

Commentary on

**A Portfolio of Original
Compositions**

Presented for PhD

June 2013

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Summary

This portfolio of original works and commentary is submitted for the qualification of PhD in June 2013. Its intention is to give a representative account of my compositional journey since I began reading for the qualification in 2005.

The portfolio contains small-scale works and large-scale works of varying durations with the intention being to display a high level of understanding of the subject matter combined with compositional flair and talent. At the outset, the challenges were to develop my compositional skills to a higher level, compose longer-scale works and find a medium I felt comfortable writing for that also complimented my writing style.

My aim has been to show the distinct difference in my work from the beginning and the end of the course in this portfolio. I feel that I am much more of an accomplished composer now who has a distinctive style and character to my music. This portfolio and commentary will act as a guide to my thought process during the compositional tasks in addition to my personal musical and compositional background and influences.

Matthew Hall

June 2013.

Aims & Objectives

I began my PhD in 2005 at the age of 22 having recently graduated from Cardiff University with a Music Degree and subsequent Masters in Composition from the same institution. Over the period of 4 years I had already been studying in Cardiff at undergraduate and graduate level, composition had become my main focus of attention. However, I felt that I had not developed enough as a composer to find my own voice and style, which I endeavoured to achieve through the PhD research process.

Improvisation has become an integral part of my compositional process combined with the use of chordal harmony and clear understanding of melodic lines and structure. Even as a child, I taught myself to improvise making use of the largely tonal chords and structures found in many musical theatre scores that I was so committed to. These elements have become an integral part of all of my works and provides me with the basis to start work from. This portfolio and commentary aims to show how this has developed in my work over the eight years that I have been working towards the PhD qualification.

Writing about my own compositions has been an immense undertaking that I have found particularly difficult throughout my research. To analyse your work and compare and contrast your work to other composers is fundamentally something that all composers do but rarely comment upon; being compared to another composer by a musicologist is one matter, but saying it yourself is wholly different. It has proven to be an unnerving but beneficial process that has enlightened me as a composer and made me understand my strengths and weaknesses as well as seeing my compositional output in a

different light. I did not realise before this process began that a number of minimalist tendencies recur through my music, which has made me question where I have obtained these tendencies from. I now understand my own work to a much higher level than I ever have done before and this has allowed me to expand on my findings in my work as a composer going forward.

Throughout my research, I have concentrated increasingly on brass band and wind orchestra instrumentation. The two large-scale works contained in my portfolio are a wind orchestra 'symphony' in 3 movements and a brass band 'test' piece. The wind orchestra and brass band have been an integral part of my life from an early age; I have played with wind orchestras since the age of 11 and was brought up on the sound of a brass band. In 2008 I had the opportunity to become a player and subsequently composer-in-residence with Tredegar Town Band, allowing me deep insight into the brass band medium. I have found that both the brass band and wind orchestra suit my own compositional harmonic language and my technique of writing for the instrumentation has improved as time has passed. A number of works composed for other bands throughout my research period have not been included in the portfolio as I felt that these were transitional works.

The Brass Band

With such an integral part of my research taking place within the brass band medium, this is the best place to start my commentary, trying to locate where I found myself as a composer in the brass band world of 2013.

There are countless theories about the origin of the brass band as an entity. Numerous bands have been thought of as the 'first' or original; however, a lot of research into the origins of bands in the early nineteenth century has been conducted through word of mouth or tales passed on from generation to generation. Without documented evidence, therefore, it can-not be proven that there is one undisputed original brass band as such, but there are a number of possibilities that were founded in the early part of the nineteenth century: The Coxlodge Band dated back to 1809¹; a band was formed in Stalybridge in 1814²; Kirkbymoorside Band began in 1815³; Black Dyke Band dates from 1816⁴; and Besses o' th' Barn from 1818.⁵ All of these bands started out as reed bands, incorporating instruments including the clarinet, piccolo, flute, bassoon and serpent⁶ as well as brass instruments of various guises.

A number of factors were distinct in the creation of the brass band as an entity, particularly local church bands being made obsolete with the reintroduction of organs into parish churches, for example at Eccles in 1813.⁷ The local working-class musicians who were no longer needed, concentrated on other forms of music and ensembles

1 Cyril Bainbridge, *Brass Triumphant* (London: Muller, 1980).

2 J.F. Russell and J.H. Elliott, *The Brass Band Movement* (London: Dent, 1936).

3 Vaughan Evans, *Durham County Brass Band League* (Durham: County Durham Books, Southgate Publishers, 1992).

4 J.F. Russell and J.H. Elliott, *The Brass Band Movement* (London: Dent, 1936).

5 Ibid.

6 Arthur R. Taylor, *Brass Bands* (London: Granada Publishing, 1979).

7 Ibid.

outside of the church. The military also played a fundamental role in the foundation of the brass band. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) a large number of military musicians and instruments were left redundant and used to create new volunteer bands in the United Kingdom with military connections. For example, the Bacup band was reconstituted in 1859 as the 4th Lancashire Rifle Volunteers,⁸ while the Halifax band was the 4th West Yorks Rifle Volunteers, the band that won the British Open and National Championships in 1860⁹. The volunteer bands had a large influence on the growth of the brass band movement as a whole, and as Trevor Herbert states ‘is probably more important than is generally realised’.¹⁰

Religion also had a large role to play, with the formation of the Salvation Army brass bands. The main difference between the Salvation Army bands and other bands of the same period was the manner in which the bands interacted with the public. As Ronald W. Holz points out:

SA bands would be radical, confrontational, and would challenge accepted practise, blaring forth their fervent evangelical message in a manner that would cause, initially, controversy, violent opposition and general public disapproval.¹¹

The Salvation Army bands were seen in general public life putting forward their message of evangelical salvation as a way of interacting with the public and gaining adherents to their theology, hence the perception of many that brass bands only play hymn tunes and marches. For many people, particularly those in the working-classes, the Salvation Army bands were the only music that they had heard; they were unaware

8 Isaac Leach, *Bacup Old Band* (Bacup: L.J. Priestley Publishers, 1908).

9 Trevor Herbert, ed., *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19th & 20th centuries* (London: Open University Press, 1991).

10 Ibid.

11 Ronald W. Holz, *Brass Bands of the Salvation Army: Their Mission and Music Volume 1* (Hitchin: Streets Publishers, 2006).

of any other genres.

Technological developments throughout the nineteenth century, inspired by Adolphe Sax, meant that the instruments within the bands were changing. Higher-quality instruments with better intonation, efficiency and articulation combined with a louder overall sound and ease of playing were produced and superseded the original instruments.

Many brass bands were formed during the years of the industrial revolution. Mills, collieries and mining towns were common places where working-class people would congregate to play with their local bands. This is where the brass band gets the working-class, blue-collar image that many people still perceive today. Brass bands created the first mass involvement of working-class people in instrumental art music, not just in the United Kingdom but possibly anywhere in the world, so much so that thousands of bands were in existence by the end of the nineteenth century.¹² Brass bands are still seen as a working-class establishment and form of music making. Adverts are screened on the television for companies such as Plus Net and Yorkshire Tea, which now have their own brass bands to advertise specifically to the working-class customer. With so many local bands forming, it was only a matter of time before contests were conceived to find out who the best bands were, along the same lines as sport and agricultural shows.

¹² Ray Farr, *The Distin Legacy: The Rise of the Brass Band in nineteenth Century Britain* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

Brass Band Contests and Test Pieces

The brass band contest can be traced back to the formation of the first bands in the early nineteenth century. One-off contests would be conceived between two bands local to each other in the equivalent of a ‘local derby’ until 1860, when Enderby Jackson created the first national brass band contests at Crystal Palace in London. Two contests were planned over the space of two days, with over forty bands participating on the first day and more than seventy on the second day, each band performing their own choice of piece in the same location providing a logistical conundrum.¹³ Each band on stage performed to a panel of three judges who were situated in a tent. The tent meant that each band had an equal chance of adjudication based purely on musical sound rather than any visible distraction or deterrent for the adjudicators. (A tent is still used for the adjudicators to sit in in contesting today, over 150 years later.) The contest on the first day was won by the Black Dyke Band from Yorkshire, which is still competing at the highest level today, and the second day's contest was won by the Cyfarthfa Band from South Wales, the band on which I based my composition *Legends of Cyfarthfa* (see portfolio).¹⁴

The inaugural contests meant that each band could play its own choice of piece. Arrangements or selections of operatic compositions were the most prominent genre, with music from Verdi's *Ernani* (1844), Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1845) and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (1877-8) amongst those compositions performed.¹⁵ Other works performed include a number of dances such as the Quadrille (*In the Park*, Ambrose Bourne), Lancer (*Coronation Gem*, Edward Newton), Polka (*Arizona Belle*, Rimmer)

¹³ Arthur R. Taylor, *Brass Bands* (London: Granada Publishing, 1979).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Brindley Boon, *Play the Music Play* (St. Albans: Campfield Press, 1966).

and Waltz (*Cornflower and Poppies*, Greenwood) alongside the March (*The Avenger*, Rimmer), a common genre which many people perceive the brass band only able to perform alongside the hymn tunes that were associated with the Salvation Army Bands mentioned previously. Bands were increasingly engaged to perform at social functions so the proportion of dances in their repertoire increased substantially.

The arrangers of music for brass band continued to concentrate on 'classic' pieces from the Romantic Period that included opera, concert overtures and primarily programme music in the form of symphonic poems. Short original pieces were being penned by composers and arrangers, but they merely added to the ever-increasing catalogue of dances mentioned earlier with the instrumentation differing between bands dependent upon its makeup. It is not until 1913 that we see the first original extended work specifically written for brass band in the form of Percy Fletcher's *Labour and Love*. As brass bands became more popular and increasingly capable, composers better known for their orchestral scores were starting to write specifically for the medium, examples of which include *A Moorland Suite* by Gustav Holst (1928), *Severn Suite* by Edward Elgar (1930), and *A Downland Suite* by John Ireland (1932). These 'art composers' added prestige to the brass band movement in a trend that has continued up to the present day.¹⁶ Many other composers had a central influence on brass band composers including Berlioz, Liszt, Mendelssohn and Wagner in the late nineteenth and early 20th twentieth centuries since it was their music that was popular in concert halls at the time.

Fletcher's *Labour and Love* (1913) is described in the score as a tone poem; a single continuous piece in which the content of a non-musical source is illustrated. There is a

¹⁶ Dennis Taylor, *English Brass Bands and their music, 1860-1930* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

large synopsis of the work contained within the score, which has become a feature of almost all original brass band test pieces up to the present day. For example, *Fragile Oasis* by Peter Meechan was commissioned and premiered at the European Championships in Oslo one hundred years after *Labour and Love* in 2013. The piece is described on Peter's website as follows:

'Fragile Oasis is the name of a collective who describe themselves as '...a grass-roots participatory initiative that connects the shared perspective of astronauts from different countries and cultures with people on Earth, encouraging all to work together so that our planet is not only visibly beautiful, but beautiful for all'.

Many involved in the project are astronauts on the International Space Station (I.S.S.), who post, on their website (<http://www.fragileoasis.org>) many different details of their experiments, photos from space, and some incredible video footage of our Earth.

Each of the five sections of this work relate to an aspect of one of these videos – either something literal or something more metaphorical. The opening section, i: The lights from Above, is a musical description of the view of the Aurora Australis from above the lights. The second section, ii: The Storm from Above (part i), is also a musical portrayal of portions of the video clip –

in this case the many lightning storms we see from above. The storms that are so powerful on Earth appear as small bolts of electricity dancing through the clouds."¹⁷

From the above quotation, we can clearly see the intended imagery portrayed in music to create an extended programmatic work. The blurb is a contemporary example of all programmatic works written as test pieces for the brass band contest stage.

Another common form of brass band test piece is one that takes its inspiration and musical foundations from an earlier piece by a different composer or earlier material from the same composer that is now being rethought. If we take the pieces chosen for the British Open, widely regarded as the contest with the largest number of the highest quality bands in the world and where some of the leading new test pieces are first seen and commissioned, we find this:

Year	Composer	Test Piece	Based upon	Number of times used
2013	Stephen Roberts	<i>Arabian Nights</i>	Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherezade	0
2012	Martin Ellerby	<i>Electra</i>	Richard Strauss, Elektra	6
2011	Philip Wilby	<i>Red Priest</i>	Vivaldi	12
2010	Peter Graham	<i>On the Shoulders of Giants</i>	Bruckner, Symphony No. 8	19
2009	Hermann Pallhuber	<i>Titan's Progress</i>	Mahler, Symphony No. 1	22
2008	Edward Gregson	<i>Rococo Variations</i>	Multiple titles from multiple composers	34
2007	Kenneth Downie	<i>Visions of Gerontius</i>	Dykes, Gerontius	2

¹⁷ http://www.petermeechanmusic.co.uk/category/brass_band/ , 30th May 2013.

2006	Philip Wilby	<i>Vienna Nights</i>	Mozart, Piano Sonata in A, K331	33
2005	Bramwell Tovey	<i>The Night to Sing</i>	Programmatic Original	8
2004	Wilfred Heaton	<i>Contest Music</i>	Original (1973)	89
2003	Holst, arr. Stephen Roberts	<i>Venus & Jupiter (from The Planets Suite)</i>	Arrangement	1
2002	John McCabe	<i>The Maunsell Forts</i>	Programmatic Original	1
2001	Bram Gay	<i>Les Preludes</i>	Arrangement of Liszt, Les Preludes	16
2000	Michael Ball	<i>Ceremony</i>	Programmatic Original	1

From the above table we can see that the last time an original work was selected for the British Open was 2005, with Bramwell Tovey's *The Night to Sing*. A further interesting statistic is the number of times that each piece has been subsequently used in a contest environment, be it as a set test or as an own choice selection. The original works are far less commonly performed (0.85 average times per year since composed) compared to the arrangements of pieces based upon other musical ideas (4.12 average times per year since composed).¹⁸ From the statistical evidence, we can see a clear preference for the pieces based upon earlier music rather than for original work. If we look at the pieces chosen for the UK National Finals for the Championship Section we find this:

Year	Composer	Test Piece	Based upon	Number of times used
2013	Edward Gregson	<i>Of Distant Memories</i>	Programmatic, multiple composers	0
2012	Maurice Ravel arr. Howard Snell	<i>Daphnis et Chloe, 2nd Suite</i>	Arrangement (1986)	4
2011	Paul Lovatt-Cooper	<i>Breath of Souls</i>	Programmatic Original	4
2010	Martin Ellerby	<i>Terra Australis</i>	Programmatic Original	3
2009	Peter Graham	<i>The Torchbearer</i>	Programmatic, Eric Ball	11

¹⁸ Analysis of data captured from <http://brassbandresults.co.uk> on 30th May 2013.

2008	Kenneth Downie	<i>Concertino for Brass Band</i>	Original	4
2007	Philip Sparke	<i>Music for Battle Creek</i>	Original	26
2006	Hector Berlioz arr. Frank Wright	<i>Les Francs Juges</i>	Arrangement (1961)	25
2005	John Pickard	<i>Eden</i>	Programmatic Original	11
2004	Michael Ball	<i>...all the flowers of the mountain...</i>	Programmatic Original	2
2003	Edward Elgar arr. Eric Ball	<i>Theme & Eight Variations from Enigma</i>	Arrangement	2
2002	Philip Wilby	<i>Masquerade</i>	Verdi, Falstaff (1993)	29
2001	Jan van der Roost	<i>Albion</i>	Programmatic Original	8
2000	Peter Graham	<i>Harrison's Dream</i>	Programmatic Original	19

We can clearly see that there are a larger number of programmatic pieces at the National Finals but also a higher number of original works. However, once again there are only two occurrences of original material being used in its own context without the programmatic element. Sparke also claims that *Music for Battle Creek* is not programmatic; however, it is a piece written deliberately and intentionally in a specific American style about a specific American band, so it has a large programmatic element even if that was unintentional.

In conclusion, brass band test pieces appear to fall within three categories: -

1. Programmatic pieces based on original ideas.
2. Pieces based upon other earlier material created by another composer or the same composer writing the new piece.
3. Stand-alone original works based on original material with non-programmatic tendencies.

The first two categories are the most common, with the stand-alone original work very much the least. Composers have been writing increasingly complex and difficult works for bands to tackle in the contest arena, pushing bands, performers, conductors, adjudicators and listeners in an ever-widening of the boundaries and scope of what is possible for a brass band. However, it is interesting to note that 100 years on from the original test piece for brass band, most test pieces utilise the same compositional method as was used then. The test pieces that have been commissioned for the two most important contests in the United Kingdom in 2013 are Gregson's programmatic use of earlier brass band composers work in *Of Distant Memories* for the National Finals, while the British Open commission *Arabian Nights* by Stephen Roberts is completely based upon Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherezade*, a work written one hundred and twenty five years previously. The brass band movement as a whole appears to the general public as a very antiquated establishment, and the statistics appear to support the evidence. The brass band contest itself has not changed in any way, shape or form for over 100 years; there are still adjudicators in a tent; the rules have remained virtually unchanged since the first contest; the music, however more complex in every musical way, is still based upon the same ideas as the brass band music of the early twentieth century.

Compositional Process

My earliest influences of the brass band genre were garnered from recordings of well-known concert pieces from bands including Black Dyke and Grimethorpe. I also remember having the opportunity to attend a concert by Grimethorpe during my teenage years that I can still remember for the quality of music making and sheer range and scope of what could be accomplished by a brass band. Concerts from bands in the higher echelons of the brass band world were a very rare occurrence at home in Shropshire which could be attributed to the small number of brass bands in the county. Currently, Shropshire only has one band registered in the championship section, the Jackfield Elcock Reisen Band and a small number of bands in the lower sections. Therefore, when I came to Cardiff University to study as an Undergraduate in 2001, my eyes had yet to be opened to the sheer scale of the brass band movement.

Throughout my Undergraduate (2001-4) and Postgraduate Masters (2004-5) courses, the influence of the brass band on my music increased. I started playing percussion with the Cwmaman Institute Silver Band in early 2005 and was introduced to the brass band contest, an entity that I was unaware existed prior to performing at the Welsh Area Championships in March of the same year. At the behest of 3 fellow students who had much more experience of playing with brass bands, I composed a brass band 'test' piece in 2005 for my Masters course, aimed at the championship section. Although the piece was not particularly successful, it gave me the opportunity to understand the scoring and orchestration for brass band. It also gave me an invaluable insight into the technical elements of the compositional process of writing a 'test' piece, alongside the insight of performers and conductors, especially after the piece was performed by the Birmingham

Conservatoire Brass Band under the direction of Ian Porthouse in 2007.

This performance was the catalyst which led to composing for brass band on a more regular basis combined with a transfer to Tredegar Town Band to play with Ian Porthouse as conductor. The difference in standard of playing between the band I had come from and Tredegar was ginormous, once again furthering my understanding of the potential capability of a brass band from an invaluable insight on the inside.

During the first three years of the PhD process from 2005-8, I had been honing my compositional skills and techniques with small-scale works for smaller ensembles. *Man Made Waters (Sketches)* was the only work written for more than 8 instruments throughout this time which I saw as a compositional sketches task to create a full-scale work at a later date from, having only 3 weeks to create the entire score for full orchestra before a workshop with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Looking back over the pieces from the first three years of the PhD has enabled me to analyse my own work and has highlighted a number of elements that are present in my writing that I had not realised before undertaking this task, prior to writing *Concerto Grosso*, the final piece in my portfolio.

Many of my pieces are based around small modular components that can be manipulated in a number of ways through repetition, elongation and condensation. Examples include the clarinet (b.49-60) and harp (b.47-60) in *Man Made Waters* and the marimba (b.96-119) in *Aerofoil*. These components generate movement within a static harmony that enables melodic lines to form an extra layer on top of the music, much

like Steve Reich does in much of his music, *Six Marimbas* and *Nagoya Marimbas* being examples. An earlier influence would be Arnold Bax whose work *Tintagel* remains a work of much importance and influence on my works alongside many composers of the Romantic period.

Most of the pieces in my portfolio are through-composed whether they are single-movement pieces such as *Lament* or multi-section such as *One Hand*. Other forms I have chosen to use include a series of sketches for *Man Made Waters*, once again with the first sketch combining two ideas, whereas in *No Respite* I used a palindrome form, having been influenced by Webern's *Pieces for Clarinet and Piano* that I studied at undergraduate level and further researching his techniques for composition.

Enesek Syllan is the longest piece within the portfolio at twenty-eight minutes split into three movements. The three movements are multi-movement pieces within themselves and are through-composed.

Influenced by Berg, Stockhausen and Webern, the earlier pieces of my portfolio show experimentation with atonality and chromaticism whilst maintaining the tonal additive chords and harmonic language that I mentioned had been such a large part of my musical education from the musical theatre background. I especially liked the harmonic content of David Bedford's *Sun Paints Rainbows on the Vast Waves* with his use of chromatic versus tonal language which I tried to emulate. *Aerofoil* is an example of this in my portfolio by making use of chromatic cluster chords and having no firm sense of key throughout, but a relatively tonal B9♭6 appears almost out of the blue (b.94).

As I progressed through the PhD process I found myself increasingly drawn to more tonal harmony from performing with and being increasingly involved with the brass band genre. The National Championships of Great Britain used Peter Graham's *Journey to The Centre of The Earth* as the test piece for the area contests in 2006 which made me realise that there was still a place in contemporary music for tonality. *One Hand* shows my increasing use of major and minor 7th chords with the vibraphone (b.39-50) swapping between E \flat maj7 to Emin7, quickly followed by F#m7 chords in the subsequent passage. *Reasons* also shows my increasing use of tonal harmony with the vibraphone part (b.144-151) making use of C major, D minor, B \flat major and F major chords.

A number of my pieces show the use of pedal notes in any range. Pedal notes give my pieces a sense of stability and slow-changing harmony, heavily influenced by the music of Steve Reich and John Adams.

I have always seen melody as being a very important part of my compositional works. Looking through the portfolio I have recognised that most of my melodic lines are linear, scalar and tonal with little being angular and dissonant which I attribute to my early influences including musical theatre. A fellow academic once commented that my melodic lines were reminiscent of vocal lines with their linear makeup, shaping and phrasing. However, in *Hours* and *Yarn* I experimented with the extremes of angularity and dissonance to test myself and the performers to see what I was capable of writing after a comment from a fellow composition student that my works were 'too easy'.

I have used rhythmical elements as a form of melodic line throughout my portfolio

taking inspiration from David Bedford and John Adams. The use of repeated or single notes and layering of different instrumental voices in the overall orchestral texture as can be seen in *Aerofoil* is something that I have explored and very keen to continue using after the PhD process has been completed heavily influenced by Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint*. I have also used rhythmical devices in pedal notes increasingly throughout my portfolio including morse code in *The Smile* and *Enesek Syllan*.

Rhythmical devices including cross-rhythms, complex patterns and changing time signatures have become a regular feature of my work, especially since becoming a percussionist with the Cwmaman Institute Silver Band at the start of my PhD research in 2005. I have always made a conscious effort to counter the problem of the first beat of the bar being the strongest by adding or shortening the regular bar length in the same way John Adams does in *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*.

From the analysis of the fundamental compositional elements of my work and their influences, it has become very apparent that I take a lot of inspiration from composers with minimalist tendencies. John Adams, Steve Reich and David Bedford have played a major role in influencing my music in terms of structure, harmony and melodic content alongside composers from the Romantic period including Rachmaninov, Chopin, Bax and Debussy for their harmonic language and orchestration. All of these influences combined with my knowledge and understanding of the brass band genre have combined in *Concerto Grosso*, the final piece of my portfolio.

Concerto Grosso

After studying and analysing previous works in the portfolio and understanding what influenced me as a composer alongside researching the brass band history of test pieces and contest music, I felt ready to write my own 'test' piece.

A number of factors presented themselves before a note had been put on paper. With the rules of contesting stating that bands are allowed a maximum of twenty-five brass players plus percussion, composers are somewhat limited in the orchestration. The makeup of the twenty-five brass players has remained constant for one hundred years giving a wide range of notes but still keeping the traditional brass band tone. Generally, the composer is able to write for the following list of brass instruments: -

1 x Soprano Cornet in E♭

9 x Cornet in B♭ (typically split into four solo cornets, one repiano, two 2nd and two 3rd)

1 x Flugel Horn in B♭

3 x Tenor Horn in E♭

2 x Baritone in B♭

2 x Trombone in B♭

1 x Bass Trombone in C

2 x Euphonium in B♭

2 x Bass in E♭

2 x Bass in B♭

There have been a number of occasions when alternative instruments are orchestrated in pieces, most notably in Salvation Army music when there is typically no repiano cornet or 3rd cornet part, only solo, 1st and 2nd cornet parts. These alternative instruments are typically seen in shorter concert works when taking more than one instrument on stage for a concert is more practical for the performers. Furthermore, many bands have purchased their own instruments, so adhering to the traditional instrumentation enables the composers' work to obtain a far wider reach than if only a selected few were able to play it with the correct instrumentation. *Nightingale Dances*, a work not included in my portfolio, uses four flugel horns instead of solo cornets at the start of the piece. A notable exception to this standard practise for 'test' pieces is Gavin Higgins' *Destroy, Trample as Quickly as She...* which substitutes 4 solo cornets for flugel horns in the middle section. However, it also needs to be noted that Higgins' work was a one-off commission for Tredegar Town Band to perform at the 2011 European Championships so the band were able to accommodate the composers wishes.

With this in mind, I decided to write using standard instrumentation for brass band, but used in a different way. Typically, the brass band is set up in the following layout: -

Percussion				
3 rd Cornet	B \flat Bass	B \flat Bass	E \flat Bass	E \flat Bass
3 rd Cornet	2 nd Horn	1 st Horn	Solo Horn	Flugel
2 nd Cornet	Solo Cornet			2 nd Baritone
2 nd Cornet	Solo Cornet		1 st Baritone	Bass Trombone
Repiano Cornet	Solo Cornet		Euphonium	2 nd Trombone
Soprano Cornet	Principle Cornet	Conductor	Solo Euphonium	1 st Trombone

Philip Wilby is renowned for his compositions where the performers are not in standard layout including *Vienna Nights* and *Red Priest*. This creates new variables and possibilities which I explored in *The Smile* but on a much larger scale in *Concerto Grosso*. Therefore, I have chosen to lay out the brass players as follows: -

Percussion				
	B \flat Bass (1)	E \flat Bass (1)	B \flat Bass (2)	E \flat Bass (2)
	1 st Baritone	Solo Euphonium	2 nd Baritone	2 nd Euphonium
2 nd Trombone	2 nd Horn		1 st Horn	Bass Trombone
Soprano Cornet	Solo Horn		Flugel	1 st Trombone
2 nd Cornet (1)	Solo Cornet (3)		Solo Cornet (1)	Repiano Cornet
3 rd Cornet (1)	Solo Cornet (4)	Conductor	Solo Cornet (2)	2 nd Cornet (2)

This layout gives a much more balanced sound from a central position. The traditional layout doesn't give this balance with mostly treble instruments on the left and bass instruments on the right. The advantages of the traditional layout are that the sections

are together making it much easier to play as an ensemble. *Concerto Grosso* treats each instrument as it's own entity, sometimes within a section that the instrument is still part of but mainly by itself, another trait of Philip Wilby's music. All together, the layout of the band enables me to work with each part individually and within different, non-traditional ensembles and creates a much more balanced sound for the stereo pan effects I have composed (b.225-227 the most extreme example).¹⁹

With the overwhelming influence on my music coming from minimalism, I created a piece based on the rhythmic patterns and dynamic phasing of *New York Counterpoint* by Steve Reich. Reich is renowned for creating pieces with multiples of the same instrument; *New York Counterpoint* being for eleven clarinets. I used this as an influence to write for a full brass band because the sounds and tones are very similar in each instrument. However, *Concerto Grosso* is not a programmatic composition or based on other previous composers' work; it merely uses the same principles found in many minimalist compositions throughout the entire piece. There has never been a complete minimalist 'test' piece for brass band which could be for a number of reasons. The most likely reason is that 'test' pieces are most commonly commissioned by a third party who have a large influence on the piece as a whole entity from concept to contest. As I have shown earlier in the commentary, most new 'test' pieces are programmatic or use previous material as their source material. Many of these pieces are specifically designed to get listeners and followers to attend the contests with their easy-listening nature, story-telling capabilities or catchy segments from well-known works previously composed for other mediums. Examples include Paul Lovatt-Cooper's *Breath of Souls* and Darrol Barry's *Malcolm Arnold Variations*.

¹⁹ NB, the numbers in brackets after the instrument name corresponds to which line the instrument is playing within it's own scoring. B♭ Bass (1) will refer to the first (top) line of the B♭ Bass on the score.

Concerto Grosso is a through-composed original work in 3 movements each interlinked by rhythmical, melodic and harmonic motifs. The most fundamental of these motifs is the repeated note pattern which is first hinted in the trombones (b.10) before becoming fully fledged (b.38). The repeated semiquaver pattern (also seen as quintuplets and sextuplets) is very static in notational terms but is constantly moving dynamically in and out of the texture around it. This is the main motif used in the first movement of Reich's *New York Counterpoint*. The dynamic contrast combined with the layout of the band creates a stereo field that the listener can easily distinguish between. The stereo field becomes increasingly noticeable (b.136-156) due to the use of canonic imitation between two parts spread far apart on the stage using a second motif seen earlier (b.66). This funk-inspired bass line ends up with a second instrument playing in the quaver rests to continue the theme of movement. The notes in the rests played by the second instrument are supposed to be like an echo, somewhat similar to the experimental passage in *No Respite* (b.64-65) with its decaying notes.

Many of the accompaniment figures make use of elongation and repetition. The cornet parts (b.6-15) use the same notes but with a different rhythmic feel (semiquavers against triplet quavers) which is also the same as the baritones, euphoniums and basses. All together they create the sense of movement over a static harmony making use of the pedal notes that have become an essential part of my compositions.

Harmonically, *Concerto Grosso* is somewhat different to the typical pieces that I have previously composed for brass band. After reading Vincent Persichetti's *Twentieth Century Harmony* I decided to use the Super Locrian mode transposed to G for the

opening and embellishing this throughout the piece whilst making use of the primary and secondary chords. Modes and scales are inherently based on major and minor 2nd intervals so there are a number of whole tone chordal structures (b.113-124). Despite the Super Locrian mode and deliberate atonality throughout the piece, there are also consonant additive chords that the earlier pieces show (Basses b.28-29).

The melodic lines in *Concerto Grosso* remain linear and 'vocal' in style. However, I have not just used the notes from the harmony, (modal or otherwise) to create tension in the music. The melodic lines are mainly solo passages but it is not just the main melodic lines that are important; each part is equally important as the next to create the overall atmosphere and perspective of the piece. Therefore, as a 'test' piece it would be challenging for the players to generate the right ambience with the number of new ideas that have not been introduced to the brass band genre before.

Overall, the piece is relatively short for a 'test' piece at 10 minutes. However, there are a number of challenging technical elements and opportunity for the best bands to play to a high level through a new genre that has its roots firmly in the brass band culture. The opening and closing of the piece are distinct because they are very different to the 'usual' 'test' piece. I have only been able to find one instance of a 'test' piece that begins with a solo instrument melody in *Jazz* by Philip Wilby. There are a number of instances where a solo instrument begins the whole piece including *Harmony Music* by Phillip Sparke however that is only one note before the rest of the entire band is introduced. There are also very few instances of a quiet ending to a 'test' piece. Eric Ball's *Resurgam* ends quietly, however, this shows the difference between a 'test' piece from 1950 and today where the bands and the paying public seemingly want a big tub-thumping ending.

Concerto Grosso aims to push the boundaries of brass bands into new realms and open up the general public, players, conductors and adjudicators to a different style that isn't regurgitating the same material that bands have been playing for the last one hundred years.

Conclusion

The PhD research process has enabled me to achieve a number of aims, chief amongst which is understanding where I stand in the world of brass band composers. Analysing my own works and those of others writing for the same genre has made me realise that there is a huge potential opening for brass bands and banding in general to take a giant leap forward in the United Kingdom and the world, but that there are just as many pitfalls as well. The brass band movement as a whole is unfortunately stuck one hundred years out of date and until it realises that and makes changes, it will continue to dwindle into insignificance in modern times.

The brass band as an entity and the amateur musicians who dedicate so much time to rehearsing and performing at concerts and contests are crying out for new music constantly. It is one of the largest musical genres for a composer to get into alongside the wind orchestra. However, if the music we as composers create is not pushing the brass band forwards, then we are merely adding to the problem. The brass band is a vibrant, youthful musical tool compared to a symphony orchestra but it is seen by many as the working-class lower echelon of music making. To give an example, the Black Dyke Band, the most famous name in all of the brass band world and 22-times National UK Champion has only performed at the BBC Proms, the biggest festival of classical music in the world every year since its inception in 1895, on five occasions.²⁰ These are the ideas that need to change with help from composers writing new and innovative music to help put the brass band back where it belongs, not as the backing band for a cheap telecoms retailer.

²⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/archive/search/performers/black-dyke-band-%2528formerly-john-foster-black-dyke-mills-band%253b-black-dyke-mills-band%2529/1> , 30th May 2013.

The PhD research process has been daunting and challenging throughout the eight years that I have been studying towards the qualification. However, it has been a very rewarding process and one that has enabled me to find my own compositional voice and style in a genre that I am passionate about and want to move forward. I am lucky to be in the position of being able to have my music performed throughout the world. Hopefully this research project has provided me with the initial step to be able to push the boundaries of brass band composition and give me the ability to galvanise and modernise the movement as a whole.

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