George Morton

**COMPOSITION PORTFOLIO**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of MMUS in Composition and Performance, Department of Music

University of Sheffield

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This composition portfolio spans my last two years as a student of composition with Dr. George Nicholson. Each piece is presented chronologically by date of composition. I have greatly enjoyed working towards this masters, and would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Nicholson, for his continued support, and my family, without whom I wouldn’t have been able to continue my studies.

**Folk Song Suite**

*for Wind Orchestra*

I. River Sheaf

II. Manor Lodge

III. The Forge: A Sheffield Apprentice

First performance Sunday 26th March 2012

Sheffield University Wind Orchestra

Conductor: Tony Houghton

Firth Hall, Sheffield University Concert Series

This suite was composed for the Sheffield University Wind Orchestra and their conductor Tony Houghton. Having spent three years playing with the ensemble, and in countless other rehearsals and concerts with Tony, I relished the opportunity to compose for a group and conductor I felt I knew so well. Writing for a wind ensemble is a wonderful opportunity to experiment with different tonal colours and timbres. The three movement work is in the style of a traditional wind band suite and features different folk tunes as an ode to Sheffield, my home for the past 5 years. The ‘folk songs’ used are all of my own composition, apart from the *Sheffield Apprentice* melody in the final movement (rehearsal mark B) which is based on a popular ballad1. The first movement is routed in the D Dorian mode, with the main theme introduced by a solo muted trumpet. This melody is passed around the sections of the ensemble, via an uplifting second theme, before petering out to an unresolved D minor chord. The second movement is gentler in nature, and features the flugelhorn with first a solo line followed by a descant-like figure. The final movement is a mixture of two folk songs- my own *Forge* and the existing *Sheffield Apprentice*. The movement represents the mass steel industry of Sheffield’s past, highlighted by the use of the anvil almost continuously.

I’d like to thank Tony Houghton for his help in having this piece performed, and for his continued support and advice during my time at the University of Sheffield.

1 THE YORKSHIRE GARLAND GROUP (2007). The Sheffield Apprentice. Available at <URL: <http://www.yorkshirefolksong.net/song_database/Courtship/The_Sheffield_Apprentice.87.aspx>> [First accessed October 2011]

**Three** **Miniatures**

*for Oboe and Piano*

I. Playful

II. Reflective

III. Resolute

First edition performed Wednesday 30th May 2012

Oboe: Hannah Lewin

Piano: Gary O’Shea

University of Sheffield Drama Studio, Final Year Recital

Three Miniatures was commissioned by Hannah Lewin for her final year undergraduate recital at the University of Sheffield. Hannah is very good friend, and I wanted to write a piece which reflected her personality and demonstrated her wonderful performance ability. The piece was completed for Hannah’s recital, but has since been heavily edited.

Each movement is titled to reflect the different aspects of the soloist’s personality. The outside movements are energetic and are designed to show off the dexterous nature of the oboe. The middle movement is more reflective and introvert, and demonstrates the sonorous beauty a skilled oboist is capable of producing in all registers of the instrument.

The slow movement was perhaps my first foray into composing in a ‘written-out-rubato’ style. By selecting very precise and often intricate rhythms and note values, I hope it appears (to the listener) devoid of a discernable pulse/metre.

**Margraten String Quartet**

*for String Quartet and tam-tam*

I. Court of Honor

II. War, Relentless War

III. Aftermath

IV. Elegy

Margraten is an American Cemetery in the Netherlands, just outside the town of Maastricht. Countless American soldiers are buried on the site, which is a monument to the young men who died on the battlefields of Europe during World War II. After visiting the cemetery, I was inspired to compose this string quartet, partly in memorial to the soldiers who lost their lives and partly as a reflection on the conflict itself. The piece opens as if one is stood in the cemetery in the present quietly reflecting on its sorrow. The interval of a perfect fifth is used consistently during this piece- a feature which is introduced by the very first notes on the first violin. As the movement progresses the listener is propelled back to the imminent threat of war in the mid-late 1930s. As the intensity of emotions intensified as war drew nearer, so does the quartet’s power. The second movement begins as the tentative first steps are made into battle. After a chaotic moment of uncertainty the movement is launched, like soldiers in war, into action. The third movement is *attacca* from the previous, and embodies the despair and loss of families as a direct result of war. The final movement is my own personal tribute to the soldiers buried in Margraten. The movement opens with a seemingly timeless viola solo, decorated with extended techniques on the other instruments. The use of the tam tam signifies the tolling of the bells to mark the end of the war and perhaps the chance for families to begin mourning loved ones. The final 9 bars are chorale-like, with subtle hints of the American hymn *Abide with Me*. The quartet ends a little more optimistic, looking forward and putting war behind. The final chord is simple open fifth B major harmonics, reasserting the interval’s importance in this composition.

For this string quartet I have experimented with strictly notated rhythms. Like the middle movement of *Three Miniatures*, to the listener the performers seem to use copious amounts of *rubato* and are left to their own rhythmic interpretation. The score is, however, very precisely notated, as to achieve this effect. Having written using this process, I was keen to write a contrasting piece experimenting with a performers’ discretion/interpretation. This is something I developed in the trumpet Sonatina.

**Peaks**

*Sonatina for Solo Trumpet*

This Sonatina is developed from experiments and sketches I made for solo trumpet, my own instrument, during my undergraduate studies. The three movements each feature a different mute, producing three distinct timbres. I chose to compose using a tonal centre, G in the middle of the stave, which each movement would begin with and keep returning to. The ideas for each movement came from warm-up techniques and concepts for the trumpet. The first movement takes the idea of warming up from the centre of a trumpet’s register, in this case the ‘tonal centre’ and working outwards to the more extremes of register. The second movement is linked to the notion of warming up the tongue using double tonguing. The final movement is based on lip flexibility exercises. This piece isn’t written as a warm up, more that it is derived from my own warm ups and exercises. Following on from the precise notation used in the previous two compositions, I have tried to give a little more freedom of interpretation to the performer.