

DPhil Composition Portfolio Inventory & Thesis Outline

JOEL BALDWIN

Portfolio of Compositions

- ***Grim's Ditch*** for ensemble and voice (duration: c. 17 minutes, submitted for Transfer of Status)
The title of this piece shares its name with a five-mile Iron Age dyke in Oxfordshire (although many other pre-historic earthworks have the same title) and is a reference to the iconic 'Ditchley Portrait' of Queen Elizabeth I painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger ('Ditchley' literally meaning 'a woodland clearing on Grim's Ditch'). According to the National Gallery, 'it is very likely that the portrait formed part of the lavish entertainments staged by Sir Henry Lee at Woodstock, where he was Lieutenant of the royal manor, and his own house, Ditchley, during Elizabeth I's visit on progress in 1592... The allegorical entertainment celebrated the Queen's forgiveness of Lee for living with his mistress Anne Vavasour and the inscriptions on the painting link to this theme. They can be translated as 'She gives and does not expect', 'She can but does not take revenge', and 'In giving back she increases' [DA[T NE]C [E]XPECT A T (left); POTEST NEC VLCISCITVR (right); REDDENDO [AUGET] (bottom right)...] A sonnet on the theme of the sun, the symbol of the monarch, refers to Elizabeth as the 'Prince of Light'. Although part of the sonnet was lost when the right-hand edge was cut down, the rhythm and rhyme-scheme means that it can be reconstructed: The prince of light, The Sonne by whom thing[s live]...' The Latin inscriptions (performed by the trombonist) and the first line of the sonnet make up the opening text of the piece. The other Latin text 'chanted' is the following: 'Cui tamen ore loqui Batavo datur, ille Britan-nos Desperet faciles in sua verba deos?' [To whom, however, it is granted to speak the Dutch language, Should he not hope that the British gods will look kindly on his words?]. These are the concluding lines of *Coram Rege Citharam Pulsaturus* [About to Play the Lute before the King] by Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) who 'played the lute for King James I early in September 1618'. The main text of the piece is a poem by Albert Verwey. Both the original Dutch and its translation are used. This is an intensely intertextual piece that expresses a deep melancholy. The lamenting protagonist of this short monodrama could be King James I, Elizabeth I or any other monarch or powerful leader in a state of depression. The piece reflects on the way people in power so often need music to communicate to and soothe their troubles. The singer and ensemble sometimes evoke the melancholic airs of Huygens and Dowland, or Gregorian chant, while at other times they simply join the dancers in the dark and energetic climate of Grim's Ditch. This piece was written for Ensemble Klang with Michaela Riener, two dancers and an accompanying film.
- ***Jacinto Chiclana*** for ensemble and voices (duration: c. 4 minutes, submitted for Transfer of Status)
Jacinto Chiclana is a setting of a Borges poem (a 'milonga'). It puts the poem's protagonist in a prominent position, the text's meaning always clear and precise. The music is not recognizably Argentinian like the poet and the scene being described in the text, but it is jocular and provocative in a way that resembles the Habanera-cum-polka dance form of the milonga. The text, while somewhat fragmentary in its delivery, has not been adapted or reordered in any way; on the surface, it retains its meaning. However, there is an underlying subversiveness being expressed here through the way the ensemble members must 'speak up' and share the text in a collaborative effort. They must express themselves but also speak as one voice. This is a political act that encourages performers to reassess their performative function and explore their body-voice relationship and physical presence through a textual and musical style that also expresses a body-voice relationship and a heightened physicality. The 'atomization of word and voice'¹ represented here is not postmodern, but it is 'postoperative'² in the sense that it reflects the opposition between the dramatic and the postdramatic.
- ***The Beginning of an Idea***: an opera (duration: c. 50 minutes, submitted for Confirmation of Status)
The Beginning of an Idea is a kind of jazz-infused chamber opera that blends the intensity and absurdity often found in works of new music theatre with the kind of rhythmic drive and vocal expressivity often found in popular music. The music parallels the struggles of its protagonist by contrasting 'serious' music with 'less serious' music and by employing a significant amount of diatonic music as well as the more 'conventional' (operatically functional) non-diatonic music. This blurs the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined. Of course, this Brechtian honesty creates a

¹ Toop, D. (2005). 'The Ghost of a Program'. *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 15, The Word: Voice, Language and Technology, p. 29.

² Novak, J. (2012). Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera, p. 24–25.

powerful dramatic irony and is intended to heighten the sense of hopelessness expressed in the story.

- ***Life Piles Up*** for string quartet (duration: c. 6 minutes, submitted for Confirmation of Status)
Life Piles Up aims to strike the balance between the literal and the metaphorical of its textual impetus (a diary entry by Virginia Woolf) by structuring musical material and shaping its phrasing in a way that expresses the image ('rising mounds', 'reflections', etc.) *and* the emotional or psychological effects (stress, time-stretching/condensing, relief, etc.) of such images without any words being sung or spoken.
- ***FLUX***: a vocalic opera (duration: c. 40 minutes, to be submitted)
FLUX experiments with definitions of performance, sound and space through abstraction and linguistic primitivism. Audiences will journey through a forest, guided by sound and performance into the hidden oasis arena. By bringing together a unique group of international collaborators, we aim to create a cross-disciplinary 360-degree experience to our audiences. Four opera singers will come into dialogue with body painted performance artists, shifting sculptural staging elements, and acoustical surround sound. The production takes inspiration from Oskar Kokoschka's highly critiqued Expressionist play, *Murderer, Hope of Women* (1909), as well as Philip Glass's *Akhmaten* (1983). Both works amplify emotion and action over spoken language, deconstructing its original purpose. By carrying these ideas into the 21st Century, *FLUX* aims to reimagine, disrupt, and expand on verbal communication as a cultural barrier. Audiences will join the performers in a physical and emotional journey through this poetic storytelling of human connectivity.

Thesis Outline

Title: **Intertextual Noise and Dantean Representations in Louis Andriessen's *La Commedia***

- Chapter 1 (c. 9000 words, submitted for Confirmation of Status)
The infernal language of *La Commedia*: melancholy, polysemy and dramatic irony
Framed by Julia Kristeva's writings on melancholia, diolocity and textual polyphony, this chapter explores the melancholy of Dante's *Inferno* and how it is expressed through the postmodern filter of Hartley's films and stage direction—matched by the postoperative musical language of Andriessen—in the first two sections of *La Commedia* (1. *The City of Dis*, or *The Ship of Fools*, and 2. *Racconto dall'Inferno*). In this chapter, I explore how polysemy and irony are manifested in these sections to produce a negative aesthetic. What are the composer and director communicating about the topography of Dante's hell, or Bosch's hell as it may be too, and a more contemporary understanding of hell in these sections? And does their 'infernal' language just equate to black comedy, or is it more akin to the aesthetics of absence as found in the works of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, who each referenced and explored Dante's *Inferno* through their own writings in intertextual and postmodernist ways?
- Chapter 2 (c. 3000 words, to be submitted)
Finding Dante in *La Commedia*: Lucifer as intertext
Part Three of *La Commedia* (*Lucifer*) is used as a case study for how concepts of noise relate to the themes of melancholia and intertextuality. What does Andriessen's setting of Vondel tell us about his understanding of the *Commedia* and how does he convey a transhistorical view of art, morality and the afterlife in this section? Does the noise of intertextuality and polystylism in this section just reinforce the work's postmodern melancholy or are there threads of Dante expressed here that reflect direct material and spiritual matters without irony? The character of Lucifer brought to life by the texts of Dante, Vondel, Andriessen, Hartley (and other pointed-to sources) in this central section of the work highlight the need for an aesthetic openness when approaching a work like *La Commedia*.
- Chapter 3 (c. 7000 words, submitted for Transfer of Status)
The communicative ecology of *La Commedia*: a poetics of citation and intertextuality
The music theatre of Louis Andriessen is often presented on a grand scale with a wide range of extramusical signifiers, pointing to many external sources. This chapter explores the intertextuality of the *La Commedia* and how the understanding of this work requires an appreciation of Andriessen's particular 'poetics of citation'—a term used by Christopher Kleinhenz to describe Dante's own

intertextual approach in the *Commedia*³—in order to explain and better understand the communicative ecology of this work and, indeed, much of Andriessen’s wider oeuvre. Then, building on Timo Andres’ synopsis of the work in the 2013 CD/DVD release’s liner notes⁴, and on Novak’s parallel narrative descriptions of this section of LC, my intertextual outline of Part Four: ‘The Garden of Earthly Delights’ (or ‘De Tuin der Lusten’ in Dutch) brings these ideas—and the overall communicative nature of the libretto as a whole—into sharper focus, acting as a kind of poly-vocal analysis that builds on and with other analyses and texts related to the work, in turn revealing a network of polyinterpretable, yet deeply connected, ideas.

- Chapter 4 (c. 4000 words, to be submitted)

The noise of *La Commedia*: religion, politics and postmodernism

This final chapter explores topics that are often associated with Andriessen and his music but have not been analysed with particular reference to the textual nuances and aesthetic noise of this final section of *La Commedia (Paradiso)*—namely: politics, religion and postmodernism. Through theories of cultural and musical noise, I explore the postoperative potential for the expression of ideologies and spirituality in new music theatre, relating this to the ideas of melancholia and intertextuality from previous chapters.

³ Kleinhenz, C. (2007). ‘Perspectives on Intertextuality in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*’, *Romance Quarterly*, 54(3). pp. 183-194. Kleinhenz describes Dante’s ‘compositional practice’ as one that ‘integrates multiple occurrences of reading, writing, comparing, contrasting, analysing, translating, incorporating, interpreting, rewriting...’ and refers to this ‘practice of intertextuality in Dante’ as Dante’s ‘poetics of citation’.

⁴ Andres, T. (2013). [Liner notes]. In *Louis Andriessen: La Commedia* [CD/DVD]. New York: Nonesuch Records.