

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Department of Music

Part II (Volume 2)

Portfolio of Compositions: Scores and Recordings

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the criteria for the award of an MMus
at the University of Sheffield.

November 2023

**A portfolio of original works,
reflecting upon aspects of the compositional process.**

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INTRODUCTION

I present a Portfolio of Compositions comprising five works scored for performance: three movements for chamber orchestra; a clarinet quartet; an organ variation as part of a collaborative project; a wind serenade, and a brass quartet. There are electronic realisations (recordings) of the ensemble pieces (attached separately to the submission), and a recording of the organ variation, performed in St. Paul's Cathedral.

The portfolio exists to develop and consolidate my compositional skills. The work is designed in part to support my composition teaching; being immersed in the compositional process myself helps raise questions with students. For example, how to explore alternative approaches for second-inversion chords. In terms of a research focus, the portfolio considers a wider definition of dissonance, as a continuum, not limited to pitch; if dissonance and consonance become 'semantic casualties' of pitch (Tenny, 1988¹), a wider definition is needed to perceive and elucidate other factors contributing to tension and release. In the process of discussing compositional parameters, further understanding of tension and release can help mitigate long-term issues arising during the compositional process. For example, overreliance on four-bar phrases perceived in relation to dissonance and how to rebalance. Or, challenging assumptions, such as the augmented fourth commonly perceived as a dissonant interval. Setting up further perceptions of dissonance, for example, how a pedal note might over anticipate in a particular context, increases potential for connectivity between musical ingredients.

On the one hand, I explore the extent to which one should morph traditional techniques, for example, the parallel six-four chords opening the third movement of my first piece: *Three Days at the Office*. On the other hand, to ascertain, as far as is possible simultaneously, the compositional circumstances under which we might challenge convention. For example, in

¹ Tenney, J. (1988) *A History of Consonance and Dissonance*, Routledge, UK.

the second piece: *Jolly D.!*, the softening of a diminished chord (b. 12, beat 3) – a timbral cluster in pianissimo triplets (b. 12, beat 2) enables the diminished chord to complete the phrase rather than arrest at the cadence. Or, the rehandling of hierarchical implications for dissonance in *Serenade for Sheffield*: such as the conventional unison *tutti* answered by quartal harmony in the opening phrases; and in *Three Occasional Fanfares* for Brass (1st mvt.): the contrasting rhythmic structure (bb. 33-36) is designed to soften the dissonant harmony and contribute to the musical narrative, form and the style.

As well as being useful pedagogical exercises, my compositions are geared to my own musical practice: writing pieces for the community, for example my contribution to the University of Sheffield concert series; an organ variation as part of a collaborative project for the Malcolm Arnold Festival, and pieces for publication: *Jolly D.!*, is the third in a set of three clarinet quartets for Queen's Temple Publications, the first two of which have been published. Much has emerged in my work through the replication, mutation and development of materials texturally in relation to dissonance. One might consider, for example, dissonance as the weighting of formal against informal writing in continuum terms, or transitional material, crafted in varying degrees of 'dominance', as determined by the forces. Further, I explore the compositional process from a panchronic versus synchronic perspective; encouraging students to consider and challenge to what extent dissonance becomes emancipated, to a greater or lesser degree, through 'historical inevitability'². For example, the breakdown and rebuilding of tonality, and re-emergence. In my final piece, the quartal/quintal harmony in my brass writing has developed significantly in all these respects since my first piece. The following programme notes outline the techniques and parameters for each work. (A shorter version of programme note prefaces the scores).

² This is Donald Mitchell's view (Mitchell, D, 1993) which follows Hans Keller's earlier assertion (in Whittall, A., 1982) that 'art arises where the arbitrary and the predictable are superseded by unpredictable inevitability'.

LIST OF SCORES & INSTRUMENTATION

1: *Three Days at the Office* (in three movements) March 2019

Instrumentation: 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets in B \flat , 2 Bassoons, Timpani, Strings.

(Score in C)

First Performance: University of Sheffield Chamber Orchestra, (Firth Hall: 12.3.19)

Recording: Electronic (12.11.23) **Duration:** 8':56"

2: *Jolly D.!* June 2021

Instrumentation: 3 Clarinets in B \flat , Bass Clarinet in B \flat . (Score in C)

Recording: Electronic (12.11.23) **Duration:** 03':06"

3: *Theme and Variation(s)* September 2021

Theme: by Malcolm Arnold. Variation IV submitted for the MMus.

Instrumentation: Pipe Organ

First Performance: by Alex Berry (St. Paul's Cathedral, 21.11.21)

Recording: MP3 (21.11.21) **Duration of submitted variation:** 02':15" (*total: 09': 24"*)

4: *Serenade for Sheffield* October 2022

Instrumentation: Flute, Oboe, 2 Clarinets in B \flat , French Horn in F, 2 Bassoons. (Score in C)

Recording: Electronic (12.11.23) **Duration:** 03':56"

5: *Three Fanfares for Brass Quartet* February 2023

Instrumentation: 2 Trumpets in B \flat , Trombone, Tuba. (Score in C)

Recording: Electronic (12.11.23) **Duration:** 14':02"

Total Duration of composition portfolio, excluding variations by other composers: 32':15"

PROGRAMME NOTES

1: Three Days at the Office (I, II, III)

The style of the composition reflects in part the influence of the Welsh composer, William Mathias. I felt drawn to his music, particularly how he contrasts serious work with lighter march material and coarse neoclassical writing; some of which emerged from his interest in Shostakovich, *Les Six*, Stravinsky, and Tippett. Several of these characteristics have been retained here; in motivic counter play, bristly over-played syncopation, and quasi tonal writing. This is largely diatonic, coloured with Mathias traits: Celtic modality and quartal/quintal harmony.

The title '*Three Days at the Office*' is deliberately left vague and open to your own interpretation. The first and third movements are based upon the opening rhythms which pervade the whole: defiant compound duple rhythms juxtaposed against cheeky gestures in simple triple metre, particularly in the bassoons. The second movement, originally sketched for a children's piano piece, was created under the working title of 'Brexit'; later removed in preference of something less contentious and coded accordingly. Enjoy the sleepy 'Haydnesque' clock ticking and Westminster chimes infused with occasional 'Blues notes'.

(These are my original programme notes which accompanied the concert as part of the 'Forged in Sheffield' series).

2: Jolly D.!

This jolly clarinet quartet explores dissonance through the lens of instrumental range and timbre; by prioritising these musical elements over others, such as the generic harmony and tonal approach, we change the perception of hierarchy in the compositional process. That said, a strong tune carries this cheerful bingle as it swings along following the free introduction. The jolly tune reappears with light variation; even the occasional canon (bb. 18-19) and bass clarinet octaves (bb. 37-38) feel subdued in preference of the focus on instrumental blend. The real interest, however, lies in morphing conventional musical 'punctuation' such as phrase fills or 'comments' to emancipate the dissonance (b. 16), i.e. to release tension built up in each phrase. The texture at these moments is designed to achieve a particular blend between the clarinets, from the chalumeau register to the clarion register, such as in contrary motion (b. 24). The subject matter also progressively promotes tension, for example, the second subject transition, second subject and countersubject (bb. 45-58). A further subject, including bitonal juxtaposition and false relations (bb. 61-79) creates sufficient contrast, all in aid of timbral colour. Returning to more familiar musical signposting, the bass clarinet asserts a dominant pedal, against cadential six-fours. When the theme reemerges in recapitulation, blues notes are infused to reconnect with the swing tempo. The Coda (bb. 106-ff.) serves to dissolve tension textually before the final statement: triplets descend through the texture, temporarily thrown off course into E-minor (b. 106) adding an augmented dominant to colour (b. 106). This is the third clarinet quartet I have written to complete a set of three; the first two of which are published by Queen's Temple Publications.

3: Theme and Variation(s)

Composers: Malcolm Arnold (Theme), Neil Brand (Variation I), Matthew Taylor (Variation II), Timothy Bowers (Variation III), Robert Tucker (Variation IV).

Permission to reproduce the score has been granted by the composers.

The original (theme) tune by Malcolm Arnold was broadcast on Christmas Day, 1957, as part of a programme called *Crown and Commonwealth*; the organ piece was a signature tune for a segment called 'Christmas round the world', played by the Australian organist William McKie. The four variations based on the tune were commissioned for the 2021 Malcolm Arnold Festival: 'Malcolm's 100th' as a collaborative project. The first three variations are by Neil Brand, Matthew Taylor and Tim Bowers respectively. I followed with the fourth variation. My variation observes the imitative nature of Arnold's theme, capturing Arnold's style: his bravado rhythmic writing; the characteristic, often witty piccolo writing (commenting here in dialogue with quasi-Bach chorale writing), and an imposing pedal solo based on the theme to reflect the composer's eccentricity. The first performance was recorded by Alex Berry in Bradford Cathedral for the online part of the Arnold festival, which he followed a month later with the second performance, in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

4: Serenade for Sheffield

In terms of the programme, the piece welcomes a gathering at Sheffield museum, to discuss the city's complex relationship with slavery. Quasi neo-classical ingredients are worked in, such as the strident unison theme, countered by more innovative harmony in fourths and mischievous minor thirds. The opening theme aims to contrast ebullient unison octaves with harmony in fourths and fifths for the flute and first clarinet (bb. 2-4), answered by the third and fourth clarinets in sixths (bb. 8-9). The following imitation and antiphonal material, first in the relative minor and returning to the home key, signals the arrival of various dignitaries (bb. 9-20). The chromatic appoggiatura/B \flat -dom- \flat 9 (b. 26) indicates a questionable arrival: the

cadential approach progressively eases, indicating that the guests feel reassured. Contrapuntal bustling resumes and an extension of the opening *tutti* continues to set the defiant sense of occasion. As a variation of the opening material, clarinets in thirds, answered by flute and oboe replicate polite chatter, with bassoons looking on wisely (bb. 34-51). This is despite a further *tutti* outburst (b. 42) between as guests gather expectantly, querying the next arrival (b. 52). The following *Adagio* (bb. 56-71), with syrupy appoggiaturas, depicts the appearance of the High Sheriff, who gracefully passes through, ceremoniously with her entourage. As we approach the subdominant key, her presence is further established, clearly representing Sheffield. The quasi-African-American harmony (b.71) symbolises and reflects the city's difficult relationship with slavery. On return to the *Allegro* (b. 72) the opening material resumes in fifths, but in conflict with the first bassoon (bb. 76-79), reflecting a 'war of words' following the pompous outbursts (b. 74, 79, 83). The impact of the subdominant of the relative minor and ostinato work (bb. 90-102) confirms investment in further cultural activism in Sheffield. The piece concludes by regathering the sense of occasion through sequential work (bb. 103-112) and returning triumphantly through the transitional dominant pedal (bb. 118-121) to the opening serenade theme.

5: Three Occasional Fanfares for Brass Quartet (I, II, III)

I: Occasional Fanfare

The three contrasting movements are designed to be played together or independently. The third movement includes continuity links to the first movement for brass ensembles wishing to perform the pieces as a complete set.

Originally sketched for a university ceremony, the movement displays contrasting moods as the occasion proceeds. My aim here is to develop my thoughts on fanfare writing, as a handling

demonstration for students. It will come as no surprise, therefore, to hear typical quasi-film music patterns, such as the sequential use of dissonance in the triplets (bb. 7-8) and the enigmatic leitmotif reference in the Lydian mode (2nd trumpet, b. 51). The relatively joyous opening in descending scales is deliberately generic as the convocation gathers. But this is countered by a dotted crotchet-quaver accompaniment dovetailed by the lower brass, all disturbed by the *sforzando* unprepared ninths (b. 6); all is not as it should be. A gracious processional march follows the introduction (b. 9 ff.). Each statement, however, is challenged by a different approach in terms of resolving dissonance. For example, the approach to imitation rather than straight canon (b.11) and to balance the conventional approach to cadences. The following *poco meno mosso* (b.17) reflects the atmosphere as university staff take their seats; this I found more of a challenge: balancing the use of tempo to reflect softer tones from the onlookers at a formal ceremony. The following *Più mosso*, however, clearly raises the sense of anticipation as the Vice Chancellor prepares to address convocation. The middle section of the movement then reflects a level of disquiet from the guests: the free use of dissonance, particularly rhythmically displaced through the texture (bb. 29-30), antiphonally between the trumpets in descending sequences; all designed to calm the tension, though with the *misterioso* (b. 33 ff.) reflecting an uncomfortable, politically charged atmosphere. The double transition (bb. 33-40, bb. 41-46) serves to 'straighten the tie': readdressing the sense of occasion, balancing earlier thematic material and modulating in preparation for the triumphant coda.

II: Occasional Fanfare: Funeral Ode

This movement draws inspiration from three sources of brass writing: (i) Andrzej Panufnik's '*Sinfonia Sacra*' (the first of three '*Visions*') written in 1963 to mark Poland's millennium of Christianity; (ii) '*Urlicht*' (primal light) - an earlier song that Mahler added as the penultimate movement for his 'Resurrection' symphony, (No. 2, 1888-1894), and (iii) Purcell's march for the funeral of Queen Mary II (1695). The opening statements (bb. 1-15) aim to redraw the sense of space and reflection found in the Panufnik. The slow, dark, sustained homophonic

brass found in the Mahler and Purcell set a context for the piece in terms of the recreating the texture of a funeral ode. There are four specific exercises: (i) I explore the subtle relationships between keys, such as tertiary movement from B \flat minor to G and juxtaposition - particularly G-minor and F-minor as dual pathos keys to determine the form; (ii) the use of phrase extension (as found in the Mahler song), to deconstruct my preoccupation with four-bar phrases (bb. 56-61); (iii) the balance of harmony from a panchronic perspective: from prepared suspensions (b. 27) to elongated quasi-Berlioz delayed resolution (b. 65). Or the unresolved writing (such as b. 12, or b. 38), and other examples deliberately exposed to be able to apply dissonance within nineteenth or twentieth century parameters. These include the second-inversions (b. 29.3); and (iv) inner dialogue to support relatively rich brass writing, for example, in the trombones (bb. 48-55). Overall, the movement is designed to anticipate and resolve dissonance, both conventionally and, for example, in ways we might not expect (b. 69). Dissonance is, therefore, both integral in terms of pitch relationships, but emancipated conceptually to work with musical elements. For example, there are longer phrases and tied pedal notes to further anticipate tension and, ultimately, release.

III: Occasional Fanfare

The third movement provides light relief following the funeral ode and represents a journey, culminating in a 'stairway to heaven'. But there is danger along the way, of course. The opening fanfares serve as an angelic welcoming statement, reappearing briefly to signal the coda (b. 111). The initial solos (first and second trumpets, bb. 11-15) start in quasi-baroque fashion, inspired by the obligato line in J.S. Bach's Chorale in *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe* (BWV 22). This reworking also felt reminiscent of Malcolm Arnold's brass band test piece solos, together with *um-pa* accompaniment. The contrasting fanfares making up the second subject (bb. 19-26) show textural contrast including colourful false relations (b. 31), adding reference to Purcell's brass writing. These are designed both to destabilise and restabilise the tonality. Fragments are then recycled throughout the movement, for example, in the following transition (bb. 27-32) establishing modulations to C-minor and G-minor respectively: G-minor

is approached from the subdominant in order to circumvent an otherwise direct B \flat -Major to G-(relative) minor manoeuvre. Further, the exploration of dissonance in different ways across the work, is synonymous with balance in consolidating the form and unity overall. For example the Arnold style syncopated semiquavers in relation to the harmony, reworked fanfare motifs, and the quasi-obligato fragments, all brought together over a dominant pedal (bb. 33-42). These effectively converge towards the 1st subject *ritornello* with variation (bb. 47–68). With each repeat there is further exploration, for example, the morphing of a Neapolitan sixth (b. 62). The diminished sevenths (in thirds) together with freer rhythmically charged dissonance, is then set up as a development section, specifically to challenge the dominant pedal hierarchically (bb. 69-87); apparently dissolving away, but defiantly arresting in confrontation by way of an unresolved minor-ninth (b. 87). The texture is then reconstructed to invert the dominant pedals in an attempt to win over the diminished sevenths. A return to the syncopated semiquavers, with strident E \flat -Major-7ths present further hierarchical energy, including a further homage to Arnold (bb. 88-101); as if called upon to unlock the dissonance. This passage ensures rebalancing of the style thematically in order to reconnect the 1st subject *ritornello* (bb. 102-107). Further, melodic variation confirms the sense of recapitulation, only to be stalled by remaining questions: these are presented thematically at a slower tempo, in D-minor (bb. 108-109), with the flat-submediant of F: the D \flat -Maj-7th chord (b. 110) to gather the concluding dominant pedal. Minimalist style fizz (bb. 112-115) anticipates the climax of heaven bound ascending scales.

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