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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PETER MAXWELL DAVIES:

GABRIELI: CANZONA

J. & W. Chester, c 1980 (£2.20)

TWO PIANO PIECES

Chester, c 1980 (£1.75)

POINTS AND DANCES

Boosey & Hawkes, c 1978 (£1.60)

BUXTEHUDE: CANTATA: ALSO HAT GOTT DIE

WELT GELIEBET

Chester, c 1980 (£3.80)

TENEBRAE SUPER GESUALDO

Chester, c 1980 (£3.40)

FOOL'S FANFARE

Chester, c 1980 (£1.75)

RENAISSANCE SCOTTISH DANCES

B & H, c 1979 (£2.50)

PURCELL: FANTASIA UPON ONE NOTE

Chester, c 1980 (£1.55)

THREE ORGAN VOLUNTARIES

Chester, c 1979 (£1.40)

THREE STUDIES FOR PERCUSSION

Chester, c 1980 (£5.50)

ANAKREONTIKA

Chester, c 1981 (£3.80)

A MIRROR OF WHITENING LIGHT

B & H, c 1978 (£6.25)

DAVID ROBERTS

Stravinsky, the arch-plunderer of musical tradition, diagnosed his condition memorably: 'Whatever interests me, whatever I love, I wish to make my own (I am probably describing a rare form of kleptomania).'¹ That word 'kleptomania' gives us a flash of insight into the involuntary, compulsive nature of his raids on others' musical property. It is not hard to see the same kind of compulsion behind Maxwell Davies's — let us be genteel — borrowings.

Davies's predilection for borrowing is of course scarcely a secret: for a large number of his works it is obvious enough from their titles, programme notes, and musical substance that they incorporate borrowed material. Often such borrowings are easily explained as the means of making some definite dramatic, philosophical, or other 'point' through the music: placing recognisable material in an unfamiliar environment or transforming it in some not-too-radical way enables the composer to manipulate listeners' emotional responses to that material. It matters little whether the recognition is precise — there can be few listeners who fail to identify the bits of *Messiah* in *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) — or whether it is comparatively vague — there can be few listeners who will know the anonymous 15th-century mass that is the starting-point for *Missa super L'homme armé* (1968, revised 1971), yet most will be able to identify it with more or less exactness as 'old music' and respond accordingly. At other times, when the borrowings — despite hefty hints from titles and programme notes — are far from obvious, no such simple explanation is available. I find it all but impossible to imagine, for example, how even someone who goes out of his or her way to become familiar with the rather obscure 15th-century carol on which the *Ricercar and Doubles on 'To Many a Well'* (1959) are based (and I can assure the reader that every note does come from the carol) could by ear alone correctly identify its role in that work. Then again there are borrowings for which there are no external clues in title or note. Perhaps the most interesting of these are the self-borrowings. For example, though there are several obvious spin-offs from *Taverner* (1956-70, main years of composition 1962-68) — the two *Fantasias* (1962, 1964), *Seven In Nomine* (1963-65), *Points and Dances* (1970) — who is to suspect that a work like *Revelation and Fall* (1965-66), which has no explicit connection with the opera, is in fact entirely based on *Taverner* material? (Nearly all to be found in the 'first movement' of the *Second Fantasia*.)

A variety of different kinds of borrowing, from the overt to the esoteric, is exemplified in the miscellaneous collection of recently issued scores I am reviewing here. I shall deal with them in order of composition.

The *Canzona* (1969) is about the closest thing to a 'simple' arrangement that you will find in Davies's work. Giovanni Gabrieli's *Canzon septimi toni octo vocum* from the *Sacrae symphoniae* of 1597 is reorchestrated for wind quintet and strings so as to interpose the minimum amount of Davies

between the original and the listener. There is not a single dynamic, the sole performance direction is the word 'short', and for pages at a time there is quick passage-work where the complete absence of slurs and other articulatory marks makes it appear as if the engraver had the score snatched away from him before he had quite finished the job.

The *Two Piano Pieces* are *Sub tuam protectionem* (1969) and *Ut re mi* (1970). The first of these is based on a keyboard arrangement from the Buxheim Organbook of a motet by Dunstable. This remains recognisably intact for most of the piece and is allocated to the left hand (the restricted compass of the original makes this a reasonably manageable proposition); the right hand superimposes some wickedly difficult mensural canons.

The three brief, *pianissimo* movements of *Ut re mi* are broken up on the page into short fragments, each of which may use more than one notational convention: (1) neumatic plainchant notation (four-line stave); (2) 16th-century keyboard notation (diamond-headed notes on a six-line stave); (3) strictly measured modern notation; (4) proportional notation. For most of the time types (2) and (3) or (2), (3), and (4) are used simultaneously. One of the many difficulties these combinations produce for the pianist is the frequent necessity to look backwards to read the second pitch of the two-element neumes.

Ut re mi shows Davies at his most perplexing: the title obviously refers to the 16th-century tradition of keyboard pieces based on a cantus firmus of solmisation syllables, but though there is a passing resemblance between the opening and that of one of John Bull's settings of *Ut re mi fa sol la*, the piece makes only the scantiest of acknowledgments to the motif. Identifying the plainsong that runs through the piece doesn't particularly help matters either. It turns out, from a consultation of *An Index of Gregorian Chant*,² to be *Quodcumque in orbe*, a hymn to St Peter. The words do not provide any conspicuous clue to why it should have been chosen (as they often do for other works). My best guess at its significance concerns its place in the liturgical calendar. The first performance of *Ut re mi* was given by Stephen Pruslin, the work's dedicatee, on January 19, 1970. Now the feast at which the hymn *Quodcumque* is sung falls on January 18, but curiously enough, in the *Liber usualis*, all but the first line of the hymn appears on a page headed 'Festa Januarii. 19'. Whether the composer misread the date (as I confess I did when I first looked at it), whether he found the closest chant to the 19th he could (there being none uniquely associated with that day), whether he wrote the piece on the eve of the concert (a rather far-fetched theory, admittedly), or whether the date has no bearing at all I wouldn't like to say.

The *Points and Dances* have been available on record³ for some years and should be quite well known. The piece is an adaptation of material from *Taverner*, Act 1, Scene 3, and Act 2, Scene 2. The main focus of attention in these scenes is on the voices; the dances — very easily recognised as modelled on Renaissance originals — are, in the composer's happy phrase, a kind of 'muzak behind the arras', and much of their detail is lost. Various small adaptations are made in their arrangement as a concert item, most obviously in the instrumentation: the subdued colouring of the Act 1 music (guitar and strings) is brightened through the use of a more diverse, Fires-type ensemble, and the gloriously raucous Renaissance wind band of Act 2 (great double quint pommer and all) is toned down through the use of modern instruments.

Also hat Gott die Welt geliebet (1970) is a very simple arrangement for the Fires of London of a cantata attributed to Buxtehude (though its authenticity is doubtful). Into the middle of this jolly but harmless piece is inserted a kind of ghostly commentary on what are just about recognisable snippets from the cantata. It's a formula that I don't find particularly successful since the effect, which one might expect to be disturbing or thought-provoking, is just rather odd.

The plan of *Tenebrae super Gesualdo* (1972),⁴ another piece for the Fires, is much more successful in its juxtaposition of contrasted musical idioms: three short fragments of Gesualdo's *Tenebrae* responses, adapted for solo voice and guitar, are sandwiched between four slow, quiet commentaries. I have not analysed the work in any detail to find how dependent the commentaries are on Gesualdo, but I do see that the work incorporates material that in one form or another is fundamental to *Worldes Bliss* (1966-69), *Hymnos* (1967), *Stedman Caters* (1968), and *Hymn to St Magnus* (1972).

Such interconnections between works as diverse as these are unlikely to be suspected by the listener. Someone with a

quick ear who knows his Maxwell Davies is much more likely to recognise that *Fool's Fanfare* (1972) – a rather slight setting for speaker, brass, percussion, ukelele, and banjo of bits of fools' and clowns' speeches from Shakespeare – actually begins with the same music as the masque *Blind Man's Buff* (1972). (Another work on the same material is the short *Canon in memoriam I.S.* (1971).)

All these devious and bewildering interrelationships are absent from the *Renaissance Scottish Dances* (1973),⁵ a group of arrangements of anonymous originals, which despite the title includes several songs. In an unobtrusive, economic fashion Davies adds emphasis to the humour, boisterousness, pathos, and Scottishness of the pieces. The *Dances*, written for the Fires, appear in Boosey's Exploring Music Series, which is directed towards the educational market, and some leeway is given in the matter of instrumentation. One of the things that always appealed to me about the Fires' performances of the work was the sight of Stephen Pruslin, their virtuoso pianist, sitting patiently through the piece in order to play the simplest of drone parts in the final dance on a melodica or other fixed-reed instrument: I'm disappointed to find that the drone is omitted from the score, but it shouldn't take too much ingenuity to restore it.

Not so frequently performed as the *Fantasia and Two Pavans after Henry Purcell* (1968), but similar in spirit if gentler and less satirical in its humour, is the adaptation (again for the Fires) of Purcell's *Fantasia upon One Note* (1973).⁶ This is by far the most radical of the ostensible arrangements under review, dressing Purcell in a succession of different disguises. One of the delights of the piece is finding out in what unlikely place the single-note cantus firmus (C sharp) will turn up next. Another is the breaking down of lines of demarcation between the players: the harpsichordist has at times to rub the rim of a brandyglass and play the open string of a cello (both tuned to the cantus note); the percussionist is called upon to play, as well as his accustomed crotales, marimba, and rototoms, the banjo; the violinist joins the harpsichordist to play four-handed. The remaining three players, flautist, clarinetist, and regular cellist, must be presumed to have enough to cope with in the natural course of things, for they confine their activities to their usual instruments.

The *Three Organ Voluntaries* (1974) are the precursors of the better-known ensemble piece *Psalm 124* (1974), which makes few changes to them beyond instrumentating them and placing between them two new sections for guitar. Each of the voluntaries, which in form resemble chorale preludes, draws material from a different piece in the *Musica Britannica* volume *Music of Scotland 1500-1700*,⁷ which has provided the point of departure for a number of Davies's pieces since he went to Orkney. The second and third voluntaries make minor borrowings from John Fethy's *O God Abuse* and the anonymous *All Sons of Adam* respectively. The first claims to be based on David Peebles's setting of Psalm 124; however, a close look at *Musica Britannica* reveals that Davies has used the tune not from Peebles's setting but from that by Andrew Kemp, which appears lower down on the same page. An easy mistake to make, and a fairly trivial one since the tunes are very similar. The work should be well within the capabilities of most amateur organists.

Both the *Three Studies for Percussion* (1975) and *Anakreontika* (1976) make use of the matrix derived from the magic square of the Moon and the plainchant *Ave Maris Stella* – I described this in some detail in *Contact* 19.⁸ Thus they belong to a group of works that also includes *Ave Maris Stella* (1975), *Symphony no. 1* (1973-76), and *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1976). However, unlike these three works, neither makes any direct reference to the plainchant *Ave Maris Stella*; this produces the interesting paradox that via the matrix the plainchant, certainly in the *Three Studies* (I am less certain how far the influence of the matrix extends in *Anakreontika*), generates all the notes, yet is quite inaudible.

The *Three Studies* were written for Gosforth High School and for my money contain the most interesting 'music for young people' that Davies has composed in recent years. The ensemble comprises instruments for eleven players: four xylophones, two glockenspiels, two metallophones (all these of different sizes), woodblock, temple block, and cymbal. The music requires a fair amount of mallet technique and a pretty advanced rhythmic sense. Each of the first two studies is based on a different 'pathway' through the matrix (see my earlier review); the third superposes the two pathways, realising them in new ways. The third study is in essence the same music as that appearing between rehearsal numbers 16

and 21 in the first movement of *Symphony no. 1*; it would be a highly instructive exercise for a student composer to compare the two to see how the same material can be treated in such different ways.

Anakreontika is an extremely attractive setting of Ancient Greek lyrics for soprano, alto flute, cello, and harpsichord. It has not been performed all that frequently, though it deserves to be.

In attempting to understand Davies's imaginative world, sooner or later one comes up against his involvement with various occult systems of thought, notably alchemy. It would be unwise to dismiss these as silly hocus-pocus, though there is a great deal of foolishness on such subjects in print. For Davies the key lies in Jung's psychology. Jung, who wrote on the subject extensively,⁹ saw alchemy not as a primitive blundering towards modern chemistry but as a symbolic representation of aspects of the unconscious. One thing at least that even the most sceptical (among whom I place myself) must admit is that the symbols and images of alchemy have great potency. A rationalist explanation of their power might be that they very obviously stand for something, but what that something is is obscure; hence one's imagination – conscious or unconscious – steps in and supplies its own subjective interpretation. The I Ching and Tarot cards may be explained in much the same way: they are tools for gaining access to the unconscious, for suggesting possibilities, for overcoming mental blocks.

A central image in Davies's work is the alchemical transmutation of base metal into gold. The implications for working with borrowed materials are fairly evident: a musically trivial fragment may be transformed into a large, imposing work that is wholly different in character, yet paradoxically identical in substance. The contrary image, that of the transformation of gold into dross, is matched by the cheapening and coarsening of a fine piece of music for dramatic or philosophical ends (for example, the *Fantasia and Two Pavans*). One can go so far without being rashly speculative, but it seems not unlikely that for Davies the analogies between alchemical and musical processes go deeper than this.

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In his programme note to *A Mirror of Whitening Light* (1976-77) for chamber orchestra, the composer writes of the work's alchemical programme:

The title 'Speculum Luminis Dealbensis' is alchemical, referring to the purification or 'whitening' process, by which a base metal may be transformed into gold, and, by extension, to the purification of the human soul. It also refers to the Spirit Mercurius, or Quicksilver, the agent or generator of this transformation process . . . Suitably enough, the 'agent' of the work, in the alchemical sense, is the magic square of Mercurius . . . The number 8 governs the whole structure, and the sharp listener who knows his 'Liber Usualis', will recognise emerging from the constant transformation processes at key points, 8 note summaries of the plain-song *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and *Sederunt Principes*, whose implied text (if you are prepared to play my game!) have some bearing on the implied alchemy involved.

Since such a number of people expressed interest in my brief account in *Contact 19* of the use of the matrix derived from the magic square of the Moon in *Ave Maris Stella*, I shall follow it up here with some parallel details of the square of Mercury in *A Mirror of Whitening Light*.

The starting-point is the plainchant *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Example 1(a)) which Davies mentions. (This, it should be noted, is not the famous sequence for Whitsunday, but an isolated antiphon labelled 'Ad invocandum Spiritum Sanctum' in the *Liber usualis*.) The eight-note 'summary' is shown in Example 1(b). The following recipe generates the square:

- (1) Transpose the 'summary' eight times so that each transposition begins with each successive pitch class of the summary.
- (2) Enter this 8x8 transposition square in a square grid with cells numbered 1-64 (Example 2).
- (3) Reorder these cells so that the numbers make up the magic square of Mercury (Example 3);¹⁰ the pitch classes will now (with exceptions) be ordered as they are in Example 4.
- (4) From each of the numbers of the square of Mercury repeatedly subtract 8 until they all fall between 1 and 8; the numbers (which represent durations) will now (with exceptions) appear as in Example 4.

The exceptions in Example 4 are the two pairs of cross-hatched squares, which have exchanged positions. Why they should do this is hard to say, but it produces an imbalance in the otherwise symmetrical (possibly too symmetrical) systems of pitch classes and durations.

As with the matrix of *Ave Maris Stella*, Example 4 is explored by diverse pathways to produce the greater part of the material. Example 5 shows six different pathways that

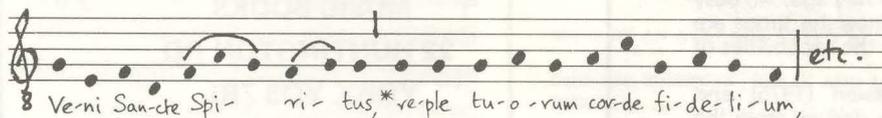
generate important cantus-firmus-like lines: (a) starts at rehearsal letter F and is shared by bassoon and english horn (see Example 6(a) for the opening); (b) starts at J and is shared by trombone, horn, trumpet, and double bass (see Example 6(b)); (c) starts at Q and is shared between clarinet and trombone; (d) also starts at Q and is taken by the cello; (e) starts at W and is shared by bassoon and trombone; (f) starts at Z and is taken by the flute. Subordinate material is generated from the matrix in more complex ways.

There is nothing magical about the employment of a magic square as an aid to composition. In the case of *A Mirror of Whitening Light* the use of the Mercury matrix is immensely successful, for it contributes to one of the composer's very finest works; in the case of *Westerlings* (1976) the same matrix does nothing to prevent the work from being one of Davies's most disappointing. Systems may help to load the dice, but they guarantee nothing. On the other hand, it is, I think, an error to condemn a system simply because it entails arbitrariness, 'juggling with numbers', or some wholly untenable theory: as intellectually unpalatable as the means may be, it is the ends that matter.

NOTES:

- ¹ Igor Stravinsky, 'Memories and Commentaries', *Stravinsky in Conversation with Robert Craft* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 238.
- ² John R. Bryden and David G. Hughes, compilers, *An Index of Gregorian Chant* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969)
- ³ Recorded on Argo ZRG 712.
- ⁴ Recorded on Unicorn KP 8002.
- ⁵ Recorded on L'Oiseau lyre DSLO 12.
- ⁶ Recorded on Unicorn KP 8005.
- ⁷ Kenneth Elliott, ed., *Music of Scotland 1500-1700*, Musica Britannica, vol. 15 (London: Stainer and Bell, 2nd, rev. edn, 1964).
- ⁸ *Contact 19* (Summer 1978), pp. 26-29.
- ⁹ In particular see *Psychology and Alchemy, Alchemical Studies, and Mysterium coniunctionis*, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vols. 12-14, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- ¹⁰ Of the enormous number of magic squares (arrays of numbers whose rows, columns, and long diagonals add up to the same total) it is possible to form, seven have been associated with the seven planets of the Ptolemaic universe (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon). The earliest extant document in which they are tabulated is *De occulta philosophia*, a book on magic by the Renaissance polymath Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim published in 1531. Though Agrippa was probably following an older Cabalistic source, there is little evidence to support the extreme claims that are often made for the antiquity of the planetary squares.

Example 1(a)



Example 2

G	E	F	D	F#	A	G#	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
E	C#	D	B	D#	F#	F	A
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
F	D	Eb	C	E	G	F#	A#
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
D	B	C	A	C#	E	D#	G
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
F#	D#	E	Db	F	Ab	G	B
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
A	F#	G	E	G#	B	Bb	D
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
G#	F	F#	Eb	G	Bb	A	C#
49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
C	A	Bb	G	B	D	C#	F
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64

(b)



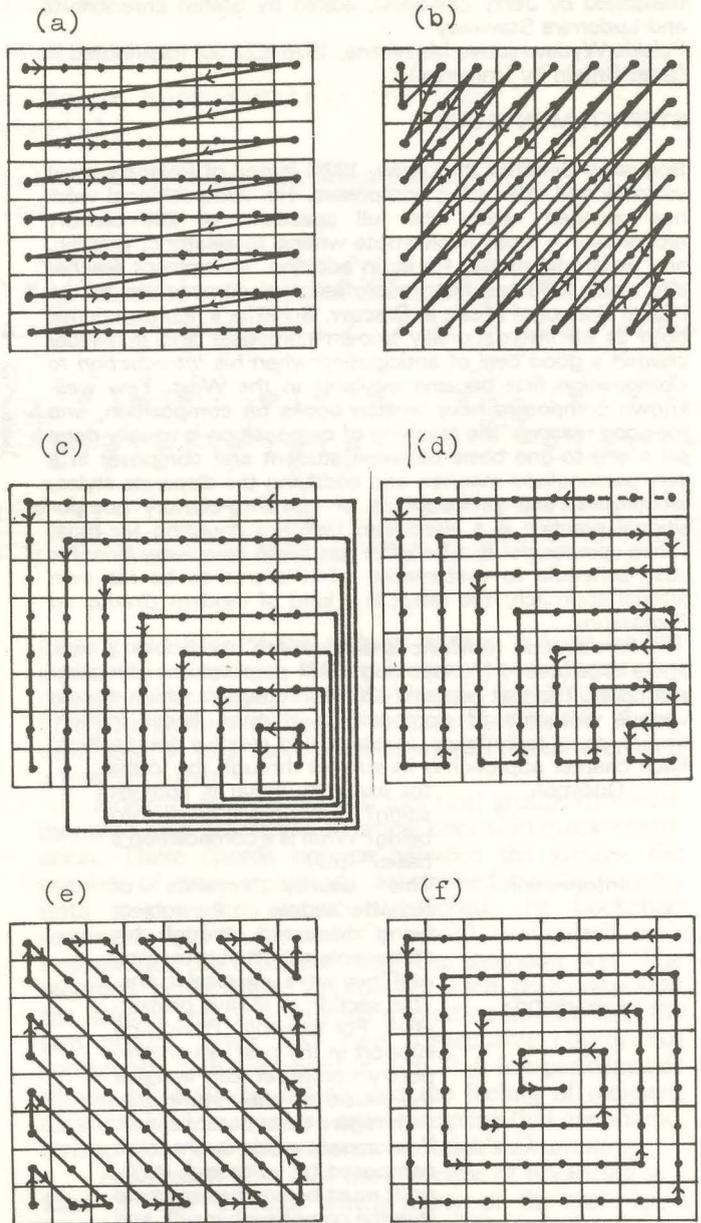
Example 3

8	58	59	5	4	62	63	1
49	15	14	52	53	11	10	56
41	23	22	44	45	19	18	48
32	34	35	29	28	38	39	25
40	26	27	37	36	30	31	33
17	47	46	20	21	43	42	24
9	55	54	12	13	51	50	16
64	2	3	61	60	6	7	57

Example 4

C 8	A 2	A# 3	F# 5	D 4	D 6	C# 7	G 1
C# 1	F 7	F# 6	D# 4	G 5	D 3	C# 2	C# 8
A 1	F# 7	G 6	E 4	D 8	D# 3	D 2	C# 5
G 8	D# 2	E 3	C# 5	D 1	C# 6	G 7	A 4
B 8	B 2	C 3	F 5	C# 4	E 6	D# 7	F# 1
F 1	A# 7	B 6	C 4	E 5	G 3	F# 2	A# 8
E 1	A 7	A# 6	B 4	D# 5	F# 3	F 2	A 8
F 8	E 2	F 3	B 5	G 4	A 6	G# 7	C 1

Example 5



Example 6(a)

Example 6(a) **F** Andante $\text{♩} = c60 \pm$
bn

(b)

(b) **S** poco a poco più animato
tbn