

British Piano Music of the 20th Century

Richard Deering

If the first golden age of British musical creativity, beginning in the early seventeenth century, may be said to have ended with the death of Purcell in 1695, a second such age certainly began around the first years of the twentieth century, culminating in a second Elizabethan Age of musical glory. Elgar, Holst, Delius and Parry initially, then Bridge, Scott, Ireland and Vaughan Williams broke upon the scene in a renaissance which led to a second half twentieth-century full of originality, a wide diversity of ideas and an abundance of composers working in every conceivable musical medium. That creativity is nowhere more strikingly demonstrated than in the genre of works for piano solo.

AS AN IMPRESSIONABLE RURAL lad I came to London to study the piano with Frank Merrick, who not only was celebrated as the only surviving pupil of Leschetitzky – and by consequence could trace his musical education line back to Beethoven – but also was known as an authority on Field, Bax, de Fumerie and a champion of living British composers. Through Frank I met Rawsthorne and presented a thesis upon *British Piano Music from 1939 to 1960* for my graduation. Thereafter I developed a lifelong fascination with British and Irish composers and included their work in all of my recitals worldwide.

Writing successfully for the piano presents several problems for a composer – due in part to the instrument's mechanical limitations but also through the wonderful heritage of piano writing that seems, within the instrument's short history, to have covered every kind of communication. However, the success and quantity of the piano compositions of Bridge, Ireland and Scott seemed to liberate every subsequent generation of British composer to the point that the years under consideration contained a marvellous and wide-ranging literature of piano compositions from young new voices as well as those whose voices and styles had matured.

A significant group, all born within the first six years of the start of the twentieth-century, I had the privilege of meeting while still young in my career. Some of them I knew quite well and others I simply met in the course of preparing their works for performance. Two of them were accomplished pianists, Alan Rawsthorne and Alan Bush, but the others, Michael Tippett, William Alwyn, Arnold Cooke and Elisabeth Lutyens all understood the piano – its strengths and limitations – well. Importantly, this group of composers also demonstrated vastly differing ways of utilising the piano's strengths and heralded the way in which younger composers could develop their own unique pianistic voices without being straitjacketed by the legacy of the past literature.

Michael Tippett's four *Piano Sonatas* are, under any assessment criteria, major contributions to the piano's literature. The most radical of the four is probably **Sonata No.2** written in 1962. In the composer's own programme note we learn that '*everything precedes (proceeds?) by statement. The effect is one of accumulation; through constant addition of new material; by variation and repetition. There is virtually no development, and particularly no bridge-passages. The formal balance comes from the balance of*

similarities.' In such a structure Tippett had reassessed the notion of sonata construction in much the same way that Liszt had radicalised the format in the previous century. There are eight main elements, which gradually interact and break each other down with the circular nature of the work underlined with the reappearance of the opening material abbreviated at the end: much the same approach was used in the structuring of the *Piano Sonata* by Edward Gregson later. Ten years later Tippett returns to the three-movement form in his **Piano Sonata No. 3** but, as in late Beethoven, allows each movement to seem like a resolution of the previous movement. Interestingly, Tippett clarified his approach to piano writing by writing that he senses virtuosity '*through arms and hands rather than fingers, whose skilled movements are beyond me. I am stimulated by the duality of the hands and their possible perceptible independence in one compositional direction and aural unity in another.*' Written to a commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, **Piano Sonata No.4** continues the fascination with late-Beethoven structuring and adds a slow fifth movement to further develop various formal devices although Tippett's strong fondness for jazz is more to the fore, especially the 'blues'. In all of these writings elements of Tippett's piano style remain constant; use of the entire keyboard (often with the hands wide apart), hammered repeated chords, complex and often superimposed ostinati and a powerful rhythmic drive.

Elisabeth Lutyens arrived at dodecaphony through her fascination with the *Fantasias* of Purcell and, although her form of serialism now seems all of a piece with the post-Schoenberg tradition, she had discovered this language for herself in virtual isolation. Probably being influenced by her architect father she was pre-occupied, in all of her compositions, with shape and form. Before composing any piece she always ensured that the initial basic cell, however small, contained the possibilities within it for change and development in various proportions, tension, relaxations and speeds in relation to each other. Once the cell had been conceived – sometimes just a few scribbled notes – the aural and formal possibilities grew in her mind with these structural thoughts forming the purpose and gesture of the whole work. Only when these formats were clear would she write the whole work down, thereby creating the impression that she wrote quickly. Her works follow a spare and logical form of development: there is always a certain motivic life and shape that carries the work along. Malcolm Williamson – one of her many important students – once accused her of being '*criminally diffident*' as she was never concerned with public attention or appreciation, nor was she interested in how performers realised her work. Once, when recording her works for radio, the producer and I differed strongly over an aspect of interpretation so we asked Liz to arbitrate. When I played her both versions she failed to notice or care about the differences! Many of the starting points for her compositions came from outside of music as she had an obsession with natural forces – light and dark, heat and cold – and this contrast can be found in many of her mature works. Within the time frame of this article there are 3 main Lutyens piano works: **Piano e Forte** is a substantial and virtuosic work of 6 clear sections within a through-composed style. Here Lutyens uses an overlapping 12-note row, typical of Webern, but with several phrases ending with slurred couplets like tonal resolutions or 'feminine endings'. Compared to her earlier works the writing here is more harmonically and rhythmically complex with a wide range of dynamic and textural variations. A feature of the piano writing is the frequent use of trills and tremolos with constant mathematical variations within the rhythmic treatment of repeated single notes. Four years later, in 1962, she wrote the **5 Intermezzi** which are brief, lyrical and very succinct, but the most radical solo piano work appeared in 1973, **Plenum**, which I was honoured to premiere at the Wigmore

Hall in 1974. The title means, “*space filled with matter*” and here she reverts to the Webernesque preoccupation with static energy and inactivity where resonance and overtones evaporate towards and into silence. She notates the work without bar lines and implies a sense of proportionate improvisation within phrases that are separated by commas and pauses. She also uses plucked notes, although later felt uncomfortable about using such “gimmicks”. As with **Piano e Forte** of fifteen years earlier she frequently links sections with a trill upon C sharp/D sharp, which also happens to begin her own favourite piano work, Debussy’s *L’Isle Joyeuse*. **Plenum** is a totally static work with no formal structure or sense of melodic, rhythmic or harmonic progression but it does achieve a wonderful sense of beauty through the suspension of time and the shimmering pauses that sustain vibrating discordant textures bouncing back and forth within long pedals. I once programmed **Plenum** in a recital held in the American University of Beirut during one of the quieter spells of the Lebanese Civil War. In one of the long silences within the work a nearby Syrian tank deafeningly fired off a round, which, aurally, lent a new definition to the meaning of the work’s title and when Liz heard she commented that she was, at last, regarded as a truly revolutionary composer! However, she was quickly brought back to reality when I recounted that, after a recital in Christchurch, New Zealand, a lady came backstage and declared that, *‘if that piece was written by a lady she should be ashamed of herself’*

Tippett and Lutyens had a powerful effect upon younger composers but the less revolutionary devices of Alwyn have always fascinated pianists, as utilised in his two later piano works, **Fantasy Waltzes** and **12 Preludes**. While being interested in new developments, Alwyn was keen to introduce new ideas into tonality rather than merely modify that concept. Writing in the *Musical Times* Alwyn states that: *‘the genuine artist cannot be content to chatter to a few initiates alone!’* In 1951 Alwyn had written **Sonata alla Toccata**, which became one of the most performed works written by a British composer post 1945 and many of the concise scalic devices used there were carried, in more developed form, into the **12 Preludes** of 1957 with some of those preludes never actually sounding their tonic notes.

Arnold Cooke was the first major composer that I ever met; we literally collided into each other on the precipitous stairs that linked the labyrinthine floors of Dinely Studios in Blandford Street. As in his publicity photograph he was inexplicably wearing a sou’wester and, knowing where he lived, I immediately christened him the Lifeboatman of Kent! He was a truly modest and unassuming man who, like several composers that I knew – most notably Fricker and John Paynter – shunned the limelight and disliked the attention when called to the platform to acknowledge the audience’s acclaim after a performance of their work. I gave the first London performances of **Sonata No.2** and the **Suite No. 2 for Piano** in the Purcell Room and Wigmore Hall respectively and the works are, undoubtedly, well written for the instrument, which was in itself impressive because Cooke was not a fluent pianist himself, but his unwavering loyalty to the Hindemithian principles limits their lasting effect and restricted the composer’s own development and performances. Whereas other instruments, with a less established repertoire, have taken Cooke’s works to their lists of standard fare the piano works have been sadly neglected. Whenever I played these works in London, Cooke would bring stalwarts of his Kent village to the concert and in Green Rooms I talked with the village policeman and postmistress – such was his simple unassuming charm as a man. Once, during a Music Club concert in Kent, I noticed Cooke within the modest audience and decided to play, as an encore, the very beautiful *Sarabande* from his very well written **Suite in C** and he was visibly very moved.

Similar to Cooke, Rawsthorne's piano music is not vast, is well crafted and is sadly less performed than it merits. During the 1960's/70's most conservatoire practice room corridors would resound to efforts to master some of the trickier parts of Rawsthorne's work, but, sadly no more. As with Alwyn's **Sonata alla Toccata** these are works that have a refreshing hint of modernity whilst still able to be accessible to the average concertgoer. Rawsthorne's style is immediately recognisable and it refuses to accommodate fads or changes in fashion. Unlike most English composers his output is almost totally instrumental and symphonic with no real interest in vocal writing. He was a great admirer of Haydn and he similarly could be called a "musician's musician" because of his way of curtailing melodic expansion, writing economically and omitting expected repetitions. He had also, like many composers of his generation, a love-hate relationship with the music of Brahms, which he thought to be too thick textured and clumsy with regard to form. However, the similarity between the opening of Brahms' *Piano Concerto No.1* and Rawsthorne's *Piano Concerto No. 2* is uncanny. Being in the forefront of English lyrical and expressive writing he was often criticised for employing the same techniques in his 1960 works as in his earlier 1930/40 compositions, but William Walton wrote in 1980 that:

Rawsthorne appears to me to be one of the most accomplished and talented. His impeccable technique, the continual inventiveness and the clarity of his contrapuntal thought, always make his music interesting, personal and pleasurable to hear, unlike so much contemporary work. The music is instantly recognisable, and the mark of true originality – laconic, elegant and disciplined – is in everything he writes.

He had studied the piano with Egon Petri and, incidentally, it was through Rawsthorne that I became the teacher of Petri's grandson. The piano is an integral part of his work, but mostly in chamber ensembles. The **Four Bagatelles** were written in 1938 but regularly performed for three or four decades thereafter and they were included in my own South Bank debut, together with the *Bagatelles* of Lutyens and Schurmann, in a Redcliffe Concert that I shared with an equally young Felicity Lott and Graham Johnson performing works by Anthony Milner. The style of writing that persisted for the rest of Rawsthorne's career was clearly-forged, with its weaving of long melodic lines with chromatic counterpoint and biting syncopated chords. The harmony, which is instantly recognisable, consists of an intricate interplay between major thirds and minor thirds with a kaleidoscope of false relations despite there being a strong sense of tonality. The later **Sonatina** continues in the same vein and also continues the sense of beginning positively and without introductory preamble. The sense of triadic harmonic construction is possibly more pronounced here, but the economic counterpoint writing preserves the clarity of texture. Like many of his works, several movements or pieces within whole works end in an unresolved and slightly unsettling manner, which leads the ear naturally, in the hope of resolution, further into the work. The use of brief motifs, often only three or four notes, becomes apparent too. The next work for piano, **Four Romantic Pieces**, written in 1953, was written for Frank Merrick and it was after their performance at Merrick's Wigmore Hall recital to mark his 80th anniversary that I first met Rawsthorne. These pieces are substantial in quality but relatively short in length. The passion for Chopin's style and form is obvious, even within the opening few bars and the sense of tonality is achieved in a manner similar to Debussy by simply repeating the tonic pedal note rather than proceeding through formal harmonic progression. The sense of triadic confusion persists right to the final bar when a quiet sustained C major second inversion chord is left, after a confusing D flat major octave

theme has exhausted itself, above a low octave pedal C. Rawsthorne's final piano work was written, somewhat predictably, for his fellow Mancunian, John Ogden. As a result the 1967 **Ballade** is a truly virtuosic work that is clearly modelled on Chopin's *Ballade No.2*. In this work Rawsthorne seems intent on incorporating every aspect of his pianistic inventiveness and at its long-sustained final climax he manages to achieve one of the most exhilarating pieces of twentieth-century piano writing. All of Rawsthorne's ideas stem from the exploration of tonality and its sense of tension and relaxation but he did use, occasionally, the principles rather than the mechanics of serialism, but the wholehearted use of serialism would have seriously hindered his need to be expressive. He remained resolutely true to his original ideals although he was well versed in all of the alternative approaches and, unlike Stevens, Alwyn or Rubbra, he made no attempt to reconcile his approach with modern thinking. He had an inner strength and conviction that protected him from the fierce onslaughts that came in the direction of many non-modern composers of the 1960's, but he was hugely respectful of modern work.

An almost exact contemporary of Alwyn, and born also in Northampton – which later produced Malcolm Arnold and Trevor Hold – was Edmund Rubbra. Rubbra was completely unmoved by musical fashions but he was challenged by reading a chance-purchased book by Ezra Pound which reflected upon what happened between sounds, be they words, harmonies or notes. This had similarly troubled Debussy and several French composers and Rubbra was led to solve the problem by exploring a new perspective upon tonality by the use of the unexpected and the juxtapositioning of the apparently unrelated. He developed the idea of using common sounds in uncommon circumstances. Whereas Stevens had used a similar approach to effect unexpected modulations, Rubbra used to introduce unexpected notes or chords. By building aural bridges between unrelated chords he managed to set up relationships between tonalities, which, in turn, helped to build form and structure. His spiritual leanings allied him to the composers of the sixteenth century and he strengthened that with an application of Elizabethan-style counterpoint in his writing. The late piano work, **Eight Preludes, Op. 131**, Rubbra regarded as one of his greatest achievements and it is his only significant composition for solo piano. Each of the eight short works was to be regarded as a paragraph within a whole organic development and, most decidedly, not as a separate piece. The use of organum-like fifths, imitative counterpoint and distant tonalities within such a small timeframe is quite extraordinary. Some of the *Preludes*, such as no. 3, have a key signature that bears no relationship to its tonality and, although it appears to finish on the dominant, it has, through its brief sixteen-bar length, achieved a sense of conclusion through its canonic use of modulatory chromatic writing. Although, superficially, a traditionalist, he has become a form of progressive by reinterpreting the past.

An unsung composer in the wider realms of the British Isles is Daniel Jones who, as early as 1938, developed a system of complex metres. This use of flexible time signatures gave his music a unique voice and none more so than in his three sets of **Bagatelles**, totalling twenty-four in all, written between 1943 and 1955 and performed periodically through into the 1960's and occasionally now. However, like Fricker, Jones' appeal is restricted because he falls between the two main stalls of modernity and traditionalism. Whereas the complex metric ideas recall the rhythmic developments of Stravinsky and Tippett, the addition of modal patterns becomes akin to early Messiaen. These unique modal patterns that appear throughout the later **Bagatelles** continue beyond the octave above the starting note and, in each hand, span a minor ninth; intervening notes are not used and repetitions of included notes only occur at the

identical register. Later pieces within this vast collection are built entirely from one motif, which is frequently transposed but never altered or developed. Although Jones's Symphonies and Quartets sustain his reputation, the importance of his **Bagatelles** for piano cannot be over-stressed. They are very important contributions to the piano repertoire.

Born between the two World Wars, the next generation of composers: Richard Rodney Bennett, Thomas Wilson, Iain Hamilton, Thea Musgrave, William Wordsworth, Alexander Goehr, Ronald Stevenson, Robert Sherlaw-Johnson, Harrison Birtwistle, David Bedford, Alun Hoddinott, Kenneth Leighton, Bernard Stevens, Peter Racine Fricker, Peter Dickinson, Lennox Berkeley and Alan Ridout wrote, in several cases, extensively and significantly for the solo piano with a number of performances by various performers throughout the twentieth-century. A number of these composers, most notably Bennett, Stevenson, Dickinson and Sherlaw-Johnson, were distinguished pianists in their own right and often gave performances of their own work. Wilson, Stevens and Ridout privileged me by letting me give first performances of their compositions, with the first two of those composers dedicating works to me. Alan Ridout was a prolific composer for the piano and often wrote short pieces as 'thank-you' tokens. After staying with June Emmerson, Alan thanked her for her hospitality by writing a very short group of pieces with each movement descriptive of a different room in her windmill home. A massive **Piano Sonata** by Ridout was faxed to me by the composer the day before he died and I gave it its first performance in Doncaster, as close to Ampleforth – the monks there being the beneficiaries of his will – as I could manage, and subsequently recorded it for ABC Radio in Sydney, but, as far as I know, no other pianist has performed this very playable and dramatic work.

Peter Racine Fricker remains a little bit of an enigma to most performers and promoters, probably not helped by living overseas. Born in 1920, his career seemed to constantly ebb and flow with changes of whim and fancy. In the 1950's he was established and winning countless prizes and important commissions but within a decade his music had virtually disappeared from London concert programmes and he left Britain to take up a teaching post in California, where he was very content. In a review of his 50th birthday concert the *Guardian* commented that his music had no wide appeal because he wrote for a contemporary audience of two decades earlier, but whilst it is true that he did subscribe to the trends of the 1970's he also did not adhere to the 1950's trends towards athematicism or dodecaphony. In 1984 he was the featured composer at the Three Choirs' Festival, at which I gave a recital, and his music was well received and discussed by large audiences. Some find his music shallow but it is also well constructed. The most probable explanation is that he paid the price of being a pioneer and had to give way to those that followed, particularly because he was so well established before the new wave of young serial composers reached their peak in the late 1950's. He was amongst the first generation of Schoenbergian composers in Britain and perhaps that was what restricted his appeal in the 1970's. However, his contribution to the piano literature is significant. His music has a continentally influenced toughness, probably instilled in him by his teacher Mátyás Seiber, with many features that remind one of Schoenberg and Hindemith. He was also, undoubtedly, influenced in aspects of the craft through assisting Tippett at Morley College. Melodic lines were important to him and, in his later piano works such as the 1961 **Twelve Studies**, he evolved pitch-rows, based upon intervals rather than the chromatic scale, that were used thematically and harmonically. The **Twelve Studies** are full of pianistic and original ideas based upon thematic development from intervallic progression and

bound together with a romantic piano virtuosity. Within *Study No. 6* the arpeggio texture is founded upon inverted and retrograde forms of a series of intervals in varying rhythmic patterns while the unique device of increasing each succeeding melodic interval by a semitone appears in a Fricker piano work for the first time. **Episodes 1**, of 1967/8 and **Episodes 2** of 1969 continue these pitch-row experiments in short sectional structures and the mosaic form continues into Fricker's largest solo piano work, **Anniversary**, written in 1977. The title of this work refers to several coinciding anniversaries in 1977 – the Queen's Silver Jubilee, the fortieth anniversary of Fricker's admission to RCM, the thirtieth anniversary of his first professional performance and the eightieth anniversary of Brahms' death. Fricker combines material from Brahms' *4th Symphony* with his own and then transforms them into the rhythm of Brahms' *3rd Piano Sonata*, which was the first work he studied at RCM. He remained remarkably consistent in pursuit of his own idiom and his own fascination with intervals. Some of his works are without a key-centre, whereas others have a key-centre established by a pedal-note; there is a consistent sense of a logical tonal procedure as well as a strong sense of symmetry. Tonality was, for him, more an end product of the process rather than the starting-point for the composing process.

Bernard Stevens wrote extensively for the piano and used the piano's resources well. Hans Keller wrote: '*Stevens does not wholly succeed in solving the modern harmonic-contrapuntal problem.....but his attempt is worth a hundred would-be modern pieces that never show the slightest awareness of this problem's existence.*' He seems to plough a furrow not previously attempted by a British composer since the seventeenth-century. His music, and particularly his piano music, has the dark sombre colourings of Brahms – his music seldom uses the higher treble registers – but the Englishness is still very apparent. He often stated that his prime musical goal was an unquestionable command of counterpoint. The **Sonata in one movement** of 1955 uses the refrain and verse format with the refrain in eight-part harmony combined with rhythmic diminution, altering time-signatures and melodic material derived from the notes of the opening chords. In 1980 Stevens wrote the much briefer but more interesting **Fuga alla Sarabanda** for me. Within just 43 bars he makes a masterly attempt at reconciling 12-note music with tonality by writing an atonal melodic line with the vertical "*harmonic*" aspects tonally anchored in E major/minor. The sarabande rhythm gives the structure a recognisable form and the fugal voices appear a tone higher and a tone lower.

Although not performed regularly now, the music of Iain Hamilton was performed frequently during the period between 1950 and 1970. Fond of repeated clusters, similar to those of Stockhausen in his later **Klavierstücke**, Hamilton builds up dense chromatic clusters from individual notes in his **Sonata No.2**, written in 1973. The work is notable for its brevity with 5 clear movements condensed into 11 minutes and uses silence and sustained sounds quite liberally.

Thomas Wilson wrote for the solo piano throughout his compositional life although the complete works can be planned for performance within an hour. He had a meticulously balanced view of his work, probably derived from his youthful training for the priesthood, and considered each individual note very thoroughly. The austere world of the 1959 **Piano Sonata**, which makes concessions to atonality, gives way, twenty years later, to reasoned textures of amazing stillness quietness and slowness, over sustained pedals in **Incunabula**. In the programme note the composer states:

formal devices like recapitulation play very little part in the work's structure, the unity of the music deriving from the essential expressive coherence of the various ideas, which, like prisms, offer different views of the same reality and the way in which tensions generated between these conflicting images are developed and finally resolved.

This inward looking piece is perfectly suited to the intimacy of the piano and explores the peculiarities of the instrument perfectly in a modern language. Written and dedicated to me and performed by me worldwide over the past twenty years to enthusiastic receptions, the work uses material common to surrounding works, including the **Piano Concerto**, and marks a turning point in Wilson's style. From this point he seems pre-occupied with economy of notation and Spartan textures. Despite his avuncular personality he was a deeply private and intense man with strong moral convictions and all this comes to the fore in this last piano composition. In his *Guardian* obituary of Wilson, John Maxwell Geddes wrote that Tom was '*the father of the 20th-Century revival in Scottish music.*' The implication in that was that the younger generation of Scottish composers, including Edward McGuire, who is mentioned later, regarded Tom as the one person who had opened up the paths of possibilities within the Scottish musical scene. Whereas these younger composers strove to be in the vanguard of new ideas Tom was quietly integrating modern ideas, such as serialism and aleatoric effects, into a traditional and more approachable texture. Tom was a humble and gregarious man who was appreciative of all that he saw and heard and together with his close friends – Wordsworth, Leighton and others – formed the backbone of Scottish musical activity through the second half of the twentieth-century.

Concurrent with Thomas Wilson's influence upon the Glasgow music scene, Edinburgh was musically motivated by Ronald Stevenson who evolved a highly individual and exploratory voice that was strongly influenced by Busoni's concept of integrating experimentation with traditional forms. Stevenson strove to blend Celtic folk traditions with the ideas of European art-music. His magnum opus, that still causes a stir when performed, is the monumental **Passacaglia on DSCH** which takes eighty minutes to perform and is formed of hundreds of variations over the initialled ground bass. The work's virtuosity lies not only in the pianistic inventiveness, which is itself a compendium of pianistic techniques, but also in the astonishing fertility with which Stevenson treats this brief motif. Completely devoid of any contemporary fashions it is nevertheless one of the most outstanding contributions to twentieth-century piano music. Amidst the extremely demanding passages there are sections suitable for average pianistic techniques. The ground, consisting of a seven bar motif, appears always at the same relative pitch irrespective of how complex the tonalities become. Although technically pitched in C minor it is largely structured around D minor giving a prevailing Russian feeling with the flattened second. There are passages of effects demanded of the performer – glissandi on the strings around silently depressed keys, fingernail glissandi on the strings and slapping the strings – and throughout there is a sense of 'world' music in the form of simulated drumming effects, suggestions of a bagpipe scale and quotes from Chopinesque Polonaises, Spanish fandangos and a quote from a celebrated Patrick Mor MacCrimmon piping lament. All of these diverse elements are, in the final section, brought into contact with the more intellectual aspects of the European tradition with a massive triple fugue over the unexhausted ground. Ingeniously, one of the fugue subjects has a suggestion of serialism, in that it uses eleven notes of the chromatic scale, and another subject is based upon *BACH*, while the third subject is the *Dies Irae* plainchant.

During the 1950's William Wordsworth's **Ballade** was performed quite often by its dedicatee, Clifford Curzon and here Wordsworth begins to find his true voice as he relinquished both English living and lyricism with his move to the Scottish Highlands. The grander scale of emotions and desire to over-awe the listener are achieved more by emotive power than by mere technical display. Although many of Wordsworth's compositions were prompted by sad events in his life the elegiac quality comes most to the fore in the 1967 **Valediction** where the authority is gained from the economy of notes with frequent use of silences and pauses with the reflective astringency created by the bi-tonality and the 'Scotch-snap' rhythm gives a sense of his new nationalism.

The fondness for intellectual forms in the 1950's was also demonstrated in Kenneth Leighton's **Fanatasia Contrappuntistica**, which won the 1956 Busoni Prize. After a declamatory opening there is an exciting Toccata, a polyphonic Chorale and two Fugas. I remember hearing this work at the Wigmore Hall, whilst still a student and thinking it to be the most exciting piece of new piano music I had ever heard. The sense of fantasy continued into what many consider to be Leighton's finest work, the Op.51 **Conflicts** where contrapuntal writing is prominent and the typically dry-textured and skittishly nervous scherzando effects are never far from the surface. Towards the end of the work the performer is allowed the choice between a frenetic written cadenza and an improvised violent cadenza upon four dense chords prescribed by the composer. Either Leighton wanted to return to the earliest understandings of a cadenza, felt unable to write a sufficiently violent cadenza himself or wanted the performer to demonstrate a personal sense of 'conflict' and explore frenzy and indiscipline against the precise notation of elsewhere in the piece.

During the 1950's the pendulum of musical fashion in Britain began to swing away from the traditional towards more Continental European ideas, as several of the above mentioned composers demonstrate. There was a growing dissatisfaction with neo-modalism and neo-classicism and considerable excitement concerning the ideas of Schoenberg and Webern, whose work was just beginning to be heard in Britain. This trend had both a positive and negative effect upon the listening public. For many there was a much-needed change to the musical scene, but the tides of change were too overwhelming for others. Those advocating change often did so at the total expense and exclusion of anything that was reminiscent of the past. Thus, on the positive side was an exciting sense of discovery and a breaking away from narrow parochialism into a more cosmopolitan context, while on the negative side there was an aggressive intolerance towards anything that was not based upon a note-row and did not conform to the basic principles of serialism. The breakdown of tonality was an unquestioned and assumed starting-point for all new music.

Many of the composers discussed above, notably Lutyens and Wilson, have discussed their approach to this problem and their wrestling with this apparent compulsion to be "new" within their conversations and writings. Prominent amongst the advocates of the "new" was the "*Manchester Group*", so called because consisted of four fellow students from the Royal Manchester – now Northern – College of Music. All moved in markedly differing ways soon after leaving college but the combined enthusiasm for Schoenbergian principles put this group – Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, Alexander Goehr and John Ogden – at the forefront of the new thinking throughout the 1950's and partly into the 60's.

Neither Davies nor Birtwistle nor Goehr has made the piano an important part of their output but Ogden was the catalyst that brought the others to early attention. Ogden was immediately recognised as one of the most important pianists that Britain had produced

and, as such, was in great demand. Not only did he have a prodigious technique, which allowed him to perform the major works with great insight and panache, but also he had a burning desire for all things new. Consequently, it was natural for him to include works by his friends in his concerts, and, by so doing, he found an immediate audience for his student-day friends. This exposure gave all three composers the confidence to continue writing and to experiment and explore even newer dimensions. The solo piano compositions of all three composers are, in the context of their complete output, relatively unimportant and relatively early works. However, Ogden's championing of these works gave the composers and the works a seriousness that made them influential in the progress of British piano writing.

The works of Davies will be discussed later in a different context but Birtwistle's early **Précis** was startling in its clear use of ideas drawn from Webern's remarkable **Variationen Op.27**, most notably its visual layout, use of symmetry and use of the keyboard. It consists of five very brief fragments constructed, with short pauses between, in an arch that leads to and from number three. Fragment number four is a transposed and reorganised version of number two while number five is an inverted and retrograde version of number one. Alexander Goehr proceeded in a relatively direct line from Schoenberg in that his father studied with Schoenberg. However, he himself studied with Messiaen although his music clearly follows a more orthodox Germanic tradition. In his early **Three Pieces, Op. 18** for piano he shows his early fascination with combining of different tempi and different textures and his use of serialism is easier to analyse. In terms of pitch organisation this latter aspect is most noticeable in his **Sonata in One Movement**, which was first performed in 1952. The piano work by which many know Goehr is the 1969 composition, **Nonomiya**. Although not programmatic there are clear similarities between this work and the Japanese Noh play. Like the Noh plays it is divided into two halves. In the first part the principal actor declaims a kind of aria and, as in the play, reappears in the second part as a ghost that threatens those that were responsible for his/its demise. As in the play the second section gradually builds in intensity and finally bursts into a furious dance where the effect is heightened by the use of rests and much thinner textures than earlier in the piece. The formal exit from play is achieved by a sequence of sustained and soft major thirds which are surrounded by aggressive chords built from the intervals of a second and seventh. Like Berg, in many of his later works such as **Lulu** and the **Violin Concerto**, one can feel Goehr coming to grips with the integration of the new ideas with the old tonal and harmonic norms.

Contemporary with Goehr, and similarly a student of Messiaen, was Robert Sherlaw-Johnson. He was a prolific performer of Messiaen's music and of his own. Sherlaw-Johnson successfully integrated the Gallic influences of his student days with serialism and exploring new forms of notation. The **Piano Sonata No.1**, written in 1963, utilises the serialism of Boulez rather than Webern and pursues a strictly logical organisation of all musical elements – pitch, rhythm, duration, tessitura and dynamic – into grade relationships. The three movements are in proportionate tempi and all begin with similar statements in their respective tempi. The angular writing makes considerable use of the extremes of the piano, particularly at the bass end, and the angularity is enhanced by the wide, and often aggressive, range of types of attack required of the performer. There is very little chordal harmony as such, but what there is owes a clear debt to Messiaen, whereas the dry and unpedalled textures with the frequent use of notated together with an element of 'chance' in the freedom of synchronisation slurred sevenths and ninths show a powerful Webern-ish influence. In this work Sherlaw-

Johnson begins his search for new sounds and encounters the corresponding need for new ways of notation and silent bass palm clusters are marked in the second movement. Four years later the search for even more pianistic dimensions resulted in **Piano Sonata No.2** where there is a lengthy preface where the new notation is explained. These new indications call for silent depression of notes, sounds from both keyboard and inner frame, striking strings with fingers, fingernail or drumstick, and the sounding of harmonics by lightly touching the strings whilst playing a note. There are also differing pedal indications and symbols for glissandi along and across the strings. This extension of notation reached its pinnacle in **Seven Short Pieces**, written in 1969, and the performer is additionally required to use soft and hard drumsticks as well as wire-brushes inside the piano. Careful damping of the strings is also needed so as to achieve harmonics to complement the sounds made by conventional keyboard technique. The seventh piece in this collection, entitled **Chameleon** is completely graphic. I recall recording this work for ABC Radio in Adelaide and it took considerably longer to 'mark up' the piano's insides, under the nervous and watchful eye of the piano technician, than it took to record it; even considering the need for three 'takes'!

Sherlaw-Johnson was appointed to the Faculty of Music at Oxford University, and, considering his fascination with low bass textures, it is no coincidence that one of the first Bösendorfer Imperial Grands – with their extra bass octave – soon appeared as the resident piano at the Holywell Music Room. **Asterogenesis**, written in 1973, makes stunning use of this resource with low palm clusters and silently depressed clusters in this ultra low register. Returning, largely to conventional notation, the work uses rhythmic patterns and chord clusters reminiscent of Messiaen whose influence is more apparent in the mystical inscription that prefixes the score. The "optional" use of the extra bass octave is noticeable when capable of being utilised as I can testify, having played the work in major concert halls on Steinways with the conventional 7 octaves and then playing it in a recital, organised for me by Robert, on the 8 octave Imperial in the Holywell. As a footnote though, it has to be said, as counterbalance, that the Imperial also had a strange effect upon the overtones of the Mozart Sonata that I also included in that Oxford recital!

Daniel Jones's younger compatriot was Alun Hoddinott who wrote a significant amount of large-scale piano works and the seven Piano Sonatas serve as the backbone of his entire output. They are all well written for the instrument and are all highly virtuosic and emotionally intense and there is a strong prevailing fascination with the sense of construction found in many of Scriabin's Sonatas. However, all the sonatas have a distinct voice of their own but the continuing fascination for certain intervals, bass registers and aggressively active rhythms is apparent throughout the first five sonatas. **Sonata No. 5**, written for John Ogden, begins with ferocious cascades of seconds and tremolos, and then, after two densely chromatic Arias, returns to a violent Toccata that is almost entirely within the bottom two octaves of the piano. **Sonata No. 6** was written in 1972 in memory of Alan Rawsthorne and is comparatively short and played without a break in a predominantly elegiac mood. The final **Sonata No. 7**, written after a gap of twelve years in 1984 represents a significant mellowing of mood and gesture with much thinner textures and manages to incorporate twelve-note melodic ideas within gigue-like trumpeting within a clearly felt C sharp tonality.

Hoddinott's fellow Welsh contemporary of significance is William Matthias whose two Piano Sonatas are more in the tradition of British composers, such as Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams and Walton. **Piano Sonata No.1** has an almost Lisztian sense of the extrovert but is firmly within the sound-world of English choral and symphonic writing,

unlike Hoddinott who makes grander and more flamboyant gestures with clear adherence to contemporary influences from mainland Europe. There is also a greater sense of space and silence in Matthias's work. **Sonata No.2** was written just five years after its predecessor in 1969 and the style has become more succinct with greater use of shimmering clusters within long sustained pedals. Played without a break, there is a hint of Bartok in the slightly acerbic use of seconds, and, as in Bartok's **Op.14 Suite** the work finishes unresolved, leaving the listener unsettled and tense, especially as the opening gave the impression that here was the start of a musical argument that would resolve itself somehow.

Bernard Stevens had stated, in a 1948 BBC lecture, entitled, *The Crisis in Contemporary Art-Music*, that the crisis centred on the isolation of contemporary art-music from contemporary popular music and the simultaneous existence of contradictory idioms in contemporary art-music. Possibly one of the composers who were most successful in bridging this gap was Lennox Berkeley.

Whilst studying in Paris, and following the success of **Rhapsody in Blue** Berkeley, like many Paris based composers, experimented with 'blue' and 'bent' notes and false-relations as well as adopting tango and similar popular rhythms in their music. He became a student of Nadia Boulanger after a recommendation from Ravel to whom Berkeley had shown his setting of some French Renaissance verse. Boulanger was a strict advocate of the study of Bach and very strict counterpoint exercises and that influence never left Berkeley, although many think his studies were stifling to his potential. He retained strong Parisian connections long after his studies had ceased, even having a flat close to Boulanger's, as he found English life rather too parochial. Whilst in Paris he became close friends with Poulenc, Stravinsky, Milhaud and Honegger. Milhaud's fascination with jazz was a powerful influence as was Poulenc's use of vernacular sounds. These strong Gallic influences of logic, precision and clarity, rather than romanticism and modalism, seriously delayed his acceptance in England. Like Mozart and Poulenc, Berkeley demands virtuoso or extrovert performers but he does call for polish and refinement. The **Six Preludes**, written in 1945 have been a staple part of the amateur and professional repertoire ever since they were written and combine glittering passagework, wistfulness and nostalgic elegance together with clear references to jazz modes and harmonies. There are suggestions of the darker, almost Brahmsian sense of pessimism, gloom and brooding that briefly lessen the Francophile mood, but these features also appear in the music of Franck. The final three *Preludes* are the most frequently played by amateurs in examinations and competitions to this day and are quite delightful. No. 4 has clear Poulenc influences, although the cross-hands is still Brahms, and the beauty of the piece is in the modification of the harmony; No. 5 is an exciting but light-textured cavort in the unsettling time signatures of $\frac{7}{8}$ and $\frac{5}{8}$ and the upper voice clearly refers back to Bizet's **Toreador's Song**. The final *Prelude* is a simply beautiful lullaby that has immediate appeal. Over a *siciliano* rhythm Berkeley explores the blues with dominant thirteenth harmonies and a brief shift upwards of a semitone, which is so beloved of writers of popular music. The **Piano Sonata**, of 1945 is naturally bigger than the *Preludes* but the harmonic vocabulary and French influence are still obvious. During the 1950's and 1960's this was a frequent work on recital programmes and radio broadcasts and Colin Horsley was a powerful advocate of these works. Berkeley made attempts to experiment with serialism but could not reconcile himself to the style. He did use serialism as an additional resource to provide dissonance and the unexpected, but his characteristic use of sequence, modulation and other melodic devices allowed him to always to end with clear tonal references. His

understanding of new experiments and his refusal to dismiss them helped with his teaching of such diverse musical voices as those of Richard Rodney Bennett, David Bedford, Nicholas Maw, Brian Chapple and Brian Ferneyhough. It is possibly ironic that his only experiment with serialism came with a work for recorder, violin, 'cello and harpsichord which gave a sense of Neo-Classical to the piece!

A natural progression from the advances in notation and effects achieved by Robert Sherlaw-Johnson, and especially from his **Seven Short Pieces** came with the works of John White, Roger Smalley and Cornelius Cardew. White was a prolific writer of sonatas and was influenced by the French style, especially the writings of Satie and Chabrier, although Messiaen's influence can be found in some of the rhythmic writing. Beginning with his 1961 **Sonata No. 1** where the writing is often moving in unison, there is a distorted march with five beats per bar and consisting of three short movements. A little later in **Sonata No. 5** the textures have become thicker but still the use of unison and parallel motion prevails and the sonatas are being constructed in one continuous movement. However, within a few years the style changes quite dramatically and the economy of notes and degree of rhythmic freedom becomes very marked. The sonatas written in 1969 indicate time durations for each "bar" – in the case of **Sonata No.44** five seconds for each bar – and the performer has complete rhythmic freedom within that time-span. Additionally there are no expressive markings, dynamics and no use made of the sustaining pedal. In fact, the pages of the score are, on some pages, very blank.

Roger Smalley, who studied with John White, Fricker and Goehr, was a keen advocate of the principles of Stockhausen, with whom he later studied. Smalley's conviction that there had never been any break in continuity from Classicism into Romanticism into Serialism was a driving creative force. He saw that tonality had died with Mahler and that Brahms and Wagner were present in Schoenberg, Berg and Webern. He never used a twelve-note series but used a small pitch set, often as a kind of cantus firmus, and he often derived parts from a motif by the use of canon, so was referencing back to the parody, texture and general layout of Medieval music. He shared Stockhausen's views about the social functions of music and whether it was right to assume that an audience had a fund of musical and historical knowledge. In the 1960's he began to adhere to the basic ideas of Cage and wondered if the point of writing the music was more important than achieving a performance of that music, with composition gradually becoming more of an intellectual and complete pursuit in itself. Slowly coming to the view that avant-garde thinking was contemporary in its chronological meaning, he dismissed any other contemporary musical forms as neither advanced nor interesting. By such thinking he, in turn, attracted several younger composers as followers, most notably, Simon Emmerson. Emmerson's **Piano Piece No.1**, written in 1972 and first performed by Smalley, is for piano with preparation or electric modulator. It is built from a single idea which the composer states in the foreword as

a 'melodic' note may be 'obscured' in two ways: horizontally by embellishment with grace-notes, or vertically by timbre alteration. A simple relation links three degrees of this obscurity to duration and loudness of each individual note. A simple square (6x6 notes, each with associated values of loudness, duration and degree of obscurity) was generated, and the piece created by reading the result in a spiral fashion – hence the steady changes in density and acceleration.

Two versions exist: in one, the timbre obscurity is obtained by preparation of some of the strings with metal and rubber objects placed between the strings. In the other, the piano is ring modulated with a constant sine wave frequency. The three

timbre obscurity degrees are indicated in the score by indications for amplification alone, amplification and colouration, and for ring modulated sound.

In contrast to the length of the explanatory foreword the actual notation simply consists of three lines of pitches. In just over a decade Emmerson and others had integrated the piano easily with electronics, tape and amplification and in **Piano Piece 4**, of 1985 the amplification allows the undamped strings to resonate more audibly with all their sympathetic overtones while, concurrent with this the pre-recorded tape plays sustained resonances. The notation is written in a similar kind of “space-time” notation and the tape either freezes certain resonances as a harmonic backdrop or “retunes” some of the pitches.

Cornelius Cardew developed similarly from an ardent Webernesque serialism, through free and sparse notation, to graphic notation as he became more fascinated by silence, inactivity and “chance” following his interest in Cage and Morton Feldman. In the foreword to the 1962 **February Pieces** Cardew writes that *“each sign is a musical event. The pieces are cyclic (start anywhere, joining the end to the beginning, or the beginning to the end if you are reading it backwards) and may be played for any length of time. End anywhere.”* In later purely graphic scores such as, **Memories of You**, there are no symbols whose meaning has been agreed in advance between composer and performer. They can be sung, spoken, struck or contemplated in silence, but not played on the actual keyboard. Cardew himself disclaimed any responsibility stating that *“My intention is that the player should simply respond to the performing situation.”* And by so writing abandons all form of creative responsibility and, controversially, rejects any participation from the audience.

In the years between 1940 and 1952 many major composers whose works are performed regularly, and to acclaim nowadays, were born. They include Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy, Edward McGuire, James Dillon, Edward Gregson, Janet Beat, Howard Skempton, John McCabe, Cecilia McDowall, Rory Boyle, Michael Berkeley, Brian Chapple and John Casken. Many of these were distinguished performing pianists also, such as Finnissy and McCabe and several wrote extensively for the piano and wrote well for the piano. Another equally distinguished group were born after 1952 and these include Andrew Pegg, Oliver Knussen, Mark Anthony Turnage, Chris Dench, Graham Fitkin, Judith Weir, Judith Bingham, Robert Saxton, Martin Butler, Richard Barratt, James Macmillan and Thomas Ades, many of whom also wrote significantly for the piano, with some truly beautiful short works written by the likes of Knussen and Dench and some phenomenally virtuosic works by Ferneyhough, Finnissy and Ades, with themselves, most often, the performers.

Clearly, every reader of this article will have their preferences from amongst these final names but selfishly I have selected to comment on works that I have played frequently and/or had dedicated to me by members within these names. Edward Gregson's early reputation was built upon his very important contributions to the world of brass and brass band music, but he was a very polished pianist himself. I cannot remember who approached whom initially as I had known Gregson for some time, but after a recital that I gave in Bromley, near to where he lived whilst in London, we met and discussed piano solo possibilities. Promised a piano sonata I scheduled a performance date but, as the date neared the completion was clearly not going to happen in time. As a result the sonata's performance slot in the Amsterdam concert was filled with the **Six Little Pieces**. Clearly the reference to Schoenberg's Op.19 collection comes immediately to mind and these pieces do pay homage to the principles of compression of form, motivic use of a limited number of pitches, a concentration on

timbre and texture, and a reduction of the means of musical expression. Like Schoenberg's they are only little in terms of duration but this collection is noticeably longer than that of Schoenberg. The connection is made closer in the quasi-Viennese *waltz* of No. 5 in both sets. Two of the pieces were sketched while Gregson was a student, whilst others were sketches for the much larger **Piano Sonata in one movement**, which was completed in 1983. However, there is a unity between the pieces in a number of ways – most particularly by temporal relationships and the use of common material. The **Piano Sonata** is dedicated 'to Michael Tippett, with admiration'. It is, in fact, Tippett's *2nd Piano Sonata* which is the starting point for this work. The one movement structure consists of alternating Tempi (or blocks of music), which are constantly juxtaposed in a mosaic-like pattern. Each of the six Tempi has its own clearly defined musical character – from the opening rising arpeggios to strident octave figurations, from dance-like patterns to slow and rather sombre chords. These are moulded into a tri-partite form similar to the statement-development-recapitulation format, which is common to conventional sonata forms. It is, however, the dramatic nature of sonata form which is the main concern of the sonata and it is that, more than any other consideration, which provided the connection with Tippett and, of course, Beethoven. As a slightly flippant memory of the first performance I can recall that the score had been given to me written in pencil and as I opened the page under the stage-lights of the Purcell Room I was horrified to discover that the notation was virtually invisible and my memory had to take over!

Dating from 1972 Robert Saxton's **Ritornelli and Intermezzi** was one of the works that I performed at Elisabeth Lutyens' 70th birthday recital. It is divided into seven sections, four of which are *Ritornelli*, the remaining three being the *Intermezzi*. The *Ritornelli* and developmental movements, A2, A3 & A4, developing material from A1 in various ways, so that although the word '*Ritornelli*' retains its original meaning of 'return', the 'returns' are not simply restatements of the first movement. A4, for example, is a rhythmical inversion of A1, with the pitches reworked. The three *Intermezzi* movements are non-developmental. B2 is a rhythmical palindrome of B1, while C is a pitch and rhythm palindrome on its own axis. In addition to these features, each movement has its own '*pivot*' figure. In the *Ritornelli* these are grace-note figures; in *Intermezzi* 1 and 3 they are sustained chords, and in the central *Intermezzo* the '*pivot*' figure is a rising – or descending – sequence of three chord-clusters. The seven sections are played without a break.

The other significant Saxton work for piano is the **Sonata** of 1981. The sonata is in one movement, which consists of several sections; the basic harmonic character of the music is heard gradually, as the opening tritone grows into dancing contrapuntal writing. During the course of the work, much is made of fast 'foreground' counterpoint, which is delineating slower 'background' harmonic progressions, and the music proceeds in a quickly-changing kaleidoscopic manner. Towards the end the first truly slow music is heard, but this quickly accelerates into a very fast passage which accumulates in rapidly rising arpeggios; these lead into a coda which consists of rising chords; this is interrupted by the fast music of the previous section more than once, but finally the chords silence the toccata-like music, having become a little chorale for Béla Bartók, to whose memory the sonata is dedicated.

Edward McGuire and Brian Chapple wrote works specifically for me – **Prelude 7** and **Tribute 2** respectively – and both explore the relationship between C major based counterpoint in the middle register of the piano, becoming more chromatic, louder and wider ranging,

The above two works are comparatively short in length but a longer work by Andrew Peggie is one that I have performed regularly and it seems to speak to audiences of all levels of experience and sophistication. Written for a premiere in South East Asia the **Sunrise Sonata**, written in 2001, envisages the piano not as a string or percussive instrument but as a metallophone-type instrument. The first movement juxtaposes a gamelan texture with horn calls while the middle movement explores a series of bell-like “*klang tones*” plus an insistent tolling on one note. The finale races to an exhilarating conclusion with complex cross-rhythms typical of African *balafon* players. The work’s unifying element is a hexatonic scale with both harmony and melody are totally derived from this scale with the ‘negative’ image of the six notes not used in the main scale used as a counter-melody in the slow movement.

Considering the underlying reason why this article is largely focused upon the period of the Queen Elizabeth’s reign, there is a very select group of composers that should be mentioned together. During the 60 years of the Queen’s reign there have been 3 holders of the post of *Master of the Queen’s Music*, if one discounts the final few months of Sir Arnold Bax’s tenure. Sir Arthur Bliss was a modest man whose music deserves more attention than it currently receives. However, he is known today primarily for his major orchestral and theatre works with the **Piano Concerto** being played occasionally and the **Piano Sonata** gaining occasional performances. They, together with his shorter collections of piano pieces, most notably **Masks** – which I had the privilege of playing in a concert that Lady Bliss attended – are worthy of more performances.

Bliss’ controversial successor was Malcolm Williamson who was a complex person and a multi-faceted composer who was publicly misunderstood by many but privately loved by all who knew him. Everyone has at least one Williamson anecdote and mine have a semi-holistic connection with this article’s content. In 1976 I was giving a recital at London’s South Bank on the occasion of Liz Lutyens’ 70th birthday. For this event I had programmed works by her younger composer students – Robert Saxton, Brian Elias and Michael Blake Watkins – together with all of the Lutyens piano works. As surprises I had asked Malcolm and Richard Rodney Bennett to write short tribute pieces and Malcolm’s piece I was going to play before the main programme started and then Malcolm would present Liz with the score of this special work, **Ritual of Admiration**. Unbeknown to anyone Malcolm had got himself locked into a cubicle in the Queen Elizabeth Hall lavatories so we could not begin the concert nor explain to the audience why we were not starting. Malcolm was eventually rescued in time for a fifteen-minute late start. On another occasion I had been booked to record a series of lecture-recitals on British music for ABC Radio and my visa was blocked by the Australian Musicians’ Union; Malcolm stepped in and asked the Union to produce an Australian pianist who could fulfil these recordings’ requirements and the visa was reluctantly granted! All of us who are old enough will remember a very moving South Bank television show recording of Malcolm rehearsing an opera written especially for performance by Special Needs children and seeing what a truly human human-being he was. As perfect examples of Williamson’s multi-faceted musical personality one has only to compare the **Travel Diaries**, which are five sets of teaching-type pieces and the **Piano Sonata No.2**, the first performance of the revised two-movement version of which I gave in January 1978, just after the end of the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Year. Within all are examples of twelve-note writing, Messiaen harmonies and constant references to popular music and jazz. Controversy dogged Williamson right to the end and, although he was awarded the CBE and given the highest honour possible for a non-resident by the Australian

Government, he became the only modern-day holder of this post not to receive a knighthood.

The current *Master of the Queen's Music* is Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, mentioned earlier as one of the Manchester Group. Davies had a mixture of early influences that were to sustain his creativity for some time. These were his affection for the structures and devices of Mediaeval Music, fascination with Oriental music love of popular dance rhythms and early teaching work with children, as well as his interest in the principles of twelve-note music. **Stevie's Ferry to Hoy**, written in 1976 is a beautiful collection of three very simple pieces. But prior to that, he had developed his serial and medieval ideas whilst at Princeton, on the recommendation of Copland who had heard the **Five Piano Pieces**, which he admired. Many of the later piano pieces were, like the earlier **Five Piano Pieces**, written for particular performers and thus utilised their strengths. The **Five Piano Pieces** were written for his student colleague John Ogden while the later works were written for Stephen Pruslin with whom Davies worked within the Pierrot Players and later the Fires of London. The **Piano Sonata**, written in 1981, is in seven movements and is prefixed with a verse from Charles Senior's seascape poetry. Throughout all seven movements there are references back to the sostenuto introduction. Lyrical, highly demanding and virtuosic the writing shows a fondness for the two hands to be far apart thus creating a sense of separation in the textures and the Finale draws upon the material of the preceding six movements with a coda that develops the opening sostenuto introduction still further. The swirling textures that come frequently clearly refer back to the "*The cries of gulls curling in shoalward whirlwinds*" of the quoted verse from Senior's "*Elegy*". Also written for Pruslin were two shorter works **Sub Tuam Protectionem** and **Ut Re Mi**, which use *cantus firmus* and derive material from the compositions of John Taverner. Davies was a firm believer in the orthodox Schoenbergian principle that the smallest particle should be a microcosmic representation of whole structure. Although, in these two works he uses plainchant as the starting-point, little trace of the original is apparent in the finished work. Alongside all of this involved and complex writing Davies still had the simplicity of imagination to write one of the most hypnotic and profoundly beautiful pieces of late twentieth-century British piano music when he wrote, as a form of social-political protest, the wonderful **Farewell to Stromness**.

Finally, while recognising that I have failed to mention many composers and acknowledging that my weighting of importance may be controversial within this article, such an article, covering such a significant period of time, could not fail to mention the most loved and most individual of voices that sadly, passed away just before the conclusion of the period under scrutiny. However, Malcolm Arnold's contribution to the piano literature is sadly not his strongest claim to fame. The **Variations on a Ukrainian Folk-Song** uses the well-known song that is often sung in English to the words of "*Yes my darling daughter*". The variations are simply structured and easy on the ear with one of them being constructed in exactly the same way as one of the Brahms/Handel *Variations*, in octave canons. There is also a **Piano Sonata**, written in 1942 whilst Arnold was on holiday in Cornwall. It remained forgotten, even by the composer, until I was sent a copy in 1983. Despite being not very well structured or developed and not really very pianistic, its importance was due to its significance within the development of the composer's style. I gave the first ever public performance of it at the old British Music Information Centre in Stratford Place to an unusually large audience for that particular venue, with Arnold present. Very soon afterwards I broadcast it in a BBC recital produced by Piers Burton-Page and Robertsons soon published it. Its merits are

limited but it is an interesting work within the development of this unique voice and style with the final movement being a wonderful model for the *Pink Panther* theme, long before Henry Mancini had written that. Before the broadcast an article appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* under the Peterborough banner mentioning its novel history and Malcolm was quoted as saying that I was "*a highly talented young pianist.*" As I was nearly forty at the time I have retained that quote as one of the most flattering ever received!

Richard Deering
London, 2012