultivates the Way,
and preserves the law,
and thus is master of victory and defeat.

Measurement,
Estimation,
Calculation,
Comparison,
Victory.

Earth determines Measurement,
Measurement determines Estimation,
Estimation determines Calculation,
Calculation determines Comparison,
Comparison determines Victory.

Victory is like a pound weighed against a grain.
Defeat is like a grain weighed against a pound.

Victory is like pent-up water crashing a thousand fathoms into a gorge.

This is all a matter of Forms and Dispositions.

III. **Potential Energy**

Many is the same as few -
It is a question of division.
Marshall with gongs, identify with flags.
Combining Indirect and Direct,
Understanding Weakness and Strength,
Engage directly, secure victory indirectly.

The Indirect is infinite as Heaven and Earth,
Inexhaustible as river and sea,
It ends and begins again like sun and moon,
Dies and is born again like the four seasons.

There are but Five notes,
and yet their permutations are more than can ever be heard.
There are but Five Colours,
and yet their permutations are more than can ever be seen.
There are but Five Flavours,
and yet their permutations are more than can ever be tasted.

But these Two - Indirect and Direct -
their permutations are inexhaustible.
They give rise to each other in a nerver-ending, inexhaustible circle.

A rushing torrent carries boulders on its flood;
Such is the energy of its momentum.
A swooping falcon breaks the back of its prey;
Such is the precision of its timing.
Devastating energy, taut timing.

Disorder is founded on order,
Fear on courage, weakness on strength.
Orderly disorder is based on careful division,
courageous fear on potential energy,
strong weakness on dispositions.

Like rolling logs or boulders:
By their nature, on level ground, logs and boulders stay still;
on steep ground they move.

Square, they halt. Round, they roll
like round boulders rolling down a mighty mountainside.

These are all matters of potential energy.

IV. **Empty and Full**

First on the field waits, fresh.
Last on the field charges in, exhausted.
To stir and not be stirred.
To lure on or obstruct from coming.
To unsettle the settled,
Appearing at the place where least expected.
Without form, without sound,
advancing irresistibly,
then retreating too swift to be be caught.

If I wish to engage,
then, for all his high ramparts and deep moat,
he cannot avoid the engagement;
I attack that which he is obliged to rescue.
If I do not wish to engage,
I can hold my ground with nothing more than a line drawn around it.
He cannot engage me;
I distract him in a different direction.

His form is visible but I am formless.
I am concentrated, he is divided.
I am concentrated into one, he is divided into ten.
I am ten to his one, many against his few.

Focus on him, scrutinize him,
know the flaws in his plans.
Rouse him, discover the springs in his actions.

V. **The Nine Kinds of Ground**

These things must be studied:
The variations of the Nine Kinds of Ground,
The Advantages of Flexible Manoeuvre,
The Principles of Human Nature.

On scattering ground, we unite the will.

On light ground, we keep connected.
On strategic ground, we bring up our rear.
On open ground, we see to our defences.
On crossroad ground, we strengthen our alliances.
On heavy ground, we ensure continuity of supplies.
On intractable ground, we keep on the move.
On enclosed ground, we block the passes.
On death ground, we demonstrate the desperateness of the situation.

If he opens a door, rush in and seize what he holds dear,
and secretly contrive an encounter.
Discard the rules,
follow him to fight the decisive battle.

At first, be like a maiden.
When he opens the door, be swift as a hare;
He will not withstand you.