B. J. Music Ed. 2000 17:1, 5–31

Making progress with composing

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Although it is widely acknowledged that composition has a part to play in general musical education, some critics have argued that its place in the school curriculum is not justified by the results. John Paynter finds the evidence still on the whole encouraging and suggests that, where there are shortcomings, these should be seen, not as criticism of classroom composing, but as indications of uncertainty about how to help pupils make progress – a dilemma which, perhaps, reflects lack of conviction about the value of creativity in a curriculum based upon a theory of knowledge and progression more helpful to other subjects than it is to the arts in education.

We accept without question that a school curriculum must show progression, not only in the programme overall but also in the content of each subject. In reality, however, things may not be that simple. In the first place, there are different kinds of progression and what would be a reasonable expectation in one area may not be so in another. Also, to be effective, the scheme must include regular appraisal of students' work, and again that is not necessarily a straightforward matter. Some subjects – music among them – may include group activities, so that defining the nature of the progression becomes part of the larger problem of how to recognise individual pupils' achievements.[1] We are not helped by the continuing confusion about assessment and evaluation; the one an informed judgement which can be challenged and if necessary revised, the other awarding values on a scale representing agreed, and therefore – at least for the time being – fixed, criteria. Either way, there is pressure upon teachers to produce verifiable evidence of progress. If, to do that, it becomes necessary to compromise by making important whatever is easiest to assess/evaluate rather than assessing/evaluating those things which are truly important to a subject, then students' achievements may be trivialised.

In spite of long-standing worries about such matters, I was pleased when, in the mid-1980s, composition became a requirement for the Music GCSE, and even more pleased when, less than ten years later, composing was included in the National Curriculum for Music. At last we appeared to have official endorsement of the importance of composing – something many of us had been hoping to see for a long time. But pleasure was tempered by Piers Spencer's 1993 report on students' opinions of GCSE Music. Although he found that the responses about composing were 'mostly positive', Spencer (1993: 75) was forced to conclude that the notion that 'Creativity should be at the heart of all affective areas of the curriculum' – a suggestion I had made in *Sound and Structure* – 'would have had little meaning for many of these students'. Two years later, in a hard-hitting article on the state

of school music, Malcolm Ross (1995: 196) asserted that 'The rush to composition . . . has been a completely false trail'.

Ross's opinions did not go unanswered (Gammon, 1996) but they were disturbing, especially when set alongside the earlier objective research, since Spencer himself, as a school teacher during the 1970s, had demonstrated that pupils' creativity could indeed be at the heart of the music curriculum (Spencer, 1981). Not surprisingly, in collating the results of his survey, he had found it

> uncomfortable to read that so many felt that the GCSE had failed to promote their musical learning in a useful way . . . [and that] . . . those who have gone on to pursue the subject at degree level should be so lacking in any conviction about the aesthetic essence of music. (1993: 75)

Like many other teachers, I have long believed that all school pupils should be encouraged to compose music, not only because it is an essential element of musical education but also because it benefits the general development of imagination and inventiveness. As the years have gone by, that belief would appear to have been borne out by developments in a number of countries. In addition to the British National Curriculum (from age five) and GCSE syllabuses, composition now features in the IGCSE, the International American Schools' Music programme, the International Baccalaureate, the IB Middle Years Programme, and in a number of other national curriculum guidelines. The teaching techniques have been evolving over a period of more than forty years and the evidence now available to us world-wide in articles, books, films, and recordings of children's compositions is impressive. Have we been deluding ourselves? Has it all been worthless and misguided, as Malcolm Ross seems to suggest: 'a completely false trail . . . [where] compositions owe more to the teacher's skills as an arranger than the pupil's as a creator'?

I am sure we have not been wasting our time, and I am equally certain that, by and large, pupils' attainments in composition are real. Yet I am conscious of a difficulty which could explain why the students Piers Spencer interviewed (and others like them) seem to have got so little sense of achievement from their GCSE composing and therefore failed to build upon that activity a wider understanding of music. It is simply that, whilst we enthusiastically encourage pupils to be musically creative, we are far less sure of ourselves when it comes to helping them to *get better* at composing.

Why do we compose?

It is the most natural thing for human beings to make up music. Even now, as we look back on the twentieth century with its extraordinary record of scientific achievement, all over the world people continue to create songs and dances intuitively more or less as they have done for thousands of years. Only a small part of the daily outpouring of music is made by those we would call 'trained musicians'. Unfortunately, this very fact causes problems for us in musical education. If inventing music is intuitive, who are we to interfere? Why should we even try to help pupils to get better at composing? Surely it's enough that they do it at all? Isn't it obvious that children make up whatever is in their imagination? They are not concerned with high-flown things like 'structure' and 'form'; they are simply

responding imaginatively to a stimulus. They like the sounds they discover, they enjoy playing with them and making patterns, and they can fashion little musical 'pictures' to represent incidents, animals, or whatever. Isn't it all a matter of feeling and emotion, not something that a teacher should attempt to influence? Even renowned composers appear to have supported that view; Ravel, for instance, in pointing out that 'Sensitivity and emotion are the real content of a work of art'.

That is true, but the mistake is to conceive of emotion and feeling as being entirely divorced from and in opposition to 'thought'. It has tended to make teachers of younger children wary of discussing musical details, on the grounds that what the children have made is simply 'what they feel'; whilst with older pupils the tendency is to avoid reference to what is felt by concentrating upon technicalities which are presented as 'rules'. Neither way are pupils being helped to get better at inventing their own music.

Our feelings may appear to be involuntary and irrational but they are, of course, activities of the mind. Even the simplest intuitive piece made up by a very young child is recognised as music only because it is heard as music: that is, as a *process* which starts, goes on, and stops and in which sounds follow one another or are combined in various ways. Spontaneous and natural though the music may be, there are points where things change: some things happen that are not heard again; some things go on for a short time and others for much longer; some passages are *progressive*, so that we feel the energy and forward 'drive' of the music, others are *recessive* in effect, the music calming or becoming quieter or slower until it seems to want to stop of its own accord. These things are the result of decisions – not necessarily conscious decisions but decisions nevertheless – taken by whoever makes up the music, and the precise moments when changes occur are crucial to its success. Since – as I shall try to show – all musical expression, simple or complex and of whatever style or cultural background, behaves like this, we could conclude that the surest way to help pupils to get better at composing is to encourage them to think about the essentially *musical* process, not as abstract rules, but directly in relation to what they themselves create.

Teaching from what is offered

The differences between instruction (*instruere* – to build into [the child's mind]) and education (*educere* – to lead out from [the child's mind]) have been rehearsed often enough. As archetypes of attitude and practice they are used frequently to support or decry changing fashions in schooling. However, in the development of musical aptitude these terms do not represent positive or negative attitudes, according to your point of view, but a necessary duality.

Instruction is appropriate for teaching someone to play a musical instrument. The techniques exist independently of the pupil, deriving equally from the ergonomics of the instrument and the changing conventions of performance practice. The teacher's task is to ensure – as far as that is possible – the pupil's success in acquiring those techniques. Although, later, in matters of interpretation, pupils must learn to develop their own ideas, in the initial stages at least, the teacher is the arbiter of success – along with others, such as examiners and competition adjudicators.

Composing is different. From the start, pupils must try to judge the success of what

they make. Their composing decisions are, therefore, vitally important. Indeed, the teacher cannot even begin until students bring something which they have made.

The word 'composing' means 'positioning [things] together', and when anyone has tried putting sounds together and is pleased with the results, enough to remember them, then the teacher can start to teach – mainly by asking questions about what is presented. It may be no more than a brief melodic pattern or a progression of chords discovered, remembered and rehearsed until fluent. It does not have to be notated, and even if there were only two notes the teacher could ask, 'Why did you put that note there and the other one *there*?' We are not imparting received techniques because what is presented to us did not exist until the pupil(s) invented it. Of course, there are bound to have been influences – all the music the pupils have ever heard, and their musical preferences: what they think of as 'music' – but even if it is derivative, what they produce is *what they have made*, and to do that they had to take decisions. By focusing on those decisions, and by pressing students to discover as much as possible about why they have made the music as it is ('I just like it like that' is not good enough!), we start them on the path of asking the questions that every composer must ask about every piece: 'Where are these musical thoughts leading? What are the possibilities? Why should I choose that path rather than any other? How do I know when this piece is completed?'

Listening and commenting

On the subject of children's poems David Holbrook (1967: 8) says, 'The least piece of writing, if the teacher has established the context for proper ''giving'', will be a ''meant'' gift'. We can apply that to school pupils' composing. The music they make is 'offered' to us and should be received in that same spirit. In my experience there is always something of genuine musical worth to be discussed as seriously as we would with recognised master-works. Talking with younger children we shall use simpler language but we must not be afraid of dealing with essentially musical matters.

To demonstrate these principles I have selected two pieces of music for comment: one a group composition by three ten-year-old girls, the other a well-known piano piece by Robert Schumann. My reason for choosing these is, quite simply, the availability of recordings – because it is essential that readers listen to the music. The children's composition can be found on an existing *BJME* tape,[2] and the Schumann piece is one which I hope may be found, without too much difficulty, on CD.

It is important to comment on what we hear rather than on what we see notated. In the case of the children's composition there is no other possibility. This piece may or may not have been notated but, in any case, we don't have a score and therefore we must trust our ears. Likewise, I hope readers will resist the temptation to look at the Schumann score. The 'music' is what we hear, and in each case we must listen to the whole piece. As it ends we should ask ourselves, 'What can I say about this *as music*?' In the classroom this would be the moment when we must teach. You will have your own answers to the question: I offer mine, for what they may be worth, as one possibility.

What can we say about . . .

The children's piece

The first thing I should want to say is that this seems to me to be successful and memorable music. You may be surprised, at the moment when it finishes, to find just how successful it is, since some slightly odd things happen along the way; things which at first might make us wonder if the composers had indeed conceived this music as a *piece.* The silence half-way through, the abrupt ending, and the unexpected dissonances are all such striking features that they immediately beg questions. True, the silence marks the end of music which is then repeated, but why such a long pause? Is it misjudged or can it be justified? The dissonance is attractive, but why here? Merely as variation? And, at the end, why do they not feel the need to do the conventional thing and slow down? Puzzling as these features are, they do seem to belong with the distinctive qualities of the melody, producing music that has a strong sense of direction and purpose.

I am not implying that three ten-year-olds engaged in technical discussion about every twist and turn of the music they were making. Probably most of the things which I find interesting occurred intuitively; they liked what they played and it became fixed as 'the piece'. But that itself was a decisive action. It could hardly be otherwise. Music can only be the outcome of a mental process which determines, at the very least, how to begin, what to do next, and how to stop. Every experienced composer knows that, as a composition grows, the music itself appears to take over, and when the work is finished it is often difficult to remember how it came into being. By listening attentively to the processes in a piece, and commenting on what appears to be happening, a teacher can help pupils to understand the nature of what they have created intuitively and to build upon that experience.

What we do know is that the girls' *intention* was to make music for dancing (see note 2), and this is apparent in the musical style: a brief drum pattern to set the tempo and a repeated phrase in octaves lead into the dance proper with its bouncy piano accompaniment. Whatever we say at this point about the music's success we should not confuse that with the mere fulfilment of intention. Rather, the evidence of success is to be found in the quality of the invention and the way in which the musical materials are extended, transformed, and developed to create the whole piece.

This is an important distinction. A composer's Intention is part of the Context: the starting point, 'stimulus', 'inspiration', or whatever we wish to call it. That may be literary, historical, political, sociological, topological, or even zoological! – as with Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of Animals.* It may be a musical procedure – e.g. fugue or the sonata principle – or a stylistic convention, such as Stravinsky's neo-classicism in *Pulcinella*, or a particular combination of sounds, performers, their instruments, and their technical accomplishments. In principle anything could be a starting point for a new musical work, but that is *not* what the music is 'about': it is merely the Context from which a composer starts to think about making a piece.

Context, then, is pre-musical, and although it might be described as 'an idea for music' it is not the same as a musical Idea! Unfortunately, some of the most commonly employed terms are often used rather loosely. 'Musical idea' may be applied to a melody

or motif (perhaps better described as *musical materials*), and 'form' is used indiscriminately for what is notated as well as what is heard, or – most frequently – to refer to an abstract schemata (ternary, rondo, sonata) irrespective of any musical reality. Those terms appear to describe independent objects, but a composition is not an 'object': it is an event presented (i.e. *present*-ed: literally 'made present') for us. The teacher's task is to focus pupils' attention on the music in action. We may, in passing, refer to the pre-musical Context – in this case the decision to compose a dance – but only to draw attention to what the composers have invented: i.e. the Idea and the materials (melody, rhythmic patterns, instrumentation).

Idea is the outcome of thinking about and around Context. It is entirely musical and may be a sudden revelation: a feeling for the completed piece and what the whole thing will be like (Paynter, 1997a: 11). Crucial musical features may suggest themselves at this stage, but most importantly there should be some sense of the wholeness which the piece must have if it is to fulfil (i.e. 'fully fill out') the Idea. First, pupils need to ask themselves what kind of piece it will be. Do they have a general view of the *character* of the music and why it should be like that? If, as with the piece we are considering now, that results in a decision to make a dance, then the next stage is to define the Idea: what kind of dance? Slow and solemn? Fast and wild? How will it start, go on, and end?

In the Dance as we hear it, the second part effectively develops the first, and this must surely have been a feature of the Idea. Initially the composers may have thought of it simply as a repeat, and it would be interesting to know if they could remember when, in the course of their composing, it became something more: a realisation that, in the repetition, there could be subtle changes. There are a number of other questions I should like to ask. Did they invent the tune first? That is possible since, when we think of 'a dance', a certain style of music comes to mind. Was the introduction added later? If so, we might take note of its structural importance in causing us to expect something to happen – an expectation quickly satisfied by the way in which the introduction leads us to anticipate the appearance of the tune.

The silence, longer than would normally be expected before a straightforward repeat, is similarly full of anticipation; surprising and, in a way, disturbing. Possibly it was this that led the composers to their boldest stroke: the decision to avoid a *ritardando* at the end. That seems to characterise the music's daring; for, surely, every listener's first reaction must be to wonder why the piece doesn't continue. Yet the music's own authority seems to tell us that the composers have got it right. Earlier (at 29″ into the piece, the end of the principal melody), what sounds like an abrupt change of key also creates a moment of surprise. When this passage reappears in the second half it is coloured by dissonances and contrary motion. The effect is both pleasing and disquieting. On the one hand the dissonance is *progressive*, maintaining the excitement by means of a new and unexpected transformation, but at the same time it has a *recessive* quality, the original texture re-presented in a darker and denser version. The surprise of that conclusion is such that it forces us to recall the other surprises and to notice how those decisions have worked together to produce a satisfying piece which, in its completed form, is so much more than a tune heard twice over.

Before we consider what else we might say about this music, let's see what happens if we ask similar questions about the Schumann.

***Schumann*: 'Eusebius' (no. 5 from *Carnaval* op. 9)**

It is easy to take a piece like this for granted. Even if it is very familiar, we must try to listen as though we were hearing it for the first time.

It lasts for just 1′43″ but a lot happens in that short time; so much so that we are hardly aware of the music 'taking time': it is as though we hear it all at once. If we ask, 'What makes this a work of art? what makes it *music*?' the answer might be, its *control* of that 'all-at-once-ness': the seamless unfolding and refolding.

So much here depends upon the nature of the materials the composer has invented. That should remind us to encourage pupils to be wary of settling too quickly for the first things they think of. They must learn to press imagination ever harder until they are absolutely sure that what they have invented is as good as it can be. Whether or not the 'Eusebius' motif came, with Mozartean ease, fully fashioned or, like Beethoven's thematic materials, had to be wrestled with over a period of time, the quality of Schumann's invention is manifest at the outset in the seven-note turn. The chameleon-like character of this motif pervades the whole piece. Melodically memorable but hardly a 'tune', its ambivalent rhythmic features give rise to the series of short sections. Sectionalised music can sometimes sound bitty and lacking in overall coherence, but Schumann achieves a remarkable wholeness in this piece by slowly transforming the material and then gradually restoring it to what it was. Obviously, repetition helps to create coherence but here that is compromised by continuously fresh views of the motif. Even the final note-for-note reprise of an earlier passage has small differences in its presentation, and in general the listener's mind is focused not on similarities but on surprising motivic changes within a framework of repetition.

Indecision is the overriding characteristic of this music, but to achieve that the composer cannot afford to be indecisive! The apparent diffidence and self-contradiction can work only if the musical process is carefully controlled. Harmonic engineering plays a big part in this. There are very few root-position chords, with only one root position of the tonic – and that's not at the end! The piece opens with a first inversion and concludes on a second inversion, unsure but nevertheless resigned. A particularly important harmony at internal cadences is the dominant ninth, wistful but dispirited after moments of hopeful energy.

All this apparent instability is precisely regulated, the transformations of the motif becoming agents of progression and recession, causing (or allowing?) the music to forge ahead, to hold back, or to cease altogether. We can hear this right at the start as the subdued melodic line moves with an odd combination of grace and gaucheness against the apparent 'security' of the left-hand crotchets. Every aspiring rise falls back again; should it take this path or that? We cannot tell. The recessive effect is strong and we feel the piece could stop altogether after only one phrase. But just when that seems about to happen the music picks itself up with a new, slightly agitated figure in which the shape of the motif is recognisable even though the notes are faster and the upward leaps are wider. The progressive quality continues until, at its most passionate moment, rich and flowing, this variant resolves on to a grand restatement of the opening phrase. Thereafter, every re-transformation is recessive, little by little losing its energy until at the end it fades completely.

Thinking and making

The children's piece: 'Dance'

We can now look at the details of what the young composers invented. At first hearing, the piece appears to consist of four, more or less independent, episodes: a rhythmic pattern (drum alone), a short introductory phrase in descending octaves, the dance tune, and a brief coda – most of which is then repeated with minor changes. Yet there is a powerful impression of wholeness, suggesting that the composers were intuitively aware of an underlying unity. Can we find anything to confirm this?

If we go straight to the main tune we notice that, in spite of its springy dance rhythms, it has that 'serious' quality often associated with minor keys, but nowhere do we find the expected minor-key features – upward movement to a tonic by way of sharpened sub-mediant and leading note. In fact, this tune is *modal* and exploits typical Dorian mode melody-types – in this case on C – which help to make the tune memorable (see Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

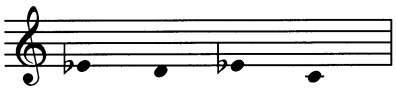


Fig. 1.

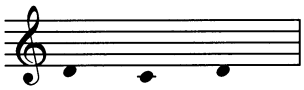


Fig. 2.

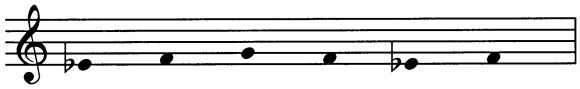
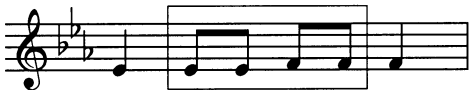


Fig. 3.

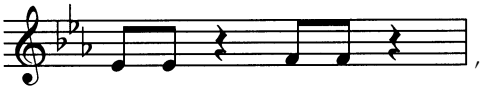
The combining of these non-harmonic modal patterns with a chordal piano accompaniment is interesting. It is obvious that the girls will have heard a great deal of harmonic music but we can only guess at where the 'folksy' modal influences may have come from.[3]

The tune, in two broad phrases, lasts for a mere twenty-one seconds, after which there is an abrupt change to the mode on A (with e♮, a♮ and b♮) for a coda: a brief stepwise rise and fall accompanied by other instruments with some contrary motion, the finality of the concluding note emphasised by repetition. This sounds like entirely new material but when we hear it again, in the second half of the piece, it is played three times and the notes in contrary motion are an octave higher, giving them greater prominence. Suddenly we are aware that the 'new' and unexpected rising and falling figure is related to the opening of the piece by means of a simple counterpoint which is, in fact, the introduction transposed down a minor third.

Other melodic elements undergo subtle changes to become unifying features. Thus,



in the first phrase of the tune becomes, in the second phrase,



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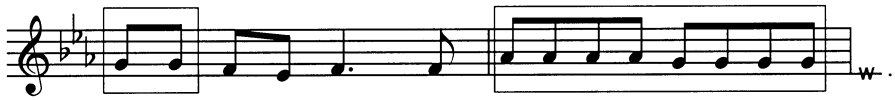
the changes opening up possibilities for further transformation:



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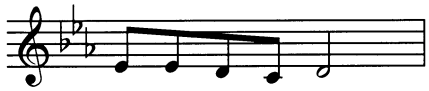
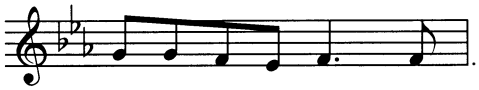
Similarly, in the first phrase



– a traditional modal melody-type – is echoed in the second phrase by



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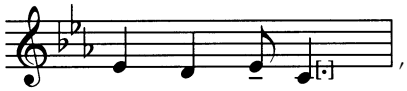
The beginning and ending of the tune is also of interest. At both points we hear the same material with its characteristic syncopation:



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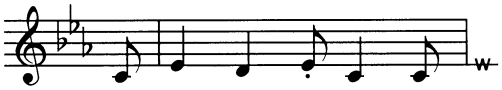
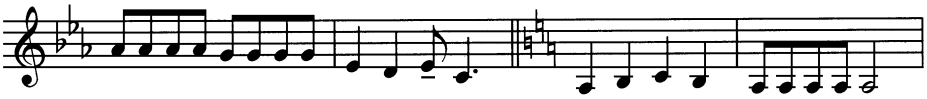
but whereas, at the start, it is set off vigorously by an anacrusis and there is a resolution of the syncopation – which also acts as an anacrusis to what follows, in effect pushing the tune onward



– at the end, this same motif but without the additional notes sounds convincingly final: an important factor in the surprise created by the coda which also appears to be 'new':



There is rhythmic as well as melodic unity in the piece. The pattern played by the drum alone at the start does more than merely set the tempo: it focuses attention on the syncopation and is the rhythmic model for the beginning and ending of the tune and also the variant of that motif (Fig. 4).

Many examples of similarly 'clever' transformations can be found in traditional music world-wide, reminding us that such things happen intuitively. Their structural importance is fully revealed only at the moment when the performance finishes, and even then their

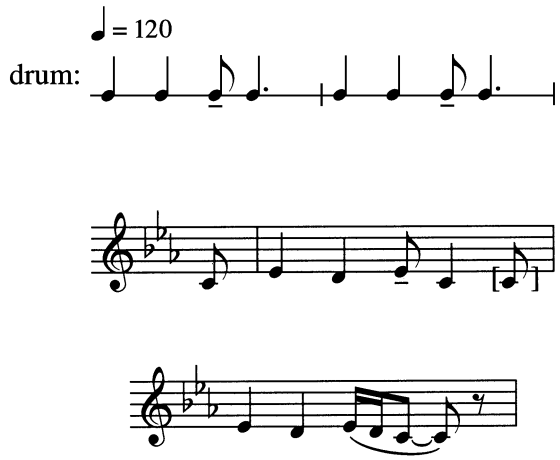


Fig. 4.

significance is *felt* rather than understood in a logical way. (A satisfaction not unlike that which we can experience even with mundane household chores: the sense of orderliness and completeness at the moment of finishing.)

Of course, it is possible that these ten-year-old composers consciously organised the links and developments in the melody, but it would seem much more likely that they acted instinctively. Experienced composers are aware of how much musical construction goes on in the subconscious mind, and of how they can develop their techniques by 'observing' work in progress, noting these processes, and then consciously exploiting them in other musical circumstances. By teaching from what is offered we can draw attention to possibilities in children's music which, because it is their own, will be important to them, but which can also help them to discover similar things in other people's music.

Schumann: 'Eusebius'

The unifying features are immediately apparent. Even so, Schumann would almost certainly have had to experiment with a number of options before finalising even the principal motif. Assuming he decided at an early stage that the music should have a vague, uncertain and indecisive character; he then had to think of a way of achieving that *generally*. There were, of course, the harmonic possibilities. On the other hand, he may well have settled first for the duple metre and the divided beats: seven quavers rather than eight giving rise to the main motif. Later, individual beats are divided into fives and threes and, to thicken the plot, that same semiquaver-quintuplet plus quaver-triplet melody line subtly outlines the *duple* metre whilst, in the left hand, *three* crotchets replace the by now established two.

'Eusebius' has certain things in common with the children's Dance – unifying melodic and rhythmic features, for instance. It also gives the impression of being in two halves, the second a modified reprise of the first. We've seen already how Schumann creates unity by drawing everything melodic from the seven-note motif and its transformations, but in addition, harmonic, dynamic and textural changes, often of a dramatic nature, are integrated with the melodic developments to create progression (diversity and forward

movement) and recession (unity and closure). The miracle of this music is its completeness in every detail; clearly and carefully composed but also deeply felt. For it would be wrong to suppose that intuition is for the musically naïve and that 'real' composers construct music always with an almost scientific detachment.

Buried treasure

Whatever place music has in our lives – the reassurance of a familiar repertoire; the challenge of new pieces; a relaxation from the demands of hectic schedules; something to match a mood or raise our spirits; or to create an exciting atmosphere at a party – the only reason why we have anything to do with it is because we want something to happen: we expect in some way to be moved by the music. There are so many things that might attract us: memorable melodies; 'big' orchestral sounds; the overwhelming excitement of a rock band; unusual or exotic instruments; the virtuosity of solo performers; the combination of words and music. Yet none of these would even begin to excite our attention unless it were found in a 'piece' of music.

This is the one thing that everybody knows about music – that it comes in pieces! The word suggests a musical actuality; an event completed and accepted entirely on its own terms. It may be prepared-composed or instantly-composed (improvised), notated or held in the memory, but if the music is 'all of a piece' we experience a flow of sounds such that unexpected developments simultaneously surprise us and sound quite natural – inevitable, even; as though it could not possibly be otherwise.[4] The question of what makes a piece 'a piece' brings us closer to understanding why, whatever diverse sensations we experience in composing, performing and listening, the feeling of self-sufficiency and completeness in the music is of paramount importance.

The wonder of it is how everything comes together and sounds right, pleasing our aesthetic sense: in the words of a medieval translator of Marcus Aurelius Antonius,

> How all things upon Earth are pesle mesle; and how miraculously things contrary one to another concurre to the beautie and perfection of this Universe.[5]

How is that concurrence, that sense of *belonging*, brought about? The sculptor, Austin Wright, spoke of 'the points at which things legitimately stick together', arguing that, in sculpture, those points 'should show [because] they are the strength of the structure'. Something very similar occurs in music: the mind engages with the flow of sound and, subliminally, we notice the *changes* that occur. We are aware of the music transforming itself – making itself whole – and we too are transformed, made whole, by it.[6]

The children's piece: 'Dance'

I said at the outset that this struck me as successful music, and I have tried to show how that opinion might be supported by the quality of the musical invention, the melodic and rhythmic developments, and the underlying unities – all the result of decisions taken by the composers. Those decisions were to do mainly with the nature of the materials and what happens to them. We've now begun to touch on another level of decision-taking: the matter of *when* changes and transformations occur.

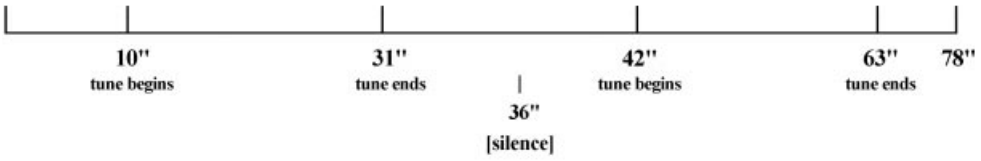


Fig. 5. *The Dance: positioning of the tune*

The Dance lasts for 78″, of which the most memorable element is the tune itself, placed more or less centrally (Fig. 5).

Between the end of the tune in the first part and its reappearance in the second part is a passage which seems to act like a pivot. It is occupied by the coda, the silence, and a reprise of some of the introductory material – the drum solo but *not* the descending octaves. Why is that last element, so important at the start, omitted here? Did the girls discuss this? Did they at first include it and then decide to leave it out? If so, we still have to ask why? And did they know why? (Perhaps because initial improvisations had given them an impression of how that would feel in relation to the overall duration?) Or was it simply a feeling that the tune had to start again when it does? But there is more. The durations of the opening and closing sections of the piece are *not* symmetrical. The first section (before the start of the tune) lasts for 10″ and the final section (the dissonant coda and its repetitions) lasts for 15″. This has the effect of positioning most of those significant changes close to Golden Section points (Fig.6).

Now, before you howl, 'Not the Golden Section again!', I am well aware that a great deal has been written about it already and that many people must be heartily sick of it.[7] Identifying precise or close coincidences between members of a mathematical sequence and what appear to be important developments in a piece of music will add nothing whatever to anyone's enjoyment of that music, but we should not too hastily dismiss the evidence of a ubiquitous delight in *a*symmetry. If we are interested in developing our own or our pupils' abilities in composition, noting how long this or that lasts, and when it might or might not be the right moment to introduce something different, can reveal why certain things appear to weaken the form whilst others strengthen it. In consequence we may want to reconsider the durations of some sections, although we should bear in mind that there's

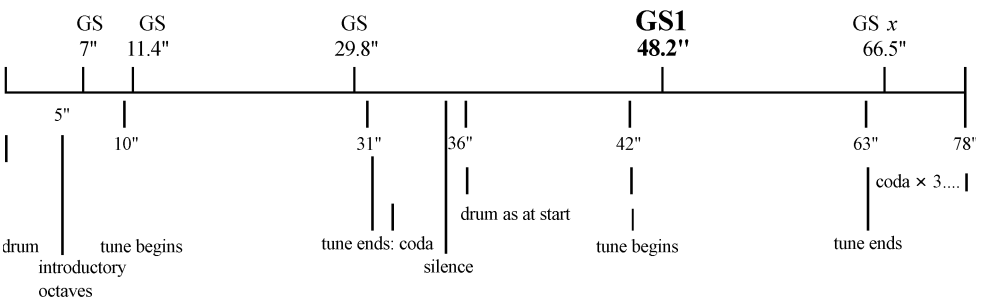


Fig. 6. *The Dance: Golden Section points*

no such thing as a recipe for a composition, and no one can make 'good' music merely by arranging for 'the climax' to arrive at precisely 0.618 of the overall duration!

Nor should we be influenced by the fact that some great painters – Vermeer, for instance – undoubtedly did calculate in advance these 'special' points on their canvases. Music, because it takes place in time and is subject to subtleties of performance, is an entirely different matter: the relationships are complex and may be sensed but not reckoned. It is not a question of measuring in advance precisely when one particular high point should occur but of realising that all the elements in a composition interact to produce what we *feel* as a 'rightness' of form which complements the character of the musical materials and is confirmed by the varying strengths of progression or recession at different points in the musical flow.

Figure 6 shows that, in spite of what appeared at first to be a symmetrical form of two more or less equal parts, placing the various sections within the overall time-scale reveals an *a*symmetrical form. This tendency applies to the dance tune on its own as well as to the piece as a whole. We have already noticed how a simple stepwise rising of repeated notes in the first half of the tune reappears, modified, in the second half. Although this tiny figure may seem relatively unimportant, the changes it undergoes have a strong effect. Perhaps this is because, whilst we recognise the notes, the metrical displacements and the silent beats unsettle us, engendering expectation and preparing the ear for even more drama as the tune dips and then reaches up to its highest point. Will it continue upwards? But no, it pulls back and drops, to end on the note from which everything sprang. The final silence occurs at the principal GS point and powerfully provokes our expectations, but it is not the climax of the tune. Likewise, the recession *from* the climax, rather than the climax itself, coincides with the Golden Section of the duration between GS1 and the end – which I call GS *x*: the moment, in numerous pieces of music, when something unusual happens which strengthens the finality of the ending (Fig. 7).[8]

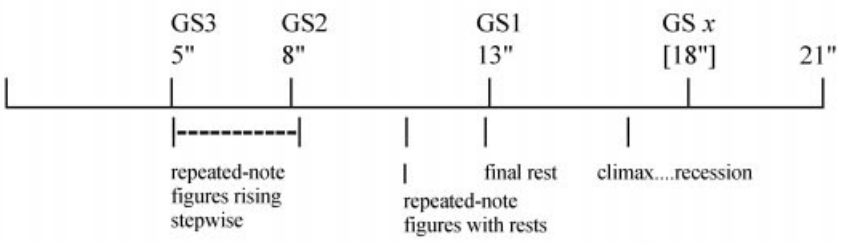


Fig. 7. *The Dance: use of repeated-note figure*

Schumann, 'Eusebius'

Asymmetrical proportions are evident from the start. In the first statement of the motif, the moment of reaching up to the highest note (e♭) coincides with GS1 of the duration of that seven-note figure, and in the first phrase as a whole other structurally important features occur at Golden Section points (Fig. 8). Why does the high g appear so soon? It is strongly progressive and sounds like a climax point, but its power is immediately dissipated, the

melody falling back by way of the f and then the low a♭ to g (so far the lowest pitch in the phrase). If we examine how this works proportionally we find that the pre-emptive 'climax' coincides with GS2 while the low g is at GS1, creating an impression of impulsive action all too quickly running out of steam: when we *expect* an emotional high point we hear instead the music begin to decline. The retreat from the climax is confirmed just three seconds later by that same note g, now clearly signalling 'it's over' (although, in fact, it isn't!), coinciding with that other important point, GS *x*. As in the children's Dance, something of significance at this moment enhances the finality of the closure.

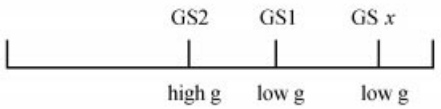


Fig. 8. *'Eusebius': proportional 'markers' in the first phrase*

It is inconceivable that Schumann would have calculated the tiny durations which create these asymmetrical proportions – and in any case, there would have been no point in doing so: clearly, he *felt* that these proportions were 'right'. In that first phrase the coincidence of GS1 with a strongly recessive moment characterises everything that happens subsequently. High points there are in plenty – climaxes of the kind the ear expects – but the essence of this piece is its ambivalence: trying so hard to be outgoing and optimistic but never quite making it; always falling back to introversion and self-doubt. The piece could not be on a larger scale because the 'big' moments cannot sustain themselves. Surely this must be in the nature of the 'possibility' that Schumann sensed in the Idea? It is achieved largely by means of the $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{3}$ unit that permeates the entire form: in every instance, the progressive qualities are developed in the larger part only to be dashed again in the much shorter downward slide to closure.

Particularly striking is the GS1 point of the whole piece. This – marked once more by a languishing dominant ninth – occurs in the midst of the most passionate passage, but is again a moment of 'doubt'. Although it is followed by a final attempt at extrovert passion, ending on the one and only root position of the tonic chord (putting a brave face on it, perhaps?), the tendency towards recession is now so powerful that the music can never rise again: it can only fade gently into oblivion.

A universal principle

Francis Bacon wrote that 'There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion',[9] seeming to suggest that this maxim would hold good anywhere. Certainly the paradox of a piece of music sounding well balanced because it is in fact *un*balanced is by no means restricted to Western art music. That other cultures also find asymmetry attractive is demonstrated by the following two examples.

(1) 'Maharo Jalalo Bilalo Ghar Kad Avasi' (Awaiting the Beloved). A folk song from Rajasthan (recording: *The Songs of The Desert Sands* NRCD 0059 DDD (1995)). The singers are accompanied by *ravenhatta* (long-necked fiddle) and the *dholaka* (double-faced barrel drum). Figure 9 shows that all the important changes are close to, and in one

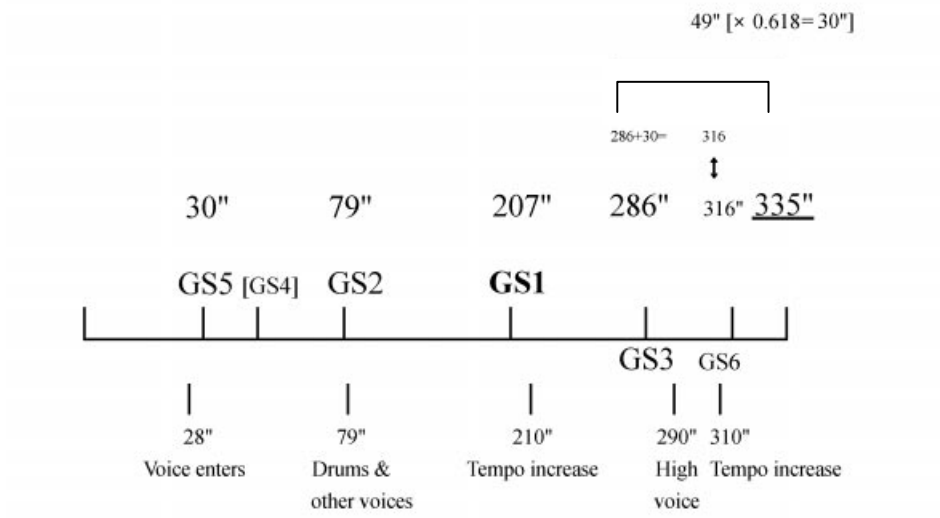


Fig. 9. *Golden Section points in 'Maharo Jalalo Bilalo Ghar Kad Avasi'*

case – the first time we hear the full ensemble – precisely coincident with, Golden Section points. Although we do not consciously listen for such things, there is no doubt that these structurally significant moments are 'the points at which things legitimately stick together', creating the hierarchy of asymmetrical proportions which produces a unified and satisfying piece.

(2) *Bubaran Hudan Mas* ('Golden Rain') Pélog Patet Barong. Javanese Court Gamelan from the Pura Paku Alaman, Jogyakarta (recording: Elektra Nonesuch Explorer Series, CD 7559-72044-2 (1991)). A *Bubaran* concludes an entertainment and is played as the audience is leaving. *Hudan Mas* is a well-known piece in the conventional gamelan form. A brief melodic introduction heralds the entry of the full gamelan and develops into a major section establishing the musical material. Later this is transformed by an *accelerando* signalled by the drum which controls every change of tempo and style, and then – again, at a signal from the drum – the pace slackens, finally changing, at a precise moment (i.e. not gradually) to an even slower tempo as the end is approached (Fig. 10).

This is not a matter of calculation or analysis but rather of *the perception of wholeness in what is heard*: the intersection of virtual time with 'real' time, apparent in the *proportions* of sectional durations to overall duration, the former marked by varying intensities of change (Paynter, 1997a and 1997b). The control of proportion is what Carter means by 'manipulating the flow of time' (see note 4). This has nothing to do with musical academicism. It is the most natural thing in the world and is experienced, not only in the so-called masterworks (prepared-composed or improvised-composed), but also in the humblest of pieces made up by musically untutored people, including the spontaneous music of children.

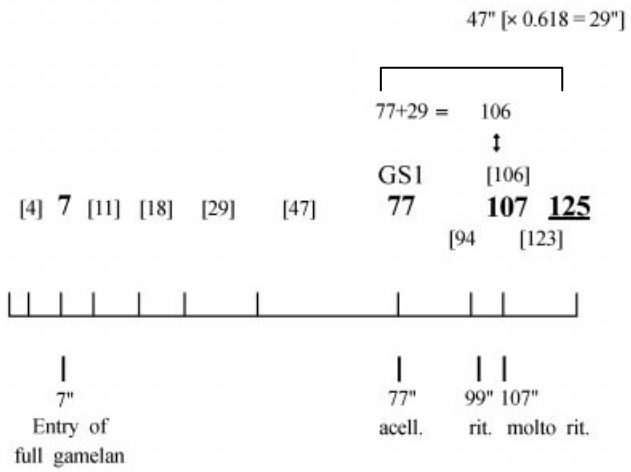


Fig. 10. *Golden Section points in* Bubaran Hudan Mas

How do we know when it's 'right'?

I've had a lot to say about recognising the 'rightness' of important moments in music. How can we help school students to develop this sensitivity – possibly the most important technique in composition? A painter, standing back from work in progress, might ask, 'Does it look right on a canvas of that size?' In music the question would be, 'Does it sound right if it goes on for that long?' Composers have to make things work together satisfactorily in a time-scale and must judge by what they *hear*, either in the imagination or directly from the sounds.

In fact, this process is not at all unusual. In many areas of life decisions are taken when a number of conditions must be met at the same time. You weigh up all the possibilities, reach a conclusion, and probably say, 'If I do that, I've only myself to blame', accepting that the one person you have to convince is yourself! That is the essential element, learned largely by trial and error. The more familiar we become with the characteristics of what we are judging the more confident our decisions will be. In musical education – from the viewpoint of the teacher – the greater the variety of music we know, and the more we practise listening to the way combinations of musical materials work, the easier we shall find it to discuss pupils' compositions. That discussion will encourage them to think for themselves about what sounds right and why it might be considered to be so, and to know that they have *only themselves to convince.*

They must also understand that, in spite of feeling satisfied at the moment when a composition is completed, they may, nevertheless, have misjudged it. There are many examples of famous works which have been revised after the initial performances because the composers felt that they had taken the wrong decisions. Sometimes this has involved a substantial alteration, such as removing one whole act of an opera. Beethoven's notebooks record his struggles to organise musical materials successfully, and to fashion, by many small changes, the 'right' character of themes and motifs, whilst Schubert's unfinished

piano sonata movements show him *failing* to find satisfactory ways of maintaining the flow of the music.

There are two things we should learn from this. First, that composing can never be a mechanical process; it is entirely a matter of judgement and there are no rules other than what the ear tells us is right. Secondly, even for very experienced composers, until the music is performed, it can be difficult to know if the judgements are correct. So much depends upon that first presentation of the completed piece. We see this happening in the classroom: it isn't until the moment when a finished piece is presented that the teacher and the composer(s) know whether or not it succeeds as music. That is why this is such an important moment in which to comment on what everyone now hears as a 'piece'. By paying careful attention to what happens in their music – and, in particular, *when* certain things happen – the teacher highlights for the students judgements they have made and decisions they have taken.

It is not the purpose of musical education to make children musical: they are already musical, since that is part of their human nature. Our questions draw attention to what they know intuitively – that musical material has potential to *go on* – so that, by taking stock of what they have made up already, the imagination can begin to explore in new directions. As we listen to pupils performing a composition we should try to remember melodic and rhythmic figures and interesting combinations of voices and/or instruments, especially where these are associated with moments of change. We can also have in mind general considerations such as unifying features; whether the music makes sense as a whole; the relationship between duration and the character of the music (how long does it last, and does that seem too long or not long enough?); whether the composers attempt to expand and transform musical materials or merely go on inventing new things; and, not least, the strength and quality of the ending. These are the things to discuss.

As soon as the performance concludes we must be ready to comment. For example, we might ask, 'How do you feel about [this tune / this rhythm pattern / those particular instruments] – do we hear enough of it/them so that we can really enjoy what happens? Or is it over too soon? How would you describe the *character* of this music? – serious? solemn? light-hearted? – does it need more – or less – time? Do you think you've got it right? Shall we get tired of it if it goes on too long? What about the beginning? Should that music go on longer so that we really get to know what it's about? Does it change too suddenly to something different? Or does it take too long to get anywhere? Are you sure about the beginning/ending? Why is it like that? Listen to yourselves as you play what you've made: do you think the important things happen when they should? How can we tell? We have to try to feel when it sounds right. Why do you think *that* sounds right? What could you do differently? Would that be better? Why?' And so on. These questions should be directed at the composers. Other members of the class learn from that discussion.

It's unlikely that we shall want to talk to pupils about the Golden Section, and we should certainly not propose that as a 'method' for making a successful piece, but it does show us that durations and proportions – *felt* rather than calculated – play a big part in the success of many different kinds of music. We should not underestimate children's sensitivity to these effects. They may not have listened to as much music as we have but they will have *heard* a lot. Children become aware of music from birth (possibly, before birth) and by the age of six they may be experimenting with spontaneous songs of their

own (Davies, 1986 and 1992). We can talk with them about those songs or about their experiments with classroom instruments, and as they get a little older we can begin to ask questions such as, 'What do you think that tune might do next?' or 'how do you think this piece should end?' The teacher's task is to help pupils to think about the way music works, and to *realise* that they are thinking about it.

Musical meaning

Music can mean whatever anyone wants it to mean. If, while you listen, you imagine landscapes, seascapes, inter-planetary travel or anything else, no one can say that is wrong; but, then, another person's entirely different literal interpretations would not be wrong either! What about the composer's intention for the music: surely that takes priority? We might think so, but that has never stopped film directors and choreographers, for example, from making use of music to support interpretations which probably would never have occurred to the composers. I remember the scornful response of a class of fourteen year-olds in the mid-1950s who told me I was quite wrong about Holst's 'Mars': they knew the music well, they said, and it had nothing to do with planets; it was from the film *Quatermass*! (Not music *for* the film, you understand, but music *from* the film: a significant difference.)

Does it matter? I doubt it. There is a widespread desire for explanation, but information about the composer's intention and the circumstances in which the music was first performed is unlikely to enhance appreciation substantially: the majority of people believe that music is doing its job if it stirs emotions or suggests images. The possibility that it may represent emotions and 'real world' events, in spite of differences of interpretation, seems to provide at least some kind of answer to the question, 'What does this music mean?'

Yet we could go further. Consider the success of Muzak. Those who produce it know that supermarket shoppers' minds can be conditioned by music in the background and that no one needs appreciation lessons or information about composers before they can be moved to make purchases! If we follow that line of argument we might conclude that there is another level of meaning which unites the enormous diversity of interpretation, and *that* could be easier to apprehend if we had no information at all; not even the composer's name and the title of the piece. There's a lot to be said for the innocent ear.

The musical present

The immediacy of music is its most potent property. Even the obvious indicators of meaning – the words of a song or the specific functions of, for example, liturgical music – can be overtaken by the singularity of the musical event: you don't have to be a believer to be deeply moved by religious music. Could it be that every piece, simply by functioning as music, speaks to us of the possibility of the perfection of a single, all-encompassing moment beyond Time? Stravinsky (1962: 53) argued that, because humanity is 'doomed to submit to the passage of time', only in music are we able to 'realise the present'. Does music, then, temporarily alleviate a restlessness which is at the heart of the human condition?

Certainly, if there is such a thing as 'real time' (which some doubt!), we experience it

as 'passage', although individual events appear to have margins of varying duration. Thus 'the present time' can mean different things. It could be this very moment – 'a split second', as we say – or it could take in a much longer stretch of time: this year; this century. Presumably the 'present' that Stravinsky had in mind would not change in that way: it would have the same (or a very similar) significance for everyone and would be without past or future.[10]

Clearly, some kind of duality is at work here, and that brings us back to the notion of a 'piece'. Everything we need to know about the music is there in what we hear; a unique sound-world the purpose of which is, literally, to entertain us – *inter tenere* 'to hold [us] between' two experiences of existence: chronometric time and psychological time; reality and imagination; the finite and the infinite. An entire audience will be aware simultaneously of the beginning and ending of a piece but during the course of the performance everyone will feel differently about how the time is passing – or, perhaps, not passing: often there is a sensation of time suspended.

The 'normal' present of our quotidian lives appears to be an emergent event; a *becoming*, the inner nature of each 'present' shaped by past conditions and suggesting an as yet unrealised future (Mead, 1932: 19). The occasion of a concert or a recital is just such a present: it has 'become' – i.e. it is conditioned by its past (preparation and anticipation: the performers have rehearsed and advertised the programme and the audience has bought tickets) and it forecasts a future (reaction, reflection, and understanding or rejection) – but there is a qualitative difference between that and the making present of the music on the programme. Each piece remains a putative form until actualised as an *occurrent event* at a designated point in the *continuant* 'present time' of the concert. The special present of the musical event is not a 'becoming' but a singular occurrence in which all the elements are organically related to each other and only to each other, 'for nothing else exists there' (Langer, 1953: 109, 262). In other words, it functions as music only at the point in time and space when and where we receive it.

Musicians and poets are keenly aware of this unique quality, particularly at the moment of a work's conception. For Hindemith it was like seeing a landscape lit by a flash of lightning. Seamus Heaney speaks of 'the poem as a ploughshare that turns time / Up and over'[11] – in effect, exposing and holding up a piece of time for us to contemplate – and Elizabeth Jennings describes vividly that moment in the composition of a poem when, suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly, everything comes together: 'in the large flights of imagination / I see for one crammed second, order so / Explicit that I need no more persuasion.'[12] Likewise, when we perform or listen to a piece of music, what ultimately persuades us that this is worth doing is not information about the cultural/historical context nor even the possibility of the music representing something else, but the *musical thought* itself concentrated in the special present of the performance. To recognise that we must also be aware of the 'normal' present in which all of this is happening.

The importance of this duality was illustrated by György Ligeti some years ago in a filmed discussion of his *Lux Aeterna* for sixteen voices. In 1966 Ligeti had broken new ground with this work. The challenge he had set himself was to create a dense micropolyphony which would produce little or no feeling of movement but which, like all other music, would satisfy listeners' expectations of conclusion and completeness. This meant that the interdependence of psychological time and chronometric time was

particularly significant, and Ligeti described how, whilst 'listening' to the piece in his imagination, he used a stop-watch to confirm the 'right' performance duration. Instead of the melodic lines and clearly audible words of conventional choral music, a fragmented text is slowly unfolded with subtly increasing and decreasing intensity in a web of vocal colour. It is hardly surprising that such highly atmospheric music was later used as part of the film score for *Space Odyssey 2001.* The voices enter gently, one by one, on a unison (*Sostenuto, molto calmo*: 'from afar'), moving outwards very gradually in intricate canons to form shimmering note-clusters which spread and draw together, little by little reaching up to a high point and then descending to end an octave lower than the opening. It lasts for just under eight minutes, but it *feels* time-less.

Music as a model of possibility

Much of this has to do with the mind's ability to flip backwards and forwards between the two time modes, testing the 'rightness' or otherwise of the experience. This is rather like those images which can be interpreted differently according to how one chooses to view them (Fig. 11).

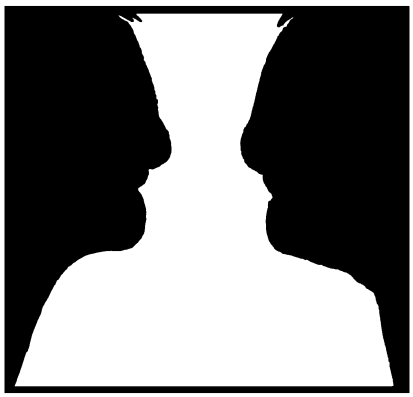


Fig. 11.

It also has something in common with that other familiar sensation when two trains, heading in opposite directions, are stationary side-by-side. One starts to move, but passengers in the other have the impression that it is *their* train that is moving. By looking away from the window they can tell immediately that their train is stationary, but looking out of the window again reverses the sensation. In other words, the mind occupies two linked existences: one in motion, the other at rest (cf. Mead, 1932: 80). Einstein observed this and similar phenomena as he travelled by tram to his work in the Swiss Patent Office, and from those experiences he derived his General Theory of Relativity which has had such a profound effect upon the course of science. Could it be that the relativity of time perception which we experience in music awakens, somewhere deep in the unconscious, a feeling of encounter with forces that drive the universe?

Perhaps too, it resonates with humanity's attempts to reconcile the evidence of

physical change with perceptions of an unchanging existence. The Hindu *Trimurti* – the triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva: the unity of a single body with three heads – has only superficial resemblance to the Christian Trinity but the resonance of a three-fold perfection is striking. The essential Trinitarian quality is its indivisibility: 'The Utterer, Utterèd, Uttering'[13] – that which exists outside Time (*Idea / Logos*) manifesting itself in history (*Event / Incarnation*) and continuing to enlighten (*Spirit / Meaning / Understanding*). Here, change and unchange are two aspects of the same thing. Parallel with this – in religious thought, mythology, science and art – is the doctrine of interacting opposites: death and resurrection, the Chinese yin–yang; Siva symbolising simultaneously destruction and renovation; Pandora's box of evils sent by Zeus to offset the fire which Prometheus had stolen to save the human race; Empedocles's conviction that the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – whilst individually immutable, were combined and separated in various ways by the opposing forces of Love and Discord, continuously making, destroying and remaking; the protagonist and antagonist of Greek tragedy; and even our somewhat jaundiced, contemporary view that 'life rubs along on hostilities!' Each of these, in its own way, is a response to the question, 'What makes existence *possible* – what makes it work as it does?' Does musical 'possibility' both ask and answer the same question? If so, that could explain why human beings seem unable to do without music.

'Somewhere in the memory there is always music'

It may seem that we have strayed a long way from the question of what to say to children about their compositions, but this has not been a diversion. Speculating on the roots of our music-making points us towards the *necessity* of what we do. For in whatever way we interpret the fundamental motivations – psychological, spiritual or bio-chemical – it is clear that they apply universally. All the world makes music and, as Curt Sachs (1944: 20–21) says,

> However far back we trace mankind, we fail to see the springing up of music . . . for [it] has little to do with the mutable surface of life, and nothing with the struggle for existence. This is why music is one of the steadiest elements in the evolution of mankind.

If, then, the need to create music plays such a major part in human life why do we not recognise that necessity and capitalise upon it in education? Why do we so often leave students with the impression that 'real' composing is what other, specially talented, people do? Partly, I suspect, it is because we take for granted the natural magic of making up music. The sheer quantity of music now available makes it difficult for us to convey to pupils the sense of adventure, and like so many other magical things in nature we expect music to be there whenever we want it. It is 'the daily doing which takes off the admiration'.[14] But this is also the key. Music is able to mean anything anyone wants it to mean only because *at root* it means the same thing to everyone: we assume that all music will behave musically. Does not this underlying universal sensitivity to music *as music* suggest very strongly that composing and performing are, jointly, the true basis of musical education?

Knowledge: the dilemma of education

Yet, in spite of what everyone knows intuitively about the nature of music, on the whole its place in the school curriculum is justified still, not by the educational potential of musical activity – unique and unlike anything else we may encounter – but by the body of knowledge it appears to represent.

Knowledge comes in many different guises and occasionally we may wonder why anyone should think it worth the effort of gathering the information. Some years ago, in an article for *The Times*, Bernard Levin wrote, with barely disguised scorn, of research designed to discover whether lobsters moved faster across the seabed in single file or line abreast. Yet even if we can't see the point of such a project, or find it amusing, we might conclude that, in the grand scheme of things, it must be useful because all knowledge is equally valuable.

To a large extent the school curriculum is based on that unspoken belief. In whatever way we define education, schooling seems to be about imparting and receiving knowledge, and in this we prefer conformity rather than discriminating between different ways of coming to know. That is justified by a curriculum which take its validity from the standards of its component parts but at the same time judges the credibility of subjects by their intellectual comparability. It is hardly surprising that students want to feel that they are mastering skills and learning something quantifiable, but is the one-size-fits-all model of the curriculum necessarily the right one? Even accepting that no knowledge is entirely without value, should we not be asking what kind of knowledge is *appropriate* to the subject? We could then consider how that appropriate knowledge might command respect by being dealt with in a way comparable with the most intellectually demanding subjects.

Educational theorists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries argued that music should be part of every child's elementary schooling. What they had in mind was singing, which they believed could have wide-ranging benefits for general education (Rainbow, 1989: 175 *et seq.*). As this idea became established it was supported by the tonic sol-fa methods of Sarah Glover, John Hullah and John Curwen, leaders in an amazing popular movement which introduced some thousands of people, many from among the poorest groups, to the pleasures of music-making. Tonic sol-fa is a means to an end: a notation devised specifically to help singers pitch intervals accurately and to enable them to achieve results faster than they could with staff-notation. But by the 1870s the use of tonic sol-fa in the schools had become a step towards theoretical knowledge: 'the scientific study of music' (Rainbow, 1989: 253, citing Heathcote Statham). And there, perhaps, we have the seeds of a music curriculum in which inert facts can take precedence over active musical experience.

The Appreciation lesson, central to school musical education from the 1930s to the early 1950s, tended to equate meaning with the pre-musical Context (which usually included anecdotes of the composer's life) and Intention (e.g. to compose a sonata – *cue* information about sonata form). The National Curriculum has continued in that vein. In spite of including performance and composition as classroom activities it tends to support the belief that intellectual rigour is provided by historical/cultural information, notation skills, and 'bar-by-bar' descriptive analysis. This also appears to raise the status of music by giving it parity with subjects such as history, mathematics and languages, but it does little

to develop students' interest in their own creative efforts. Indeed, it may have the opposite effect, students being inclined to undervalue their composing because the approved curriculum appears to value the other things more.

In his recent book, *Musicking*, Christopher Small suggests that the well-established view of musical knowledge has been detrimental to the way in which concert audiences listen, its continuing influence due to musical historians, not least among them

> the doyen of contemporary German musicologists, Carl Dalhaus, who tells us, flatly that 'the subject matter of music is made up, primarily, of significant works of music that have outlived the culture of their age' and that 'the concept ''work'' and not ''event'' is the cornerstone of music history'. (Small, 1998: 4, citing Dalhaus, 1983)

I have argued elsewhere that music's most compelling quality is that it has no history: 'nowness' is of its essence (Paynter, 1997a/1997b). The study of musical history is not the study of *music* because, regardless of the culture of the age in which it was composed, a piece of music has no relevance except for those who perform it and listen to it at the moment when they perform and listen – i.e. within their own time and culture. The differences between live and recorded performances are also significant.[15] Indisputably we experience every work of music as an independent *event* not as a musical object: the score (which is what Dalhaus means by 'the concept ''work'' ') is no more than a sign of potential music. Notation is an imperfect science and composers have a habit of making alterations or leaving things in a sketchy state.[16] And in any case, an improvisation is just as much a 'work' as is a notated composition.

The tendency which Small identifies among concert-goers has also influenced musical education. In spite of the attention we pay to other cultures, the highest achievements of Western art music still seem to represent a body of *knowledge* by which we may assess the worth of any music. By comparison with that canon of acceptable, stood-the-test-of-time musical works the compositional efforts of school pupils are bound to appear primitive. It seems hardly possible that we should develop a worthwhile level of discourse around such pieces. All too easily we may leave students with the impression that, whilst we believe it is good for them to 'have a go' at composing, that is not on the same intellectual plane as learning about 'great' music.

Yet the 'learning about' could be appropriate were it linked purposefully to creative and artistic questions arising from students' composing and performing. For example, in the children's 'Dance' discussed earlier, their intuitive Dorian tune might have started them on an exploration of modes generally (including Indian rāgs), leading to the conscious use of that knowledge to create more modal pieces. Or again, the strongly characteristic folk dance style (Greek? – hinting at the syncopations of the *kalamatianos*; or Israeli? e.g. the tiny decorative downward movement at the end of the first phrase which we do not hear the second time round[17]) could lead to further compositions deliberately exploiting characteristics of other ethnic musics, much as Bartók and Janáček did.

Music stemming from literary or visual contexts presents particular problems when it comes to deciding what is appropriate knowledge. It is tempting to think that if we tell students 'the story' they will understand the music more easily. Unfortunately, that has the opposite effect. Beethoven was certainly aware that, by imitating birdsong in the slow movement of his Sixth Symphony, he might be giving listeners the wrong idea. In his own

programme note for that work he made it clear that this was 'more an expression of feeling than a painting'. Similarly, an evocative title, even when it is meant to help, may send us in the wrong direction. Liszt, in spite of being the inventor of 'programme music', would not have expected listeners to hear 'Les cloches de Genève' (from the first set of *Années de Pèlerinage*) as nothing more than a representation of bells.

What appropriate knowledge could we derive from listening to Schumann's 'Eusebius' in the way I have suggested above? The piece might be played and discussed as follow-up to a composition project involving the combining of contrasting characteristics. In that case it could be helpful for students to know that *Carnaval* is a collection of twenty-one 'characteristic pieces', a genre which, although not in any sense 'programme music', often displays strong associative links between Context and Idea. Here the background is the *comedia del'arte* with its Pierrot-like figures, to which is added the dual persona of Eusebius and Florestan symbolising Schumann's view of his own personality, by turn introvert and extrovert. The Context could be the basis for thinking about how a musical Idea might be derived from thoughts about introversion and extroversion.

Inevitably the school curriculum will always be under review and subject to change. Whatever the reasons for such changes – demographic, ideological – it is the teachers who have to try to make sense of what is to be done. A curriculum which cannot allow for differences in the kind of knowledge and progression appropriate to individual subjects makes every teacher's job harder. In music, even an unwitting emphasis upon 'the scientific study of music' and an onwards-and-upwards notion of progression seems to have influenced students to think of composing as a relatively unimportant aspect of their education. In such an atmosphere it is very difficult for teachers to help students to get better at composing.

My principal concern here has been to show that, aside from the enormous quantity of information that has grown up around the study of music, and irrespective of variety in style and interpretation, it is the essentially musical properties – that is to say, the ways in which we recognise it as music – that draw us in and persuade us to become involved with it. Therefore, it is what can be learned from musical *activity* – composing and performing – that makes most sense of the subject as an element of the school curriculum. Music-making offers students a chance to encounter a kind of knowledge different from that which characterises the majority of curriculum subjects. Unless, in the first place, we can capitalise upon that there would seem to be little justification for including music in the curriculum at all. Historical information, the techniques of harmony and counterpoint and analysis are important and worthwhile so long as they are directly related to musical activity, but when such things become ends in themselves, hurdles to be overcome or a mere gathering of knowledge because it is felt that this gives the study of music academic validity, then, inevitably, imagination and creativity are downgraded and real musical understanding goes further beyond reach.

Notes

1 As we enter a new century it is interesting to note that, in spite of curriculum changes designed to restore standards allegedly lost in the 'freedom' of 1970s schooling, more and more business

operations are calling upon education to develop students' collaborative potential. Twenty-five years ago we were demonstrating that musical education in schools could provide opportunities for the kind of creative 'team' working that is now so highly valued. Why has that been forgotten? (See Grenville Hancox, 'Music Education and Industry', in Paynter, 1982: 239–40.)

2 The cassette tape accompanying *BJME* 8 (1991). The piece I have selected can be found in track 37. It was composed by three girls participating in a Durham Summer School for Young Musicians. The recording is associated with the article 'Music and Play' by the late Richard Addison (*BJME* 8/3: 207–17. See also *BJME* 10/1: 2). Detailed commentary on the music was not a consideration in that article because Addison's principal concern was with composing as an example of 'play'. He noted only the circumstances in which the piece was produced and used ('The next piece also was composed by a group of three girls. It was intended in the first place as a dance, but was later fitted with words. The dissonant ending is entirely intentional (drum and piano)') See *BJME* 8/3: 311 n. from which the position of the piece in track 37 can be identified.

3 These children appear to have done quite naturally what one famous British composer did deliberately – to spite his teacher! In a broadcast talk given towards the end of his life, Ralph Vaughan Williams spoke of how he had begun to be interested in modality during the 1890s. His composition teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford, had little time for such experiments and, trying to steer VW back to classical harmony, told him to compose a waltz: 'So, I wrote a waltz', said VW, 'I wrote a *modal* waltz!'

4 Cf. Alexander Goehr, 'I write music so that people can follow from bar to bar, and know that some notes follow and others don't' (BBC broadcast talk). Also Elliot Carter, 'to me composing consists in dealing with the flow of music rather than with particular instants of sound . . . Music is the only world in which you can really manipulate the flow of time . . . so that how you make the stream flow and what obstacles you put in to stop it from flowing . . . become fundamental.' (Alan Edwards, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: a Conversation with Elliot Carter* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1971: 37).

5 'Pesle mesle' – pell-mell, confused, disordered.

6 For well over 2500 years – certainly from Plato onwards – this important property of music has been discussed and written about. It underpins the now standard para-medical practice of music therapy. In addition, almost all 'alternative' medicine makes use of music for what is seen as its power to *calm.* However, another interpretation might be more accurate: that music, rather than calming (in the sense of disengaging the mind from its immediate concerns), actually *engages* the mind with the musical processes and transformations, transporting us, as it were, into a different state of awareness, notably our awareness of how time is passing.

7 I confess to having written about it myself in a number of publications, beginning with *Sound and Silence* (1970: 197–9). In 1965 I had come across Ernö Lendvai's article, 'Duality and Synthesis in the Music of Béla Bartók' (*New Hungarian Quarterly*, 3/7, 1962) – the first exposition of a theory he subsequently developed in *Béla Bartók: an Analysis of his Music* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1971). I was greatly influenced by his ideas, but later came to feel that, in a basic feature of his method, Lendvai was mistaken: he calculated the durations in numbers of bars whereas, in reality, we are concerned with the durations we *experience.* About such a crucial matter the score can tell us nothing: everything depends upon the duration of a piece *in performance.*

8 To give just one example, the completely unexpected rising demi-semiquavers [thirty-second notes] in the two final bars of the first fugue (C major) in Book 1 of Bach's '48'.

9 *Essays or Counsels Civill and Morall* (1612), no. 43.

10 Metaphorically, that is, since this could not strictly be true. It would be possible to conceive of a present that included the whole of temporal reality, but 'Whatever else it would be it would not be a present, for that out of which it had passed would not have ceased to exist, and that which is to exist would already be in that inclusive present' (Mead, 1932: 1).

11 Seamus Heaney, 'Poet's Chair' 3 (*The Spirit Level.* London, Faber and Faber, 1996).

12 Elizabeth Jennings, 'I count the moments', *Collected Poems 1953–1985* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986).

13 Gerard Manley Hopkins: unfinished poem on *Margaret Clitheroe*.

14 John Donne, Sermon XXII, St Paul's Cathedral, Easter Day 1627: 'the ordinary things in Nature would be greater miracles than the extraordinary, which we admire most, if they were done but once; The standing still of the Sun, for *Josuahs* use, was not, in it selfe so wonderful a thing, as that so vast and immense a body as the Sun should run so many miles in a minute; The motion of the Sun were a greater wonder than the standing still . . . .And onely the daily doing takes off the admiration.'

15 Much is made (by BBC Radio 3, for example) of 'live' broadcasts of concerts, suggesting that this offers something substantially different from recorded concerts. But apart from the fact that the broadcast is taking place at the same time as the event in the concert hall (a fact which is of no musical import whatsoever), what we hear through our loudspeakers is what the engineers want us to hear, and that may include all manner of acoustic modifications to make the broadcast sound 'more acceptable'. In this way it is the *broadcast* which is made important, not the music. The 'live presence', which is an essential part of musical experience, cannot be transmitted.

16 Handel and his contemporaries routinely altered the scores of major operatic and choral works to take advantage of new performance opportunities. Mozart would deliberately leave details to the chance of the concert occasion: for example, the piano concerto in D major K.537 (known as the 'Second Coronation' concerto) was composed in 1788 but the score was always incomplete. When Mozart performed the concerto in Frankfurt in October 1790 much of what the audience heard would have been improvised. No cadenzas were written down, some melodies in the piano right hand were in outline only, and *the entire left-hand part was left blank* – it was completed in 1794 by an anonymous hack so that the score could be published. Concert audiences listening to this concerto today are not generally aware that a substantial amount of what they hear is not by Mozart.

17 Cf the two Druze dance tune examples in the *New Grove* article on 'Israel'. (Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 9: 358–9.)

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