INTERSECTING INFLUENCES:
FINDING COMPOSITIONAL UNITY ACROSS DIFFERENT MUSICAL SPACES

Volume 1 of 2: Academic Commentary

By Timothy Johnston

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ABSTRACT

Even within the relatively short scope of my musical career to date, my compositions exist across a spectrum of different artistic influences. The foremost of these are my Classical training as a composer within Western Art music and my love of English and Welsh folk music, alongside professional and academic experience in music production and composition for screen. In this doctoral project, I have sought to develop a creative practice which seamlessly unifies these influences to create a distinct and original compositional voice.

The goal of such a unified creative practice was pursued via interrogation of three main research questions. First, I systematically examined the ongoing process of finding a confident compositional technique, with particular emphasis eventually gravitating towards a modally inflected, quintal harmonic language and a motivic approach inspired by Schoenberg's theory of liquidation. My second research question was to appraise and develop engagement with pre-existing musical 'found objects', in particular folk music, as a source of inspiration to me. I considered the discursive and dramatic potentials of folk music quotation within new compositions, the advantages and challenges these different approaches posed, and the role that the contemporary folk music movement has in my music. The final research question considered the role of narrative in my music, and particularly its formal function, in a unification of practical techniques from my Classical training and a theoretical foundation drawing on my experience as a media composer. This is applied through narratological concepts of music as a narrative agent combined with structural and harmonic theories from writings on the Western Art canon.

The individual study, and unified combination, of these individual interests serve to allow my creative output to encompass the multiple traditions that continue to inspire me, writing and (re)interpreting that music through the lens of my emerging compositional identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, for their constant love, support, and belief in me.

I would also like to thank: my supervisors, Dr Robert Fokkens and Dr Carlo Cenciarelli, for all their wisdom and encouragement throughout this project, and for continuing to expand my horizons in academia's ongoing quest for knowledge; Dr Daniel Bickerton for his friendship and mentorship throughout my studies at Cardiff University; Rob Harbron, Patrick Rimes, Shirley Smart, Fay Hield, Grégoire Blanc, George Barton, and all the other extraordinary musicians who helped to bring my music to life; my dear friends and fellow artists Matthew Colclough, Kerry Bunkhall and Ian Holt for all their support and humour; and finally, my wonderful partner Rhiannon Pooley for all her love and enthusiasm in joining me on this journey.

MUSIC INCLUDED IN PORTFOLIO

1. *Facebook Snapshots* (2019) for Native Instruments' Massive and fixed media (3:30)

2. *Gone* (2020) for baritone, flute, viola, and harp (6:45)

3. *Discovering Ghosts* (2020) for soprano, bass clarinet, viola, cello, and harp (7:00)

4. *Contredanse* (2020) for solo bassoon (3:30)

5. *Bright-Shadow* (2020) for Theremin and two pianos (7:00)

6. *Sinfonietta* (2020) for English tenor-treble concertina and orchestra (12:00)

7. *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri* (2021) for violin, cello, and harp (9:30)

8. *Hob* (2021) for solo marimba (6:00)

9. *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* (2021) for soprano, B♭ clarinet, double bass, and harp (4:15)

10. *Imagined Engines* (2021) for solo piano, studio production, and film (3:45)

11. *Nocturne* (2021) for solo English tenor-treble concertina (6:30)

12. *Trio* (2022) for B♭ clarinet, acoustic guitar, and double bass (4:00)

13. *John Thomas Rejigged* (2022) for violin, cello, concertina, and piano (9:15)

APPENDIX

Remaining tracks from *Green Grow the Rushes* (2022) studio album, for small ensemble (21:15)

     i.   Scarborough Fair
    ii.   Green Grow the Rushes
   iii.   Y Sguthan
   iv.   Stormalong

Approximate durations given

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The central focus of my research, through my compositions, has been to develop a personal creative practice which unifies my broad musical interests and influences. As a composer, I have been trained in the Western Art music tradition, as well as having professional and academic experience in music for screen. In addition to these, I also have a keen interest, and professional experience in, music production and creative studio techniques. A final significant contributing musical tradition to my areas of interest is folk music from around the British Isles and particularly that of England and Wales. At the start of this doctoral project, reflecting upon such a wide variety of musical and academic influences, I sought to make the focus of this research my journey to integrating key elements of these musical traditions into my creative output. However, I did not seek to simply subsume these repertoires into my existing compositional practice. Instead, my aim was to establish a coherent musical voice that is a nexus of the different musical traditions that inform the expertise, tastes, and research interests that make up my musical personality. In the foreground of my creative influences, and thus this doctoral research, are Western Art music and Anglo-Welsh folk music, as the sources of much of my formal musical training and influence on early musical tastes respectively. However, I do not consider my music (or this research) limited to such a simple binary. My academic study of writing music for media has been a primary source of inspiration to my ways of thinking about musical narrative, and my experience in music production also grew to significantly contribute to my engagement with music creation towards the conclusion of this portfolio of works.

1.1 Research Questions

My pursuit of this unification of a creative practice, an overarching theme of cross-pollination between different musical traditions, can be divided into three key areas of investigation posed as the following questions:

1. Materials and means: what musical materials and techniques can I employ in the creation of a coherent yet contextually flexible musical voice?

2. Found objects: how does the incorporation of musical 'found objects' – borrowed (folk) melody, text/narrative, or stylistic cues – within my work assume a dramatic or discursive function?

3. Narrative and form: what role does structure play in informing my approach to storytelling through music?

Whilst not every research question features prominently in every piece in the following portfolio of music, my own musical answers to the issues came into being, and evolved, over the course of the project as I considered them from a variety of creative contexts. This resulted in a fruitful creative feedback loop, where my academic research challenged me to closely examine the rationale behind my artistic choices whilst the research itself continually evolved as a reflection of developments in my compositional language. The specifics of my compositional technique are given a fuller treatment in the following chapters, but some broader considerations and definitions of the issues under consideration in my work are first worthy of attention.

1.2 Musical Influences

Early on, key influences on my research approach were Kerry Andrew and Fay Hield, whose work as folk music performers feeds into their wider practice (as a concert-work composer and ethnomusicologist respectively) and proved an inspirational point of departure for me as I began this project.[1] Additionally, I am drawn to the fine lines between arrangement and recomposition explored by ensembles like Welsh 'chamberfolk' trio VRï, operating broadly within the 'folk music' space, but referencing clear acknowledgements towards wider traditions such as classical technique and Welsh sacred music.[2] Composers of influence to me, whose

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[1] See, for example, Andrew's *Dusk Songs* and album *KELD* (performed as You Are Wolf), own label (2018) and Fay Hield, *Wrackline*, Topic Records (2020).

[2] 'Chamberfolk' is the self-identified description of VRï's creative output, by members Jordan Price Williams, Aneirin Jones, and Patrick Rimes <https://www.vri.cymru> [accessed 10 July 2023]. See VRï, *Tŷ Ein Tadau*, Recordiau Erwydd (2018).

work focuses on a generally more concert hall-based environment include Lynne Plowman and Liz Lane in their bright, quasi-impressionistic harmonic palettes.[3] Of particular note is also Sally Beamish, whose approach to structure inspired by folk/non-classical traditions I have found myself returning to across several projects.[4] The music of William Mathias and Richard Blackford are the key influences on my harmonic language, specifically in my renewed embrace of quintal harmony.[5] An interest in simple repeating gestures also reflects my influence from minimalist composers such as Terry Riley, whose matrix-based approach to *In C* was of significant influence to my approach to *John Thomas Rejigged*, as well as post-minimalist composers such as Carolina Eyck who approach such musical textures with an expanded sense of harmonic movement.[6]

The work of composers involved in the folk music revival of the early 20th century, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, is also deserving of credit in moulding my early perceptions of folk music. In his eponymous essay on the concept of 'National Music', Vaughan Williams expresses his belief that these endeavours offered the opportunity to achieve a distinct musical sound outside of what he saw as creeping German cultural hegemony.[7] Even if such an idea proved less universal in the post-war decades than its proponents would have liked, the creative *oeuvre* that resulted from that period has played an important role in shaping reception of traditional repertoire. Indeed, the luscious textures, extended harmony, and motivic development of Vaughan Williams, George Butterworth, and (outside of British repertoire) Béla Bartók were just as, if not more, significant as an introduction to traditional

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[3] See Plowman's *White Stars Green Leaves* (2010) and *Small World* (2022), and Lane's *Silver Rose* (2014).

[4] In particular, Beamish's use of Scottish *pibroch* as structural impetus for *Symphony no. 1* (1992), or impressionistic treatment of the eponymous tune in *The Day Dawn* (1999). Other works of more general composition interest to me, such as motivic technique and approach to narration, include the interrelated *Seafarer Trio* (2000) and *Viola Concerto no. 2* (2001).

[5] For examples of key works of interest to me from each of these composers, see Mathias' *Sinfonietta* (1969) and *Symphony no. 3* (1991), Blackford's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2013).

[6] See, for example, Eyck's *Elegies for Theremin & Voice*, Butterscotch Records (2019).

[7] Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Should Music be National?', in *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: OUP, 1963), 71.

music for me than any contemporary or historical discourse around folk music itself. Their music formed a lasting impression and I believe my own music carries the aesthetic fingerprints of such influences. For example, whilst I have increasingly constructed harmony from a quintal way of thinking, I credit my love and use of major seventh and ninth sonorities to much of Vaughan Williams' later string writing (see my *Sinfonietta* or *Nocturne*). I count Butterworth's *Six Songs from a Shropshire Lad* as a continuing source of inspiration to which I owe my piano writing (such as in *Bright-Shadow* or *Imagined Engines*), and I have delighted in revisiting Bartókian techniques based on liquidation as a melodic device (such as in *Contredanse*).

In regard to specific compositional and creative approaches to folk music of the 21st century, there are several creative practices to consider, draw inspiration from, and either gravitate toward or depart from. One such approach is the close reading of component elements of folk music as they function within their original context, and use of these functions as the inspirational basis of new work within an 'Art music' context. The work of David Flynn can be seen as typical of this approach, in particular deriving from the harmonic implications and rhythmic character of traditional Irish music, drawing upon what he describes as 'the hidden complexity of traditional music' that is expressed in performance techniques but rarely appears on a score. Flynn also places great emphasis on the interpretive significance of notation and its implications for compositional control over a given piece, and to this end he differentiates three strategies in relation to non-aurally interpreting folk music. Firstly, a 'skeletal approach' which provides only the basic melodic outline of the music, at the expense of conveying any significant information about the performance practice that Flynn considers to be what makes it 'authentic traditional music'.[8] This is contrasted at the opposite extreme by a 'maximalist approach', akin to the New Complexity of composers like Brian Ferneyhough in prescribing as much fine detail onto the page as possible, or alternatively at an 'ornamental approach' which

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[8] David Flynn, 'Traditional Irish Music: A Path to New Music' (PhD dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology, Conservatory of Music and Drama, 2010), 64.

endeavours to bridge this gap with the inclusion of additional notational information which gestures toward, but not strictly denotes, ornamental features.[9] Whilst the 'skeletal approach' could be seen as a shortcoming due to its imprecision, it is the one that I find comes most naturally to me in expressive terms and is easily lent to my use of liquidation as a compositional technique. Flynn also asserts that 'no one will ever get close to the essence of traditional music by analysing it as it is normally notated'.[10] Whilst highly polemical, he is nevertheless correct that simple notation alone provides us at best with a document of folk music 'under erasure' when considering the multitude of unwritten technical, ornamental, and social details involved within a performance.[11] However, in doing so I believe he leaves out the important possibility that engagement with folk musical materials may still be authentic to an individual composer's perceptions of, and emotional response to, such music without the need for a complete theory of 'authentic traditional music'. In contrast to a critique of classical musicians playing folk music, if folk musicians are the ones playing contemporary music based upon or recomposed from traditional music this opens additional potentials for a discursive space between the composer and performers. Such a discourse may thus be grounded in creative stimuli and improvisation, charting a course between the strong (albeit very different) cultures of doing so within both folk and Art music practice.[12] Flynn himself applies this to his own works, either applying the 'skeletal' approach for works intended to be played by folk musicians, or writing 'hybrid compositions' for ensembles made up of players from mixed musical traditions.[13]

Composers like Michael Ellison take these types of engagement beyond Western music, especially in regard to Flynn's middle-path concept of the 'ornamental approach'. Ellison's work on Turkish music, and the *makam* system in particular, creates music that is a stylistic

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[9] Flynn, 'Traditional Irish Music', 48-51.

[10] Ibid., 39.

[11] Borrowing the term from Jacques Derrida in (tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016). See also the introduction to Ross Cole's, *The Folk: Music, Modernity, and the Political Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 2021)

[12] See chapter 5 for discussion of my own musical exploration of such an approach, especially in *John Thomas Rejigged*.

[13] See, for example, *The Longest Reel* (2009) for solo fiddle, or *Stories from the Old World* (2008) for Uilleann Pipes, String Quartet, Seannós Singer and Narrator.

fusion on multiple levels: a bridge of an East-West divide; a negotiation of conventions of notation, improvisation, and tuning systems; and a synthesis of a workshop-based creative conversation between a composer's individual agency and the embrace of external expertise.[14] As regards other composers' approaches that align with my own, that which is set out by Yue Zhuo in his doctoral thesis is a helpful one in this regard. Zhuo's music utilises recontextualising of formal Chinese 'folk' characteristics in combining both Eastern and Western instrumentation and narratives.[15] However, first and foremost his compositional research is considered to be 'an ongoing self-identity forming process', and that the creation of that music is 'a giant dynamic identity-forming act'.[16] As will be elucidated in later chapters, my music is certainly indebted to elements of the approaches used by Ellison. However, in a motivation more like Zhuo's, the primary driving force of my own project is autobiographical, focused on a personal expression of my own interaction with a variety of different musical materials and stimuli.

Throughout my music, I seek to acknowledge the non-standard route to which I came to be interested in folk music not as a performer but as an academic and composer. I do not see this 'outside' status within folk music practice as exclusionary of engagement with such materials, especially given the complexities around any elusively definitive agreement on truly 'authentic' practice within folk music. Nevertheless, my status within this musical world is entirely necessary of acknowledgment when considering a musical approach to such practice, to avoid any disingenuous claim of authority within folk music practice or abandoning my core

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[14] For Ellison's stylistically hybrid work see, for example, the opera *Deniz Küstü (The Sea Crossed Fisherman)* (2016), *Elif* (2017) for kemençe, kanun and chamber ensemble, and the more (but by no means entirely) conventionally notated *Derivations* (2018) for kemençe and viola.

[15] For examples of these characteristics, see *Like a Dream, Not a Dream* (2019) for chamber ensemble of mobile phones (utilising what Zhuo describes in his doctoral thesis as a 'feature that I often associated with Chinese folk tunes, the quick pitch fluctuation of a major 2nd interval'), *Sheng-sheng-man* (2022) for mezzo-soprano and mixed ensemble (utilising Taoist *Jiao-bei* fortune-telling blocks as a prominent 'solo instrument'), and *Door Gods* (2018) for percussion (musically reimagining deities of Taoist-Buddhist religion).

[16] Yue Zhuo, 'Experiencing Identity, Forming Poetic Space: Expression and Interaction in a Portfolio of Original Compositions' (PhD dissertation, Cardiff University, 2022).

musical values rooted in a Western Art music training. Rather, I seek to engage with such materials in a way that brings forth a new means of expressing myself, in what David Beard (writing of Judith Weir and Michael Finnissy) describes as 'empathetic but inevitably subjective responses to different musical styles and folk traditions: in each case, the composer learns something about his or her own identity by engaging with another.'[17]

1.3 Influential Discourses: A Film Composer's Approach to Narrative

My route to engagement with theoretical issues surrounding music and narrative is at something on a tangent to many of the conceptually interrogative works of academic literature surrounding music belonging to the Western Art canon. Indeed, my early exposure to literature on narrative in a musical context during my undergraduate and Masters degrees was focused on writings dedicated to the narratology of film music. Key texts of this discourse such as those by Chion and Gorbman, the latter of whom famously applies the theories of Genette to a specifically film-musical context, proved formative to my understanding of the narrative functions that music can assume.[18] Further work on this topic, such as Stilwell's famous essay 'The Fantastical Gap' on diegetic ambiguity, continued to shape my understanding of the subject, and Held's *Crossing the Border*, which sums up these concepts into a vision of music as a narrative agent, is of lasting significance to me.[19] The overriding theme of this conceptual landscape, for all its variety in detail, impressed on me the creative perspective that it is inherently possible for music to assume a narrative role. Whilst this literature is fundamentally predicated on the music it examines being part of a multimedia format, and so does not incorporate into its scope any assertion that absolute music can achieve the same effect, such

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[17] David Beard, '"Out of the Air": Judith Weir's Emergence in 1970s Britain, or Interpreting Creative Self-Censorship', *Music & Letters*, 100/3 (2019), 481–528.

[18] See Michel Chion, tr. Claudia Gorbman, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994), and Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). See also Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), and (tr. Janet E. Lewin) *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[19] See Stilwell, Robynn, 'The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic', in Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (eds.), *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2007) and Guido Heldt, *Music and Levels of Narration in Film: Steps Across the Border* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

an axiomatic position has nevertheless stayed with me as a starting point to my creative engagement with the subject.

Such a position is, of course, not a universally accepted view, and within the broader analytical literature authors like Berger emphasise that any narration, let alone musical narration, is far less fundamental and requires a certain level of knowledge in order to be narrative and not only descriptive.[20] Almén goes even further and suggests that before narrative can be thought of musically, a complete reformulation of the concept is necessary, drawing out the most fundamental defining characteristics of narrative in order to decouple it from its most common, literary, context.[21] Even authors who remain suspicious of music's intrinsic narrative properties readily concede that some music can at least be *considered* as a narrative, as Klein observes that 'narrative lends us a set of metaphors for understanding music'.[22] Further, within literature on Art music there is still a strong precedent for narrative analysis, which I have reverse-engineered into a source of compositional inspiration, and in particular Hepokoski's theory of sonata failure as mediated through the writings of Harper-Scott.[23]

These narrative preoccupations intersect with my interest in folk music and lore (see below), and the AHRC-backed research project 'Modern Fairies' run by the University of Sheffield and University of Oxford between 2018-19. This creative research project commissioned a group of musicians, visual artists, and poets/authors to 'reimagine and re-mediate the fairy material in order to make it "modern"'.[24] The reflective and highly intertextual employment of 'creative appropriation' (as described by the project itself) is a good example of what Warshaver considered the third level of his 'triadic schema of cultural re/production'. In theorising different

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[20] Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[21] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[22] Michael Klein, 'Musical Story', in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[23] J.P.E Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[24] Fay Heild and Carolyne Larington, 'Making "Modern Fairies": Making Fairies Modern', Folklore, 132/1 (2021), 72-96. Lest there be room of lack of definitional clarity, Heild and Larington, in the same paper, go to caveat this wording and note that 'No definition of modernity was offered in the project's initial stages; the artists were invited to create within the context of their own individual understanding of what might constitute 'making new'.

'kinds' of folklore, and the different approaches taken to it, Warshaver places his third level as the most far removed from 'original' folklore, describing it as an 'abstract reconceptualization and denotative reconstitution' of older material.[25] Whilst I was not a part of the 'Modern Fairies' project, and indeed the project contained no classically-trained composers, the approach it took to creatively engaging with existing narrative material greatly appealed to me. 'Modern Fairies', therefore, provided me with a helpful model for how to approach my own explorations of folkloric material as the basis of new work, and a model which I could then modify and reframe to the specific practical needs and contexts in which I was working.

1.4 Influential Discourses: 'Folk' Music

A significant amount of my music is a personal exploration of how I relate to, and musically interact with, some of the ideas and repertoires which constitute English and Welsh folk musics. The study of folk music, and the term 'folk' itself, is no stranger to controversy and so a brief overview of my understanding of, and influences from within, the study of folk music is worthy of attention.

Throughout the 20th century, the academic study of vernacular culture has played as much of a part in its own history as its component traditions have, and the study and reception of folk traditions has often been a mirror to the ideals and concerns of the time, from Romanticism to Modernism, Nationalism to Marxism.[26] In England, figures such as Cecil Sharp preached a gospel of song and dance collection from rural communities as an antidote to contemporary popular music and as a source of collective national identity,[27] whilst such interest existed alongside parallel movements in Wales spearheaded by figures such as Ruth Herbert Lewis and Morfydd Owen.[28] By the mid-century, a new generation of collectors and theorists

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[25] Gerald Warshaver, 'On Postmodern Folklore', *Western Folklore*, 50/3 (1991), 219-229.

[26] David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong' 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

[27] See, for example, Cecil Sharp, 'Introduction', in *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (Taunton: Athenaeum Press, 1907).

[28] E. Wyn James, 'An "English" lady among the Welsh folk: Ruth Herbert Lewis and the Welsh Folk-Song Society', 2004 <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/special-collections/subject-guides/welsh-ballads/ruth-herbert-lewis> [accessed 19/05/2022].

approached their subject under the heavy influence of the contemporary Marxist zeitgeist and opened the mainstream 'folk' discourse to new horizons, such as A.L. Lloyd and Ewan MacColl's embrace of urban vernacular music.[29] However, later theorists decried the term 'folk' altogether as fruitlessly bourgeois and, in his now-famous treatise on the subject, David Harker called for a far more radical reformulation of the discourse around traditional music as simply a small slice of broader workers' culture.[30] Despite the misgivings of such authors, the word 'folk' continues to be alive and well within 21st-century academia and performance practice, although often accompanied by a new theoretical approach to its application. Michael Brocken was one of the first writers to take this new approach and, rather than seeing bourgeois expropriation of the music, he embraces the very non-traditional applications of folk music in the second half of the 20th century, from folk clubs to folk rock.[31] A core theme of Brocken's work is that folk music has undergone a radical transformation of genre expectations over the last century: the music has been the recipient of many different definitions, all of which are worthy of attention regardless of how much resemblance they bear to some hypothetical original source. This definition of traditional music as something that evolved in a fundamental way during the 20th century is also applied in the scholarship and creative practice of singer and ethnomusicologist Fay Hield, whose work focuses on the intersection of anthropology and practical musicianship within the contemporary English folk music scene.[32] Another significant figure in modern discourse on folk music is Steve Roud, notably the editor of *The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*.[33] Whilst harbouring a clear distaste for Marxist readings of folk

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[29] A.L. Lloyd, 'The Industrial Songs', in *Folk Song in England* (New York: International Publishers, 1967; repr. London: Faber & Faber, 2008), albeit notwithstanding Alfred William's work on the subject some half-century before. See Alfred Williams, *Round About the Upper Thames* (London: Duckworth, 1922).

[30] Harker, *Fakesong*, 248 & 254.

[31] Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

[32] See Fay Hield, 'English Folk Singing and the Construction of Community' (PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2010), and Fay Hield, 'In Defence of Revivals: Tradition and Community in a Contemporary English Folk Club', *Proceedings of The English Folk Dance and Song Society Folk Song Conference* (2013), 173-187.

[33] An undertaking which placed Roud in the illustrious company of Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd, editors of the original edition.

music discourse, Roud's work nevertheless provides an invaluable overview of many archival materials and their history, whilst remaining agnostic on how such music should be artistically approached today.[34] The term 'folk' remains controversial for its Romantic origins in Herder's writings and association with often middle class, commercially-tinged subsequent usage.[35] Nevertheless, set against this combined discursive backdrop, I have not found this term to be significantly more or less problematic than any of the commonly used alternatives ('traditional', 'vernacular', 'proletarian', etc.) and so remains my preferred term for the purposes of this commentary.

My conclusion from this ongoing academic discourse is to approach defining folk music in two different ways depending on context. The first of these is viewing folk songs as the product of social processes or, as Roud refers to it, '"folk song by destination" rather than "folk song by origin"'.[36] This approach opens the possibility to label any music that has been absorbed into popular consciousness, collective memory, or an individual's personal repertoire as having become folk music, at least to some extent. This repertoire could be from an oral tradition, but equally could be from music halls, popular music, classical music, or the latest songs and compositions from contemporary practitioners of today's folk music scene. This is certainly a helpfully broad approach, although it is perhaps at its most useful when considering folk music from an anthropological or sociological perspective, or for keeping an open mind as to a song's origins when undertaking historical research on a specific tune. Therefore, when thinking about folk music in terms of existing historical repertoire to quote or re-perform from a compositional perspective, a second definition is also useful. I define this as repertoire within popular circulation outside of, or at least parallel to, a primarily written or recorded tradition. This material, including the repertoire famously stowed away in many an Edwardian collector's notebook, stands as a distinct canon of work which is still beloved and consumed by its

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[34] Steve Roud, *Folk Song in England* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017).

[35] Philip Bohlman, 'Folk Song at the Beginnings of National History: Essay on *Alte Volkslieder* (1774)' in *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[36] Roud, *Folk Song in England,* 24.

enthusiasts. Such an archivally-oriented consideration firmly locates the specific repertoire which the likes of Sharp and Vaughan Williams collected as folk music, although it is important to stress that a balanced conception of folk music should not be limited to this repertoire. Nevertheless, the act of performing, reinterpreting, and being tangentially inspired by this canon of music has become a tradition of its own, emerging from 20th- and 21st-century folk, classical, and popular music traditions. This is arguably just as inauthentic as the term 'folk' is itself when trying to talk about vernacular music-making, but has gained such a life of its own as to be thoroughly worthy of consideration for its own emergent aesthetic frameworks. Whilst the bombastic figure of Cecil Sharp in the early years of the 1900s saw everything 'folk' as an antidote to the ills of contemporary culture, and Marxist writers like A.L. Lloyd sought to cast 'folk' repertoires as the voice of the proletariat, in my own musical explorations of these materials I have endeavoured to be far more modest in my intended scope.[37] I have been aware of not trying to form grand theories as to what folk music can and cannot be, but rather to engage with it as much as possible by acknowledging both its origins and the social influence it has had over the years.

1.5 Approaching Found Objects

As a result of considering the issues discussed above, an important next consideration for me was the development of an 'ethics of borrowing' when approaching the quotation and reimagining of pre-existing sources of material, be those musical or narrative. Neither classical nor folk musics exist as isolated objects, and both hold great significance to those who engage with them. I certainly count myself among such people, as both a classically-trained musician and an enthusiastic audience member, and amateur performer, of folk music. As such, I consider it essential to approach this subject from an informed and topically engaged position in order to satisfactorily articulate my creative process to a wider audience. Respect for my

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[37] Such agenda-based views of folk music are what Roud refers to as 'folk song for use' and the 'burden of expectation' in *Folk Song in England*, 8-9. For Sharp's antipathy towards popular music, see for example his 1906 lecture to the Esperance Society, quoted in Roy Judge, 'Mary Neal and the Esperance Morris', *Folk Music Journal*, 5/5 (1989), 545-591.

chosen traditional material and its practitioners is of great importance to me, but I do not see this as a reason to treat the music as a museum piece to be statically curated or somehow defended. Rather, I regard the music as a vibrant and flexible tradition, strong enough to welcome successive generations of musicians who recast and reimagine it as an intrinsic element of their own creative expression. Such respect is, in my work, not exhibited through ensuring that any given use of quotation is necessarily 'historically authentic', but rather that it is musically compelling. When incorporating some form of pre-existing music into one's own creative output, it is worth considering the artistic function of placing such music into a new context. As such, Burkholder's 'topology of musical borrowing' is a helpful starting point for thinking about creating new music that is directly referential to pre-existing sources.[38] Burkholder's topology can be summarised by three types of questions he notes when approaching musical borrowing:

> …first, analytical questions: for any individual piece, what is borrowed or used as a source? how is it used in the new work? second, interpretive or critical questions: why is this material borrowed and used in this way? what musical or extramusical functions does it serve? third, historical questions: where did the composer get the idea to do this? what is the history of the practice?[39]

I have found that such a reflective approach, even though originally written from an analyst's perspective, is a valuable tool in my own compositional work and one which causes me to continually challenge how and why I am working with a particular piece of borrowed material. I have endeavoured to pose such questions even in my earliest pieces in this project. In a piece like *Gone,* the use of quotation is obvious and it serves a specific narrative purpose. In projects like *Contredanse* or *Hob*, melodic and narrative quotation or inspiration serves more indirect structural functions; a return to a much more obvious use of borrowed music in *John*

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[38] Peter Burkholder, 'The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field', *Notes*, 50/3 (1994), 851-870.

[39] Ibid., 864.

Thomas Rejigged informs my growing desire to celebrate, but also creatively unify, my broad musical interests. It has been my endeavour to meet this academic challenge with practical musical results that are all the stronger for grappling with the issues under consideration. Specific applications of these considerations in my own music, and the compositional techniques employed to realise them, are analysed and reflected upon in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2: INITIAL EXPERIMENTS IN IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES

My first research question, an examination of the musical 'materials and means' which best creatively satisfy me was an ongoing thread throughout my work, but nevertheless also an essential first step to facilitate the most confident and effective compositions engaging with any more specific expressive issues. As such, I dedicated the opening stages of this doctoral project to a broad exploration of different technical approaches that might yield such an outcome. Considerations were made to discursive themes that interested me, such as the definition of 'folklore' within the digital age or approaches to musical quotation, as well as a priority placed on strengthening my underlying compositional technique and finding developmental and structural gestures that I found both creatively stimulating and consistently satisfying. Prior to my PhD, an interest in highly differing musical styles provided me with a wide variety of musical ideas but at the expense of a coherent sense of musical voice, often resulting in projects being approached in ways that significantly differed from piece to piece, with musical outcomes that reflected this. The pieces that emerged from the start of my PhD portfolio are in many respects, good examples of this technical uncertainty, taking highly contrasting compositional approaches to their creation and stylistic cues. Nevertheless, such an approach here was deliberate, to identify areas of technical interest more systematically and, even within an apparent lack of cohesion, begin to draw together for myself a narrative of shared musical successes between these pieces that could be continually refined in future work. Whilst I stand by these pieces as individual works, I consider their primary value in this portfolio to be their function as musical signposts to future points of development, and the synthesising of different ideas arising here into more cohesive works later in the project.

2.1 *Facebook Snapshots*: Digital Vernacular

Facebook Snapshots (2019) was the first piece written for my portfolio and was a tentative first step into exploring a 'found object' as a source of inspiration. However, whilst later work would handle musical quotation directly, *Facebook Snapshots* was conceived somewhat more conceptually, drawing inspiration from the academic discourses that I was reading at the time

as that 'object'. As such, the musical material is all my own, but my choice of text aimed at exploring definitions of 'folklore' and the idea that Internet culture is a new frontier in not just the collection, but transmission, of folkloric material: an emblematic medium for a process of tradition 'that includes handing around as well as handing down.'[40] Lynne McNeill identifies online social networks as facilitating new 'expressive forms' that can constitute a tradition that both 'expresses the *need* along with a *process* by which it is shared'.[41] For McNeill, this clearly ascribes folkloric qualities to Internet discourses, since 'as long as expressive forms are being informally transmitted, we will have tradition.'[42] Trevor Blank goes even further in arguing that the very idea of 'tradition' as a primary concern should be divorced from the study of folklore since the perception of age and origin that comes with the word can distract from a broader conception of folklore as 'the outward expression of creativity – in myriad forms and interactions – by individuals and their communities.'[43]

Taking this contemporary application of this way of thinking about potential 'folk' materials, I chose to set three short poems (with permission) written by two of my friends who had first posted them online: vernacular text distributed in a very contemporary vernacular medium. My choice of texts also playfully suggests the experience of looking through a Facebook feed, with short snapshots of seemingly unrelated material which evoke a familiar recipe of social media: a tranquil scene, a personal anecdote, and (inevitably) cats. Taking such an explicitly digital context for inspiration, the texts are delivered digitally by means of recordings of the three poems recited by their authors. I chose to complement these digital texts with an equally digital instrumental accompaniment. Drawing on my experience in music production and sound design, the music is written for Native Instruments' wavetable synthesiser Massive. This

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[40] Merrill Kaplan, 'Curation and Tradition on Web 2.0', in *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*, ed. Trevor Blank and Robert Howard (UT: Utah State University Press, 2013), 125.

[41] Lynne McNeill, 'And the Greatest of These Is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century', in *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century*, 183.

[42] Ibid. 184.

[43] Trevor Blank, 'Toward a Conceptual Framework for the Study of Folklore and the Internet', in *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World* (Utah: Utah State University Press, 2009) 1-20.

is a highly expressive software instrument that allows for a wide variety of different timbral effects to be accessed from a single patch via MIDI CC instructions. Massive is a veteran softsynth within popular music production although, to my knowledge, has little to no presence as an instrument within Art music. Nevertheless, popular music technology and techniques have a strong presence in contemporary Art music, with composers placing it at the centre of works, such as Anna Meredith and Gabriel Prokofiev's concerti for beatboxer and turntables respectively, and Max Richter's ambient installation event *Sleep*.[44] Overtly pop-oriented instrumental choices are also a common feature of contemporary folk music from artists like Kate Rusby (and her Moog-playing bassist Duncan Lyall), or Kelly Oliver's rendition of 'Lady Margaret' accompanied only by vocoder.[45] In folk music, also beyond these explicit contemporary references to pop music through technology, a distinction between 'folk' and 'popular' musics has never been as clear cut as is often maintained. There is plentiful cross-pollination historically between oral, printed, and professional performance traditions, and this blurred distinction was certainly an influence on this first creative endeavour for my PhD.[46]

Inspired by this discursive backdrop, I began work on the compositional process of *Facebook Snapshots*. Whilst my choice of text and instrumentation was an attempt to reference the issues discussed above, I intensely felt a need (and, perhaps, self-imposed pressure) to focus on a core compositional technique before gaining the confidence to move away from my classical training too far. Therefore, though the context of the piece is somewhat more unconventional, my musical approach principally focused this through the familiar lens of word painting. I wished to respond to the overall impression of the poems, all three of which are characterised by a gentle sense of whimsy, as well as responding to individual dramatic

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[44] See Anna Meredith, *Concerto for Beatboxer* (2010), Gabriel Prokofiev, *Concerto for Turntables* (2006), and Max Richter, *Sleep* (2015).

[45] See, for example, Rusby's version of Archie Fisher's 'The Witch of the Westmorland', on *Life in a Paper Boat*, Pure Records (2016), and Kelly Oliver, *Botany Bay*, own label (2018).

[46] See Steve Roud, 'Nymphs and Shepherd in the Garden' and 'Penny Gaffs, Music Halls and Parlours', in *Folk Song in England* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), or Michael Brocken's treatment of the influence of skiffle on the commercialisation of folk music within 'Challenging folk historiography: skiffle as a pop aesthetic', in *The British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

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details. An example of this word painting is the use of filtered noise swells in bb.52-54 to suggest passing traffic in response to the line 'a quiet road', echoed in b.60 and b.68 in response to similar lyrical references. Another example is found in the compositional technique of the accompaniment to the second poem. Two statements of the musical material are hocketted in chromatic inversion, representing the 'two identical bowls, filled identically, with identical kibble' (fig. 1).

Figure 1 Facebook Snapshots *bb.23-26 (keyboard line only), melodic shape hocketted in inversion.*

I had intended *Facebook Snapshots* as the first of a larger series of pieces overtly utilising live electronics as a polemical link between traditional words and music and their frequent origins in popular music. However, this project ultimately fell by the wayside, as I found this argument neither as historically nor creatively compelling as I had originally imagined. Nevertheless, I am glad to have engaged to some degree with the link between folk and commercial popular music, even if exclusive pursuit of this as a source of inspiration would have been at the cost of due attention being given to other aspects of the discipline. Rather than considering this piece a false start to my portfolio, it helpfully clarified some important issues in my mind in how to continue: the application of different discourses within folkloristics continued to shape my thinking on finding broad ways of engaging with such material; the combination of spoken text against more metrically fixed accompaniment became a recurring theme in a number of other works; and music technology continued to play an important role in much of my work, both as an instrument and creative tool (see *Bright-Shadow* and *Imagined Engines*) as well as a practical facilitator for the creation of projects like *Green Grow the Rushes*.

2.2 *Gone*: Quotation as Narrator

Gone, for baritone, flute, viola, and harp, was written for Ty Cerdd's CoDI Text programme in 2019-20. This was a series of workshops with composer Joseph Davies and playwright Kaite O'Reilly, with the brief to create a musical setting of one of a selection of Kaite's texts, provided at the first workshop. I chose an extract from the play *Persians*, Kaite's retelling of Aeschylus' Greek tragedy, drawn from Xerxes' closing lament over catastrophic Persian losses after the Battle of Salamis.[47] Preceding this scene, a messenger recounts detailed descriptions of the battle, leaving Xerxes to respond to the memory of the violence rather than explicitly describing it. The structure of the text maps Xerxes' surges from quiet internalised despair to outbursts of anger, and back again to resignation, as a warped nostalgia for the battle before the inevitable passage of time carries him away from his fallen comrades. I avoided geographically locating the music to Aeschylus' original setting because, in addition to preventing potential cliché, such a choice would run contrary to Kaite's original staging in a fictional 20th-century European-esque dictatorship. Moreover, I was primarily interested in the emotional effect of the text, rather than treating it as any kind of historical re-enactment. Prioritising emotional effect over situational detail presented an opportunity to use quotation of (British) folk music as a medium for conveying a sense of indefinable nostalgic loss to the (predominantly British) audience.

As a component of my research, this piece focused on my first two research questions.: 'materials and means', through the continued experimentation with compositional language, and 'found objects' as my first foray into a treatment of musical quotation within my PhD. When developing a creative practice that draws upon pre-existing music, a spectrum emerges encompassing on one end simple musical arrangement (such as harmonisation), to motivic quotation, to newly (re)composed material at the other. I wanted to embrace elements from across this spectrum within my work and *Gone* represents my first step to developing an

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[47] Kaite O'Reilly, *Persians* (GB: Fair Acre Press, 2019). The presentation of the text Kaite offered for use in setting during the CoDI programme is a condensed version of several portions of Xerxes' larger speech.

approach that could do so. The piece is constructed from a combination of original and quoted music and is built around three main pieces of material. The first of these is the opening 'anxiety motif' (fig. 2), consisting of a Phrygian-inflected harp riff over which short and angular lines are shared between the flute and viola.

Figure 2 Gone*, opening bars (instrumental parts), 'anxiety motif'.*

The second main piece of material, an 'anger motif' first appearing in b.53 (fig. 3), is characterised by chromatic freedom, thin harmony, short phrases which continually fail to cadence, and an unstable pulse, to suggest the mental unravelling within Xerxes' tirade.

Figure 3 Gone*, bb.53-57 (instrumental parts), 'anger motif'.*

The music is episodic, with the materials structured into contrasting sections which follow the dramatic ebb and flow of the text. Delivery of the text, sung or spoken, is restricted to taking

place over only the first two pieces of material for most of the piece, until the narrative climax

of the text in the final section of the piece where it is combined with the third and final piece of

musical material, prefigured in bb.30-37, bb.65-71 and bb.77-80 but only fully stated from

b.103. This is my own harmonisation and paraphrase of a melody to the ballad 'The Three

Ravens' [RN 5/Child 26] (see fig. 4 & 5).[48] This ballad's story imagines a group of ravens

overlooking a battlefield, which is slowly filling with mourners, and commenting to each other

how what has happened cannot be reversed by grief and only destroys those left behind. The

words and tune were first published in the 17th century by Thomas Ravenscroft in his book

Melismata, an anthology of popular songs or, 'Musical Phansies Fitting the Court, Citie, and

Countrey Humours'.[49] Whether 'The Three Ravens' was truly in popular circulation before

Melismata's publication is not known for certain.[50] However, it was certainly in popular tradition

subsequently, as well as finding its way into Francis Child's *The English and Scottish Popular*

Ballads.[51] In *Gone*, the innocuous ballad melody functions as what film sound theorist Michel

Chion calls 'anempathetic music', that is indifferent to Xerxes' emotional torment as he

struggles to come to terms with disaster.[52] The quotation creates a parallel between the two

stories that, whilst unlikely to be overtly registered by most listeners, adds an additional layer

of extra-musical meaning to the piece. It is also used to invoke a sense of nostalgia,

highlighting the wistful quality to the text, as Xerxes looks back to happier times before, and

even during, the battle when he was united with his comrades.

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[48] 'RN', or 'Roud Number' denote entries from the Roud Folk Song Index, the commonly used system of cataloguing archival repertoire in English folk music. 'Child Numbers' refer to ballads from Francis Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, according to the order in which they appear there.

[49] Thomas Ravenscroft, *Melismata* (London: Thomas Adams, 1611), front cover.

[50] See Z. Bidgood, 'The Significance of Thomas Ravenscroft', *Folk Music Journal*, 4/1 (1980), 24-34.

[51] Francis J. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882-1898; repr. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003), 'no. 26'. For testimony of *The Three Ravens* in 19th vernacular repertoire, see Frank Kidson, *Traditional Tunes: A Collection of Ballads Airs* (Oxford: Taphouse, 1891), 17-18.

[52] Michel Chion, tr. Claudia Gorbman, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994), 8.

Figure 4 Ravenscroft's original version of 'The Three Ravens' (treble line) in Melismata.

Figure 5 Gone*, bb.103-105, the opening of 'The Three Ravens' (in the viola line).*

The use of 'The Three Ravens' is not a strict arrangement, and even the 'full' statement of the melody from b.103 is glossed both rhythmically and structurally. However, this is not in the service of a sense of discursive musical subversion. Rather, it is to fit the pacing of the musical phrase (my version is significantly shortened) and to rhythmically smooth over repeated notes

in the original that served to fit in multi-syllable words, since the melodic quotation only appears instrumentally and the accompanying text is narrated rather than sung. Moreover, these modifications are not radical enough to constitute a recomposition of the tune and still locate my intention for the ballad's inclusion as a fairly direct form of quotation (even if quotation in my musical 'manner of speaking') of something deliberately separate and more whimsical to the music that precedes it. In a similar manner, my choice of harmonisation, whilst not replicating Ravenscroft's part song setting, is self-consciously conservative in its adherence to a consonant modal minor in deliberate contrast to the freer chromaticism of the rest of the music. I was gratified in rehearsal when several of the performers identified the main quotation at b.103 as, 'sounding folky' and 'like a folk song', even though they were unaware of what song it was. The perception of a folk tune can, in many people, trigger a nostalgic response even without firmly defining what that nostalgia is for, beyond a sense of now-unattainable past. Given the narrative and emotional cues of my piece, I thought it a particularly appropriate fusion as an expressive response to the text.

2.3 *Discovering Ghosts*: A Useful Diversion

Immediately following the completion of *Gone*, my next project presented itself as an opportunity to again write for voice and small ensemble, this time for a composition workshop hosted by Cardiff University. I was keen to continue working with a vocal technique combining spoken narration with sung passages, as I had found this to be a particularly fruitful outcome of my previous work. My choice of text was less overtly narrative, but nevertheless shared similarities with *Gone* in its highly introspective meditation and subjective reflection upon individual experience, courtesy of my friend Will Christofides (who had also contributed text to *Facebook Snapshots*). Of my research concerns, I wanted to focus specifically on further developing my compositional technique, the materials and means of my core musical creation.

The vocal techniques in *Discovering Ghosts*, and their relationship to overall structure, are very much a continuation of thought from *Gone*. However, rather than following particular narrative episodes, here the vocal line builds towards (and then recedes from) the climactic

melodic statement at b.55, (*"oh the sweet stabbing anguish"*), as both a musical and textual dramatic peak in the work. This is vocally arrived at through a gradual evolution into melodic material from first free-spoken narration, then *sprechstimme* and *arioso*-esque passages. After transitional material in bb.63-80, which functions in a modulatory capacity, this trend is reversed over the remainder of the piece. A much less emphatic statement of the 'sweet anguish' material (bb.81-85) quickly dissolves into a passage of humming, doubled/harmonised by the cellist, that was foreshadowed in the very beginning of the music. This is itself then replaced with a return to the *arioso* material, then freely spoken passages (bb.111-112 & bb.132-133), and a final gesture of 'ghostly' humming concluding the piece as it began. A harmonic approach based on a sense of tonal centre has always been an aesthetic necessity for me, but at this point in my compositional development I still struggled with finding a convincing and consistent technique for implementing the potential for easy harmonic movement as an intrinsic part of my musical language. In a bid to achieve this, the music oscillates between pitch spaces centred on B♮ and D♭ (and a brief diversion centred around F♯ in bb.89-107), with greater chromatic freedom blurring in from the vocal line. This additional chromaticism functioned in several ways within my compositional motivation. Firstly, it provides a destabilising sense of word painting in accompaniment of the text, introspective and ambiguous, and also an attempt to find a way of expanding the starting pitch sets on which I based each section. However, having completed and subsequently reflected upon the piece, I concluded that this proved unsatisfactory to me due to the difficulty to satisfactorily integrate them with my predilection for working with quoted materials.

Ironically, given that my intention for *Discovering Ghosts* was for it to be primarily a harmonic exercise, my approach to vocal writing emerged as the far more profitable outcome of the process, and I continued to build on this foundation the following year in *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush*, supported by a more mature, quintal harmonic language. Harmonically, my attempt at singular focus on technical means ended up being a weakness of the resulting music. All the pieces in my portfolio, in one way or another, engage with my

first research question in how I endeavoured to strengthen and refine my technique through their composition. However, *Discovering Ghosts* is one of the few to exclusively engage with it at the expense of the other two, which upon reflection I believe leaves the piece more conceptually isolated from the rest of the works included. As I was soon to discover, attention to melodic concerns would itself go a very long way to resolving my harmonic identity crisis, and attention to my music's potential narrative qualities in *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* would allow me to handle structure with far greater ease. Nevertheless, I believe that its inclusion in this portfolio is important as a document of the processes that I worked on to achieve a sense of technical and aesthetic coherence that was the final goal of my research. This piece also undeniably refined my earlier experiments with narration in *Gone* and was the first piece in this portfolio to explicitly attempt to develop a dedicated harmonic technique. Both of these factors proved a valuable point of reference and experience for me, even if I found neither to be entirely satisfying in *Discovering Ghosts* and it would take later compositions to settle these aesthetic matters for me more fully. In the meantime, the various technical considerations and aesthetic priorities from my compositions so far, and the lessons I was learning from them, began to coalesce more effectively by the late spring of 2020 as I returned my attention to melodic priorities through the lens of musical quotation.

2.4 *Contredanse*: A Pivot to Liquidation

Contredanse, for solo bassoon, is a recomposition of the country dance tune 'Grimstock', published in the 17th century by John Playford.[53] Drawing heavily on compositional techniques derived from Bartók's cell-based approach to material, I deconstruct the tune by breaking it into its constituent materials to be rebuilt into something new.[54] In doing so, I sought to humorously acknowledge that despite being extensively used for folk dance movements in the 20th century, Playford's music was itself catering to an upper middle-class market to provide a

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[53] John Playford, *The Dancing Master*, 5th edn (London: William Godbid, 1675).
[54] See, for example, Elliott Antokoletz, 'Pitch-Set Derivations from the Folk Modes in Bartók's Music', *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, (1982) 265-274.

gentrified ideal of 'authentically' vernacular dance.[55] Despite (or perhaps because of) this, *The Dancing Master* was hugely popular, published in seventeen editions for over three quarters of a century, providing genteel consumers with instructions on how to learn the 'country dance' that was in fashion, along with a collection of accompanying tunes.[56]

Recomposition as an approach within post-1900 music has been taken up by composers in a variety of manners. A 'light touch' approach to reworking pre-existing music might be exemplified in Judith Weir's *O Viridissima*, a rendering of Hildegard of Bingen's melody recomposed for piano trio. Here the core melodic line is plainly stated as a largely unbroken musical phrase, setting up its coherence as a source of primary concern for the following music. Weir's process of recomposition that follows is one primarily of redevelopment rather than radical reimagination, idiomatically ornamenting and 'word painting' (in reference to the original text) the melodic line in its new instrumental context with, in Weir's own words, 'registral and timbral variations'.[57] Fuller harmonic elements emerge as a developmental trajectory of the music, but nevertheless in a supportive and derivative function of the melodic material. A far more radical approach to recomposition is found in the work of Michael Finnissy where, in such pieces as *English Country Tunes* (1977), traditional music is used as a stimulus point, transformed beyond almost all recognition through extensive technical and textural processes, or a postmodern collage approach to the sources of traditional material in a work like *Folklore* (1994) in a similar fashion to Berio's *Folk Songs* three decades before. Writing of Finnissy's *Folklore II*, but I believe equally applicable to Berio, Beirens argues that this clearly defines the positioning of the (Art music) composer as an outsider, and functions to 'imitate

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[55] For an example of Playford's influence on the folk music revivals of the 20th century, see Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book Part II. Containing thirty country dances from the English dancing master (1650-1686)* (London: Novello, 1913).

[56] Playford's decidedly 'non-folky' target audience are explicitly referred to in his introduction, which addresses the 'Gentlemen of the Inns of Court' as those who he envisaged using his book to learn the style. Keith Whitlock argues that despite being valorised by later folk music enthusiasts, Playford's emphasis on the Englishness of his materials is likely to have been informed more by marketing and politics than a specific concern for cultural preservation. See 'John Playford's The English Dancing Master 1650/51 as Cultural Politics', *Folk Music Journal*, 7/5 (1999), 548-578.

[57] Judith Weir, 'Composer's Note' in the score to *O Viridissima*, Chester Music (2015).

the sound of the music, [the composer's] memory of it, transmit the feelings or impressions it leaves on him', and that 'what we are offered [...] is therefore a subjective material, filtered, compiled and coloured by the processes, imagination and subjective perception of the composer.[58] Such a view can be taken as a good description of my own endeavours in *Contredanse*, and to an extent this wider project. Whilst my source material is pseudo-traditional, the resulting recomposition is as much a musical self-portrait as it is a reframing of 'folk' music, more technically indebted to Bartok's treatment of liquidation and the riff-building motivic economy of Barry Cockcroft than with techniques found in folk music.[59] Indeed, my approach may be best summarised as an emphasis on motivic connectedness, in a deliberate misreading of Schoenberg's description of 'composing with the tones of the motif.'[60]

My developmental plan for *Contredanse* involved disassembling the component phrases of Playford's original tune into three core cells (see fig. 6-9). Each of these became the basis for the three overarching sections of the piece (bb.1-28, bb.29-76, bb.77-109, along with a short coda from b.110 recapitulating the first cell), with passing chromatic movement providing additional colour to the otherwise stable diatonic space inherited from the original melody. This technique drew on Schoenberg's theory of liquidation, as a process of 'gradually eliminating characteristic features, until only uncharacteristic ones remain'.[61] Whilst in a Schoenbergian sense liquidation is associated with stripping musical material of its functional obligations, in my process this breaking down and re-ordering of component materials is a way of recomposing melodic ideas to gain a structural and textural function within the music.[62]

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[58] Maarten Beirens, 'Archaeology of the Self: Michael Finnissy's "Folklore"', Tempo, 57/223 (2003), 46-56.

[59] See Barry Cockcroft's *Ku Ku* (1997) as a work of particular influence on me from Cockcroft's creative output, in the way the entire piece is derived from its opening three notes.

[60] Quoted in Joseph Straus, 'Recompositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern', *The Musical Quarterly*, 72/3 (1986), 301-328.

[61] Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London: Faber, 1970), 58.

[62] Áine Heneghan, 'Liquidation and Its Origins', *Journal of Music Theory*, 63/1 (2019), 71-102.

Figure 6 'Grimstock', as printed in the 1675 edition of John Playford's The Dancing Master*, and transcribed into modern notation. Highlighted bars indicate the three cells of musical material that are extracted and recomposed in* Contredanse*.*

Figure 7 Contredanse *bb.1-5, recomposition of first cell.*

Figure 8 Contredanse *bb.29-32, recomposition of second cell.*

Figure 9 Contredanse *bb.90-96, recomposition of third cell.*

The compositional and discursive impetus for *Contredanse* stems from leaving just enough of the original material audible for an informed listener to be able to detect, whilst rendering most of the piece unrecognisable from the original in form and function. In stripping each cell of material from its original musical function, I sought to create a recompositional effect that adds

a 'new motivic layer [which] thus forces us to rehear the original layer a new way, in terms of the non-traditional motivic structures it contains.'[63]

However, this is a specific and ironic use of quotation that, whilst I am pleased with its results in this piece, felt limited in scope for continued use and postmodern in its aesthetic in a way that is already dating quickly.[64] As with my use of quotation as a narrative effect in *Gone*, to me this remained 'music in quotation marks', and so I continued my endeavours to find a practice which felt creatively sustainable long-term. Nevertheless, the techniques of motivic liquidation that I began experimenting with in *Contredanse* I found to be a highly creatively stimulating approach and would return to in many pieces across my remaining portfolio as a key developmental technique. A refocusing of my attention specifically onto melodic development techniques, and how those inform any harmonic implications rather than being dictated by them, would become the central concern for answering my 'materials and means' research question. It would also greatly influence my thinking around my approach to 'found objects' and would be the central concern in the two pieces considered next.

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[63] Straus, 'Recompositions', 313, originally referring Schoenberg's *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra*.

[64] Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (NY: Continuum, 2009), 5-49.

CHAPTER 3: PRIORITY OF THE MELODIC LINE

Following the early period of broader experimentation examined in chapter 2, my compositional focus started to clarify towards an emphasis on my treatment of melody, both original and borrowed. This certainly did not preclude consideration of other musical factors though, and indeed the following pieces under discussion, *Sinfonietta* and *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, contributed significantly to the establishment of a harmonic language that I found creatively satisfying. Likewise, both pieces continued my exploration of musical 'found objects' (research question 2) in their approach to using folk melodies as a point of creative stimulus. *Sinfonietta* also represented the first project in a fruitful set of collaborations with concertina player Rob Harbron, as I began to look beyond my own creative sphere and toward engagement with musicians active within the contemporary folk music world.

3.1 *Sinfonietta*: Hybrid Musical Identity

Early in the summer of 2020 I began planning my *Sinfonietta*, in which I aimed to work with both borrowed and original musical material. As my sketchwork progressed, I found myself drawing on English Morris tune repertoire for inspiration; this is a large body of important repertoire to folk music in England, as the soundtrack to a particularly idiosyncratic dance tradition and for its incorporation of famous tunes such as 'Shepherd's Hey' and 'Brighton Camp'. Morris repertoire, and the music for 'folk' dance more generally, was also a preoccupation of both the early- and mid-20th century folk revivals, with musicians such as William Kimber and Scan Tester becoming relatively well-known figures in their own right, in a rare case of the folk performer not being entirely overshadowed by the folk collector. Since both Kimber and Tester were concertina players, and the source of much of the music I was listening to in preparation for my composition, I began researching not only their repertoire but the concertina itself as an *obbligato* instrument within the orchestration. To gain a better understanding of the instrument, I worked with Rob Harbron, one of the country's foremost specialists on the English concertina and a folk music educator. Over the course of several online masterclasses, Rob demonstrated the concertina's capabilities and gave me feedback

on my instrumental writing by playing through and commenting on my sketches. From the outset, I was aware that writing for concertina would automatically create an association with folk music, given that in the 21st century it is an instrument almost exclusively associated with that genre. However, it became increasingly apparent that the concertina's history also gave the instrument a dual identity between the classical and folk music worlds that felt particularly apt for my research.

The English-system concertina was patented in the late 1820s by the physicist and inventor Charles Wheatstone. The instrument was initially aimed at a solidly middle-class, amateur clientele, and was viewed as a suitably respectable instrument for women to learn alongside the piano, harp, and guitar.[65] Early evangelists for the instrument included Giulio Regondi, a child prodigy guitarist and composer, who became the concertina's first virtuoso.[66] Regondi's compositions typify early concertina repertoire, showcasing instrumental agility with rippling passagework and quasi-contrapuntal textures.[67] However, by the end of the 19th century, little new classical repertoire for the concertina was being written, and the instrument (particularly in its 'anglo' and 'duet' variants) had migrated to the preserve of folk music and the music hall.[68] By the early 20th century, the 'folk' concertina had a distinctive performance style, characterised by a simple melodic line supported with an aggressive homophonic chordal accompaniment, prioritising rhythmic drive over melodic intricacy.[69] Despite a small revival of interest within Art music in the 1980s, the contemporary concertina has remained broadly within the domain of folk music performance.[70] Contemporary concertina technique has also emerged as a hybrid of its two precedent traditions: some modern virtuosi like Mohsen Amini

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[65] Allan W. Atlas, 'Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: The Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835-1870', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* (2006), 1-234.

[66] Douglas Rogers, 'Giulio Regondi: Guitarist, Concertinist or Melophonist? A Reconnaissance', *Concertina World*, CW472 supplements December 2017 (repr. from three articles in *Guitar Review*, Autumn 1992, Winter 1993, and Spring 1994).

[67] Regondi's 'Serenade' for concertina and piano in A major, and 'Remembrance' for baritone concertina are good representative examples of this.

[68] Allan W. Atlas, 'The "Respectable" Concertina', *Music & Letters*, 80/2 (1999), 241-253.

[69] This technique is typified in the playing of William Kimber and Scan Taster, both of whom were recorded in the middle of the century.

[70] Atlas, 'The "Respectable" Concertina' 242.

have returned to a form of dazzling passagework that would not be entirely unfamiliar to Regondi; others, like Rob Harbron, prioritise lyrical melodic lines, invoking folk concertina repertoire, whilst simultaneously employing a more classically-informed contrapuntal texture in their accompaniment.[71] As such, this interwoven history made the instrument an appealing choice to me, as an embodiment of the dual nature of the music I wished to create in this piece.

The opening movement of *Sinfonietta*, 'Stick Dance', focuses on the folk character of the concertina, with its core material for the movement based on the Morris tune 'Rodney'.[72] I wanted to choose a tune that was in the repertoire recorded by William Kimber, although beyond this my primary motivation for using this particular Morris tune was simply subjective appeal.[73] Nevertheless, I was careful to avoid some tunes from Kimber's repertoire, such as 'Constant Billy' or 'Shepherd's Hey', which already have well-known orchestral arrangements.[74] Moreover, regardless of Holst and Grainger's musical shadow, I did not want the music to be a simple arrangement but rather to be the basis of a more extensive developmental treatment, in the manner of *Contredanse*. The tune 'Rodney' is set, within the broadly oppositional structure of the movement, against a boisterous chromatic fanfare which functions as the main theme of the entire work and returns in the third movement (fig. 10).
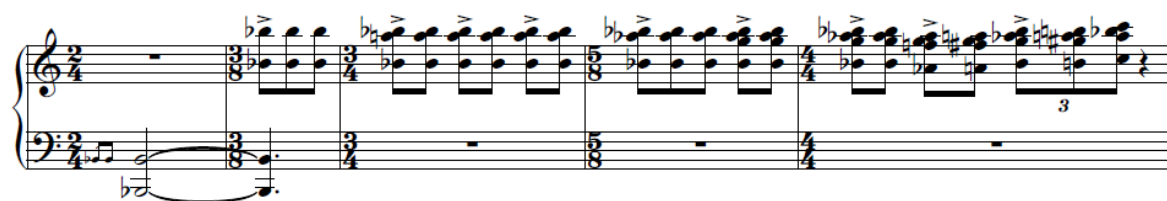
Figure 10 Sinfonietta *'main theme', bb.1-5, piano reduction.*

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[71] For example, consider Amini's intricate playing in Talisk, *Dawn*, Talisk Records (2022), compared with the textural variation in the music of Rob Harbron, *Meanders*, own label (2019).

[72] Cecil Sharp identifies 'Rodney' as a stick dance, a nomenclature used to differentiate a Morris dance being performed with the aid of wooden sticks, as opposed to today's generally more familiar 'handkerchief dance'. See Cecil Sharp, *Morris Dance Tunes, Set 3* (London: Novello, 1909).

[73] William Kimber, *The Art of William Kimber*, Topic Records (2016).

[74] See, Percy Grainger's *Shepherd's Hey* (1911), or Holst *Six Morris Dance Tunes* (1910).

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The movement's structure is tripartite, mirroring the ABA form of 'Rodney', whilst each section is built out of smaller blocks of musical material derived from or contrasting against snatches of the original tune. This structure is summarised in table 2, outlining the largest formal boundaries and the contrasting materials within them.

Table 2 Overall structure of Sinfonietta *mvt 1 'Stick Dance'.*

Section	Bar numbers	Material
A	b.1-6	Fanfare (orchestra)
	b.7-42	Lyrical theme (trumpet solo, accomp. orchestra)
	b.43-58	Fanfare (orchestra)
	b.59-67	'Rodney' A-section (original melody, concertina solo)
	b.68-77	Quartal transitional material (strings + concertina)
	b.78-92	Fanfare (orchestra)
B	b.93-122	Chromatic 'Rodney' B-section + quartal material (orchestra)
	b.123-129	Fanfare (orchestra)
	b.130-133	'Rodney' B-section (original melody, concertina solo)
	b.134-147	'Rodney' B-section, original (concertina) + chromatic (orchestra) versions
A₁	b.148-175	Lyrical theme (full tutti)
	b.176-181	Fanfare (full tutti)

The first appearance of material derived from 'Rodney' is a lyrical melody presented in the orchestra, the second half of which is built by selectively drawing notes from the Morris tune. This is accompanied by a riff in the lower strings which is closely based on the first three bars of the original tune, recast into 5/8 (fig. 11-13).

Figure 11 Opening melodic line transcribed from 'Rodney' as performed by William Kimber. Double stems denote pitches drawn from to create the second half of the 'lyrical' theme (fig. 12) in order to unify a sense of melodic shape between complementary materials.

Figure 12 Sinfonietta mvt 1, bb.16-28 trumpet solo, 'lyrical' theme (score excerpt in C).

Figure 13 Sinfonietta *mvt 1, bb.7-11, accompanimental riff (violas). Compare this excerpt with b.1-2 of the melody in fig. 11.*

This melodic and rhythmic development in the orchestra is contrasted by solo interjections from the concertina, replying with the original tune as a simple melodic line in octaves, highlighted with occasional chordal stabs in the same spirit as William Kimber's performance of the tune (fig. 14).[75]

Figure 14 Sinfonietta *mvt 1, bb.59-67 concertina solo.*

Having set up this contrast, the concertina and orchestra unite in transitional material which serves not only to reconcile the soloist and orchestra, but also begins to explore the concertina in a non-melodic role. At the time of composition, melodic liquidation was already emerging as my preferred way of composing with borrowed music. However, the parallel-heavy quartal harmony of this movement's 'transitional material' also represents an early step towards a harmonic language that would reappear throughout my subsequent work (see fig. 15). As this language developed in my subsequent music, quartal and quintal chord formation is used interchangeably, as variations in inversion and chord voicing rather than as two separate systems.

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[75] Kimber's rhythmic pulse varies across the recording, starting the tune in simple time, but fluidly drifting back and forth between this and something much closer to a swung rhythm/compound time. Therefore, whilst my rendering of the 'plain' version 'Rodney' in b.59 etc. is an aesthetic editorial choice on which rhythmic character to set down in notation, it is not a conventionally (re)composed 'variation' on the original.

Figure 15 Sinfonietta *mvt 1, bb.68-77, quartal transitional material.*

The format of the first section (bb.1-92), which contrasts the original melody's A-section with newly composed and more chromatically inflected material, is repeated for the B-section. Disjointed, chromatic, and rhythmically recomposed versions of the tune appear in the orchestra, alongside snatches of the transitional quartal material, but then give way to the concertina returning to its melodic role presenting the original version of the tune (fig. 16 & 17).

Figure 16 Sinfonietta *mvt 1 bb.101-104, violas, chromatic version of 'Rodney' B-section in new rhythm.*

Figure 17 Sinfonietta *mvt 1, bb.130-133 corresponding concertina solo more closely echoing the original Morris tune.*

The orchestra and concertina once again combine at b.148, with the concertina adopting a more accompanimental role, joining in the strings' 5/8 material, whilst the winds restate the 'lyrical theme'. The movement is completed with a final restatement of the opening chromatic material, leading to a playfully inconclusive final cadence. The compositional techniques explored in this first movement laid the groundwork for my approach to future pieces in the liquidation of melodic and rhythmic elements of the borrowed music, along with an early (albeit

not fully committed) embrace of quartal/quintal harmony. However, the subsequent movements move away from using traditional music, instead focusing on different elements of performance practice associated with the concertina.

The second movement is in another simple ABA structure, around a B-Lydian melody. It is a whimsical study in the concertina's rich lower registers and harmonic capabilities, and unapologetically indulges in the slow lyricism at its foundation (fig. 18). The movement heading 'Passacaglia' is, like the stick dance before it, treated as a point of inspiration rather than a strict formal convention. The opening concertina solo, treated as the theme for the passacaglia, is repeated throughout the orchestra as both melody and bassline.

Figure 18 Sinfonietta *mtv 2, bb.1-10 opening concertina solo.*

This regular repetition is disrupted at b.35, where the passacaglia theme breaks down upon transposition at the dominant (F♯-Lydian) in the bass line (vla, vc. & db). At first it fails to progress past the third note of the phrase, instead reflecting back down the scale. This is followed by another attempt with more, but still limited, success at picking out the main melodic shape. This couplet of phrases, along with new melodic material over the 'failed' bassline, is repeated before the passacaglia theme finally returns on F♯ in the second bassoon at b.56. A return to B-Lydian at b.62 firmly reestablishes the passacaglia theme, with melodic materials from the middle section now recontextualised as a countermelody before the music tails away into the stillness from where it began.

The final movement, 'Scherzo', showcases passagework-type figures as the primary material of the movement (see fig. 19), woven around the 'fanfare' and 'transitional' materials from the first movement. Amidst the playfully chaotic juxtaposition of themes battling for dominance,

the reprised materials also help to signpost the harmonic shifts that take place throughout the movement, drifting away from, and back to, a C tonal centre which culminates in the satisfactory final cadence that the first movement eschewed.

Figure 19 Sinfonietta *mvt 3 bb.14-18 concertina 'passagework' solo.*

Sinfonietta represents not only my first attempt at writing for the concertina, but my first use of folk music as more than just source material for quotation. The first movement coupled quotation of a traditional tune with a systematic developmental approach to embedding the borrowed music into the *raison d'etre* of the movement, whilst the second and third movements focused on engagement with the concertina's historical uses. I greatly enjoyed the writing process of this piece, particularly consulting with Rob (to whom the work is dedicated), and within the compositional process not only a continuation of a developmental strategy, but an emerging harmonic language that would remain increasingly important to me.

3.2 *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*: Liquidation of Quotation

When examining much Anglo-Welsh folk music from the last four centuries, one must admit that documented evidence places it invariably either in tonal major/minor scales or scales that can be described in the context of the Western church modes.[76] In a bid to introduce greater harmonic variety in my music and the 'found objects' I engaged with, I initially undertook several experiments with significantly more chromatic material to impose new pitch sets upon these traditional materials. However, none of these resulted in a musical outcome that I was happy with; the original implied harmonic character of these traditional melodies is a significant source of their appeal to me, and I found that recasting them into radically different scales negated the attraction of working with such repertoire in the first place.[77] Using the standard

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[76] The localising of this comment does not necessarily limit its observation exclusively to English and Welsh folk repertoires, or necessarily the *entirety* of those repertoires, but rather reflects that these are the musics primarily under consideration in the author's engagement with folk music.

[77] Such test work is not included in this portfolio, due to its ultimate lack of creative progress or interest to me.

church modes, or combinations thereof, as a harmonic starting point for my music allowed the borrowed material to retain the melodic shapes that I enjoy so much. During early experiments with bringing folk music into my creative practice, I often experienced a sense of anxiety around composing such music within academia. This manifested as a sense of obligation towards a high degree of chromaticism, despite this being something that I found unsatisfactory every time I tried to use it as the basis of a piece. Commitment to a harmonic language that complemented, rather than contrasted, the modally inflected original melodic lines was daunting to me lest my music not be deemed serious enough. However, I gradually concluded that I was spending considerable effort looking for an intellectual justification to bring folk music into a personal practice that was something intrinsically separate from the music being quoted. As such, I began to move away from thinking of my use of folk music as an end point, something that I could only really do once I had justified it. Instead, I found the confidence to acknowledge that my justification for working with folk music was first and foremost my emotional response to the repertoire, and I began to focus my creative energies on refining how I expressed my impulse to contribute to that creative practice.

By late 2020, I had just finished two large projects either entirely, or at least significantly, focused on original music (*Bright-Shadow* and *Sinfonietta*), and so I chose my next project to return my attention to how I handled exclusively borrowed music. Particularly, I challenged myself to work with as simple a set of compositional gestures as I dared, and the resulting work was *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, a suite for violin, cello, and harp completed in early 2021. The five airs in question are based upon tunes from *Melus-seiniau Cymru*, a catalogue of Welsh song tunes collected by the antiquarian and Anglican cleric John Jenkins (who took the bardic name Ifor Ceri) in the early 19th century.[78] Of the eponymous five airs that I chose to work with, three are significantly recomposed. These are interleaved with the other two airs presented in simple arrangements, intended as short 'palate-cleansers' to contrast the overt motivic and structural development used to transform the melodic ideas in the movements around them.

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[78] John Jenkins, *Melus-seiniau Cymru* (1817-1825).

Within the odd-numbered movements, I returned to my approach of liquidation, extracting characteristic cells of musical material, single phrases, or fragments of phrases, from their original context. For example, the first movement begins with short cells of material drawn from the tune 'Mi Welais Rhyfeddod'. The distinctive descending scales of the first phrase (fig. 20), and the oscillating seconds of the third phrase (fig. 21), are liquidated through repetition and decontextualising of small rhythmic elements to change their overall pulse (fig. 22).

Figure 20 'Mi Welais Rhyfeddod' bb.1-4.

Figure 21 'Mi Welais Rhyfeddod' bb.9-12.

Figure 22 Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, mvt.1 bb.4-9, harp line.*

The oscillating seconds figure runs through much of the movement, over which the violin and cello explore additional treatments of fragmentary material. The liquidation results in a shift in rhythmic emphasis, as the fragmented snatches of melody take the pulse out of compound time and into a progressively lengthening sequence of common metres. This alternation between time signatures gradually becomes its own motif as the music hits a dramatic peak in the asymmetric time signatures of bb.47-59.

The third movement explores two different versions of the carol 'Ffarwel Ned Puw'. The first, drawn from *Melus-seiniau Cymru*, opens the movement with a fragment of melody (b.1-2²), and slowly teases out additional material from Jenkins' collected melody, combining small cells of the starting material into fuller musical phrases across the first 41 bars of music (fig. 23 & 24). This development is centred around a complete statement of the melody (shared between

harp and violin) between b.18[2] and b.22[1], which acts as an anchor point to give shape to the snatches of transformed or decontextualised material surrounding it.

23 'Ffarwel Ned Puw' opening bars, from Melus-seiniau Cymru.

Figure 24 Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, mvt. 3 bb.14-18, working elements of the first five beats of the melody (as per fig. 23) across the ensemble: A, beats 2-4; B, beats 1-3 (transposed); C, beats 1-3 (intervallically augmented); D, beats 4-5 (transposed); E, beats 1-3 (intervallically and rhythmically augmented).*

The second tune, which appears from b.42 onwards in the harp, is a much more recently recorded version of the carol, as noted by Phyllis Kinney, which I have recast with an E-Lydian inflection a variably natural/sharp $\hat{4}$ (see fig. 25).[79]

[79] Phyllis Kinney, *Welsh Traditional Music* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011 repr. 2015), 108-109.

Figure 25 Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, mvt 3 bb.42-48, harp part (#$\hat{4}$ and $\hat{5}$ are spelled enharmonically for purposes of pedalling).*

Over this new tune, the rather pedestrian B-section of the melody from *Melus-seiniau* is turned into an accompaniment, rhythmically augmented and hocketted between the violin and cello (fig. 26 & 27).

Figure 26 'Ffarwel Ned Puw' B-section, from Melus-seiniau Cymru.

Figure 27 Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, mvt. 3 bb.48-57, violin and cello lines.*

My treatment of the tune 'Y Saith Rhyfeddod' in the last movement takes its primary inspiration from the repeated gesture at the end of each phrase in the original tune (fig. 28).
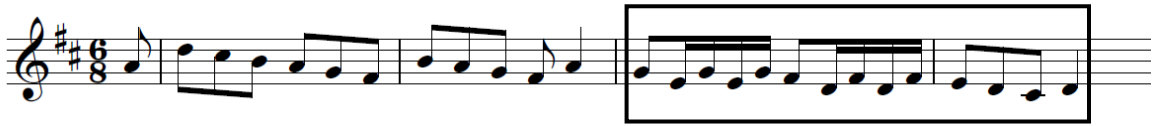
Figure 28 Bars 1-4 of my transcription of 'Y Saith Rhyfeddod' from Melus-seiniau Cymru*, with the principally liquidated material highlighted.*

In performances of this tune which feature the words of the eponymous counting song, this repeating gesture does not carry text, and is instead either scatted or used as an instrumental phrase.[80] This form of punctuation between the 'main' material is replicated in the tune's appearance in *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*; here, it is transformed into a rondo-like A-theme, harmonised by its own melodic inversion, which functions to bookend statements of the other musical material. This 'A-theme' gesture is liquidated into its three basic features: oscillating thirds, stepwise movement mid-phrase, and a short scalic gesture. It is also rhythmically recomposed by extending the phrases via a process of fragmentation and repetition, where the change in note value is replaced by a change in pulse (see fig. 29). Longer phrases built out of variations on the first two bars of the original melody, often rhythmically augmented, then play off this gesture in question-and-answer phrasing between the bowed strings and harp.

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[80] See, for example, Gwenan Gibbard, Patrick Rimes and Gwilym Bowen Rhys' performance for BBC Radio Cymru in 2014 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p01xhqf6>.

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Figure 29 Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, mvt 5 bb.5-8, 'liquified' repeating gesture (violin and cello), followed by opening of the original melody in rhythmic augmentation (harp). Liquidated components presented as oscillating thirds (b.5), stepwise movement mid-phrase realised as oscillating seconds (b.6), and a short scalic gesture (b.7).*

I have found the liquidation of quoted materials a valuable developmental technique that is both reliable and creatively satisfying to me. This is, of course, not the only technique at my disposal, especially demonstrated as structure and musical narrative took prominence in my approach to originally composed material in the music discussed in the following chapter. Nevertheless, the composition of these pieces so far provided me with the confidence, and early technical underpinnings, of a framework in which to showcase traditional material for all the qualities that are attractive to me, whilst also providing the compositional tools and flexibility to move beyond direct quotation.

Composition of the music discussed next saw me take a step back from quotation, as I turned my attention to the dramatic and structural roles that narrative has within my music. However, these techniques were not abandoned, with an approach focused on expanding small musical units into larger structures a recurring theme in subsequent music, and these returned more explicitly to play an essential role in my compositional approach to *John Thomas Rejigged*, as discussed in Chapter 5. Here, *Contredanse*, *Sinfonietta*, and *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri* would prove to have been a valuable testing ground for the deconstructive techniques that underpin this later work.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

My approach to musical form underwent significant development during the second year of my research. I have long preferred musical structures that are recapitulatory or symmetrical, such as ternary, rondo, and arch forms, but past attempts at programmatic music involved elaborate pre-compositional systems to fit every narrative detail of the source material into the piece. This often resulted in a reactive compositional approach bogged down by a linear structure directly responding to the individual details of the story, and ultimately collapsing under its own weight.[81] An early step made in maturing my approach was the radical simplification of any chosen narrative material. Focusing only on broader narrative themes allowed me to use tried-and-tested musical structures which I could then tailor to the specific demands of the narrative whilst still providing overall structural scaffolding for the music. This broader lesson learned, and new approach taken, can be summarised in Klein's analytical approach to narrative, where 'instead of mapping a particular story of actors and actions onto the music, expressive states evoked by this music [are described] and the ways that their unfolding implies a narrative.'[82] A compositional application of this approach was honed primarily over my triptych of 'fairy tales', *Bright-Shadow* (June 2020), *Hob* (March 2021), and *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* (April/September 2022).

Most of this project is focused on reconciling my influences from Western Art- and folk musics, but these are not my only musical perspectives. I was keen to also include other elements of my wider musical practice into my PhD, and the portion of my research dedicated to narrative was well suited to consideration of my experiences as a film composer. *Imagined Engines*, an audiovisual work, could potentially have been an outlier relative to my other works in this portfolio. In fact, it gave me a very helpful avenue of exploration for continuing to develop my harmonic language, reformulate the role that music technology and production would play in

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[81] This is something that I was grappling with prior to my PhD as well as early in the project, particularly in early sketchwork for *Bright-Shadow*.

[82] Michael Klein, 'Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 26/1 (2004), 23-56.

my PhD, and offered a different context to creating compelling musical narrative structure outside of programmatic concert works. Working with audiovisual material is a very different process to concert works, often firmly centred on a director/composer relationship where the composer's role is to react to a pre-prescribed brief, but I wanted to work on a film that could be developed with a different approach. Therefore, together with a film-maker friend, I created *Imagined Engines*, in which the visual and narrative development of the film was a single structural process created in parallel with the scoring. But first, my studies in narrative structure within this PhD portfolio began with my instrumental concert music and so this is where the following analysis starts.

4.1 *Bright-Shadow*: Structure as Narrative

The first work in which I seriously turned my attention to such narrative considerations was *Bright-Shadow*. As discussed in Chapter 1, I was closely following the progress of the AHRC project 'Modern Fairies', a collaboration between academics and artists which sought to explore how folklore and fairy tales 'can be re-mediated to be made relevant to modern audiences', and this perspective served as the lens through which I undertook my work.[83] As the music was written in the late spring of 2020, another significant influence on the final shape of this piece was the COVID-19 pandemic. Working from my home in the depths of lockdown, I was faced with the prospect that a significant source of performance opportunities, University-run workshops, was indefinitely postponed (and had already cost me a live workshopping opportunity for *Discovering Ghosts*). However, whilst a lack of workshops would indeed cost me the opportunity to hear and discuss my music live, it did free me from the restraint of writing for prescribed ensembles that such events unavoidably entail. My response to this new-found freedom was to create music using an ensemble that would, under normal circumstances, be sufficiently impractical as to not occur to me to use. This disregard for conventional logistics allowed me to deploy musical colours and expressive details that would

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[83] 'About' on the Modern Fairies website <modernfairies.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/about> [accessed 13/03/2024].

have otherwise gone unexplored in my music. Around the same time, I was gaining an interest in contemporary Theremin repertoire, from composers such as Carolina Eyck and Régis Campo, and so I selected Theremin as a solo instrument, to be accompanied by multiple pianos (after initial experiments with three, I reduced this scoring to two).[84] The facilitation of a 'performance' was instead brought about via a remote recording session between myself and Thereminist Grégoire Blanc, based in France.

The term 'bright-shadow' is used by folklorist James Roy King to refer to the transcendental region of myth and folk tale, 'a world that embraces searches and quests, secret doors and casement windows, poverty and wealth, puddles and lamps, twilight and dawn'.[85] The narrative of my piece *Bright-Shadow* is based on the tale of King Herla, as found in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* [Courtier's Trifles], a compendium of tall tales and wry political satire from the 12th century.[86] The basic narrative is common across British and Irish folklore, but Map's telling describes Herla, 'a king of the most ancient Britons', who, when out in the forest one day meets with a group of fairies whose king invites Herla to his wedding in the Otherworld.[87] To his detriment, Herla forgets his promise to attend and when the time comes he is whisked away unprepared. After apparently surviving the fairy wedding, Herla returns home to find that centuries have passed in his absence, his kingdom is long-forgotten, and that he and his knights are forced to forever ride on neither dead nor alive.[88]

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[84] See, for example Campo's concerto for Theremin, *Dancefloor with Pulsing* (2018).

[85] James R. King, *Old Tales and New Truths: Charting the Bright-Shadow World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 7.

[86] Walter Map tr. Montague R. James (Brooke and Mynors, eds), *De nugis curialium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[87] Welsh folk stories with the same narrative theme are mentioned, for example, in Peter Stevenson, *Welsh Folk Tales* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2017), 65. The famous Irish version of the story, *Oisín in Tir na nÓg*, is attributed by various sources to an eighteenth-century poem Micheál Coimín, see James MacKillop, *Fionn mac Cumhaill: Celtic Myth in English Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 32-33.

[88] Map, *De nugis curialium*, 27.

The most significant theoretical contributions to my structural process in this piece come from J.P.E Harper-Scott's *Edward Elgar, Modernist*.[89] The first of these is Harper-Scott's analysis of the narrative significance of tonal centre through the lens of Hepokoski's theory of 'sonata failure' and the lack/loss of tonic resolution.[90] In an analysis of Elgar's first symphony, Harper-Scott reads the inconclusive final return to the tonic as both structurally ironic and narratively tragic, turning Romantic triumphalism into Modernist uncertainty. I was keen to explore whether this approach to finding narrative significance in tonal centre and musical form would be a fruitful method of working within my own music, and so I quickly set about writing a piece to which they could be applied. There are three main pieces of musical material in *Bright-Shadow*: motifs for the concept of 'bright-shadow' (bb.1-4); King Herla (pianos, bb.12-15); and the 'wild dance' (from b.79), indicated in fig. 30-32.

Figure 30 'Bright-Shadow' motif, Theremin bb.1-5.

Figure 31 'King Herla' motif, piano 2 bb.12-13.

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[89] J.P.E Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). *Bright-Shadow* is inspired as much by Harper-Scott's view of narrative as his analysis of Elgar.

[90] These are mostly articulated in James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy*, Elements of Sonata Theory - Norms, Types, and Deformations*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and James Hepokoski, 'Beyond the Sonata Principle', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 55/1 (2002), 91-154, both quoted and analysed in Harper-Scott, *Elgar* (2006).

Figure 32 'Wild Dance' motif, piano 1 bb.79-84.

The opening of *Bright-Shadow* initially suggests F-Lydian, but quickly dissolves into Herla's pompous, chorale-like theme centred on an E-major tonal space.[91] The Lydian/Mixolydian-inflected 'wild dance' is unshakably grounded on G at the point in the narrative at which Herla and his knights enter the Otherworld (from b.79), using harmonic stasis to evoke a sense of frozen time.[92] Throughout the piece the Theremin plays material derived from the 'bright-shadow' motif, wandering freely across a variety of transpositions and becoming a signifier of ambiguity. Herla's initial otherworldly encounter is depicted with the first appearance of the 'wild dance' in b.20, slower than in its main statement and cast diatonically. The 'bright-shadow' motif then plays in rhythmic unison with a restatement of Herla's theme, as the pact is made. Much discussion in contemporary folkloristics focuses on the significance of 'liminal spaces', such as thresholds (between a building and the outside world) and the seashore (between the land and sea), as supernaturally-charged places where the division between the human and Otherworld thins.[93] Therefore, Herla's supernatural meeting in a forest (which sits between civilisation and wilderness) is centred on F♯, a harmonic liminality between Herla's home key

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[91] This use of a 'tonal feint' is simply to align the final note of the 'Bright-Shadow' motif with $\hat{5}$ of E, and is inspired by the opening of Richard Blackford's *Spirited*, (2015), described as such by the composer in a personal correspondence.

[92] The choice of G as the tonal centre for the Otherworld is, as far as any listener is concerned, coincidental. However, as a composer who experiences colour hearing, it also has a deeper personal significance due to my association of the note and key of G with the colour green. Green is often associated with the Otherworld in folklore and myth, such as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the tale of the Green Children (a good retelling of which appears in Carolyne Larrington, *The Land of the Green Man: A Journey Through the Supernatural Landscapes of the British Isles* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015)), as well as a medieval association with the Devil (see D. W. Robertson, Jr., 'Why the Devil Wears Green', *Modern Language Notes*, 69/7 (1954), 470-472).

[93] There are numerous references to this idea throughout the literature, but Larrington, *The Land of the Green Man* (2015) is a prime example.

of E major, and the bright-shadow realm's modal G. The final tonal centre of the piece is ambiguous. It is nominally a transposition of the opening accompanimental riff (bb.6-15) from E major to A major. However, given the strong dominant emphasis of the material and its subsequent transposition onto the note E, the A-major association is lost. The reprise instead functions as a signifier of 'the same but different' for Herla's return from the Otherworld only to survey the ruins of his kingdom after the passage of several centuries. Moreover, the restatement of Herla's theme fails to re-establish its home key of E (bb.161-163) but remains caught on the Otherworld's tonal centre of G (he is stuck as non-mortal) before disintegrating into chromatic ambiguity. The return of the opening material in its original transposition in b.176 is too late for Herla, whose music has faded away to ghostly Theremin pedal tones.

The other significant contribution to my structural thinking is Harper-Scott's concept of 'the mimetic function of sonata form', and its similarity to fairy tales in his analysis of the first three of W.H. Auden's six-point codification of the archetypal quest narrative.[94] Auden's first archetypal element is 'a precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married', which Harper-Scott ascribes to 'the conclusive attainment of the tonic', as alluded to in the first subject's final resolution in the recapitulation/coda. This is followed by 'a long journey to find it [the precious Object]', and 'a Hero, who alone can find the precious Object', which Harper-Scott assigns to the roles of 'the sonata trajectory' and 'the second subject' (in contrast to the first subject which, presumably, is the medium in which the Object is carried). Such use of a modified version of sonata form conveniently bridged the conceptual gap between the textual and musical components of my work and substantially informed my retelling of the Herla narrative. So far as the piece is primarily about the supernatural, I have conformed to Harper-Scott's assignment of Hero (or, better, protagonist) status upon the 'bright-shadow' as the second subject. However, I believe Harper-Scott too readily overlooks the thematic significance of the first subject; leaving it as a vessel for the introduction and possible

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[94] W.H. Auden, 'The Quest Hero', in *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings'*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 40-61, quoted and analysed in Harper-Scott, *Elgar* (2006), 171-183.

vindication of the tonic ignores its motivic potential. Instead, I have combined Harper-Scott's analysis with a more traditional, oppositional reading of sonata form as a conflict between the first and second subjects. The piece begins with a bare statement of the 'bright-shadow' motif, which is used as a signifier of the supernatural as well as musically flagging moments of narrative significance. It is immediately followed by the establishment of the first subject, Herla's homophonic motif in E. Musical material for the Otherworld, a full statement of which is delayed until near the end of the piece, is the second subject, referred to in the score as a 'wild dance'. Developmentally, the traditional overcoming of one subject by another is replaced with the Hepokoskian model of sonata failure, continuing to feed into the thrust of the narrative. The primary Herla material, tinged with hubris, attempts to overcome anything 'bright-shadow' in the development section (bb.45-78), having first been introduced to the Otherworld's material on a reasonably level footing in bb.20-44. It is not a fundamental malevolence of the Otherworld which is Herla's undoing, but rather he is a victim of his own inability to engage with the bright-shadow realm, and a failure to rise to the, '…challenges posed by the network in which he […] must function'.[95]

These approaches combine to make what is my most significant departure from standard sonata form in *Bright-Shadow*: a restructuring in which the development section is placed in between the two subjects, by which the first subject engineers its own downfall even as both are framed by the additional presence and ambiguities of the 'bright-shadow' motif (see table 1). After the initial attempt to state Herla's motif in the 'wrong' key in the recapitulation, all that is left is the accompanimental material from the first subject, depicting a return to the 'real world' (as demanded by the narrative) but missing the main theme – a fundamental element required for a successful return to the tonic.

Bright-Shadow was a significant compositional breakthrough for me in the process of developing a structural approach to conveying programmatic narrative through the framework

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95 King, *Old Tales* (1992), 203.

of (albeit modified) conventional musical form. I continued this project in 2021 with the next of my musical fairy tales.

Table 1 Modified sonata form in Bright-Shadow.

Section		Function	Material	Tonal space	Bar nos.
Exposition		Introduction: 'sets the scene'	'Bright-Shadow' motif	n/a	bb.1-4
		First Subject	Herla motif and 'real world' musical 'landscape'.	E major	bb.5-19
	Development	'The Pact'	Introduces the second subject material ('wild dance') and situates both subjects in a liminal harmonic and motivic space.	F# major, (increasingly chromatic)	bb.20-44
		Development	Hubris of Herla to ignore and attempt to 'overcome' the second subject.	Various (diatonic)	bb.45-78
		Second subject	Full statement of the 'wild dance', establishment of modal G as the opposing tonality to Herla's diatonic E.	Modal G	bb.79-149
Recap		(Failed) Recapitulation	Return to the real world 'landscape', but confirmation of Herla's failure.	Ambiguous	bb.150-185

4.2 *Hob*: Narrative Developments

At the start of 2021, I was presented with the opportunity to write for percussionist Geroge Barton as part of the newly returned University composition workshop series (albeit still in an online format), and so decided to take the opportunity to continue the next of my musical fairy tales. I had not written for solo marimba before, and so the project continued in the spirit of *Bright-Shadow* in challenging myself to write for previously unexplored forces within my music. Moreover, this piece continued my engagement with my research question upon narrative and structure, interrogating how I go about conveying narrative themes within my music.

Karol Berger argues that narrative form in music does not emerge from any particular musical phrase, but from complete musical gestures taking on the function of narrative structure (such

as a beginning, middle, end).[96] Whilst it is clear that on some level such generic structural features appear in virtually all music, Berger draws a distinction for narrative music in particular by defining it as an intrinsically 'temporal form' in that 'its parts succeed one another in a determined order and that their succession is governed by the relationships of causing and resulting by necessity or probability.'[97] However, such functions must therefore fall into some kind of coherent sequence of events, and so structure must also be a key issue in the attainment of narrative function. Analysts such as Newman view the potential of narrative interpretation as a result of the compositional undermining of Classical structure, as a 'play with function and succession'.[98] Whilst my musical constructions are certainly far from textbook Classical forms in their details, my mindset during their composition actually represents an opposite perspective to Newman's; narrative is not the *result* of formal irregularity, but rather distinct musical structure (regular or otherwise) is the medium *through which* narrative is portrayed, albeit 'buttressed by programmatic details, text, or other devices that more precisely characterised the agents in question'.[99]

As such, a brief overview of the structure of *Hob*, and its narrative signification, is a helpful next step in this reflective analysis. Hobs, or domestic sprites, are a theme found across British folklore. These creatures pair themselves with a down-on-their luck human and work tirelessly to turn around their mortal companion's fortunes. However, these fairies habitually take offence at some perceived slight and either abandon the hapless human to their own misfortune or actively go about sabotaging their life.[100] These tales often have an archetypal

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[96] Karol Berger, 'Poetics II. Narrative and Lyric: The Poetic Forms and the Object of Artistic Presentation', in *A Theory of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[97] Ibid., 194.

[98] Anthony Newcomb, 'Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies', 19th-Century Music, 11/2 (1987), 164-174.

[99] Byron Almén and Robert Hatten, 'Narrative Engagement with 20th-Century Music: Possibilities and Limits', in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[100] See Peter Binnall, 'A Brownie Legend from Lincolnshire', *Folklore*, 51/3 (1940), 219-222 for a standard version of the theme (referring to the sprites as Brownies in this instance), or M. C. Balfour, 'Legends of the Lincolnshire Cars. Part II' *Folklore*, 2/3 (1891), 264-271 for the tale of the particularly malicious Yallery Brown.

arch form to them – the discovery of a hob by the human, the bringing of good fortune, and subsequent umbrage and retribution – which lend themselves very well to my fondness for symmetrical musical structure. The music begins with a representation of the luckless human, unable to establish a coherent sense of line and limited to short and aimless phrases. This narrative conceit is reinforced by the intervallic makeup of the music: the music begins 'imperfectly' with a series of augmented and diminished fifths which continually try, but fail, to find a satisfactory cadence point in perfect intervals on the music's tonal centre of A (fig. 33 & 34).

Figure 33 Hob*, bb.1-5, stating first a diminished fifth (b.1), augmented fifth (b.3), and perfect fifth (b.5) before collapsing back into a 'failed cadence' of non-perfect intervals (b.6).*

Figure 34 Hob *bb.7-18, unable to establish a coherent line.*

From b.32, with impish assistance, a groove begins to become established, and the music moves into a more fluid exploration of the diminished, augmented, and perfect intervals as phrases lengthen and motivic shapes begin to assemble into more coherent lines (see fig. 35).

Figure 35 Hob *bb.37-49, gradually building a groove.*

Between bb.101-115 the music reaches optimal 'assistance', with stacks of perfect intervals building up steady phrases and a consistent rhythmic groove making use of the only moment in the piece that does not feature constant time signature changes (fig. 36).

Figure 36 Hob *bb.101-106, hitting full groove.*

However, b.112 introduces the first signs of this stability beginning to sour and soon, just as it appeared without warning, the music's source of power vanishes leaving it to slowly disintegrate back to where it started. The material returns in its initial intervallic and rhythmic

form, most directly highlighted by the opening notes used in retrograde at the close of the piece (see fig. 37).

Figure 37 Melodic retrograde in final four bars of Hob.

As noted above, features of the specifically referred-to story are gesturally referenced throughout the music but, similarly to *Bright-Shadow*, I view the treatment of resolution (and the lack thereof) as the underpinning feature that makes the music truly narrative. Hepokoski is far from alone in his reading of unsatisfactory resolution as narratively tragic, and in this regard Klein's analysis of Chopin's Ballades provides helpful insight. Klein reads the failure of tonic resolution for what he hears as the central themes of the first and fourth Ballades as tragic, or at least defiant.[101] The retrograded resolution of *Hob* is certainly a far cry from any sense of Romantic triumphalism, although unlike in *Bright-Shadow* it is at least in its starting transposition. However, drawing on Edward Cone's concept of apotheosis in music, Klein notes that implicit in this should be a sense of thematic development, since if 'characters in a narrative change over time, then the themes that represent them or their emotional states must change over time as well. Thus, apotheosis is both a structural and expressive transformation of a theme.'[102] The hapless figure of the human in hob narratives is quite the opposite of apotheosis: rather than an encounter with the supernatural elevating them to divine status, they are rather damned to their own fate. Accordingly, the expressive state of the music not only attempts to represent their state of incoherence and incapacity to function, but itself suffers the same disaster of reprobation.

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[101] Michael Klein, 'Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 26/1 (2004), 23-56.

[102] Klein, 'Chopin's Fourth Ballade', 32.

Such 'tragic' renderings of motif and structure served their purposes well for my creative goals in *Bright-Shadow* and *Hob*, but they are not a perfect fit for all contexts. The next work to engage with my narrative explorations strikes a far lighter tone than the two which precede it, and accordingly required a different approach to its musical storytelling.

4.3 *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush*: Narrative as Structure

In the spring of 2021, I began work combining my structural and harmonic experiments from *Bright-Shadow* and *Hob* into a final part of my 'fairy tale' series, this time a musical retelling of Aesop's fable 'The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush'.[103] The eponymous piece was originally scored for soprano, bass clarinet, violin, cello and harp as part of a workshop for the Riot Ensemble. However, as part of undergoing minor revisions, I lightly rescored the piece for soprano, B♭ clarinet, double bass and harp for The Hermes Experiment, who workshopped the piece at the BFE/RMA Research Students' Conference at the University of Plymouth in January 2022. I consider the latter iteration to be the completed version of the piece and is the version included in this portfolio.

The music is modally inflected in its harmonic construction, using a scale which fluidly morphs between Dorian and Mixolydian colours via a variably sharp/natural $\hat{3}$ (fig. 38) and a Lydian-coloured scale on G with a similarly variable $\hat{5}$.

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[103] The exact text used in *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* is my own assembly of multiple different versions of the fable, but is primarily based on Sir Roger L'Estrange 'A Bat, Bramble and Cormorant', in *Fables, of Aesop And other Eminent Mythologists* (London, 1692), 'The Heron, the Cat and the Bramble' as told by Lewis T Evans, <https://museum.wales/collections/folktales/?story=32> [accessed 21/03/2021], and Laura Gibbs (tr./ed.), 'The Bat, the Booby, and the Bramble Bush', in *Aesop's Fables* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002) [Kindle edn].

Figure 38 The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush *bb.80-84 (harp part), modality with variable C♮ /C♯, (♮/♯ 3) and quartal/quintally derived melodic line.*

The modal spaces are assigned narrative associations so that each holds a distinct structural function within the music. The Dorian/Mixolydian-inflected sections are associated with purely instrumental material offering musical scene setting, whilst the Lydian-inflected scale is reserved for passages that provide narration (sung or spoken) from the soprano. Motivically, each of the three characters has their own distinct recurring musical cell which interweaves with, and evolves into, the singer's material as it moves between rhythmic spoken narration and melodic lines (fig. 39 & 40).

Figure 39 The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush *bb.6-8, introduction of character motifs underneath their respective narration (score in C).*

Figure 40 The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush *bb.15-27, vocal line carrying character themes in its melody, in the Lydian-inflected scale.*

The musical structure of *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* can be analysed as being essentially episodic, alternating between the instrumental scene setting material and episodes of motivically-focused narrative delivery. This is realised by character motif, structural pacing, and vocal style all being used as storytelling tools, at the service of delivering the text with maximum dramatic impact. From a perspective within the diegesis, the outcome of the story is clearly an undesirable (or at least unexpected) one for its characters. However, the 'moral' of the story is aetiological, and as such is far lighter and more comical compared to its predecessors in my trilogy of fairy tales. Likewise, the music itself ensures that the ending is far from tragic. Unlike Herla's tonally displaced demise, the conclusion here is one of satisfying resolution, recapitulating the opening material in its original modal space as a structural conclusion. The music also ensures that our trio of characters' story ends with something that can be seen as, even if not quite as grand as apotheosis, at least an agreeable resolution. The final statement of each successive motif (bb.59-79) contains the longest versions of their material heard in the music, with such extensions achieved by motivic development which provides the sense of growth and completion to their role in the story that the protagonist of *Hob* failed to attain.

The thematic development throughout the music is also accompanied by colouristic gestures as playful dramatic cues and sound effects, which convey meaning without disrupting the pacing of the larger story (such as the 'one chord storm' in b.45). *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* is the only one of my three fairy tales to have text and this is reflected in my

approach, giving it what is arguably the most literal rendering of narrative delivery through the establishment and development of motivic material. Such an approach is, perhaps, indicative of my training in media composition where there is commonly more overt emphasis on musical expression complementing the non-musical medium with which it is paired. My next narrative project, however, was to place my influences from film music at the centre of the music's creative impetus.

4.4 *Imagined Engines*: Audiovisual Structure

Whilst grappling with the challenges of narrative and structure in concert works throughout late 2020 and early 2021, I was simultaneously slowly working on another strand of this research question: music and film. Folk and Western Art musics are the two areas that have received most attention in this project, as they are my two largest creative influences, but I also have both academic and practical experience within the discipline of film scoring (a Master's degree and credits on films ranging from feature length to animated shorts, respectively).[104] This experience has been important in shaping my musical thinking, and I wished to further explore the link between my media and concert works via their treatment of narrative. Having worked extensively over my second year on narrative within concert works, I was keen to see what influence this progress would have when working to picture. In particular, I wanted to explore moving away from the usual postproduction status-quo where a film is delivered to the composer already at picture lock (or close to it) and the composition process is a generally reactive one. A typical film score has music that is structurally tied to responding to visuals, however much interpretive freedom it may have narratively. The opposite arrangement, where the visuals instead exclusively react to musical cues, could lead to something akin to a music video. I wished to explore a line between these extremes, where music and visuals were created in parallel with one another and given equal dramatic importance.

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[104] MA Composition for Film and Television (Distinction) at the University of Bristol, 2018.

To help me explore this approach I turned to my friend and keen amateur filmmaker, Matt Colclough. Matt and I have worked on numerous short media projects together and so were extremely well-acquainted with each other's creative processes.[105] This project began with a series of conversations about our goals for the film, which was to be created in the medium of computer-generated animation. Many of Matt's films and fine art projects make use of bold colour palettes and striking geometric structures, and we agreed to use this as a visual starting point. Structurally, I wanted to find a way of making the piece a physical realisation of a simple ABA_1 ternary form, and we chose to represent this by using a 'there-and-back-again' visual structure as the camera moves through the virtual space. This was soon joined by the decision to create an abstracted visualisation of an idea or thought process, taking literal inspiration from the phrase 'the cogs turning', to depict a lightbulb moving through abstract machinery where musical and visual development interact to produce increasing intricacy as the piece progresses (fig. 41). This journey, and the machinery it passes around, is a representation of ABA_1 musical form, the main sections of which are delineated by three main camera moves into (A), around (B) and out of (A_1) the virtual space.

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[105] For an example of previous work, see *Hostas and the Art of Flight*, directed by Matthew Colclough <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvm_VCAgtAA> [accessed 23/02/2023].
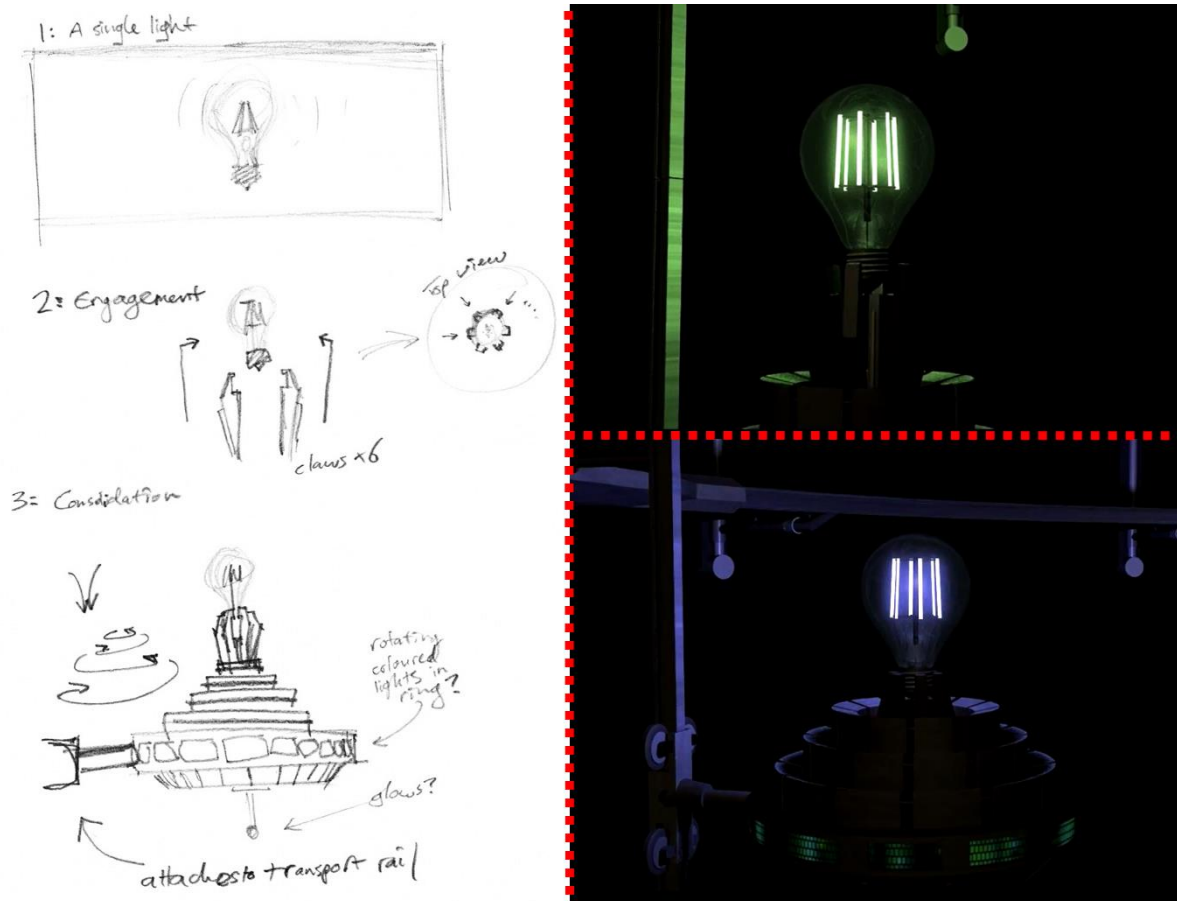
Figure 41 Imagined Engines*, excerpt of Matt Colclough's initial storyboard sketches (left) compared with frames from the finished film (right) comparable to '2: Engagement' and '3: Consolidation' from the sketch.*

Compositionally, I chose to balance the mechanistic visuals with a much more whimsical musical language, symbolic of the complementary contrast between the technical process and subjective aesthetics within a creative act. To further reinforce this, I selected solo piano as the instrumentation for its sympathetic meld of mechanical sound production and lyrical expressive potential, and this instrumental choice was also to be augmented with a substantial creative studio techniques element. I was heavily influenced by the delicate harmonic washes and quintal colours in the music of Liz Lane and Lynne Plowman, and their influence has been of growing importance to my harmonic development over the course of my PhD studies.[106] Another significant influence on my writing came from Purcell's *Fantasia Upon One Note*.

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[106] Works of particular influence on me at the time of writing were Liz Lane, *Ballad*, (2008/2019), Lynne Plowman, *Lullaby for Ianto*, (2007), and Sally Beamish, *Lullaby for Owain*, (1985), along with Joshua Carney, *Inside the Piano* (2009) <https://soundcloud.com/joshua-d-carney/inside-the-piano-piano-and> [accessed 27/02/2023].

Within the visuals, prominent framing is almost always given to the main lightbulb(s), and this sense of simple constancy around which visual complexity is built inspired my own use of a one-note theme as the basis for the music. There are two distinct developmental treatments of this theme for the A- and B-sections respectively, which are then combined for the musical and visual *dénouement* in the final A₁ section. The first is a traditionally compositional use of the one-note theme, familiar to Purcell's treatment of the same idea, weaving assorted musical lines around a central pedal tone within a phrase (fig. 42).

Figure 42 Imagined Engines *main piano line, bb.1-5 - note the one-note theme of repeating Gs flowing between left and right hands.*

However, the B-section takes a much more technological approach to development by using layers of looped material, derived from the static melodic line, to build up the musical texture. The visuals for this section depict a multi-ringed gyroscope-like object as the pivot point for the piece, literally so for the visual environment and structurally as the inspiration for the musical B-section. Each piece of looped musical material is synchronised to the movement of an individual spinning ring, as layers of musical rhythm and visual movement are nested within one another (fig. 43 & 44).

Figure 43 Imagined Engines, *b.37-46 (B-section excerpt) - each bracketed region was played through in the solo piano line, and then re-recorded for looping to build up a texture continually slowing in rhythmic pacing to mirror the slower outer sections of the gyroscope-like object in the visuals.*

Figure 44 Imagined Engines, *layers of movement within the gyroscope B-Section.*

Looping is combined with freer 'live' material in the A_1 reprise. This section starts by recapitulating earlier material in retrograde, as the camera pulls back through the reconfigured space in reverse (compare bb.22-24 with bb.74-76), before moving into variations of the opening music for the final visual reconfiguration of the structure.

Plans for additional film projects, to further explore my approach to audiovisual work outside of a commercial environment, were prevented by the ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns and related logistical uncertainty throughout late 2020 into 2021. Nevertheless, *Imagined Engines* was a fruitful conclusion to my second research question, experimenting with how physical and harmonic spaces can be aligned with on-screen movement, and how they can be treated through musical development as a form of abstract narrative. My approach to musical storytelling has developed from viewing narrative as an external variable to be accommodated by my music, to an approach of applying a particular narrative to the structural and compositional tools already at my disposal. In addition to *Imagined Engines*, this was achieved within concert pieces by aligning narrative and musical formal functions, such as sonata form in *Bright-Shadow*, or applying narrative allusion to motivic and developmental structure within simple musical forms, as in *Hob* and *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush*.

CHAPTER 5: UNIFYING TECHNIQUES

The opening pieces of this portfolio represent early, broad experiments in ways of turning my areas of musical interest into consistent points of inspiration via a set of unifying techniques. Consequently, the final pieces in this research portfolio utilise those techniques and influences which have risen to the forefront of my music across the course of this research in a more mature and confident manner. These compositions demonstrate my key areas of musical concern as they have become progressively clearer to me, not just in terms of compositional technique, but also in my approach to collaborative music-making and the performance and presentation formats in which my music exists. The period of compositional activity that preceded these pieces, and which resulted in the music discussed in the previous chapter, concluded at a point where I considered the fundamental concerns of my third research question ('narrative and form') were satisfactorily addressed. These subsequent pieces, therefore, return to my first two lines of enquiry ('materials and means' and 'found objects'). All three pieces affirm my gravitation toward a quintally-informed harmonic language, with *Nocturne* and *Trio* particularly focused on developing this way of thinking. Nevertheless, the harmony of all three is created through the lens of their melodic potential, and this emphasis on harmony and melody interdependently arising from one another represents some of the most significant progress in my writing. *John Thomas Rejigged* continues my utilisation of liquidation as a developmental tool when reimagining borrowed music as a 'found object', and proved fruitful in emphasising collaborative performance and improvisation, and the relinquishment of absolute compositional control, as a way of creating music.

5.1 *Nocturne*: Development, Harmony, and Recording

My experience of working in close collaboration with concertina player Rob Harbron on *Sinfonietta* in 2020 had been a particularly fruitful and creatively rewarding experience, and so the following year I asked Rob to workshop another piece with me, this time for solo concertina. I wanted to write something that was more modest in scale compared to *Sinfonietta* as the latter, written in the middle of the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, was unlikely to find a

performance any time soon. Whilst *Sinfonietta* more explicitly addressed elements of compositional research into my responses to borrowed (folk) music, *Nocturne* primarily addresses the maturation of my thinking around the means of creating my music (research question 1). As will be discussed below, this very much still involved careful consideration of compositional technique, especially harmony, and the contextual significance of the concertina as a 'folk' instrument was still a source of inspiration for the music. However, another subtle but significant shift in how I think about my music was to approach the composition with the final goal of it existing as a recorded object, with the potential for live performance, rather than as an abstract score waiting to be performed live and potentially recorded as an afterthought. To this end, in addition to the workshops together I also commissioned Rob to record the completed piece, as I wanted the music to exist as a distinct sonic item, released onto streaming platforms like Spotify. Not only would this provide me with the satisfaction of a commercial recording of my finished piece but would allow that piece to have a greater reach than if it were presented exclusively as a concert work. Prioritising recording over live performance was also beneficial because the concertina is a niche instrument within contemporary classical music, with relatively few players interested in such notated repertoire. However, this 'live versus recorded' consideration should not be considered as a simple binary. The music is for a solo, acoustic instrument and thus can be (and has been) performed to a live audience, and my rationale was never to exclude this possibility. At the time of composition, a large motivator was finding a pragmatic response to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. However, it was also an aesthetic decision to prioritise the recorded version over potential concert performances as the main expected medium of consumption and thus where my creative energies (and limited financial resources for the project) would be focused.

The term 'Nocturne' was chosen partly for its broad scope denoting a relatively free, evocative piece, similar in function to other terms like 'Fantasia' or 'Romanza'. However, its name also alludes to my conception of the piece. Whilst there is no strict programmatic element to the music, and the material is entirely original, I was inspired by my memories of walking through

Sidmouth Folk Festival (the UK's oldest folk music and dance festival) at night. Strains of music from tune sessions drift from the many small bars and hotels that host the festival's fringe events each evening, and these tunes echo around the narrow back streets taking on different timbral colours, harmonising each other, and morphing back and forth between different tunes as one walks from street to street. Whilst *Sinfonietta* primarily focused on the more robust chordal aspects of the concertina, *Nocturne* is a study in varied textural and technical detail for the instrument. Whilst no specific folk tune is quoted, the music is nevertheless inspired by Rob's treatment of melodic material in his own performance practice. A recurring theme of Rob's improvisatory playing, and the wider tradition he works within, is the structural use of octave displacement as the basic developmental/transpositional device around which any further ornamental or harmonic variation is centred. The melody of *Nocturne* is, therefore, subjected to a similar treatment, within an overall tripartite $A_{1+2+3}BA_4$ structure.

The music begins with an opening statement of the A-section, comprising four uneven-length phrases (starting at b.2, b.7, b.15 & b.23 respectively). This is accompanied by a simple E♭ pedal tone, before opening up into more independent lines punctuated by moments of octave unison. The A-section is then repeated (from b.27-b.51), with the primary octave transposition of the music shifting up compared to the first statement (fig. 45 & 46) alongside variations in ornamentation, harmonisation, and rhythmic detail.

Figure 45 Nocturne *A-section main melody, bb.1-6, featuring a simple pedal tone accompaniment.*

Figure 46 Nocturne *A-section (second statement) bb.27-31, shifted up an octave and features a more independent lower line in counterpoint to the melody.*

The third presentation of the A-section continues this approach, not only shifting down in octave displacement again, but in tonal centre from E♭ to G along with a stark shift in texture from fluid contrapuntal textures to steadily pulsing chords.

The contrasting B-section (bb.77-109) explores the extremities of instrumental register and timbre, utilising the lowest and highest notes of Rob's tenor-treble instrument, often contrasting against one another as internal melodic lines weave through the texture. Here, the delicate, fleeting internal lines of counterpoint in Rob's playing, as noted in Chapter 3 during the discussion on *Sinfonietta*, are more directly referenced as the significant source of melodic impetus and structural endpoint to each phrase. Notating such internal melodic movement proved to be a challenge, as any sense of notational clarity was all but impossible within the confine of the English concertina's conventional stave notation (in what relatively limited notated repertoire it has) of a single treble stave. Therefore, whilst workshopping the piece, Rob and I agreed upon a modified notation for these passages in which the music is expanded across a double stave, with one dedicated to melodic movement and the other to the surrounding chords, along with forays into the otherwise non-standard bass clef (fig. 47). The form is completed by a brief final repetition of the A-section, which combines elements of its three previous statements, before finally subsiding into stillness.

Figure 47 Nocturne*, bb.119-124, internal line (top stave) moving within chords.*

Just as *Nocturne* represents a maturing of my approach to instrumental writing for the concertina, it also demonstrates a growing security in my harmonic writing. When writing *Sinfonietta*, my approach to quintal harmony was still somewhat tentative, a particular harmonic colour that ebbed and flowed within the music, rather than a fully committed language. *Nocturne*, alongside *Hob* and *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush* (both

written earlier in the same year) demonstrates more consistency in my approach to quintal harmony, as an integral element of the musical material rather than as an isolated harmonic effect. In contrast to some earlier works, quartal/quintal shapes were now the fundamental basis of my harmonic construction rather than an additional non-triadic colour to create tension or otherness (such as in *Bright-Shadow*). I continued to make use of the distinctive colour created by shifting a given quintal chord shape up and down in parallel motion, but also used variations in chord voicing to retain a quintal harmonic colour without exclusively relying on the very specific sound that block parallels bring with them.

Nocturne was completed by late 2021 and was released online, just as the country once again plunged into intermittent COVID-19 lockdowns. An official single was released on streaming platforms, along with a video performance of Rob recorded at the Subscription Rooms, Stroud.[107] For all the progress in my creative thinking that I made whilst writing *Nocturne*, and the technical side of my harmonic writing, it is nevertheless still fully notated music, albeit that which impressionistically refers to traits of an improvisatory style found in the contemporary performance practice of English folk music. I would return to working with Rob in 2022 to tackle these remaining issues in *John Thomas Rejigged* and the wider album which it formed a part of. Here, I would combine the issues worked in *Nocturne* with further consideration of my research into musical 'found objects', and finally reach my musical conclusions on all of these factors at play within the scope of my doctoral project.

5.2 *Trio*: Harmony Reaffirmed

Trio was the final piece of my portfolio to be started, with its composition following *Nocturne* and taking place in between creative workshops for *John Thomas Rejigged* (as discussed in the following sections), although the latter would be completed after *Trio*. As the final time I would start with a compositional blank slate within the scope of this doctoral portfolio, I chose to return to composing entirely original material, and place my emphasis on one final

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[107] '*Nocturne* for English concertina' (2021), written by Timothy Johnston, performed by Rob Harbron, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmJiTOTpqnU> [accessed 17/01/2023].

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interrogation of my 'materials and means' research question. The melodic emphasis in *John Thomas Rejigged* as an ongoing project encouraged me, rather than musically 'repeat myself', to instead return to a systematic consideration of harmony and pitch sets as the primary compositional motivation of the music.

The piece was written for the Riot Ensemble, in a small trio configuration of clarinet, guitar and double bass, which were the guest ensemble for my final postgraduate composer's workshop hosted by the University. As such, although the broad instrumentation was fixed for me, I made the decision to replace the group's conventional nylon-strung classical guitar for its steel string alternative, in drop-D tuning. My intention for the music was not to explicitly engage with folk music, so far as quoted materials were concerned. However, the near-ubiquitous use of steel string guitar within the contemporary folk music that I was immersing myself in provided the sonorities and resonance that were required to realise the sounds filling my imagination. However, this was not intended to be a new piece of 'folk music', and many of the technical aspects of the music firmly trace their origin to the Art music theory that I was being introduced to at the time.

Around the time of starting sketching for the beginnings of the music I attended an online seminar by composer and organist Carlotta Ferrari, on the subject of 21st century modal compositional technique. The focus of the seminar were the pitch set generation techniques Restarting Pitch Space and Interval Mirror Point, developed respectively by Carson Cooman in 2005 and James Clay in 2019.[108] These techniques are brought to play in Ferrari's music at the service of generating often-familiar sounding tonal sonorities, and even for the quotation of pre-existing diatonic material, within a nevertheless novel harmonic system, in a similar effect (although from a different theoretical basis) to Messiaen's concept of 'tonal

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[108] Carson Cooman: Restarting Pitch Space <https://carsoncooman.com/restarting-pitch-space> [accessed 25/03/2024] and James Clay: Interval Mirror Point <https://jamesmatthewclay.wixsite.com/jamesmclaycomposer/intervallic-mirror-point> [accessed 25/03/2024].

atmospheres'.[109] I believe that RPS and IMP certainly have the potential for creative investigation in my work at some future point, but at this late stage of my research I was not eager to start experiments with a whole new way of working harmonically. Due to this, key features of these techniques, such as their properties of non-octave equivalence, remain unexplored in my work to date. Nevertheless, exposure to these techniques was an important, if indirect, source of inspiration to re-examine ways to chromatically diversify an essentially modal pitch space. A particular appeal was the way in which chromatic variability of a given pitch value, including the 'tonic' note, may be varied within a work whilst still adhering to an overall systematic approach. To create a similar effect for *Trio*, I turned to my increasingly settled quintal harmonic language as a source for my starting pitch set and, working through the circle of fifths, the piece employs all 12 pitches in the chromatic scale (fig. 48).

Figure 48 Circle of fifths, centred around D, from which the pitch material for Trio *is derived.*

An insistently static, Lydian-inflected harmonic basis inescapably locates D as the tonal centre of the music at a fixed point, from which chromatic deviation may occur. My focus on fourths/fifths is not only used to generate the pitch material but is also used as the basis of my chord construction, thus organising and rationalising such an approach as being derived from the circle of fifths rather than freeform chromatic decoration. This wash of consonant, quintal harmony is then used as the underpinnings for a higher degree of chromatic freedom in the melodic line, the greater fluidity of which is used to emphasise the variability of sharp or natural forms of the foundational modal 'atmosphere' in which the music is located (see fig. 49).

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[109] Olivier Messiaen, tr. John Satterfield, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1966). For relevant examples of Ferrari's work, see for example *Corali RPS* (2016) and *An der Nordsee* (2020) as studies in RPS and IMP respectively.

Figure 49 Trio *bb.19-21 (score in C), quartal/quintal shapes in the guitar and reinforced by the double bass, morphing between Lydian and diatonic major spaces via the harmonic implications of the variably sharp $\hat{4}$ (G). Greater chromatic freedom is afforded the clarinet, freely working around D-G#-C-F/F#-B (circle for fourths with variably perfect/augmented intervals).*

The approach to mutually melodic and harmonic quintal derivation in *Trio* proved to be a very helpful concluding summary of the train of thought on the 'materials and means' of my compositional technique over the course of this portfolio. It was deeply informed by harmonic experiments that began in pieces like *Sinfonietta*, and even *Discovering Ghosts*, and continued to feed forward in informing the then still in progress *John Thomas Rejigged* (as considered below) in its reconciliation of operating within distinctly tonal/modal terms whilst still accommodating the richness of additional chromatic colours. There remains scope for further experimentation in the application of this way of working, particularly how it could fit into a less harmonically static, modulatory context, and methods for sustaining this language over larger scale works. I will doubtless be pursuing such considerations in future works, but for now turn our attention to the background to the concluding piece of this portfolio.

5.3 Rationale for the album *Green Grow the Rushes*

John Thomas Rejigged is the largest component of a wider project which I undertook in 2022 that continued efforts to refocus my work around recording. This took the form of an album, *Green Grow the Rushes* which was comprised of five reimaginings of folk music from England and Wales and presented these in techniques across a spectrum from arranging and harmonisation to full recomposition. *John Thomas Rejigged* is the most complete instance of the latter, and so will form the basis of my reflective analysis in the next section. Nevertheless, recordings of the remaining works from the album are included in the audiovisual appendix, and some preliminary considerations for the wider album are beneficial in setting the following analysis in the context in which the music was composed.

From very early in my doctoral studies I knew that I ultimately wanted to operate in a production-led musical space that owed as much to folk and film music as to the contemporary classical domain. Nevertheless, as a classically-trained composer I also had no desire to simply switch genre, and rather I wanted to synthesise my multiple creative interests into a single musical voice. Bringing together the multiple strands of my musical endeavours and key concerns from research questions, I planned to bring all these issues together into a substantial concluding recording project. An album would achieve a further-reaching impact, and a higher quality record for posterity, than a series of workshops or a single performance could. The goal of the album was thus to be the *dénouement* of my artistic trajectory over the previous years of research and larger portfolio, particularly in regard to developing a project that has folk music as its essential element rather than just as a quotation. However, I still wanted the result to distinctively reflect my own musical characteristics and influences, rather than deliberately emulating a particular style from the existing folk performance tradition. Moreover, I wanted to occupy a space that represents my musical voice without positioning myself within the boundaries of any single genre expectation.

A return to working with folk music as the core material for this concluding project was important to me for two main reasons. Firstly, given that a primary concern of the project was

to work with contemporary folk musicians, the choice of material very clearly signposted the work as music that engaged with that world. Secondly, it gave me the opportunity to bring to conclusion my research into how music can still be distinctively mine whilst using borrowed melodic impetus through a process of melodic, textural, and structural recomposition. My next task was to recruit players for a small band, and I invited musicians who have a strong improvisatory element to their music-making within folk or jazz practice. Over the autumn of 2021, my ensemble took shape: Patrick Rimes, a violinist working in both folk and classical performance traditions, and a member of the Welsh supergroup Calan and the chamberfolk trio VRï; Shirley Smart, a jazz cellist and musicologist specialising in crossing genre boundaries between different musical cultures; Rob Harbron, returning for our third collaboration together; and Fay Hield, an award-winning folk singer and ethnomusicologist at the University of Sheffield. I felt strongly that the project would not be best served with me merely directing the music as a workshop leader, placing physical and creative distance between myself and the other musicians, and so I also joined the group on piano and guitar.

The project was scheduled to take place over the course of three day-long workshops, followed by a fourth day's recording session. Dates were agreed for February, May, and July 2022, with the recording session booked two days after the final workshop. Ahead of the first workshop, I produced a set of starting materials consisting of a transcription of words and music from my chosen archive sources, and an introductory statement on the direction in which I wished to take the project. This was sent out in advance to the performers. I also prepared a set of more specific ideas for the music such as countermelodies, riffs, harmonisations, melodic and rhythmic developments, and prose notes about improvisatory contexts to place the material in. However, I did not send these additional sketches to the other musicians, as I wanted to explore their first impressions of the music without initially biasing their responses. The workshopping process began with an initial conversation on the compositional and improvisational approaches that we, as a group, enjoyed working within in our individual creative outputs, and how that would translate into this ensemble project. There

was agreement between all present that, despite the differences in our creative outputs, we took a similar approach to reworking traditional material into a new version: make a close reading of the melodic line to identify individual key phrases which are then focused on as the impetus for recomposition or highlighting within an arrangement. Establishing this creative common ground was not only an icebreaker but allowed me to focus on conveying creative ideas to the band without having to communicate a potentially alien way of working. This conversation, and those ongoing throughout the process, led on to informing our improvisation around the initial 'stimulus materials' I had provided and the building of core structural details for each piece in the album.

5.4 *John Thomas Rejigged*: Liquidation, Improvisation

My adaptation of Schoenberg's concept of liquidation was of particular importance for my compositional approach in this project. Specifically, I treated the material in what Heneghan calls 'the chemical analogy' of Schoenberg's theory, where '…nothing is destroyed; rather, the reaction causes the elements to coalesce into different forms.'[110] It should be acknowledged that my interpretation of liquidation is, in practice, quite different to Schoenberg's application of the idea for motivic analysis, but it nevertheless functions as an important point of technical inspiration to me. As the basis of the instrumental 'jig set' of the album, *John Thomas Rejigged*, I chose to create a recomposition of three jigs from the personal tune book of the eponymous 18th-century Welsh fiddler John Thomas.[111] Little detail about Thomas is known for certain, but his legacy is a personal manuscript that contains a large collection of song and dance tunes from across the United Kingdom.[112] Typical of many tune books of the period, the collection is eclectic, containing material from published sources such as Playford, and excerpts of

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[110] Áine Heneghan, 'Liquidation and Its Origins', *Journal of Music Theory*, 63/1 (2019), 71-102.

[111] Cass Meurig (ed.), *Alawon John Thomas: A Fiddler's Tune Book from Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Aberystwyth: The National Library of Wales, 2004).

[112] Cass Meurig, 'Fiddle Tunes in Eighteenth-Century Wales', in *Play It Like It Is*, ed. Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2006), 6-13. Also see John Thomas, 'Fiddler's tune-book [c. 1752]', The National Library of Wales (online access) <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/5130424> [accessed 13/01/2023].

classical repertoire by composers such as Purcell and Handel, alongside material likely to have come from what today would be considered folk repertoire from an unwritten tradition.

When approaching how to reimagine these jigs as musical 'found objects' within a recomposition, I chose not to present the three melodies in immediate succession, but instead between highly texture-focused periods of improvisation upon material laid out in a matrix of small musical cells. Schoenberg himself observed that liquidation is often best suited to 'short rhythmic figures', and the cells which I created were drawn from fragments of all three jigs presented simultaneously to offer the same basic pool of improvisatory starting material each of the four times this section occurs.[113] Transposition of these cells around the circle of fifths in subsequent statements provided the means for these textural passages to assume a 'modulatory' function, adding greater harmonic breadth to the piece. It also, following on from the harmonic logic in *Trio*, was a source of chromatic deviation from the diatonic implied harmony of the source jigs without imposing an alien pitch set onto them.

Another essential source of inspiration for me here was Terry Riley's *In C* in which texture is created out of small independent musical gestures. The notation of *In C* was also a significant influence on my thinking for how to present the work to performers. My notational approach for all the pieces in the album avoided fully scoring the music, and instead I provided the band with a set of performance notes, more akin to traditional lead sheets from jazz and pop music. This allowed me to take the materials from the basic archive transcriptions into specifically recomposed or reimagined pieces, and implemented conversations in the workshops around structure, arrangement, and improvisatory approaches. As such, resulting lead sheets took the form of what Flynn would refer to as a 'hybrid composition'; here, the melodic material is stated simply in 'skeletal' form, allowing its folk musician performers to freely improvise at will whilst the 'score' provides instructions on the contexts and 'rules' in which this improvisation

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[113] Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London: Faber, 1970), 179.

is shaped and constrained.[114] More complete notation is provided in the piano parts for myself since, as a much less confident improviser, this was a far more accessible format for me to work in during the more rhythmically and harmonically ornate passages. Nevertheless, although I needed to exercise my compositional vision for the project, I wanted to avoid restricting the other musicians' creativity by binding them to fixed notation. Given that I had engaged the performers on the strength of their improvisatory skills, an objective for these workshops was for me to articulate a similar level of detail as could be achieved in notated music whilst maintaining the freedom that is so intrinsic to much folk music performance.

In *John Thomas Rejigged*, performers are instructed to begin by playing a selection of cells, as few or as many times as desired and in any order. On the occasions where the option is given, these may also be played at any of the provided transpositions, although the performers should gravitate towards the tonal centre of the next jig before a new section begins. At the conclusion of the cell-based texture, the designated leader begins playing longer portions, and eventually two full statements, of the original version of the given tune. The remaining players gradually join the leader in unison, or in the case of the piano (and sometimes cello) with a simple harmonisation. At the conclusion of this melody, a variation of the tune is played where the rhythmic emphasis of each phrase is offset, heavily distorting the jigs' stable sense of pulse. The piano line during the 'shifted emphasis' sections grows in complexity with each successive tune, from simple unison to block chords. These three components – cell matrix, original tune, and shifted emphasis – make up a single 'unit' in the music, with a complete statement dedicated to each of the three tunes (see fig. 50).

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[114] David Flynn, 'Traditional Irish Music: A Path to New Music' (PhD dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology, Conservatory of Music and Drama, 2010), 330.

Figure 50 'John Thomas Rejigged': cell matrix, original tune and shifted emphasis version of 'Kick the World Before Me'.

The piece concludes with a final section of cell-based improvisation, with the cells transposed onto three pitch centres to choose from. In rehearsal, it was agreed that at the start of this section the violin, concertina and cello would each pick a different tonal centre and stay more closely to that than in previous sections, whilst the piano moved more freely between the three acting as the 'deciding vote' at any given moment as to where the balance of pitch centre falls (see fig. 51). The entry into this final section was chosen to be on the same (first) cell. Here, the specified transpositions created an acerbic quintal harmony in parallel motion which then gradually dissolved back into the textural cloud of independent cells. Dissonant clashes

between the simultaneous different tonal centres also afforded a sense of chromatic colour to the overall effect, whilst still prioritising the melodic shape and mode of individual elements.

Figure 51 'John Thomas Rejigged', final cell matrix (first system).

The themes of cell-based liquidation of material, and rhythmic recomposition, also occur in other pieces within *Green Grow the Rushes*. For example, a matrix of liquidated motivic material (albeit on a much smaller scale) is used as the basis for an instrumental interlude in my rendering of the Child Ballad 'Scarborough Fair'. Here, over a steady piano accompaniment, the instrumentalists play a collection of seven cells of material, derived from either the traditional tune or my own piano riff that opens the song. These cells could be improvised around in any order and any octave, building up the texture. Additionally, in rehearsal, a structure for how to approach this section was agreed upon where the performers would play a 'game of chase' with one another, each trying to lock on to a dominant phrase at any given moment before the leader who started that cell moves onto a new one (fig. 52).

Figure 52 Cell-based improvisatory passage from the lead sheet for 'Scarborough Fair'.

Rhythmic recomposition, along with melodic portmanteau, formed the basis of the title track, 'Green Grow the Rushes'. Here, the melodic material is a recomposed combination of two

tunes, courtesy of the collection of Sabine Baring-Gould and Lucy Broadwood's second tune in *English Country Songs* (fig. 53 & 54).[115]

Figure 53 Transcription of 'The Dilly Song' from Sabine Baring-Gould's notes [3/13/44F].

Figure 54 Transcription (and transposition) of 'Green Grow the Rushes' from Lucy Broadwood's 'English Country Songs'.

I drew on elements from both tunes, recomposing them into a new melodic line characterised by an unstable rhythmic pulse and constantly shifting time signature, in a similar fashion to the 'shifted emphasis' passages in *John Thomas Rejigged* (fig. 55).

Figure 55 My own recomposition of a combination of the two tunes, alternating between melodic shapes retained from the versions in fig. 53 & 54 (transposed to G for comparative purposes).

My approach for composing this material via lead sheets brought advantages and challenges. Its greatest benefit to my creative workflow was its flexibility, allowing me to organise, codify, and guide improvisation within the band. Although the printed materials bore a closer resemblance to a jazz lead sheet, I treated them more like graphic scores: a visualisation of the music that was interpreted and negotiated with performers during a necessary rehearsal

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[115] Sabine Baring-Gould, 'Rough Copy Volume X', Plymouth & West Devon Record Office Collection, via the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library online [SBG/3/13/44F] <https://www.vwml.org/record/SBG/3/13/44F> [accessed 24/01/2022], and Lucy Broadwood and J.A. Fuller Maitland, *English Country Songs* (London: Cramer and co., 1893).

period. These could be quickly updated after each workshop to reflect the maturation of my own compositional ideas, practical and artistic feedback from the other performers, and moments from the workshop that arose spontaneously but that I later wished to include as formal elements of the music. The lead sheets set out core material, provided structure, and controlled improvisatory parameters, in a format in which I attempted to convey as much information as possible to the entire group in as condensed a manner as possible. However, this system was still cumbersome, requiring double music stands for each player to hold their music. Moreover, as with graphic scores, the overall results that I wanted to achieve are unlikely to be immediately obvious from printed material, requiring a rehearsal process to take their contents from compositional ideas to finished music. I do not want to entirely abandon a more conventional approach to writing concert works, and so this workflow will not necessarily be an ideal fit for all my compositional projects in the future. However, it has been very informative to me in balancing compositional precision with fluidity in performance and remains my intended research focus for further work beyond the course of this doctoral project.

The album's balance of score-based compositional control and improvisatory freedom proved to be an especially fruitful approach. It has expanded my creative horizons as to where I want my work to fit within a larger musical landscape and has furnished me with good experience in the technical apparatus of how to situate myself there. Working exclusively with pre-existing traditional music as the source material for each piece in this album gave the project a clear focus, and specifically sought to answer my research questions around quotation and contemporary performance practice. However, in future projects I would like to introduce more originally composed starting material alongside traditional repertoire. Nevertheless, I am pleased with how the album straddles contemporary Western Art- and folk musics, alongside being a satisfying outlet for my interests in music production. I see this as a creative starting point to my musical life post-PhD and I am keen to continue pursuing the format of self-produced albums as the focal point of my main artistic output.

CHAPTER 6: SOME CONCLUSIONS

I have sought to answer my research questions from an academic perspective in my writing, and from a compositional perspective in my music. This process has enabled me to develop a creative practice which openly draws on the full range of experiences, expertise, and personal tastes that make up my musical personality. The successful exploration of my two primary expressive issues within this portfolio – the use of 'found objects' in my music, and my relationship with musical narrative – was contingent on the emergence of a secure compositional technique, where I have been notably influenced by composers ranging from Vaughan Williams and Schoenberg to Mathias and Beamish. Every piece in my portfolio of compositions interrogates the growth of this technical proficiency and, although I make no claim of 'completion' for what I believe to be a career-long process, this work nevertheless provided a platform for further developing a sound musical approach to reflect upon and creatively embrace my wider influences. My experience in music production also provided me with the professional recording and mixing skills that are the technological facilitator of an increasing emphasis on recorded audio as a preferred medium for my music, one that both artistically speaks to me and at present best reaches an audience. The confluence of all these issues represents my interaction with plural stylistic influences and has yielded an idiom in which I believe I am able to produce my strongest work yet.

6.1 Research Question 1: Materials and Means

At the start of my doctoral studies, I established areas of technical growth which I knew would be profitable for attention: the development of a more systematic and individual harmonic language; a clear approach to motivic development; and an aesthetic approach capable of expressing my musical language flexibly regardless of the context in which I was writing (concert works, film music, a 'folk' idiom, etc.). The realisation of these goals has nevertheless taken me in directions that I did not expect when I started, but which have been highly rewarding.

Early compositions in my portfolio focused on establishing a musical identity by means of their harmony, and in some cases attempted to reconcile these harmonic experiments with musical 'found objects' in quotation. However, I believe the most fruitful of these early technical experiments, *Contredanse*, pushed me toward a melodically focused approach as my dominant form of compositional thought. A modified form of Schoenberg's theory of liquidation emerged as my preferred technique, to which I am drawn as a developmental tool since it demands the composition of a developmental or structural solution for the foundational musical building blocks which it generates. This proved especially helpful when working with borrowed music, providing an alternative way of presenting such material rather than relying exclusively on fuller melodic statements or simpler types of fragmentation. The process of liquidation is inherently a retrospective technique, requiring some previously stated material or pre-existing 'found object' to be liquidated. Nevertheless, the approach that I have taken to handling material that has been liquidated, a process of building larger musical structures out of as minimal a set of materials as possible, can still be found in pieces like *Imagined Engines*, *Hob,* and *The Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush*. These pieces have, from the outset, small 'cellular' materials which are originally composed (as opposed to being pre-liquidated quotations, such as in *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*), the transformation, recontextualization, and restatement of which form the structural and dramatic substance of the music.

The priority afforded to the melodic line, even if in a highly deconstructed form, fortunately provided its own answer to my harmonic conundrum, especially in giving me the confidence to derive my harmonic content very explicitly from the simple, often modal melodic material which serves as my chief musical priority. Harmonic stasis is used as a specific, aesthetic device in places such as *Bright-Shadow*'s 'wild dance', or in the *Trio*, whilst harmonic movement and chromatic colour in my work are increasingly achieved by drawing in additional pitches from around the circle of fifths. Such an approach is reinforced by my use of quintal chord construction out of these pitch sets, providing a sense of rationale and unification to the relationship between melodic and harmonic ideas.

6.2 Research Question 2: Found Objects

The incorporation of quoted and reimagined forms of pre-existing music – 'found objects' – into new compositions has long been a source of inspiration for me. Prior to my doctorate, and in the early stages of this portfolio (notably in *Gone*), I leant towards the use of direct quotation as a tool for dramatic or discursive purposes. However, this exposes the 'found object' to the danger of being something to be used by, rather than itself being an intrinsic part of, my creative practice. Quotation simply by drawing in pre-existing repertoire as a musical 'other' created a degree of distance from my chosen material, which I found creatively restricting.

Early 20th-century anthologies of folk song harmonisations for piano and voice may rightly be viewed with a degree of scepticism as 'folk song in evening dress'.[116] However, in the context of the vibrant contemporary performance practice and myriad folk-inspired subgenres which sprang up over the mid-20th and early 21st centuries, this scepticism alone offers little to rationalise how folk song in the flat caps and jeans of today's 'folkie' subculture is any more authentic. However, an absolutist view of folk music as something exclusively ancient, improvised, or working class is equally problematic as a way of thinking about such historically varied and subjectively defined repertoires. The evolution that 'folk music' would undergo in performance style, and both technological and commercial influences across the 20th century would likely be a surprise to the subject's early scholars, but the canon of material they promoted is still at the core of much contemporary folk music practice. Over the last century-and-a-half, the very idea of folk music has been continually moulded by its own history and has helped to shape a musical aesthetic amply worthy of creative attention.

My own endeavours to pay creative attention to this emergent musical aesthetic are admittedly from something of an outsider's perspective; I am, by education and familiarity, a classically-trained composer rather than a performer musically raised within the folk music 'scene'.

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[116] Maud Karpeles &, A.H. Fox Strangeways, *Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 33.

Whilst in the avoidance of misunderstanding or pretence, such a position is worthy of consideration, I do not consider it a technical, ethical or practical barrier to meaningful engagement with non-Classical music in principle. On the contrary, such an intersection of musical traditions has proven to be fertile ground for creative conversation and collaboration with other music professionals operating outside of my existing musical expertise. Moreover, beginning with *Sinfonietta* and *Five Airs for Ifor Ceri*, I have sought to shift my use of borrowed material from this externalised status and go beyond (or at least sidestep) this limitation of quotation by beginning to position my creative practice in complement to, rather than contrast with, contemporary folk music. This has been very beneficial for me in finding a satisfactory musical idiom of my own and escapes the sense of irony that overshadowed the use of folk music early on in my portfolio. *Nocturne* presents a continuing engagement with such ideas entirely separate from musical quotation, offering a very personal and impressionistic response to my own experience of the role of folk music as an emotive influence, and aesthetic preference, in my sense of musical identity. *John Thomas Rejigged*, and the wider *Green Grow the Rushes* project, developed this response further, actively engaging with current professionals within a discursive, workshop environment to exchange different musical expertise and perspectives. Consequently, this shifts the emphasis of 'found objects' in my music away from static sources of quotation, and onto their role as an ongoing source of stimulus for creative innovation and conversation. I view this conversation certainly as one negotiated both between myself and contemporary practitioners, but also as an endeavour to be an accomplished and respectful interlocutor with the spirit of those past musicians whose repertoire continues to creatively excite and inspire.

6.3 Research Question 3: Narrative and Form

My other significant expressive concern for this project was in matters of musical storytelling, and how music might convey, and itself be, narrative. Previous works, such as *Gone*, innately conveyed a degree of narrative intent through their use of text, but the narrative qualities of the music itself was not considered. My triptych of fairy tales, *Bright-Shadow*, *Hob*, and *The*

Bat, the Cormorant & the Bramble Bush addressed this consideration through the lens of my interest in folklore. This consideration of the relationship between music and narrative, be that abstract or explicitly presented in text, was focused on my use of musical form and how narrative meaning may be ascribed to structural events as demarcated by their harmonic and developmental content. Rather than using music to merely accompany sung, spoken or programmatic narrative as a reactive series of dramatic gestures in service of a linear dramatic trajectory, these fairy tales utilised the symbolic use and interpretation of existing musical apparatuses (such as recapitulatory failure) and the existing body of theoretical writing coding such form as narratively significant. Structures like sonata form are modified as vessels for that narrative intent, whilst features such as tonal centre, texture, and melodic shape are used to express the themes of the story alongside more conventional narrative tools such as leitmotif and word painting.

Outside of a folkloric narrative setting, the experimental collaboration of *Imagined Engines* allowed me the freedom to explore the use of musical structure across the short film. In a similar fashion to my programmatic concert music, core significance was placed on the treatment of material and how that coincided and supported the (abstract) narrative. When writing film music prior to my PhD, this economy of narrative response was more instinctive for me than it was in my concert music, however the structure of a typical soundtrack cue is often still determined by the visuals. *Imagined Engines* provided a fully collaborative opportunity to take greater control of not only the musical gestures that I could make, but shape the visual narrative to optimise musical impact in the manner a composer might when choosing a text to set.

6.4 Final Reflections

The conclusion of this doctoral project is an opportunity to reflect on how the past four years of composition and research have affected my compositional voice. It has led me to reevaluate my compositional priorities and settle on developmental techniques and performance practices. In doing so it has aligned my creative practice as a manifestation of the stylistically

plural space that is the network of my varied musical tastes and sources of inspiration and has brought, at least to my evaluation, the greatest personal satisfaction and creative success to my work. This growing creative security is already contributing to my musical output beyond my doctoral research. For example, it significantly shaped the approach I took to my first major project completed after this portfolio, the soundtrack to a documentary on the history of Christianity in Wales. This presented me with the opportunity to explore the rich tradition of Welsh chapel repertoire and apply my work on quotation and recomposition to a variety of hymns, anthems, psalms, and folk tunes from the 17th century onwards.[117] The practical experience, compositional techniques, and academic perspectives provided by this PhD have proven invaluable when composing *Welsh Awakenings*, and I believe my approach to this soundtrack demonstrates something of the template which I intend to pursue in my future work.

I am hardly the first composer to grapple with many of the musical questions and challenges surrounding individuality of style that I have faced, and I will surely not be the last. The questions that I have tackled in this thesis are not settled issues, but the basis for a life-long process of exploration and personal development – a process that I relish the prospect of continuing.

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[117] Timothy Johnston, *Welsh Awakenings: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, own label (2023).

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