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Music Composition Portfolio

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Music Composition Portfolio

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

Master's Degree (MPhil) in Music Composition

is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment for that stated above.

Signed: . . . . . (candidate)

Date: . . . . . .

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ABSTRACT

There are six pieces included in this M.Phil. These were completed over two years and are accompanied by a written text part. These pieces contain different instrumentations and range from solo to orchestral works. In this portfolio there is a set of two choir pieces, a trio for piano, clarinet and violin, an orchestral piece, a guitar quartet, three pieces for saxophone quartet and a solo piano piece.

The written part of this portfolio examines in detail my compositions with reference to their inspiration, construction and overall shape. There is a detailed description of the six works along with musical examples. A CD accompanies this document with recordings and MIDI files of selected compositions.

Chapter One is an introductory section with some background information about the composer. The purpose of this short introduction is to give the reader some insight into the day to day working of the composer and specific references to his influences. Due to the kind of music that was written and the kind of musician this composer is, there was a need to provide some material on the approaches and instinct of his particular style.

Chapter Two contains six commentaries, one for each of the works in the portfolio. Each commentary discusses inspiration, technical aspects of the piece, and provides musical examples. These musical examples are used to explain more clearly the methods used by the composer in the construction of the piece.

INTRODUCTION

I was twelve years old when given my first guitar as a Christmas present. I was not too happy as I wanted to be a drummer and the guitar seemed like a lot of work. However, I persevered and started to practice with my two brothers and father who all played. These first few lessons from my father were perhaps the most important for me. He helped me to understand the instrument and eventually I would never put it down. After thirteen years I still play every day! Perhaps the most important thing about this early period was that I developed and honed my aural skills. By learning to tune the guitar and figure out songs, my ear became quite sharp and acute. This not only was an advantage for transcribing but it was a great skill with which to create. I began trying things out and writing simple intros to songs. I played in bands and arranged the music of each song we did. Through this development of my ear, slowly my music tastes began to change and I found myself straying away from what everybody else in the school was listening to. This was the turning point in my playing and composing.

Having listened to styles like country, rock, blues and metal throughout my early teens, I eventually started to enjoy listening to classical and jazz especially. These were styles of music that demanded more of the listener and a little more 'active listening'. Of these two styles I think I was more intrigued by jazz music. The harmony in jazz music was very appealing to me and being an improviser and ear player by nature, I felt at ease with the genre. It had a policy of play what you 'feel' rather than play what you see, and this was central to how I composed at that time. My compositional styles relied heavily on the improvisations I was doing. It was in this period when I started to learn songs from the 'fakebook' of jazz and developed this other harmonic language. All the chords and progressions were completely alien to me and it took a while for my ear to become accustomed to these complex harmonies. Having become a proficient jazz guitarist I started to take composition as my primary degree subject. I came into some difficulty when trying to combine my improvisations to a classical structure. It was a challenge to take an improvisation and construct a piece from it. I started to use the improvisations as

source material so that I would change and adopt this material to fit the structure and form of the piece.

Throughout my time in college I have listened to and studied many different composers. I have enjoyed each of the different eras of Classical Music and have found something of interest in all the most well-known composers. However there are some more than others who have had a profound influence on me. Some examples being: Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Bill Evans, Steve Reich, Henryk Gorecki, Claude Debussy, Miles Davis, Morton Feldman and Arvo Pärt. All of these composers are different in some way but contain similarities through their own unique sounds. From the brass arrangements of Ellington and Miller, the harmonies of Evans and Debussy to the compositional styles of Pärt, Feldman and Gorecki, all have been part of my compositional style. These composers have a richness of colour and a depth of musical instinct that appeals to me greatly. There is a sense that their music is not composed based on a theoretical or mathematical system, but rather by an attention to sound and an awareness of their natural ability as musicians. They seem to rely on this aural process rather than a technical stand point. The harmonies are chosen carefully and the music flows very naturally. Phrases and gestures occur when the listener expects them and the pacing of the music is neither too laborious nor too fleeting. This, in my opinion, is due to their natural instinct as musicians and the focus put on listening intently to the music and making clear, decisive changes based on an aural response rather than a theoretical one.

The intention of my music is not to educate but rather to entertain. I would like to take people out of the space they are in and into somewhere else, where they can relax and enjoy the sounds around them. This is why there are no sudden sharp interjections or harsh accents through the music; the contrasts come in a more subtle way. Each piece is constructed using a rough idea of how the music will be i.e. fast, slow, dark, light, cold, warm etc. Then a series of long improvisations done on guitar will follow. This is something that I am used to from my early days learning. These aural improvisations direct me as to what kind of piece it will be. It is at this stage where I start to think about tempo, overall structure, harmonic material, motifs, dynamics, texture, instrumental techniques etc. After the main ideas are set down on manuscript the composition then starts to take shape. My constant use of the guitar during the composition process helps

me to hear the different parts and to refer to particular voicings and chords. This use of improvisation is an integral part in my compositional style and owes a lot to jazz music. The improvisation aspect however does not come in to the score at any point. The reason for this is that the piece itself has been created from an improvisation, and therefore there is no need for another improvisation by the performers.

There are some outside influences in my music, most notably, from the art world. I have an enthusiasm for paintings and use of colour. For me looking at colours has the same sensation as hearing certain sounds in music. I feel different depending on what colours are juxtaposed beside each other and what sounds I hear together. This, I believe, has always been with me, but I have only written music based on it in recent years. In the portfolio I have included a number of pieces relating to colour and most are influenced by a style of painting called color field. Color field painters use blocks of flat solid colour that are consistent in form. Some notable painters of this style include Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock and Gene Davis. It is closely linked to another branch of abstract painting called 'Abstract Expressionism', of which Mark Rothko was a key exponent. In my piece *Rothko's Colours* I try to emulate the characteristics of this style and use static blocks of sound, rather than an agitated rhythmic style. *Changing Hues* takes its name from a lyric of the song 'Vincent' by Don McLean; which is about the painter Vincent Van Gogh. Its use of colour is not as static as *Rothko's Colours* but relates more to the changing of one colour to another. This inspiration through colour was a key influence in the genesis of a number of my pieces in this portfolio.

2. COMMENTARIES

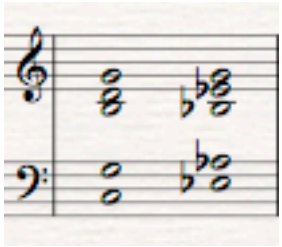
2.1 Two Pieces for *a capella* Choir

Complementary Colours

This piece is the first of two pieces for *a cappella* choir. The central idea behind this piece is the complementary nature of some colours to others. The inspiration for this came from the 'colour wheel'. The colours that are on opposite sides of the wheel are known as complementary colours. These colours have an unusual relationship to each other, which I found very interesting. In this piece I try to create the look and feel of these colours as if side-by-side, in music. Some examples of these complementary colours are: Blue and Orange, Red and Green and Purple with Yellow.

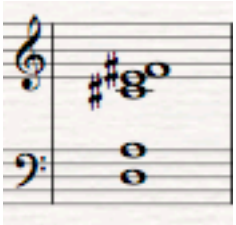
Each of these colours contains a different harmony and the relationship of one block of harmony to the next is what the piece is based on. I choose these harmonies very carefully and one of the ways I do this is by using 'slash chords'. Slash chords are chords where there is (usually) a major or minor triad above a bass note that is not the tonic. For example a C/G chord would be a C major triad with a G note in the bass, thus creating a C major second inversion. By using these slash chords this enables me to move around through the chords without thinking too much about tonality but focusing on the line of the progression. An example of two slash chords can be seen here in bar 21 (Fig. 2.1). The first crotchet duration of the bar is a G chord with a C bass and the third crotchet has an E flat chord with an A flat in the tenor.

Fig.2.1



And a more complicated example is seen here at bar 44 (Fig.2.2) where there is an A6/D chord, resulting in a Dmaj9.

Fig. 2.2



Another harmonic device I like to use is the ‘common tone’ idea. This is where a pitch is sustained through a collection of chords. This ties the chords all together and creates a common thread through the phrase. The sustained note has a different role in each chord and therefore depending on the harmony it can sound consonant or harshly dissonant. An example of this technique can be seen in bars 44 and 76 in the soprano part.

Fig. 2.3

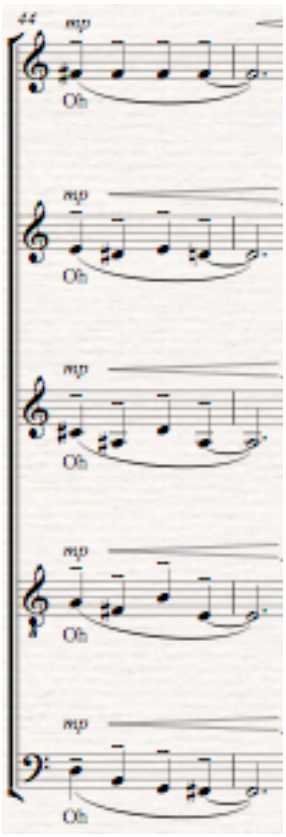
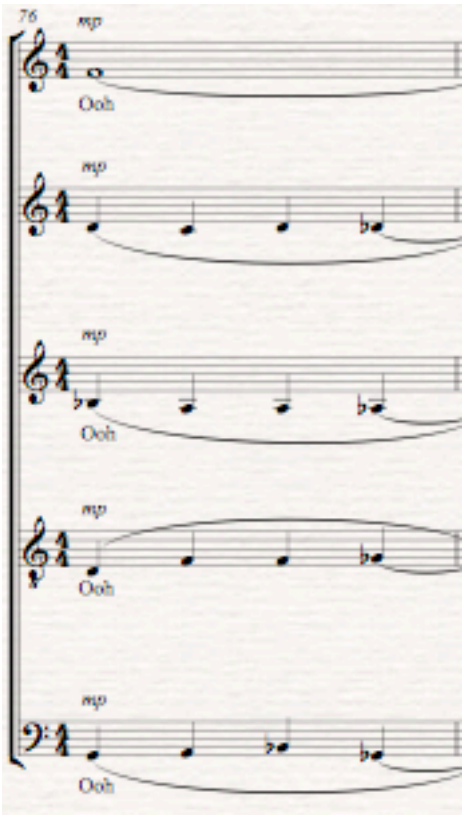
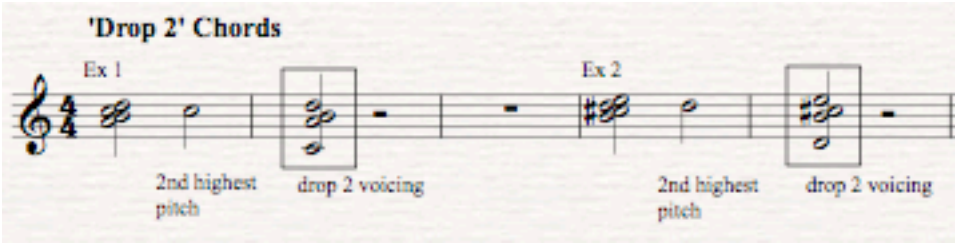


Fig. 2.4



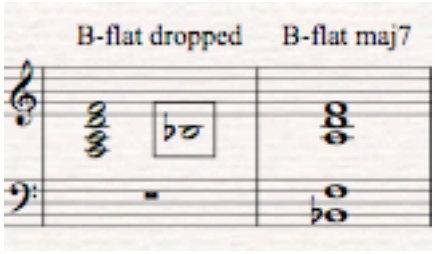
There is a particular voicing that I use in my music a lot that is used in Jazz music extensively. It is called the ‘drop 2’ voicing and is formed by taking the second highest note in a cluster of pitches (usually four or five), and dropping this note down an octave. This process of dropping the note down expands out the chord and gives it a new broad, resonant quality. This voicing is very common to guitar players and is seen as a textbook guitar voicing for any chord. Below are two examples of these drop 2 chords.

Fig. 2.5



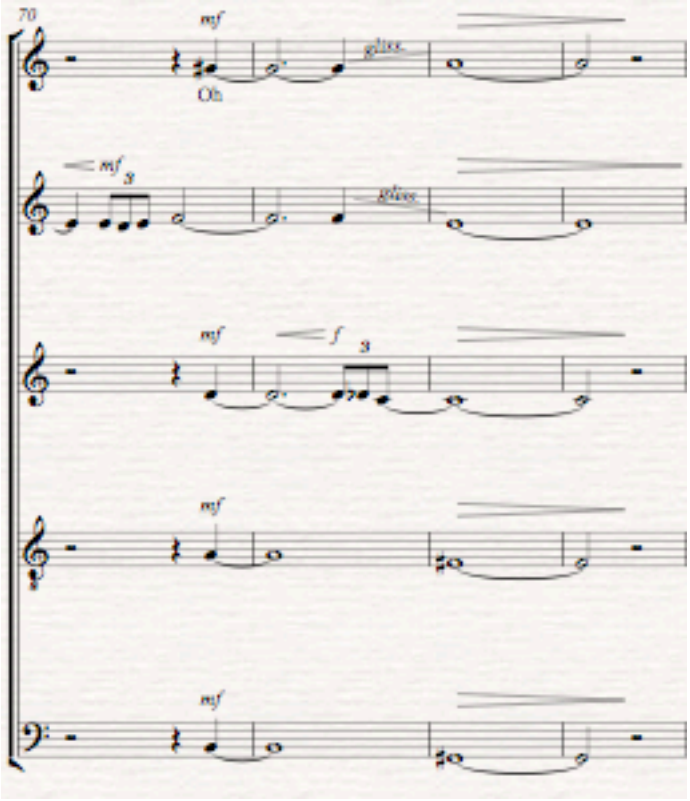
An example of a drop 2 voicing is seen at the third crotchet of bar 76 where the B-flat has been dropped down an octave to form a B-flat maj7 chord.

Fig. 2.6



The structure of this piece is ABA Ternary form. The second A section is not as long as the first but acts like a Recapitulation. The B section starts from bar 48 and contains more individual movement inside the voices. The soprano part takes the melody while the other parts accompany the melodic line. As the A section returns at bar 67 the music becomes more dissonant and new darker harmonies occur between the voices. An example of this change comes from bars 70 through to 73.

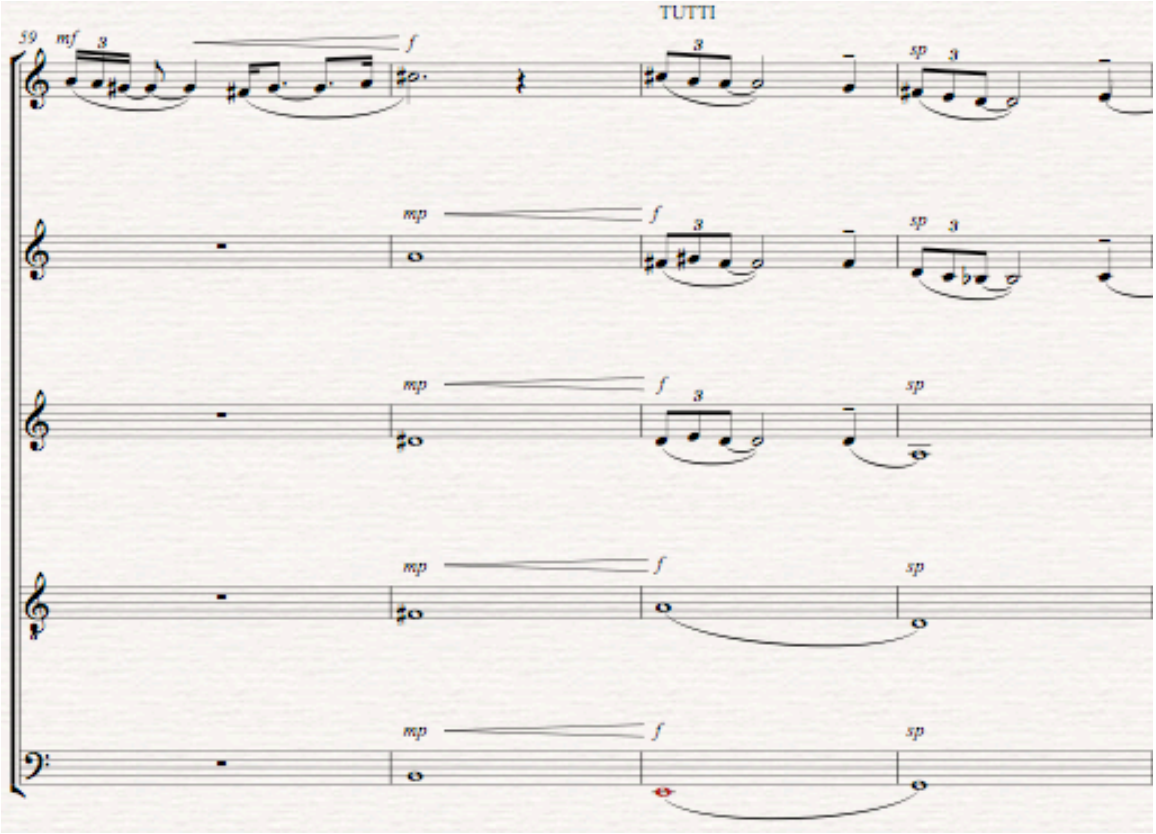
Fig. 2.7



A return to the four-crotchet motif brings the piece back to the original mood first heard.

One of the most important aspects of this piece in terms of performance is the dynamics. Dynamics give the piece its energy and shape. Without dynamics the piece could be seen as a straight line with no curves, no direction and nothing happening! I wanted to make the music swell and ebb seamlessly through the collections of colour. The climax of the piece and the arrival of the highest pitch comes in bar 60 in the soprano on the C#. The use of dynamics in the build up to this pitch and throughout the piece shapes the music and gives it a sense of direction. An example of these dynamics is shown below.

Fig. 2.8



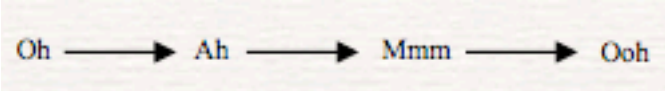
I like to contrast the dynamics as much as possible using both poles of the dynamic range. Going from *mezzo piano* to *forte* in the space of two bars heightens the drama and forces the listener to become more involved with the music.

For this piece I chose not to use any text. This was partly due to the fact that I had already chosen a concept for the piece and felt no specific need for any text, as I did not want to be restricted to the meaning of the words and the sounds that each word holds. I chose to use my own vowel sounds so that I could achieve the sound and shape of words without using any. This was what appealed to me the most. Another reason why I chose to use vowels was to do with interpretation. If there is a set text and the audience has the words in front of them, the meaning and impact of the piece is going to be predetermined for each listener. What I intended to do was to make sure every person would come up with their own thoughts and interpretations.

The way in which I use the vowel sounds is very simple; in the score between one vowel sound and another there is a small dash. This dash means that as you go through

the bar you should slowly change the shape of your mouth to then arrive at the next vowel sound. This achieves a smooth transition from one mouth shape to another. Perhaps most importantly though these vowel sounds are completely ambiguous in meaning and fit well with the atonal setting of the music. The vowel sounds I have chosen have each got a certain timbre that I like. The closed mouth sounds (Mmm) combined with the open vowel sounds (Oh, Ah, Ooh) provided some contrast through the piece. I think also there was an effective natural *diminuendo* when a closed mouth sound was employed; this too was something I liked when tried at the workshop. An example of how these vowel sounds move can be seen below.

Fig. 2.9



Changing Hues

This piece is the second of two pieces for *a cappella* choir. It is similar in concept to *Complementary Colours* in the way that it is also influenced by the relationship of colours to each other. The inspiration for this work came when I was watching somebody painting with dark brown paint and completely by accident a white speck of paint landed in this dark brown colour. When the person mixed in the white paint, I was amazed to see just how different the overall colour had become. It was a completely different shade of brown and held a very different mood. I thought a comparison of this in music would be a good idea. For this piece I started out with an idea for the background, a system of pitches that would develop and recur in sections. Over this background I would then lay different harmonies, thereby changing the mood of the music. This meant that anytime a new note was heard, this changed the complexion of the background music and acted like the contaminating white paint.

The structure of the piece is like Rondo Form, ABACAD, with the recurring A sections contrasted with the other alternating sections. The A sections contain lines that

are interwoven with only a few pitches (Fig. 2.10). These pitches slowly expand in number and range as the music progresses. I will address this expansion in detail later. The movement in these sections is very irregular and never contains rhythmic unison. This creates contrast to the *tutti* sections where the voices come in unison (Fig. 2.11). An example of these structural differences can be seen below.

Fig. 2.10

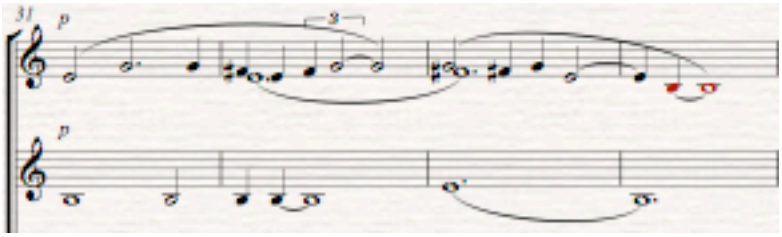
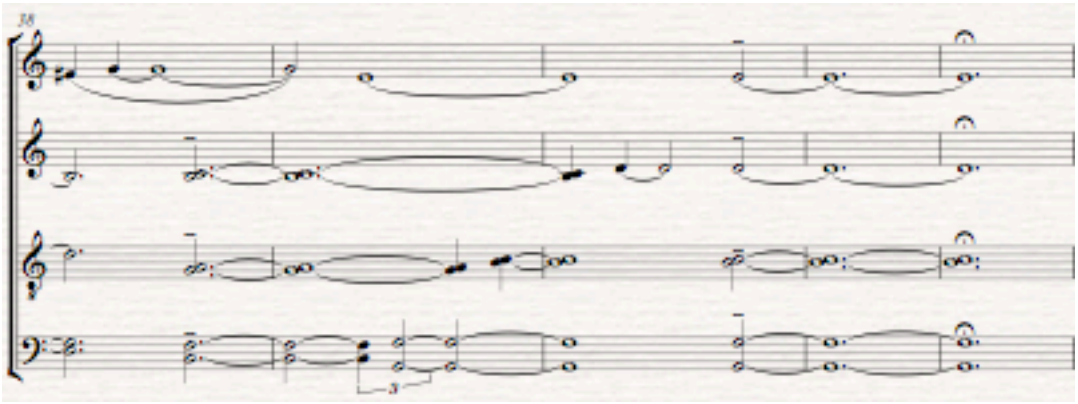


Fig. 2.11

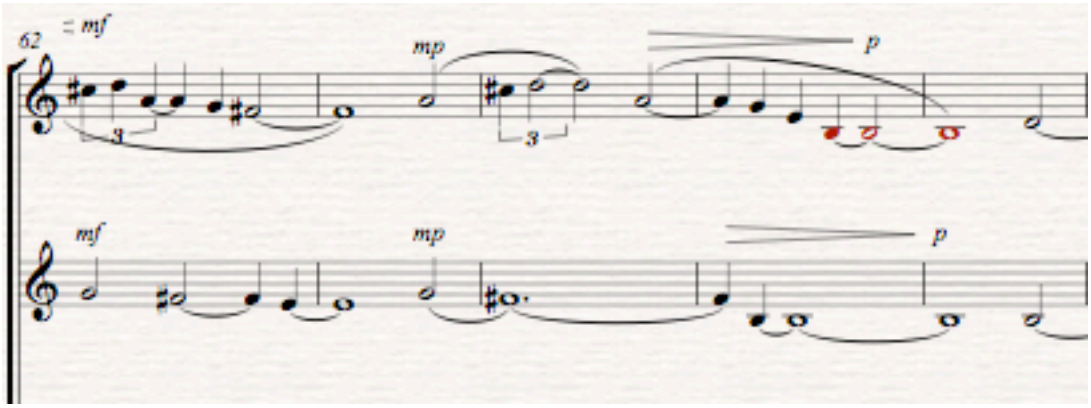


Another structural component of the piece was to lengthen the phrases of both the A section material along with the contrasting sections. Each section as the music progresses gets slightly longer until we reach the 'Solo' section with the soprano. This means the music is free to develop and become more detailed.

The shape of the piece rises from low to high throughout but at the very end returns to its original register. The music at the beginning is centered on the E above middle C and slowly expands outward with the inclusion of the alto, tenor and bass

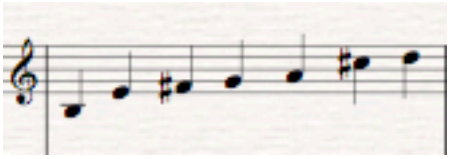
entries. The climax of the piece, which is the highest note, comes in bar 62. This is also when the seven-note scale is completed and the piece has reached its point of direction.

Fig. 2.12



The use and choice of pitch material became one of the most thought about subjects for this piece. There were two distinct ideas in this piece: the first was the recurring colour of the A sections, and the second was the changing of this colour by the introduction of new voices and timbres. For the A section material, I chose to use only a set number of pitches sparingly. This was used to set up a mysterious sound and keep the music constant. The original A section started with only one or two pitches and then by adding new pitches slowly, a full seven-note scale was formed.

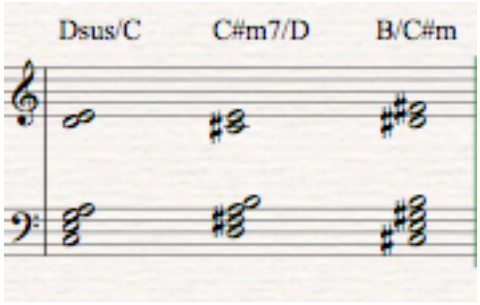
Fig. 2.13



As for the other contrasting sections, the pitches used for these are in no way connected to the seven-note scale. The pitches they use add new interesting colours to the background material of the soprano and alto. One of the ways in which these contrasting sections create this ‘changing of hues’ was by using ‘extended slash chords’. An extended slash chord is one where the triad or the upper chord has been altered using an

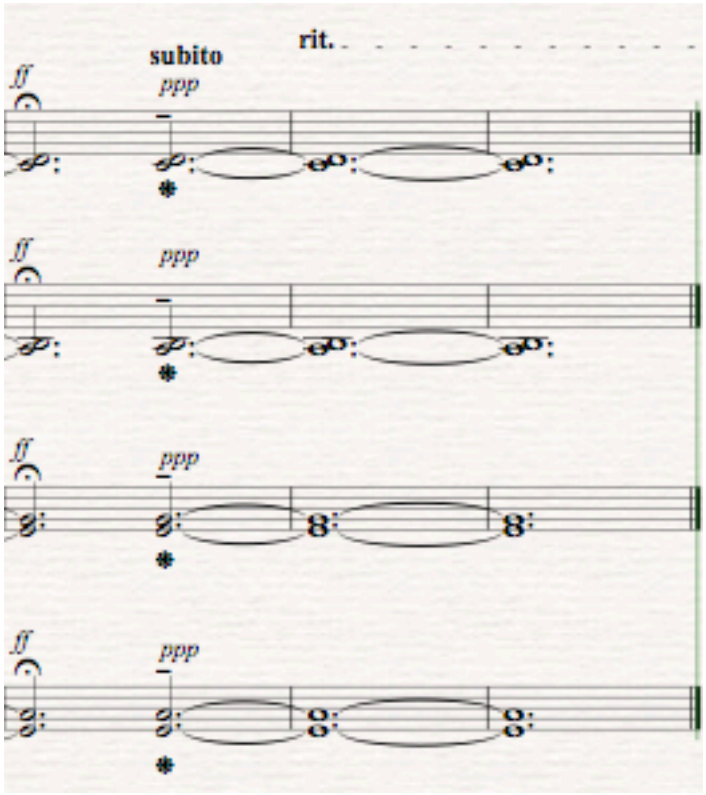
extension. It still maintains the form of a chord with a different bass note underneath, but this time the upper chord contains extensions and hence thickens the texture. An example of these extended slash chords is seen here in bars 50 to 55 in the alto, tenor and bass parts. The progression moves from a Dsus/C or C 6/9, to a C#m7/D or Dmaj13 and then to a B/C#m also called C#m11.

Fig. 2.14



As with *Complementary Colours* I chose not to use any text. Unlike *Complementary Colours* the vowel sound does not change, it stays the same 'auh' sound for the whole piece, apart from a few specifically marked points. These points are marked with an asterix on the score. This asterix means that notes under which it is written are to be hummed. This humming was incorporated into the music to lower the dynamics and create a much more muted sound. The hummed sound is used in four places during the piece and almost always happens in the lower part of the voice's range. It occurs in bars 26, 76, 104 and 110. I wrote these notes in a low range because firstly it would be easier for the singers to sing and secondly I feel the result is more effective when placed there. A good example of this is heard in the last three bars of the piece.

Fig. 2.15



Another issue I had relating to the singing of the piece was repeated notes. I thought that if a note was repeated the 'auh' sound would be re-sung, meaning a breath was needed to sing the repeated note. This would mean a break in the line and a disruption to the phrase. My solution to this was to have each repeated note sung with an 'l' sound. This maintained a smooth line and took away the need for strong attacks on any of the notes. Other consonants were tried and tested in a vocal workshop to see just which one best suited the fluid nature of the music; luckily the 'l' sound was perfect! During the workshop I asked about the long sustained notes and what the best way of dealing with these was. Usually the singers would need a breath at some point but because this piece is written for choir I staggered the breathing so that a continuous sound was heard. This enabled me to sustain long notes without a break for breath, in mid-phrase.

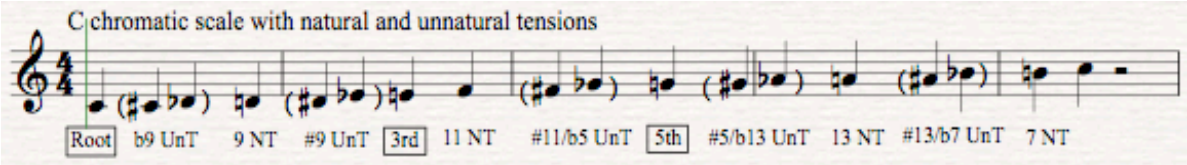
2.2 New York Nights

The inspiration for this piece came from a trip I had to the city a few years ago. The city itself, apart from being quite large, can be very claustrophobic and crammed. This was a feeling that was always present when I was there. However, at night-time the city was very different from the day; it was still active but it became more atmospheric and colourful. Interesting sights and sounds filled the air as you walked around: hotdog vendors looking for customers, impatient cabdrivers dodging jaywalkers and general activity from everybody around. There was also a sense of danger; walking off the main street and ending up in a quiet poorly lit avenue giving you a sense that you have disturbed someone or something. This was, however, contrasted with the more elegant, warm nature of the city. A friendly feeling of camaraderie between the people in such a big city is rare and very comforting.

Historically the city itself has a fascinating story and this also influenced the construction of the piece. One factor is the fact that the city is a melting pot of all different cultures and traditions. When poverty struck the people of Europe they flocked to New York in search of a new life. During the Great Famine in Ireland approximately one million people emigrated to new shores, as did people from Eastern Europe, Italy and Scandinavia. These people brought with them the music, food and traditions that shaped the East Coast of America. One of the great changes in America during the turn of the century was the influence of the African American presence in the Southern States. These African Americans started to bring their own unique voice to the music of the South. This music became known as Jazz. It was this phenomenon that is the central influence on the music of this piece. During the 1920's right through to the 60's New York has been one of the big Jazz hubs of the world and still maintains its title today. Jazz music played a huge part socially in New York during these times. It was the soundtrack during the Prohibition era and was played in almost every speakeasy throughout America at that time. It also helped to stop the segregation between blacks and whites and meant that eventually musicians of either colour could play together on the same stage.

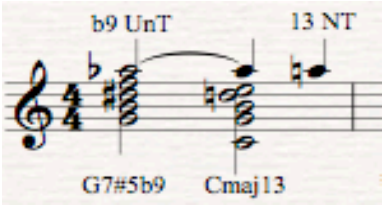
Jazz music to me has a vibrant colour and intensity about it that is not so prominent in other types of popular music. This is largely due to its rich harmonic language. The harmony of Jazz music has changed dramatically over the decades but one thread has been sustained throughout and that is the use of extensions and chord substitutions. In Jazz the only essential notes needed for any harmony are the root and the third of the chord; any additional notes are called 'extensions'. These extra notes create colour, mood and tensions that resolve from chord to chord. Sometimes these extensions contain natural and unnatural or altered tensions. Natural tensions are notes that originate diatonically from the root, for example 6ths, 9ths 11ths and 13ths. Whereas altered notes are ones which have been 'altered' from the diatonic scale and sound unnatural with the root, for example b5's, #5's, b9's and #9's etc.

Fig. 2.16



These altered pitches contribute to the harmony by adding an intensity that would otherwise be absent. A common harmony extension shift in Jazz is to release an altered note from one chord to a natural one in the following chord. This is a very important technique in the composition of Jazz chord progressions because it involves the concept of 'Tension and Release'.

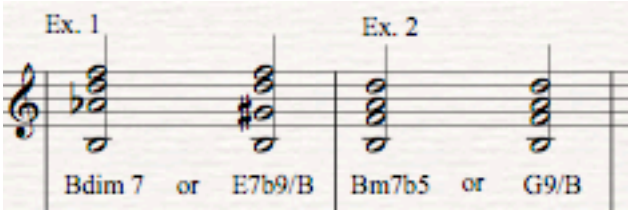
Fig. 2.17



Chord substitution is also a very common Jazz practice. It is executed by replacing one chord with another that has exactly the same notes. However this new

chord serves a very different harmonic function and is used mainly as a pivot for a new direction in the harmony. For example a Bdim7 chord could be seen as an E7b9 chord with its 5th in the bass. Also a Bm7b5 chord, or a B half diminished chord can be looked at as a G9 chord played as a voicing, with the root omitted.

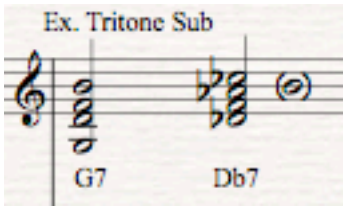
Fig. 2.18



These patterns are seen between lots of chords and they can be given several names and functions depending on where the harmony is going. The harmony I use in this piece does not have one tonal centre; this means I can move around through different chords without ever belonging to one specific key. I achieve this maneuverability by using these chord substitutions.

One of the most used substitutions is the tritone substitution. This substitution is achieved by pivoting around the third and seventh of any dominant chord to create a new harmony. The third and dominant seventh of one chord inverts itself to become the third and dominant seventh of another chord; by doing this we maintain two common pitches while stretching the harmony beyond the diatonic framework.

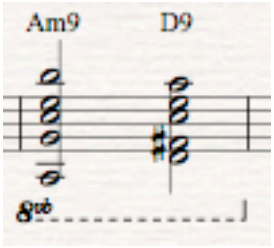
Fig. 2.19



This kind of chord progression is common in ‘Modal Jazz’ because it has an ‘outside’ sound and the reason for this is because the new substitution is built on the tritone.

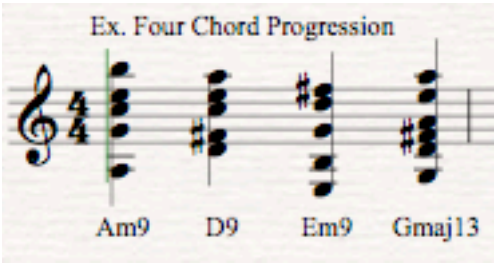
The chords that I used throughout this piece were specifically chosen with the mood of the city in mind. I wanted to start with just a two-chord opening so that the listener would be grabbed instantly and his/her attention held. These two chords are a minor triad and a major triad, but it is the extensions added that carry the most interest. The first chord has two extensions, a dominant seventh with a ninth, and the second chord also has a dominant seventh with a ninth.

Fig. 2.20



These ninth chords have a particular Jazz sound as they carry the ninth interval, which is seen as a very melodic interval in Jazz music. The construction of these chords comes from taking a major or minor third and placing the extensions on top or inside, whether they are altered or natural. The next two chords to appear complete a four chord collection, these are an E minor 9 chord and a G major 13, bars 19 and 31 respectively.

Fig. 2.21

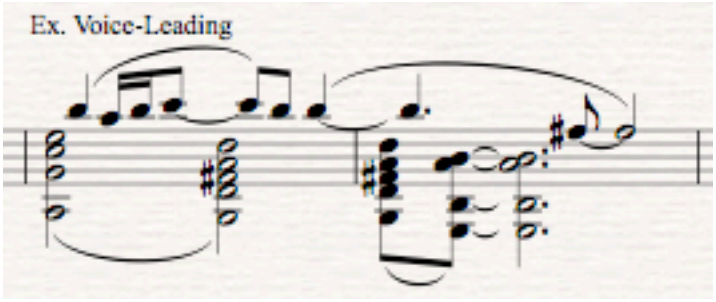


These chords although all relating to G major do not seem connected to the previous opening chords due to their placement in the music; they are added more for colour and give the music a sense of direction. For me sometimes an unpredictable chord change can be as exhilarating as any change in dynamics or instrumentation. Other chords are

carefully chosen throughout the rest of the piece by determining what character they possess and their affect on the listener.

The progression from chord to chord is almost as important as the chords themselves. A weak progression where the chords have been chosen without thought given to the direction of the harmony, often results in a weak phrase and a 'wandering' feeling. One of the ways in which I avoid this 'wandering' is to use techniques like 'voice-leading' or 'chordal melodies'. Chordal Melodies are defined as melodies that are contained within the chords; they are not complete separate melodies. I use the extensions of the chords to create a melodic line within the chord progression. Voice-Leading is a technique where the chord progression is led by a melodic line, which then dictates the harmony.

Fig. 2.22



Both of these techniques can be seen in the final section of the piece (bar 105 on). This section moves through ten chords that contain a melody within; the harmony is supplementary to this melodic line.

Fig. 2.23

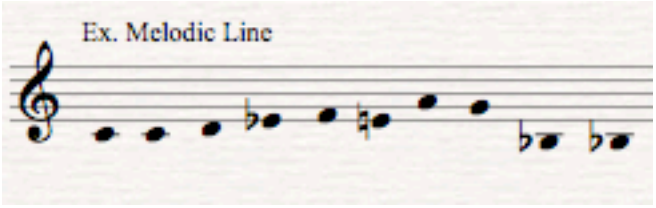
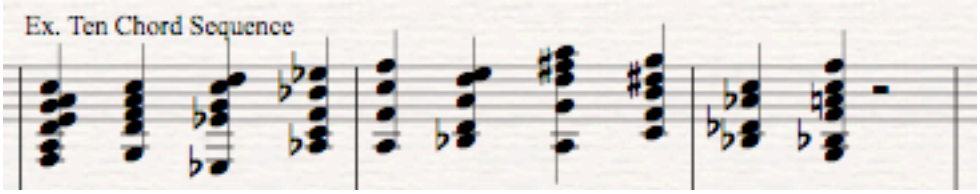


Fig. 2.24

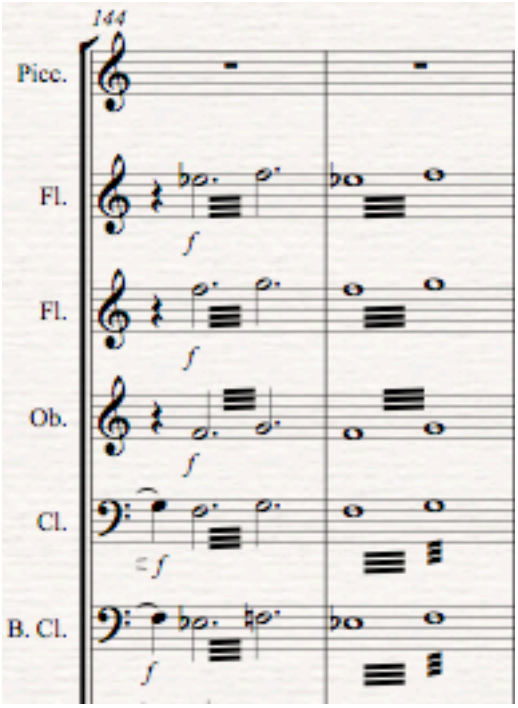


In this piece there is a distinct emphasis on particular families of instruments. The relationship between these families is very important for the overall shape of the work. The brass section, for example, is in the foreground for the most part of the piece and carries most of the melodic material, whereas the string section provides a harmonic backdrop for rich 'brassy' sonorities to be laid upon. The strings however themselves are divided into two parts, *pizzicato* rhythmic interjections and long sustained notes in the bowed instruments. Each of these provides contrast and support to the main brass texture.

The wind section is used in a secondary role much like the strings, never really dictating the piece but rather enriching the harmony with melodic lines and doublings. The winds do however take a more active role during the middle section of the piece when the strings drop out, bars 82-101. The relationship of the percussion instruments throughout the piece is similar to the *pizzicato* string parts. They serve to punctuate the brass lines and help to define phrase lengths.

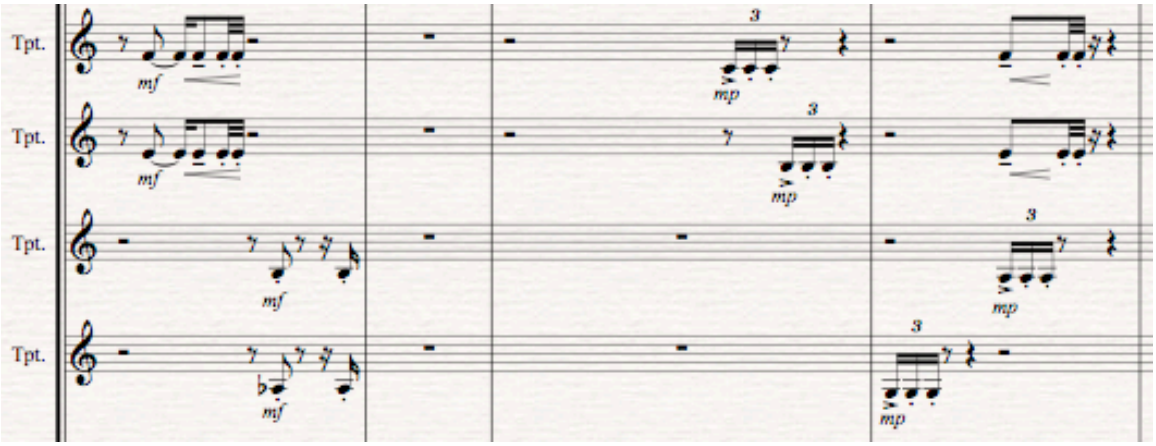
I have used very different ways of dealing with each of the orchestral families. The winds, for example, play snippets of melody and sometimes add colour to the sound by doubling the chord extensions higher up in a different pitch area. I think because the piece is in a low register, the winds can soar over the top of the brass and strings to stretch the range and introduce a new pitch area. Also characteristically the winds are more agile than the brass instruments and so they can execute tremolos and trills with better ease and to a much greater effect. I utilized these characteristics in many points of climax through the work, for example bars 144 and 145.

Fig. 2.25



The brass on the other hand are not as versatile and so play in a different manner. The horns are the instruments that carry most of the dominant harmony and melody throughout. When all four horns play there is a thickening of the texture and a very heavy 'brassy' sound is achieved. This sound was central in the inspiration of the piece. I wanted to have the brass as a weight pulling the music down to a dark, murky sound where the percussion could then rumble and add to this. The use of the 'Harmon' mutes on the first and second trumpets has a specific 'jazzy' sound, largely due to the fact that a lot of jazz trumpeters today still use them regularly. The brass section becomes the most striking during the middle section, bars 82-101. The trumpets during this section depict the sound of car horns and traffic noise. These noises are conveyed as semi-quaver motifs that begin to pop out from the music and disrupt the *legato*, melodic material heard in the wind parts.

Fig. 2.26



As previously said, the string section is split into two different roles: one is the *pizzicato* rhythmic part and the other is the long sustained bowed notes. The *pizzicato* was chosen to add some movement to the static background role of the strings, and also to provide a contrast to the blocks of harmony played by the brass and wind sections. The bowed string parts however alternate between *tremolo* and natural notes with first and second violins sometimes playing double stops and *divisi* chords. The string *tremolo* was employed mostly with a timpani roll during a long *crescendo* for dynamic effect. The *tremolo* was also used to add tension and depict the dangerous element of the city at night-time.

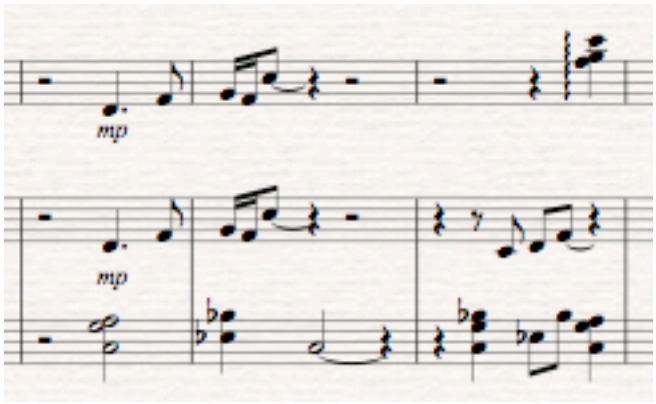
For me the most effective use of the instruments was to not use them! In the middle section I chose not to have the strings play at all. This was to thin out the texture and bring the listeners attention to other parts of the orchestra. Finally, the strings do not use the mutes until they reach the final section. The music in this section is quite quiet in comparison to the other sections and I thought it would be a good idea to use the mutes for all strings to try and get a low 'hum'. I took this idea from a cello player I had been talking to about mutes and how they work within an orchestra, and he told me that

collectively mutes work very well in a whole string section. It has more of an effect if there is more than one person playing at the same time, instead of an ensemble piece with one instrument muted. When the strings drop out temporarily during the last few bars, I remove the mutes to allow the final harmonics to be heard clearly and cleanly.

Percussion instruments are particularly interesting to me because of how they influence the texture and colour of a piece. For this piece I chose the timpani, a suspended cymbal and the glockenspiel. The timpani and cymbal are used in points of climax, generally played *tremolo* with *crescendo*. They mainly play together but there are some points in the piece where only timpani are used; this is due to the fact that rhythms are not as clearly articulated on the cymbal as with the timpani. Like most percussion instruments these two instruments drop out in the middle of the piece and only reappear at the end. This happens because the middle section is where the brass and winds play a very central role and it was important to keep the texture light and not weigh it down with heavy sounds.

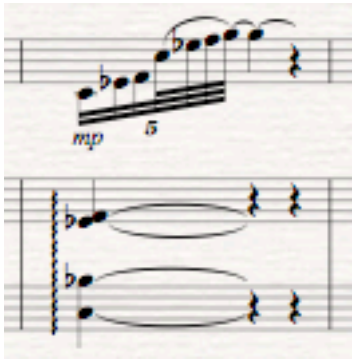
Perhaps the most startling use of the percussion section is the use of the glockenspiel. The glockenspiel is by far the highest and most distinct sound in the piece and this is very important structurally and sonically. I use it very sparingly throughout, but when it is used it is rarely mistakable. The first time, for example, is very stark: bars 35 and 36. It is played almost on its own with just the bass clarinet and bassoons for support. Up to this point the music has been quite low but loud and now the sound of the glockenspiel is piercing through this 'cloudy' texture. This happens repeatedly at breaks in the music, at the end of phrases, etc. It serves as a sparse divider between these huge collections of thick texture and colour, for example bars 61-64. The glockenspiel then at the end of the middle section plays the melody with, for the first time in the piece, the celesta.

Fig. 2.27



This makes for a very unpredictable, yet powerful sonority. The glockenspiel plays a very high melody that is doubled by the celesta two octaves below. This phrase, bars 98-100, ends with the highest note of the piece in a chord played by the glockenspiel. These two instruments come together again at the end of the piece on the final chord at bar 154.

Fig. 2.28



The subtle use of the celesta with the glockenspiel I think is very effective because of the 'light' sound that both instruments have and the 'brilliant' and clear quality the notes produce. They have a great contrast with the heavy sound that dominates the piece throughout. These were what attracted me to using the instruments together and why I think they are so compatible.

2.3 Three Pieces for Piano, Violin and Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

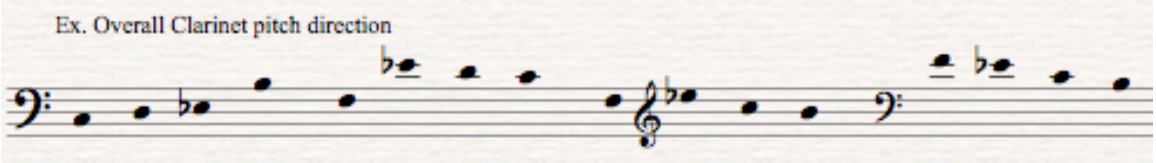
These three pieces were composed in contrast to one another in mood and in construction. The idea was to bring the listener through a series of different moods and scenes to stir up an emotional response to the music. I purposely chose very different harmonic material for each piece because I felt that there would be a bigger impact on the listener if one piece was followed by another hugely contrasting in sound, colour and atmosphere. For example the first piece, *Lying in Wait* was composed using only a set number of pitches; this gives the piece a very sinister, brooding mood that is described by the title. In sharp contrast to this the second piece, *A Day on the Wheat Harvest* is very relaxed and contemplative in mood and contains no real abrupt changes in dynamics or dissonance. The third and final piece of this work is the duo for violin and piano. The title of this piece is perhaps the most open in terms of interpretation. *Letter to a Friend* is the title, which has no specific meaning but as soon as the music begins all sorts of images and stories come to mind. There is a nostalgic, almost sad, sound to this final movement, which was a feeling that was very present all the way through the writing of it. The kind of movement and shape of this piece is also starkly different from those before, making it an unusual ending for the set.

The titles have a lot to do with how the listener identifies with a piece before a sound is heard. This is something I like to do a lot with my pieces; which is to use a very descriptive title so that the listener can not only imagine the scene but also really get inside the mood of the piece. The more descriptive the title, the less room there is for interpretation. So for this set of pieces the meaning is really up to the listener to find it.

Lying in Wait

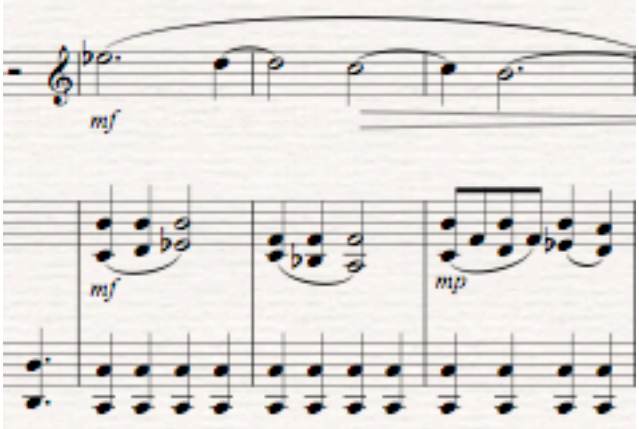
The overall shape of this piece is achieved by the use of the pitch material.

Fig. 2.29



As the melodic lines in the bass clarinet continually rise, this leads to a climax point in the piece, at bar 36. At this point a change in the piano drone from a D pitch to a C is quite an important change structurally.

Fig. 2.30

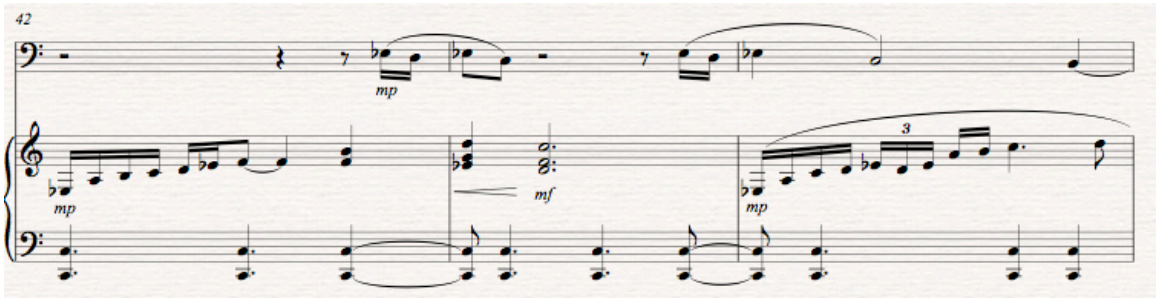


From this point the pitch area closes in again and the piece draws to a close. The shape therefore is a symmetrical one. There are points along the way that act as pivotal moments, contributing to the shape. An example of one of these changes is seen in bar 10, as the single note drone in the left hand of the piano suddenly becomes an octave drone. Also the change in the piano from single notes predominantly in the right hand to

chords at bar 36 is another example. These subtle changes in texture change the overall mood of the piece.

The relationship between the instruments is important in this piece to create the mood and sustain a feeling of threat throughout. The bass clarinet is used in its lower range for most of the piece and the piano complements this by playing very close in register as well. The clarinet moves in three or four note phrases that constantly expand in range. This kind of playing by the clarinet is mostly linear with few intervallic jumps. The piano however is supporting this by playing a repeated pitch over and over as a drone. This creates a solid backdrop to lay the clarinet part upon. As the piece moves slowly forward the range of the clarinet expands and the lines become more intricate. The piano also supports this with a more chordal accompaniment. The piano in the right hand mimics the clarinet part with linear melodic material, example bars 42-44.

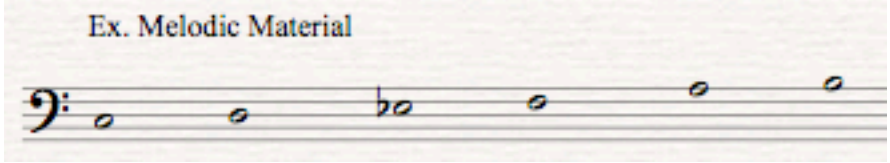
Fig. 2.31



The clarinet at the end of the piece returns to its original opening register and the piece draws to an end with the piano playing dissonant chords based on the previous material.

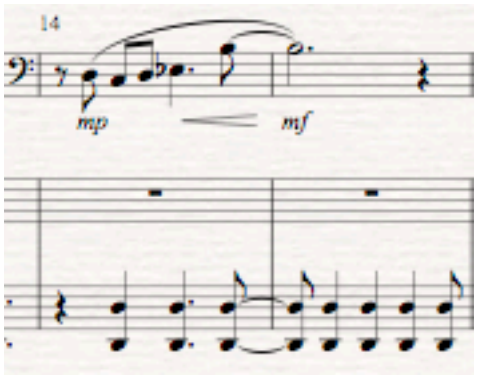
I chose specific pitches for this piece by way of improvisation; these were carefully decided upon to enhance the mood and create an atmosphere. They are played firstly with just three notes, then expanded one by one until a hexatonic scale is formed.

Fig. 2.32



Each new pitch was introduced with emphasis and sometimes was held sustained over the drone bass, example bars 14-15

Fig. 2.33



These new pitches also helped in expanding the range of each instrument and created new pitch areas. When the scale has finally been played with all the pitches it creates thicker textures and more possibilities instrumentally. In bar 40 the piano plays the scale intervallically while in bar 44 the scale is played from an Eb up to a C natural linearly.

Fig. 2.34

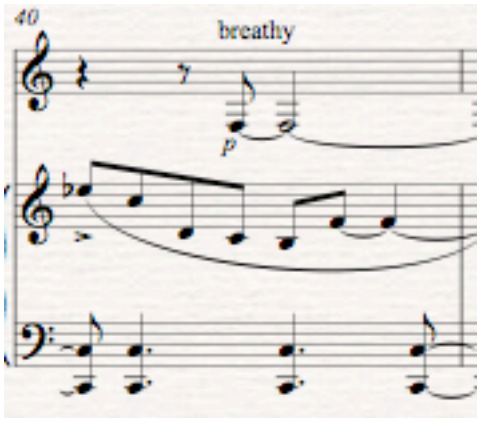
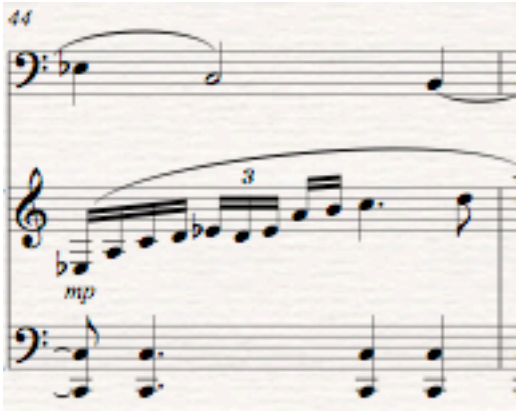


Fig. 2.35



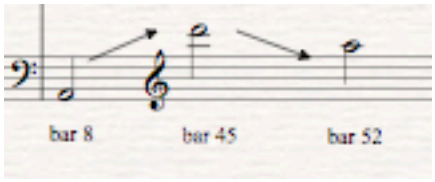
These contrasting uses of the piano create a thick texture and allow the right hand to be more creative and melodic over the drone. As the piece progresses and more pitches are introduced, the music becomes more intense and mysterious as a result.

My main thinking during the construction of this piece was to try and maintain a 'static' atmosphere that was present from start to finish. The combination of the drone idea and the restrained use of pitch material meant that a certain 'sound' was maintained throughout. This was key to the identity of the work. I think there is an influence of Arvo Pärt's music. His music is very concise and unified; there is a great sense of deliberate repetition and a sonorous sound that rings throughout every piece. I tried to achieve that same kind of attention to sonority in this piece by use of pitch material and rhythmic repetition. Perhaps one of the main differences between Pärt's music and this particular piece is the inevitable direction towards the climax at bar 36. There is a sense that the music is going somewhere, it is not a completely 'static', un-developing piece of music. The fact that there is an arrival point suggests that the music has a definite direction and is moving towards this point of climax from the beginning.

A Day on the Wheat Harvest

The shape of this piece is very different to *Lying in Wait* by the fact that it is not a symmetrical one. There are three instruments in this piece and two of them have very static roles while the other moves around and between them; the bass clarinet is this instrument. From the start of the piece to the very end the clarinet line is constantly rising. From bar 8 to its last pitch in bars 52-53, the clarinet spans three octaves.

Fig. 2.36



It rises from well below the piano to high above it just underneath the violin register. This upwardly rising line is the shape the piece hangs on and is the only real developing

feature of the piece. The slowly rising clarinet line depicts the long, drawn out day of work on the harvest. The piano depicts the slow, repetitive nature of the work that is done while the violin portrays the ever-present, searing heat of the sun that beats down on the workers.

There are clear, specific roles taken by each of the instruments in this piece. Each instrument contributes something to the overall sound and effect that the music has. The piano for the whole piece contains no melodic material, its purpose is harmonic support and to create a texture which the other instruments can be played over. Unlike the clarinet and violin, the piano plays in every single bar giving it a feeling of background music, or a backdrop that sets up a certain ambience. The violin is also less important as a background instrument; it contains less movement than the piano and again contains no melody. I think because of what the violin represents, to give it more movement does not add to its representation, but rather detracts from it. The piano and violin together work as a unit while the clarinet is the voice of the piece carrying the melodic material. The clarinet line is like the 'story' of the piece and meanders through the different piano colours. It is this relationship that is most interesting and striking.

The pitch material was chosen using intervals rather than individual pitch selection. The intervals I used were mainly perfect fourths, perfect fifths and major seconds. Sometimes as a consequence of the music being layered, major sixths can be heard. The reason I chose these intervals was because they contained an ambiguous, open sound that I thought matched the vast landscape I was trying to portray. It allowed me, through the 'harmonic series', to sustain great resonances with these specific intervals. All of the piano music contains these fourths and fifths and most of the lines and ideas in the clarinet part also move by these intervals. The opening bars of the piece and the final chord in the piano are clear examples of this spacious sounding harmony.

Fig. 2.37

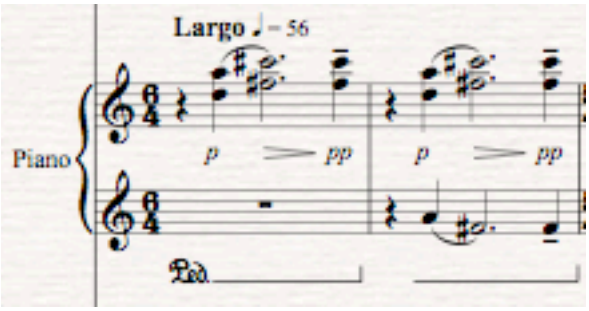
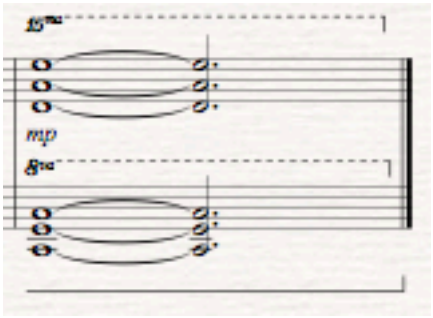


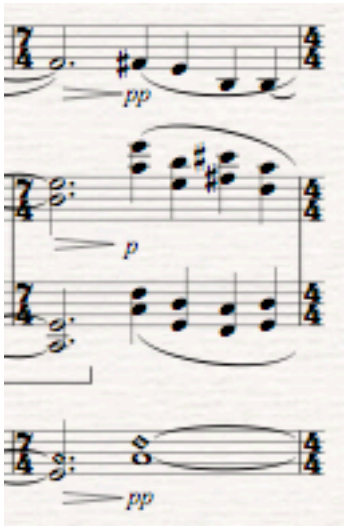
Fig. 2.38



Though the piece is atonal in its construction, there seems to be a certain feeling of tonality due to the repetitive piano part. However, by having no key the music seamlessly floats between different tonalities never actually being grounded to one at any time.

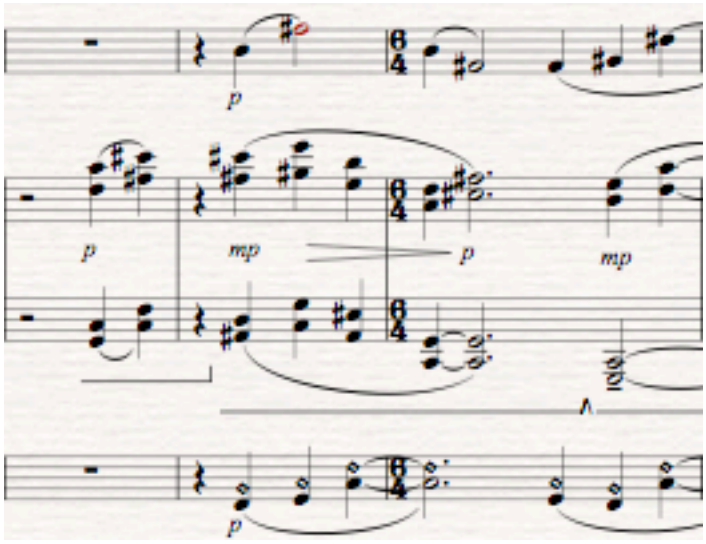
Perhaps one of the most noticeable elements of this music is its sense of movement. The music moves in small phrases or waves. The changing time signatures lengthen and shorten these phrases while the rising and falling fourths and fifths give them shape. A large portion of this piece moves in regular blocks of rhythmic unison, this technique was applied to connect the parts both rhythmically as well as harmonically.

Fig. 2.39



One of the other compositional ideas I used for structure was to give the instruments points of silence in which each instrument rests for the duration of a crotchet or minim.

Fig. 2.40



These pauses in the music were used to create phrase lengths and to have the music breathe more easily instead of it being one block of consistent harmony. I think of silence as music as well. I do not think there is a need to have an instrument playing at all times. It is very effective to have one of the instruments come from a silence and take some time to itself; this gives the instrument and the music it plays an extra importance or surprise element, which can be very powerful on a first hearing.

Letter to a Friend

The overall shape of this movement comes in the form of contrasting phrases. There are three distinct motifs throughout: one is a voice-leading violin idea accompanied by piano chords (Fig.2.41), the second is a low piano chord with violin *pizzicato*(Fig. 2.42), and the third is a rising linear solo line almost like imitation between the two instruments (Fig. 2.43).

Fig. 2.41

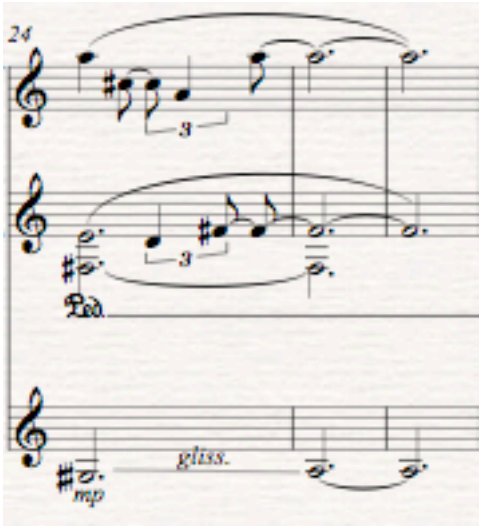


Fig. 2.42

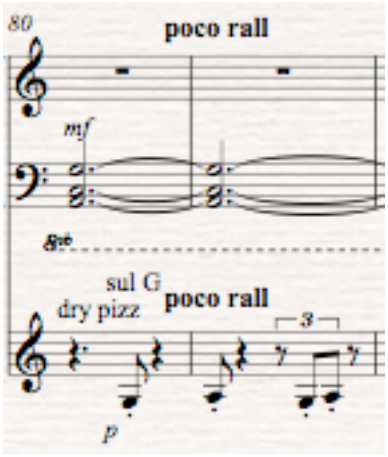
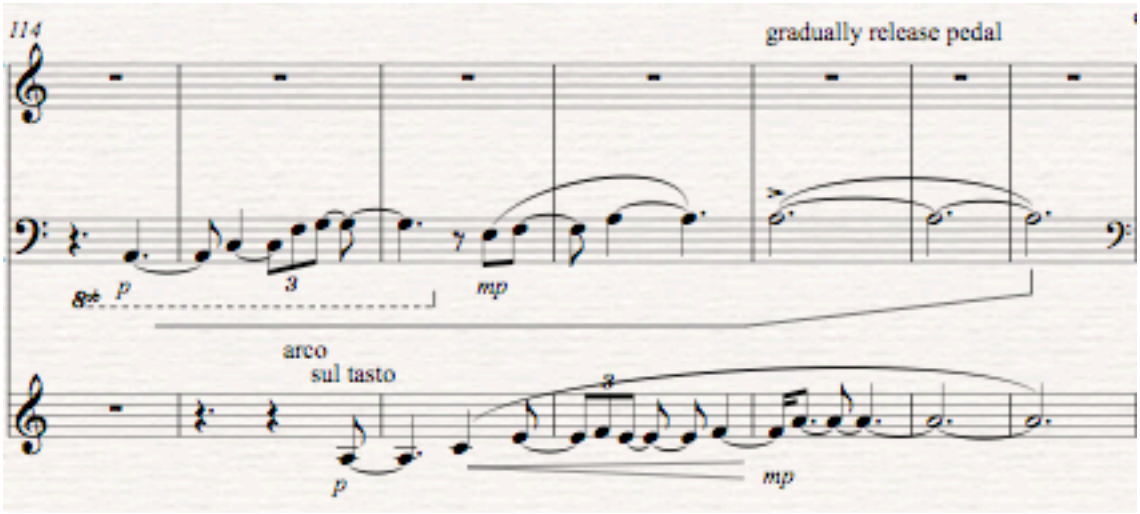
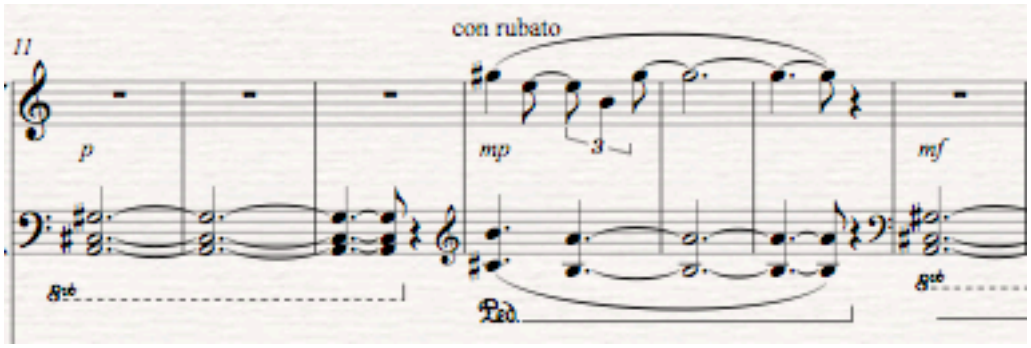


Fig. 2.43



The use of these ideas creates the shape of the piece. Wide leaps in register allow the piece to move from one phrase to the next without seeming startling. For example in bar 17 the return of the low piano chord does not seem startling because of the previously heard chord at bar 11.

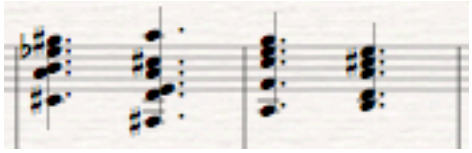
Fig. 2.44



These changes in register become all the more familiar as the piece progresses. *Pizzicato* violin breaks up the flow of the voice-leading sections and creates a new sonority.

The whole piece is based on a four-chord progression that can be played in any order. These kinds of progressions are what I like to call 'variable progressions', they will work in any order because they are directly transposed from one another and carry a similar mood. Also because they are written in an atonal setting, these parallel chords have no function diatonically and so they do not need, necessarily, to be resolved. This creates a lot of scope harmonically for the direction of the piece. These chords are as follows.

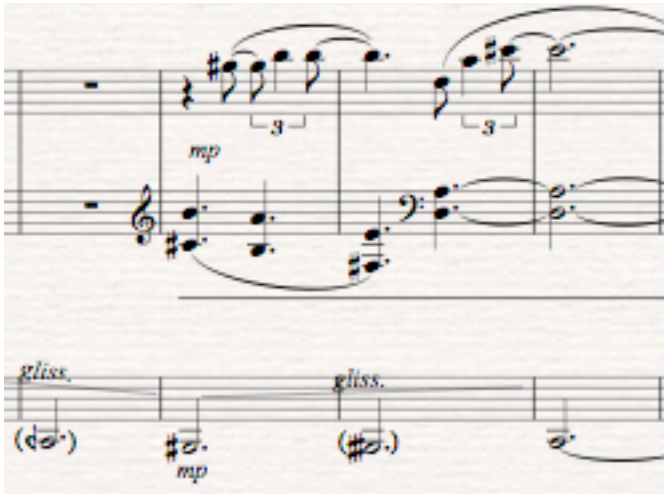
Fig. 2.45



The piano takes each chord and breaks it up into its components while the violin takes the melody. The piano simply breaks up one of the chords to create a linear scale, which can then be used as melodic material. This is due to the sustaining pedal being held down. The *pizzicato* playing of the violin is similar to the piano; a chord is taken and the components of this chord are played individually to create a melodic line.

Of the three main ideas contained in this piece, the one that I think is most effective and startling is Voice-leading. Voice-leading is a technique where a chord progression is led by a single voice. This voice can be contained in the chord or it can be a separate line all together. In the example below for instance, the voice is in the violin part. The violin ties two blocks of harmony together using microtonal *glissandi*. There is an inside/outside sound to some of the violin lines. This is because the pitches contain harsh dissonances that clash with the harmony, but as the harmony then changes so does this pitch. This results in a slow transition from one chord to the next.

Fig. 2.46

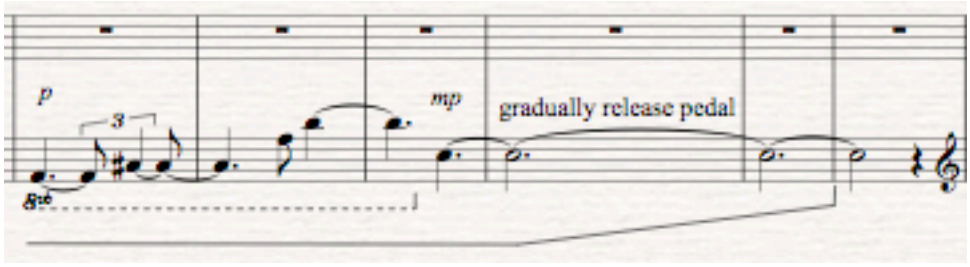


This technique is also an effective way of linking atonal variable progressions together by using a melodic line as a lead. If this crucial melodic line is not present the music can tend to roll onward and not really carry a sense of direction.

Both the instruments in this piece have specific roles and therefore are treated differently. The violin has very subtle touches of colour that change the tone of the music, for example its slow use of *glissando*, *poco a poco, vibrato* and dry *pizzicato*. These techniques with a very fluid piano part make for a pleasant sonority. Moving in *crescendos* and *diminuendos* the violin explores all the different dynamics from triple *piano* to *mezzo forte*. Apart from the very beginning the violin uses the mute throughout the whole piece. This was used to dampen the violin sound so that it complemented the piano's playing. I did not want too much of the bow to sound, I preferred for this piece

that the attack of the bow would somehow not be so prominent. As for the piano, its use inside this piece is quite simple. Fluidity of its part was the most crucial aspect to get right so I opted to use the sustaining pedal continuously. I wanted to mesh the chords together and because the pitches were not always played at the same time, it was necessary to use the pedal so that they could ring on, creating the sound that was needed. At some points of the piano part there is a slow releasing of the pedal; this was an idea to have one pitch emerge through a 'cloud' of notes. By keeping one key pressed down and releasing the pedal, I could make it seem as if one pitch was coming out of the collection.

Fig. 2.47



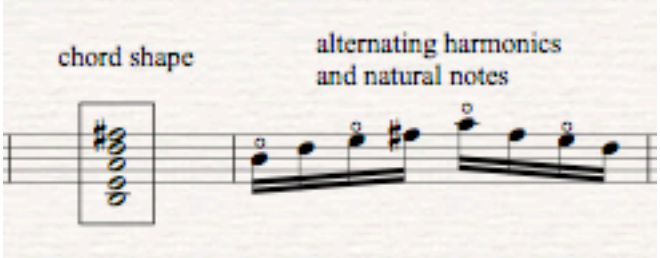
2.4 Warm Rain

This piece is written for a Guitar Quartet. This kind of quartet is different from a string quartet or a saxophone quartet in that each of the four instruments is exactly the same. There is however one tuning alteration that I have made with this particular piece and that is the use of 'drop D' tuning in the fourth guitar part. Drop D tuning is where the lowest string is detuned down a major second from E to D. This gives the guitar a much more dark and resonant sound that is very effective when used properly. It is usually the fourth part that is detuned in a guitar quartet; this leaves the higher parts to play the upper registers.

The inspiration for this piece came to me in the summer. The music depicts a summer rain shower and the subsequent burst of sunshine through the last few drops. I have always wanted to write music based on the rain and I thought for this piece the sound of four steel-string guitars would be a perfect sonority. The difference in sound between a steel-string guitar and a classical guitar is huge, mainly because of the resonance and volume that can be achieved with steel strings. The amount of sustain with steel strings is one of the noticeable differences between the classical guitar and the steel-string guitar. The strings on a classical guitar are wound with nylon strings and because of this, the sound that comes from the guitar is not as clear and brilliant as the steel strings. This means that for a piece such as this where there are a lot of harmonics, a steel string guitar will have a sharper attack and this was crucial to the overall sound. The ongoing continuity of rain and the repetition it has were key factors in the writing of the piece. This continuity was maintained throughout using a specific steel-string guitar technique called 'Harp Harmonics'. These harp harmonics allow a continuous sequence of notes to be held like a sustain pedal on a piano.

Harp harmonics are a simple and effective way of creating a continuous sound while sustaining a certain collection of pitches. They are constructed as follows: take a chord shape, then alternate between harmonics and natural notes, skipping a string each time. Once the whole chord is completed, repeat again and again so that a continuous sound is maintained.

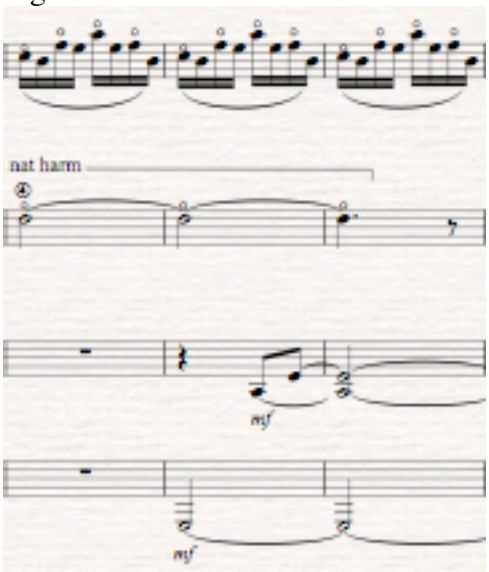
Fig. 2.48



To achieve the best sound from this technique it is important to keep the harmonics equal in volume to the natural notes. Any change in dynamics will unbalance the effect and only take away from the smooth quality of the technique.

Throughout the piece there are distinct relationships between each part. These relationships provide contrast and direction. For example, the use of harmonics in the first and second parts is contrasted with the natural notes of the third and fourth parts.

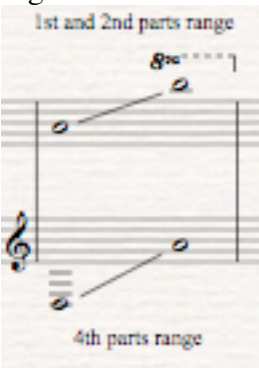
Fig. 2.49



Also the continuity of the first and second parts is in contrast to the more dispersed playing of the third and fourth parts. These relationships set up a foreground/background scenario throughout the piece. There is a registral relationship established from early on.

The fourth line stays within the low areas, and does not rise too high throughout, while the first and second parts maintain their higher pitch areas.

Fig. 2.50

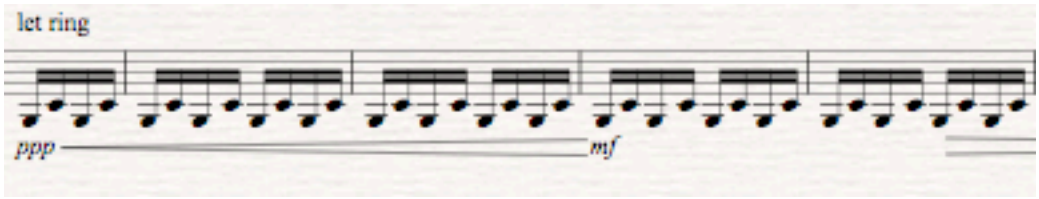


The third part, however, plays a more rhythmic role. Most of the contrasting rhythmic material comes from the third part.

Structurally the piece is in three parts, an opening A section, a B section and finally a small Coda section. The first section, up to bar 59, contains two ideas. These are the upper harp harmonics and the low bass notes. The B section is a longer, more developed section that contains more movement in the lower parts. The harmonic material in this section also becomes more dissonant and jarring in places. The B section differs from the A section structurally, as the phrase lengths of the harp harmonics material shortens as the section draws to a close. Also, the entries of the lower parts appear more frequently and contain more dissonance than the previous A section. The final Coda section from bar 151, which depicts the return of the sun and the last few drops of rain, uses harmonics in short phrases with low bass notes.

There is a clear textural contrast between these three sections. In the first section there are only occasional bass notes that add density to the harp harmonics background. In the second section the texture becomes thicker, with the addition of the semi-quaver alternating bass note idea in the fourth part.

Fig. 2.51



As well as this motif, there is the use of double-stop harmonics in the first and second parts and chords in the third.

Fig. 2.52

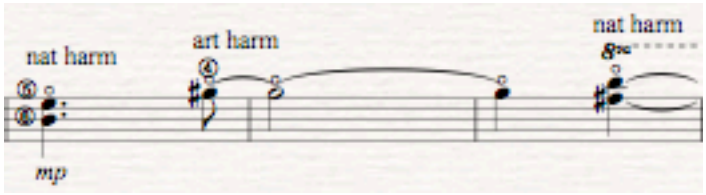
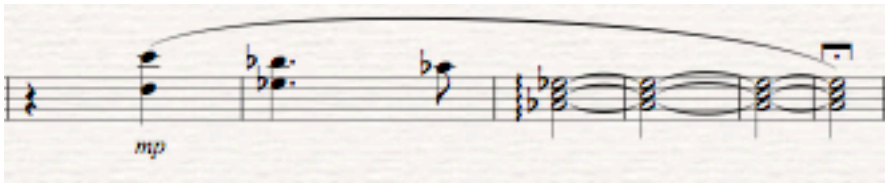


Fig. 2.53



All of these elements contribute to a texturally dense middle section. For the final Coda section the music returns to the sparse texture of the opening, this time with slower, less rhythmic material. Here the harp harmonics make reference to the opening motif of the piece while the low bass notes bring the piece to a close.

2.5 Three pieces for Saxophone Quartet

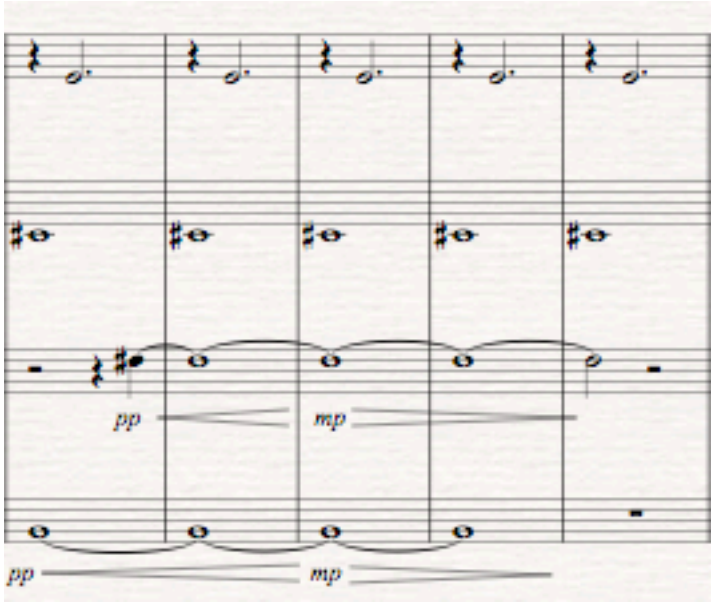
Different Shades

This piece is the first of three for saxophone quartet. I chose to do a work for saxophone quartet mainly because of my love of the instrument and its connection to Jazz music. I have often tried to emulate the sound quality of a saxophone in my own guitar playing. There is a soft, velvety sound that is distinctive to a saxophone and this is something I have always liked and sought to use in this piece. A saxophone quartet comprises: soprano, alto, tenor and baritone. There is a lot of overlapping in the four saxophone ranges and this means that a smooth, well-balanced sonority can be maintained.

In this piece the music moves through a collection of different harmonies that resolve at the end. The title represents what happens in the music. Shades of colour are depicted by the slowly changing collection of notes heard throughout. Every time a new collection is heard, there is a change in shade. These shades are what give the music its colour. The central idea was simply to set up a repetitive rhythm and then thicken the texture and enhance the colour by adding instruments at different points. The appearance and disappearance of these new notes create the different colours within the music. Every new collection of notes provides a contrast and sense of surprise to the listener.

To establish the different shades, I contrasted them with the repetitive material. This was done in two ways: firstly by the use of staggered entries, and secondly by the use of dynamics. Whilst the soprano and alto saxophones maintain the repetitive rhythmical element, the tenor and baritone saxophones enter the texture and create the different shades. They almost always enter in a staggered fashion i.e. one after the other. Also they drop out of the texture in the same way, one after another. This creates a sense of freedom within the music that I liked and makes the music seem as if there is no fixed meter.

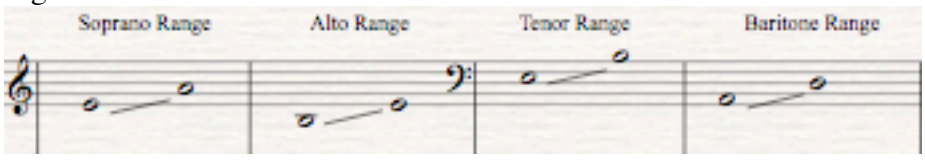
Fig. 2.54



All of these entries contain dynamic shaping. There is usually a *crescendo* followed by a *diminuendo*. This gives shape to the lines and a direction in the piece. As the piece moves forward the tenor and baritone entries become more and more frequent, dropping out only for a bar sometimes. This indicates a slight change in pacing and activity within the parts. The phrase length from each entry to the next becomes shorter and shorter until the tenor and baritone continuously play material without ever dropping out. This thickens the texture and propels the music toward a climax.

The use of pitch material is important in this movement. For the most part each of the four saxophones stay within a certain register, rarely moving beyond the interval of a fourth. They do not overlap at any point until the end when the parts contain more movement.

Fig. 2.55



This closed, constrained placement of pitch area was used to ensure no unnecessary leaps in range would occur. It also creates unity within the parts. My intention was to have the four saxophones act as one continuous sonority, rather than four individual lines.

Rothko's Colours

The second movement of the Saxophone Quartet was inspired by the Abstract Expressionist painter Mark Rothko. Rothko's style is very simple technically but very effective nonetheless. He uses blocks of colour that sit on top of one another and carefully chooses colours that have a profound reaction to each other.

[1]Mark Rothko – 'Yellow-Red-Blue'

In this piece I tried to emulate these static blocks of colour by using shifting harmonies that slowly change one note at a time.

The most important thing for me when considering doing a piece influenced by the work of Rothko was the overall structure. I specifically did not want any breaks in

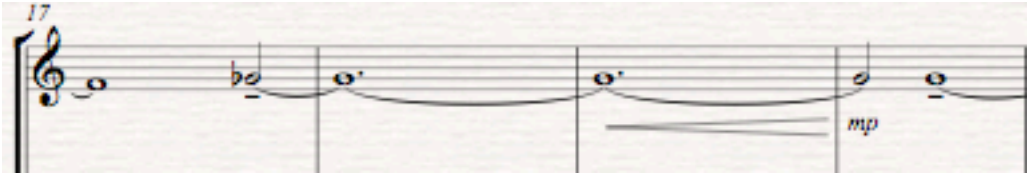
[1] http://www.google.ie/ imghp?hl=en&tab=wi

sound. There were to be no rests or stopping points of any kind throughout the piece. This lack of breaks meant a continuous sonority was held and this was what I wanted. Also crucially there were to be no jumps in register or dynamics. Everything played as smoothly and as fluidly as possible complemented Rothko's work. The lack of rests or stopping points therefore meant no clear sectional divisions. Structurally I wanted the music to float and move as if free of any structure or form.

The dynamics in *Rothko's Colours* come in the form of subtle waves. It always returns to the default *piano* marking having come from a *crescendo* to a *mezzo piano* or *mezzo forte*. These occasional *crescendos* are places of harmonic intensity that create the necessary contrast in the piece. I think that without these dynamics the music could seem aimless and arbitrary.

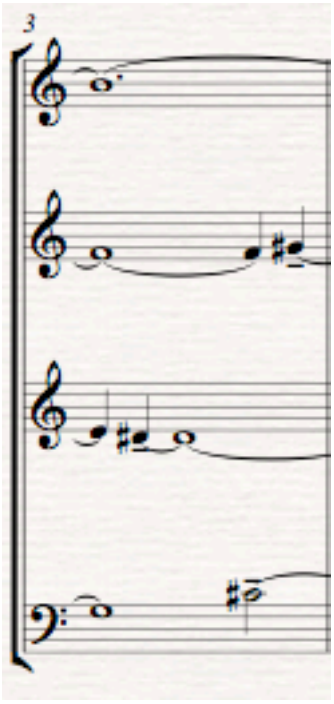
Some issues arose when doing rehearsals of this piece, principally articulation and breathing. I notated every note in this piece with a *tenuto*. This was specifically intended to maintain a smoothness of playing and to avoid strongly accented articulation. The quartet had asked me to describe to them exactly the sound I wanted. In my mind each note had the sound of being slightly delayed, as if the air came through the instrument after the note was fingered. This took time to explain but as I did they got the idea very quickly. Another issue we had was about breathing. They told me, after playing it through, that the long notes would be hard to sustain at this tempo. My way of dealing with this was to ask the players to *diminuendo* and take a slightly premature breath at the end of the long note. This allowed them to take in enough air to play the next note. Due to the slow tempo this premature breath does not affect the overall continuity of sound. In the situations where a *crescendo* was at the end of a long note, I asked them to prepare a long breath before hand in order to achieve this.

Fig. 2.56



There is one repeated idea that carries right through this piece from start to finish and it is the crotchet rhythmic pattern. This idea consists of two crotchets either repeating the same pitch or, as in the example below, moving from one tied note to the next.

Fig. 2.57



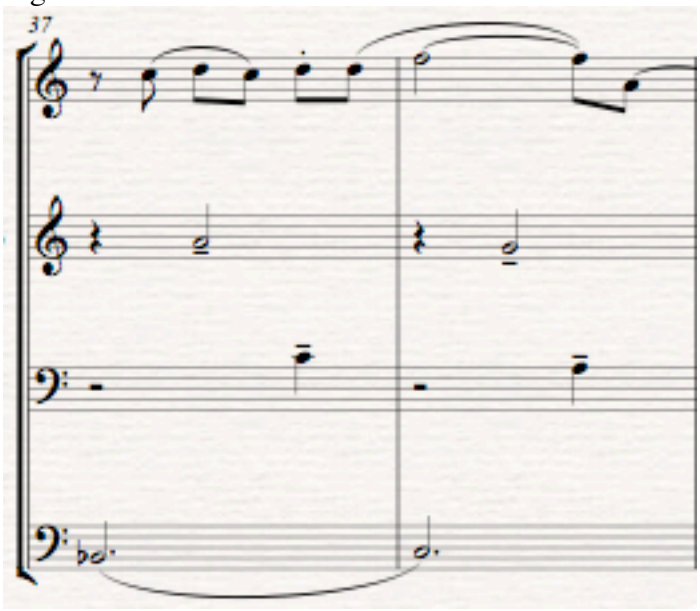
This motif creates a sense of pulse throughout the piece that the tempo does not provide. Many times the same note is repeated using this motif and I thought it would be a good way of breaking up the long notes and making use of the soft *tenuto* articulation.

An Ending

An Ending is the third and final movement of this saxophone quartet. This piece was not inspired by any external concept. It was instead conceived by a musical idea that grew organically to become the piece. The initial idea was to repeat a 4-bar pattern and include a changing melody on top. As the piece develops the 4-bar pattern changes and the music becomes more dense. It heads towards a climax point where the highest note of the piece is reached at bar 49. From here the music returns back to its original character and register.

One of the key relationships of this piece is that of the soprano saxophone with the alto, tenor and baritone saxophones. This relationship is an example of foreground and background. As soon as the soprano enters at bar 17, taking the foreground melody, these relationships are established. The other three parts supply the background material upon which the melody is played. Rhythmically the background instruments never change their pulsing 3/4 rhythm, however this provides the stability on which the soprano can add syncopation.

Fig. 2.58

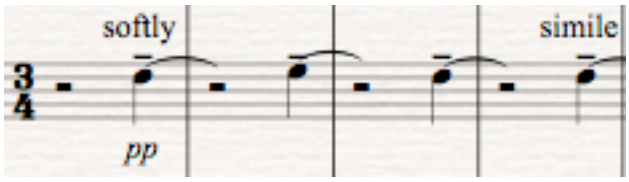


The piece is in two sections and each section has a direction to a climax point. These climax points are at bars 49 and 67. The first section ends at bar 50 and at bar 51 the second or 'tail' section begins. The whole of the first section is leading to the climax point at bar 49, and builds more and more tension as it travels there. In contrast to this the 'tail' section is much more relaxed and calm in nature and brings the music to a tranquil conclusion.

Dynamics are an important aspect of this piece. The role of dynamics is to give a sense of direction and purpose to any piece of music. Without dynamics music becomes flat and neutral. Throughout the first section of this piece the dynamics get increasingly louder and this adds tension. I used this tension to give the feeling that the music was traveling towards something. That something is the loudest dynamic marking in the piece, the *forte* at bar 49. There is a huge contrast as the next section begins with a very quiet dynamic marking of *pianissimo*.

As with the two other movements there is this common thread of 'four playing as one'. This is no more evident than in bars 9-16 where the alto, tenor and baritone play together as if they are all one instrument. I visualized this progression as a left hand organ part where there is a natural dynamic swell in the bar as each instrument joins in. This idea continues while the soprano takes its own line creating a layering effect. This was another issue that had to be explained to the quartet in rehearsals. In the tenor part the first few bars are marked with a tie into the next bar. This notation was used to ensure that the note proceeded to ring slightly over the bar line, imitating a keyboard player.

Fig. 2.59



This meant that the background material had a smoother feel and a more lyrical kind of accompaniment.

2.6 Winter Walking

Winter Walking is a piece for solo piano. The piano was possibly the only instrument that I could write this kind of piece for. I needed an instrument with a wide range and a great deal of sustain. The sounds that a piano can achieve, and the resonance that the notes contain, were key elements in the writing of this piece. The piano has the ability to play very high notes simultaneously with low notes to great effect. It was this contrast of registers combined with the sustain pedal that inspired me to write for piano.

This work is very different from the other pieces in the portfolio in character but shares a similarity with *Warm Rain* in that it is influenced by the weather. When I was writing this piece I had the fire beside me and was looking out of the window at people facing icy winds and heavy rain. This image of someone walking outdoors in the wintertime became the central mood in this piece. I had to try and sum up in music this cold feeling. The first decision I made when thinking broadly about the piece was tempo.

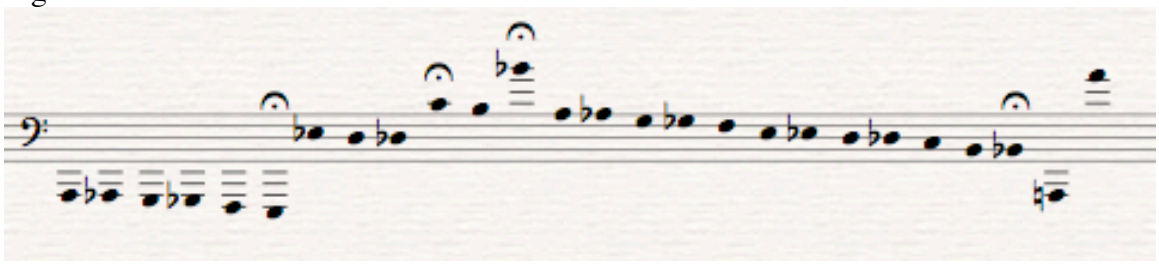
Firstly, to correctly portray the sense of walking, I chose to use no specific bpm number. Instead a description of tempo was used at the head of the score, *Molto Largo*. This was used so that the performer would decide at what tempo the piece should be played. This brought up an issue about pacing. Exactly when, and where, to play the notes is left to the discretion of the performer. The only other description related to tempo is the marking 'calmly and freely'. This gives the performer something to consider when thinking about the pacing of the piece.

Another musical aspect that is left up to the performer's discretion is dynamics. There are only two markings throughout the piece and they act as bookends, at the very beginning and at the very end. The dynamics are to be added into the piece by the performer. Depending on each performer the piece may have several different interpretations. There is only one restriction for the performer dynamically and that is that they stay within a range of *pianissimo* to *mezzo forte*. I chose to do this simply to maintain some level of dynamic control over the music.

There are two distinctly different ideas throughout this work: the first idea being G octaves in the right hand, the second being chromatically descending bass notes in the left hand. The notes that fill the space between then connect these two pitch areas. The

theory behind this was to keep returning to the high G octaves while having movement everywhere else. All the music that happens below the high G octave, we hear in relation to it. This means that the G changes its relationship to the lower harmony throughout. Sometimes this G can sound contemplative and sometimes it may sound harsh depending what is going on underneath. There are some points in the piece where an octave leap in the chromatic bass line appears. These leaps are a way of bringing the music to a new pitch area and also of creating some contrast to what has come before.

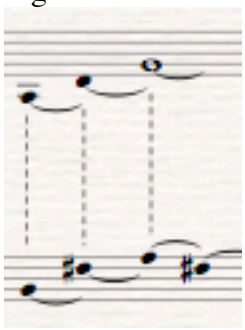
Fig. 2.60



This contrast of high notes and low notes gives the piece its mood and character. It was this utilization of space that the imagery and title conveys.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this piece at first glance would be the notation. The lack of rests, barlines, stems, dynamics and phrase marks was deliberate and intentional. The reason for this was to give the performer more freedom and let his/her perception of the piece become evident. I wanted the performer to read the piece without a strict rhythm and play each note when it felt right. The only restriction on durations was my use of noteheads. There are two different noteheads in this piece: the white notehead and the black notehead. However they are merely guidelines as to which note is the shorter; they are not to be played literally. All of these notes will be sustained by the pedal and will continue to resonate once they are struck. On the occasions where there are notes on separate staves to be played together, a dotted line notation is used.

Fig. 2.61



Only when there is a dotted line should notes be played simultaneously between the two staves. There is one other notation that is used at the final chord of the piece. This notation was used in the *Letter To A Friend* duet for piano and violin, and is a pedaling issue. I wanted this chord to ring as long as the high notes could be heard clearly. Therefore as soon as the two G's and the B start to fade, the sustaining pedal should be gradually released.

Structurally the piece has no clear section divisions but there are points at which the piece comes to a pause. These points are not meant to be breaks between sections but rather places for a subtle, deliberate pause. They are placed there for the listener to process all that has come before and anticipate the next sound that will be heard. They punctuate places where there has been a change in register or perhaps before some registral contrast. A *fermata* is used to emphasize these distinct changes in the music. There are four *fermatas* used throughout the piece and each plays an important role in the pacing of the music, see Fig. 2.60

CONCLUSION

The aim of this portfolio was to find and develop my own original voice as a composer and present a porfolio of contrasting works of varying instrumentations. I think I have been successful in this task and have enjoyed writing these pieces over the two years. I am particularly happy with the level of originality I brought to the music in this porfolio. I have worked on trying to combine my natural, instinctual ear playing side with my classical, taught way of writing to create a style that was influenced by both aural and technical training. I think I have achieved this and hope to develop this idea further in the future.

One of the areas I would like to explore more in detail is the use of freer notation similar to the compositions of Morton Feldman and John Cage. This to me has the potential to be a very interesting avenue of exploration. I touched on this idea in the last piece for the porfolio *Winter Walking*. The use of noteheads only with no barlines or signatures gives the music a much freer sound and forces the performer to become more involved with the music. Other areas for development also might be writing more for electric instruments i.e. electric guitars with effects, writing music for a poetry reading, music for plays or music for TV and film.

3. PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS

1. Three Pieces for Piano, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet and Violin

    - *Lying in Wait* for Bass Clarinet and Piano (2008)
    - *A Day on the Wheat Harvest* for Piano, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet and Violin (2009)
    - *Letter to a Friend* for Piano and Violin (2009)

2. *New York Nights* for Orchestra (2009/10)

3. Two Pieces for *a cappella* Choir

    - *Complementary Colours* for SSATB (2010)
    - *Changing Hues* for SATB (2010)

4. *Warm Rain* for Guitar Quartet (2010)

5. Three Pieces for Saxophone Quartet

    - *Different Shades* (2010)
    - *Rothko's Colours* (2010)
    - *An Ending* (2010)

6. *Winter Walking* for solo Piano (2010)

APPENDIX

Track List

Track 1. *Complementary Colours*, MIDI file.

Track 2. *Changing Hues*, MIDI file.

Track 3. *New York Nights*, D.I.T. Symphony Orchestra March 2011.

Track 4. *Lying in Wait*, Concorde Ensemble May 2009.

Track 5. *A Day on the Wheat Harvest*, Concorde Ensemble May 2009.

Track 6. *Letter to a Friend*, Concorde Ensemble May 2009.

Track 7. *Warm Rain*, Dan O'Neill December 2010.

Track 8. *Different Shades*, Chatham Sax Quartet November 2010.

Track 9. *Rothko's Colours*, Chatham Sax Quartet November 2010.

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Track 10. *An Ending*, Chatham Sax Quartet November 2010.

Track 11. *Winter Walking*, Jane O'Leary December 2010.

Track 12. *Winter Walking*, Jaime Gonzalez January 2011.

(Track 11 and 12 are two separate recordings of *Winter Walking*. This was done in order to show the interpretation differences between both performers)