Composing for Amateurs – A practical exploration of interactive creativity and socio-musical relationships

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Abstract

This research project explores the creative and socio-musical relationships that occur when a composer and an amateur ensemble enter a creative relationship. Two separate fields of theoretical enquiry are explored: serious-leisure and community music. The principle aim of my research project is to identify concepts and methods that can inform successful creatively interactive socio-musical relationships between amateur ensembles and composers. The resulting methodology has been applied to several practical projects with contrasting amateur ensembles: a chamber choir, a brass band, a chamber orchestra, a symphony orchestra, and a large scale multi-cultural choral event. Whilst individual compositional technique is an important factor in finding solutions to writing for each of the ensembles, technique is a secondary consideration and is considered against the establishment of successful socio-musical relationships.

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List of Portfolio Compositions

1. ***Koinonia***

   Composed for mixed choral and percussion groups.

   Duration c. 27 minutes

2. ***Farewell***

   Composed for Brackley and District Band

   For Brass Band

   Duration c. 4 minutes

3. ***Clarion***

   Composed for the Leamington Chamber Orchestra

   For Orchestra

   Duration c. 3 minutes

4. ***Songs of the Soul***

   i. **Infant Joy**

   ii. **Dreams**

   iii. **A Birthday**

   iv. **Be Still**

   Composed for Ex Urbe Chamber Choir

   For SSAATTBB unaccompanied choir

   Duration c. 12 minutes

5. ***The Pale Blue Dot***

   Composed for Kensington Symphony Orchestra

   For Orchestra

   Duration c. 18 minutes

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Chapter One: Background and Context

This research project looks to explore theoretical themes that support a collaborative practice-based methodology when composing for amateur ensembles, acknowledging the importance of socio-musical relationships that arise in such projects. It is hoped that this will provide a theoretical background that will further enrich and strengthen current practice in projects with amateur music societies, and lead composers and ensembles to give a deeper consideration of the multi-faceted nature of socio-musical relationships.

The Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics that distinguish an amateur musician from a professional and how can they be considered by composers?
2. How useful are concepts from the field of Community Music, in particular the role of the facilitator, in formulating a composer's approach to socio-musical relationships with amateur ensembles?
3. How do practical approaches affect socio-musical relationships when composing for amateur ensembles?

Writing for amateurs - A personal journey

My first experience of an amateur music society was as an undergraduate, when Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral orchestra performed one of my final-year compositions. The piece was not written with a specific type of performer in mind, and, after a tentative performance, the conductor told me it would sound very different when performed by a professional orchestra. Another piece in the program was *Five Klee Pictures* by Peter Maxwell-Davis (1959). Without knowing the background to the work, I was moved by its clarity of expression and its rhythmic and structural devices. In contrast to my composition, the orchestra played it with accuracy and enthusiasm. It was only later I realised that it had been written for a school, amateur, or professional orchestra. Despite the performance of my piece being approximate in places, the dedication from the orchestra and my own excitement at hearing my piece are what I remember of the concert. Little did I realise the value in an amateur ensemble sacrificing programme space for a student work.

In 2006 I had the opportunity of participating in the 'Adopt a Composer' scheme. The interview at the Society for the Promotion of New Music (henceforth SPNM) offices

included questions around relevant experience and skills. Having no real experience of writing for amateur music ensembles I drew on my experience as director of music at a high school, emphasising the inter-personal, public speaking and pedagogical skills that come with teaching, and hoping that these would be of use. I was paired with the City of Birmingham Choir (CBC). I was informed that the CBC regularly employ the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) to accompany them, and so it was to be for this project.

My approach to writing this piece considered the nature of the ensemble and their rehearsal schedules and involved bringing the choir into the creative process through discussion, reflection and the opportunity to contribute to the creative process. This is not because there was any kind of guide to working that way or research on best practice when writing for amateurs. It was because a socio-musical relationship based on respect, trust, and a sharing of the compositional process seemed to be the right way to approach the project. The response from the choir and the audience was overwhelmingly positive, and the resulting piece went on to be awarded a British Composer Award. The project affected me as a composer and the following year I wrote an article for SPNM promoting the positive experiences that arise when writing for amateurs (Long, 2007). I also delivered a talk to amateur music society representatives at the annual conference of Making Music, the principle representative organisation for amateur music ensembles, about the positive experiences of commissioning new music. These two experiences, along with my experience in education, have directly shaped my inter-personal skills and have led me to this research project.

In addition to composing, I have worked as a music teacher in mainstream state education for the past twenty-five years, leading a successful music and performing arts department. Whilst my literature review has been completed from as neutral a point as possible, the skills I have acquired and developed over time, and the maturity one gains from mainstream teaching experience, cannot be overlooked in my practical approach and overall philosophy with regards writing for amateur ensembles. It is this background against which I have conducted this research project.

Current State of Knowledge

In this study I will explore the socio-musical relationship between amateur ensembles and the composer. My focus is on amateur music making in the context of classical music societies:

choral societies, amateur orchestras, amateur ensembles. In addition, I have considered brass bands; whilst these have a specific historical development and a different repertoire, their participants share characteristics with other amateur musicians. The organisation of most of these groups is characterised by the UK voluntary association model (Finnegan, 2007: 38). They have a written constitution, a committee with elected officers, membership subscriptions and an Annual General Meeting, and their activities have different characteristics to other amateur music making such as educational or creative community music projects. Amateur music societies such as this have been in existence since the nineteenth century and are 'a natural part of local classical music and of English urban life' (Finnegan, 2007: 38).

An examination of research reveals that there is a lack of academic study surrounding classical amateur music societies, composers and the socio-musical relationships that arise when they are brought together for a commission. There is, however, a rich history of interactions between composers and amateur and young musicians over the twentieth century that has helped to shape amateur creative music making in Britain. This development can be traced from Holst and Vaughan-Williams, Tippett and Britten, through to the experimentalism of Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, to Paynter and developments in education, Weigold and the development of the creative music making workshop, ensemble outreach programs and composers working in schools. The idea that the composer needed to be 'of use' (Moore, 2015: 45) and that the role of the composer needed to be more socially aware (Laycock, 2005) is a theme that emerged amongst British composers during the twentieth century and runs through this development, suggesting a different kind of self-sacrificing composer when working with amateur musicians. As Weigold observed of the latter part of the century:

> The air was changing and many of us were caught, as it were, on both sides of the fence. Wanting to write pure concert music, and wanting to explore new ways of art-making, built on finding more humane relationships with people and community.
>
> (Weigold, 2015: 227)

The tradition of composers incorporating amateur musicians into their compositional activities is reflected by those associated with Morley College. These include Holst, Vaughan-Williams, Tippett, Britten and Cardew amongst others. Rooted in socialist political views, the activities of Morley brought the language of contemporary music to amateur

musicians. Holst insisted that his students write compositions that were practical and could be played by amateurs as well as professionals (Laycock, 2005: 26) and directed the first modern performance of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* being staged by combined amateur and professional forces. Vaughan-Williams wrote many hymn tunes to be sung by amateur choirs, ran a community festival and encouraged young musicians and amateur music making. Tippett also held the role of Director of Morley College and his pacifism and political views are well documented. His oratorio *A Child of Our Time* (1941) was composed for amateur choirs.

Britten's compositions for young people and amateurs often demonstrate technically differentiated musical content. Pieces such as *Noye's Fludde* (1958) and *Children's Crusade* (1969) show parts of varying difficulty. *Noye's Fludde* has enjoyed considerable success and stands as an important work in demonstrating a mixture of instrumental and vocal forces with a range of technical ability. Telling the story of Noah and the ark, this community opera provided opportunities for young singers and instrumentalists to perform in a major classical work. Adult roles are to be performed by accomplished adult singers who then support roles for young adults and children. Similarly, instrumental sections are also differentiated with amateur musicians being supported by more technically proficient musicians. There are also moments where the audience 'congregation' participates.

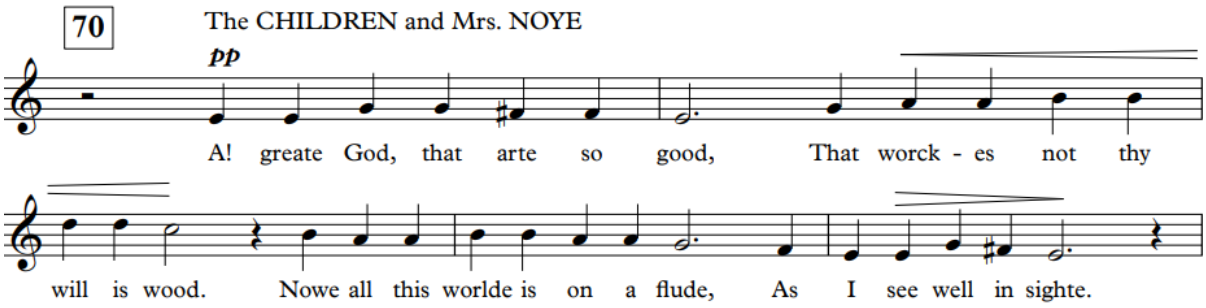

Figure 1: technically accessible writing for young singers in Britten's Noye's Fludde (1958)

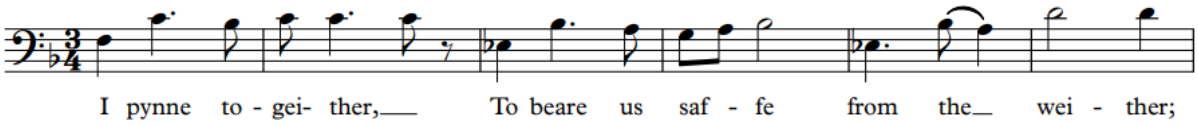

Figure 2: more challenging vocal writing in Noah's part from Britten's Noye's Fludde (1958) *(7 bars after rehearsal 19).*

Christopher Fox (2015) describes the success and popularity of *Noye's Fludde* as a key work when writing for amateurs. Whilst of a very different aesthetic, he goes on to discuss Terry Riley's *In C* (1964) and Cardew's *The Great Learning* (1968) as representing a similar success in engaging musicians of different abilities on a large scale (Fox, 2015). Whilst not being specifically written for amateur ensembles, these works have proven to be accessible to amateur musicians and can be seen as precursors to other developments in creative music making. *In C*, with its attractive tonal repetitive phrases, is a popular piece that is easy to perform. Unlike *Noye's Fludde,* it contains indeterminate elements that aid an amateur performance. Individual parts are not virtuosic, and individual musicians can decide on how quickly they move through the musical phrases, within given restrictions, and the number and type of instruments is not designated other than a piano to keep the pulse. Cardew's *The Great Learning*, created for an evening class of student musicians of varying skill levels at Morley College, was begun in 1968 and is the precursor to the Scratch Orchestra. Very much a product of the experimental aesthetics of the time, the work consists of seven 'paragraphs' with instructions for performers that involve elements of creative freedom and indeterminacy. This means that the work, whilst at the edge of avant-garde experimentalism, was accessible to musicians of any ability. Whilst accessible to many, the experimental aesthetics of *The Great Learning* went beyond the consideration of writing for amateurs and professionals. In stark contrast to Britten, Cardew had a damning opinion of amateur music makers, describing them as 'incompetent and incapable of understanding' (Cardew, 1961, cited in Skempton, 2015: p.23). Despite the aesthetics of both pieces not being specifically aimed at amateurs, both *In C* and *The Great Learning* are works that establish composition approaches that have had a considerable impact in making contemporary music accessible to amateur performers. As Fox describes, 'the model of collective music making they espouse has become well established, perhaps particularly in Britain, where the debate about the relationship between

amateur and professional music-making is as lively today as it was when the Arts Council was being established [1946].' (Fox, 2015: 43)

Whilst there are many pieces that are playable by amateurs, pieces written for amateurs that gain wider popularity and influence are relatively rare. Many are written for a specific group or set of circumstances. An example of a piece that has broken out of the context of its original creation is Stephen Montague's *Dark Sun – August 1945*. A COMA (Contemporary Music Making for All) commission from 1995, it has an emotive extra-musical theme, being based on the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 and has had over 100 performances (Montague, 2016: 75). The piece is scored for large orchestra and optional chorus. There is also an optional antiphonal chorus part that can include children, as well as three CD players that act as 'radios', with evocative recordings of old-time stations adding to the musical texture. The piece is performable by amateur musicians and singers, yet the work is stylistically uncompromising in its sound world and in the use of experimentalist techniques such as unmetered bars, indeterminate pitch and recorded sound sources. Writing of his experience of composing *Dark Sun – August, 1945*, Montague reflects on a different experience when compared to working with professionals:

> Writing for large amateur orchestral and vocal forces was new territory for me, and a steep learning curve. With the gift of ample rehearsal time and boundless enthusiasm from the performers we were together able to mould the piece into its final shape and successfully perform it.
>
> (Montague, 2016: 75)

Supporting his discussion of creative music making in the UK, Laycock explores the changing nature of the composer and their interactions with amateur musicians. This is done largely with a focus on the development of the creative music workshop and performer creativity which he traces from the activities at Morley College through the activities of Cardew, Weigold, COMA and a range of other projects including his own Rainbow over Bath (Laycock, 2015). Acknowledging the influence of Cage and the American Experimentalists on a generation of British composers and the changing philosophical and practical definition of the composer, he goes on to discuss the movement towards a different approach to composition where the performer is included in the creative process, making contemporary music and composition accessible to a broader range of musical ability.

Over the last fifty years, overlapping with the notion of the 'amateur', the musical education of young people has been of greater concern to contemporary British composers and classroom-based composition pedagogy has been informed by the techniques of experimentalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Paynter's *Sound and Silence* (1970) paved the way to a new approach to creative music making in the classroom, and in the development of community music creative workshops. This, along with the Education Reform Act of 1988, played a large part in giving musical composition a greater focus in the new National Curriculum. An increased focus on composition as part of the three key stages meant that classroom teachers needed more support, prompting Paynter to follow up his earlier work *Sound and Silence* (1970) with *Sound and Structure* (1992). During this period there was a growing demand for composers working within educational environments and the outreach programmes of professional orchestras and ensembles. Moore outlines her own work with the London Sinfonietta outreach projects in the 1980s, as well as the influence of composers such as Turnage and Osbourne working with musicians in prisons and McNicol's contribution to bringing contemporary music to classrooms (Moore, 2015). Jonathan Dove's *The Hackney Chronicles* of 2001 is an example of a composer creating a work for school children and creating a work that is embedded within an educational context. The work, a children's opera for primary schools, is 'designed as a means of introducing the curriculum through the arts' (HDMT Music, 2006: online). This changing role of the composer brought with it a new range of challenges with Sharpe and Dust highlighting the need for guidance in working relationships between artists and teachers as early as 1990 (Sharp and Dust, 1990).

The practice of working with amateur and young musicians has contributed to the development of the contemporary music scene in Britain, leading to reforms in music education, developments in community music and approaches to creative music workshops and projects, it continues to form a varied and vibrant part of our current musical tapestry. Several legacies remain. It is now normal for ensembles – both professional and amateur – to have outreach programmes that make links with schools, youth groups and the local community. The development of community music in the 1970s has led to the establishment of new roles such as community arts facilitators and workshop leaders. For example, The National Careers Service now includes 'community arts worker' as a career (National Careers Service, n.d.). COMA continues to develop its activities and repertoire for amateur musicians. Making Music, Sound and Music and the Performing Rights Society continue to support and develop the Adopt a Composer scheme, pairing amateur ensembles with

emerging composers. Whilst funding for artists in schools is now less common, support of composition teaching continues with initiatives such as the current Sound and Music *Listen, Imagine, Compose* that provides support for teachers to develop their composing in the classroom, a summer school led by professional composers for young composers aged 14-18, and *Go Compose!*, a national network of workshops and programme of events led by professional practitioners (Sound and Music, n.d.). The BBC also provide their BBC 10 pieces resource (BBC, 2021) for schools which includes contemporary pieces by living composers, providing alternative classroom scorings that are performable by a greater range of technical abilities and variable instrumentation.

The Amateur Music Society

The tradition of composers working with amateurs in Britain is extensive, leading to reforms in music education, developments in community music and approaches to creative music projects. Against the development of contemporary music during the twentieth century, the changing nature of the modern concert-going public and rapid developments in how music is produced and consumed in a digital age, amateur music societies have remained largely unchanged, upholding and preserving a specific musical tradition.

Amateur music societies pose different challenges to a composer when compared to a professional ensemble. Practical advice and resources are available for a composer entering into a creative relationship with an amateur ensemble. Making Music have started to document the legacy of The Adopt a Composer scheme (renamed Adopt a Music Creator from 2019) and there is now an online resource of practical examples of pieces written by emerging composers for amateur music societies that have arisen from this scheme (Making Music, n.d.). There are also accounts of how composers may approach amateur or young musicians from a technical and logistical point of view (for example, see Bullard, 2013). There is, however, little research that deals specifically with amateur societies, composers and the socio-musical relationships that arise during a commission style creative project. Amateur musicians who participate in classical music societies have specific characteristics and motivations for participating. These are different to the open-minded contemporary music enthusiasts that may form a regional COMA ensemble, for example, or a creative music workshop that may take place within an educational context, or the hands-on creativity of the community music participant.

Studies by Finnegan (2007) and Everitt (1997) review the activities of amateur musicians at a local level mainly from an economic, organisational and demographical point of view. There are some accounts of relationships with composers, amateurs and socio-musical relationships. After the introduction of the new National Curriculum, when composers were in demand to work within educational environments, Sharp and Dust highlighted issues around the relationships between artist and the educational organisation within which they were working (Sharp and Dust. 1990: 17-19). Unrealistic expectations on the role of the artist, poor communication, lack of time, pressure to succeed, lack of evaluation and feedback are stated as the main reasons for difficulties in relationships. In a similar way, Churchill's review of Making Music's Adopt a Composer Scheme (Churchill, 2009) argued that the success of commissions relies on positive socio-musical relationships between all stakeholders. Arrowsmith (Arrowsmith, 2016) has explored how facilitator skills that are found in community music can help to promote positive socio-musical relationships between leaders and musicians within the context of an amateur orchestra whilst Humphries (2019) has explored compositional techniques within the context of a variety of amateur and community music settings.

Current advice for amateur music ensembles and composers

The nature of creative music projects, community music and educational projects often involves participants who have been brought together for the purpose of that project. When considering amateur music societies, participation in a creative project with a composer will have very different expectations. Advice exists for amateur ensembles when considering working with composers. There are many organisations in the UK that provide support including Making Music, the National Association of Choirs, Brass Bands England, and The Welsh Amateur Music Federation. Making Music (formerly The National Federation of Music Societies) is the largest of these organisations and was formed in 1935. They represent over 3,700 amateur groups. Other organisations specialise in a particular ensemble such as Brass Bands England (formerly The British Federation of Brass Bands), formed in 1968. COMA offer technical advice for composers wishing to write for COMA ensembles following their open score guidance.

Music Making offer advice on commissioning new works (Making Music, 2015). Importantly, the organisation has been fundamental in the success of the Adopt a Composer scheme, an annual scheme that pairs composers with amateur ensembles with the aim of

producing a new work. A model has been established that has produced many successful collaborative projects between a wide range of ensembles and composers. Much of their commissioning advice relates to the Adopt a Composer scheme and subsequent evaluations. Their advice to ensembles is from the point of view of a commissioning group and highlights the aspects of this relationship that they prioritise, with a focus on the experience given to the audience and group, involving group members in the creative process, and consideration of specific audiences or occasions.

Making Music emphasise that there are risks involved in commissioning that an amateur group needs to be aware of. They give a step-by-step guide in deciding whether a composer is appropriate for a project. Some of this guidance covers practical issues surrounding fees, rehearsals, performance dates and so on. Decisions on the amount of artistic freedom to allow the composer, ensuring that a successful working relationship can be achieved, and creating a sense of joint ownership, are also highlighted as important issues to consider. A checklist for selecting the right composer for the commission is included, advising ensembles to consider the style and skills of the composer. Non-musical skills are also highlighted in the management of events such as workshops.

The Adopt a Composer scheme brings together amateur ensembles and emerging composers and is unusual in that it has always allocated an experienced mentor to each project. The mentor is there from the early stages to offer advice, guidance and to ensure any potential problems in the creative relationship are avoided. In a similar way, Third Ear operate as an intermediary, recognising the importance of successful socio-musical relationships within creative projects. Run by Julia Haferkorn and Ed McKeon (involved in the Adopt a Composer scheme in its early stages), Third Ear Music are an independent organisation offering a unique perspective on the commissioning relationship between composers and performing groups.

Whilst not specifically aimed at amateur music ensembles, Third Ear offer guidance through the full commissioning process and cover any type of commission situation – ‘whether a string quartet, a community choir, for air guitars or a piece for 100 kazoos’ (Third Ear Music, 2019: online). They will oversee all aspects of the process from initial meetings to contracts and the final performance. They split the commission into three stages: the idea – the relationship – the process, suggesting that the ‘idea’ comes from the performer and is then shared and discussed with an artist. Importantly, they point out that there needs to be space

for the artist to create, and that there is inevitably an element of creative risk. The importance of the relationship between composer and commissioning group is given appropriate consideration by Third Ear, who emphasise the notion of creativity as a gift, and that 'to give or receive such a gift requires mutual trust, respect and admiration' (Third Ear Music, 2019: online). The value of the artist's time (beyond monetary value) and the value of possibly being part of a creative process all form part of the commission journey.

Drawing on their experience of the Adopt a Composer scheme, and recognising that composers may not always be aware of the characteristics of amateur ensembles, Making Music in partnership with BASCA (British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors) commissioned a guide that was designed to give advice to composers working within the amateur sector. Alan Bullard collated the advice and comments of more than twenty composers to create *Composers Talking: Commissioning New Music for Voluntary Performing Groups* (Bullard, 2013). It is an important attempt to collate the advice and views of composers who have experience of working with amateur musicians. Bullard categorised the data under four themes: reasons that composers should write for amateur musicians, technical considerations, musical or stylistic aspects that the composer should consider and practical matters relevant to the composer when being commissioned by an amateur ensemble. The guide offers a wealth of practical advice that is useful for composers and ensembles alike and is the only recent attempt to bring together the views of composers in this way.

Other advice for composers is given by Sound and Music (SAM). In 2008 four organisations, the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM), the British Music Information Centre (BMIC), Contemporary Music Network and Sonic Arts Network joined to form Sound and Music, forming the principal organisation promoting and developing new music in the UK. Their vision is 'to create a world where new music and sound prospers, transforming lives, challenging expectations and celebrating the work of its creators.' (Sound and Music, 2021: online)

Sound and Music offer a range of professional development schemes and have been invaluable in the career development of many composers. In partnership with Making Music they run the Adopt a Composer scheme. Their principle online guidance for composers is in the form of the 'composer's toolbox' written by Julia Haferkorn (Third Ear Music Ltd) consisting of a collection of articles and advice aimed at building and sustaining a career as a

composer. Whilst most of the advice from SAM covers practical and technical issues, there is also advice aimed at composers under the age of 25. An article written by clarinettist Heather Roche (Roche, 2013), comes from the point of view of a professional performer and highlights some potential issues surrounding socio-musical relationships between composers and performers in workshop and rehearsal environments. She offers thoughts on how composers can protect themselves from overly critical performers. There are practical considerations such as being punctual, well prepared and the importance of meeting deadlines. There are also considerations around the social aspect of the relationship such as showing an investment in the project, talking about a new work at rehearsals to help performers feel part of the sound world and even a recommendation that something as simple as learning the names of performers can give a psychological edge. Roche highlights a need for composers to 'protect themselves' from performers, indicating that she, as a performer, has experienced problematic socio-musical relationships between performers and composers and that this is an area that may need to be addressed.

The last organisation to consider is Contemporary Music Making for All (COMA) which was established by Chris Shurety in 1993. Originally centred around a summer school, it has since established regional ensembles and has commissioned over a thousand new works for amateur musicians, many from leading composers. There is an important difference between the traditional amateur music society and a COMA ensemble. Musicians who participate are interested in contemporary art music, and the idea of working with composers is familiar. The COMA ensemble sets up a quite different socio-musical relationship between composer and participants and, whilst the motivation to participate may be similar to a member of a choral society, for example, the nature of the social-musical interactions that arise will be different.

The aim of COMA is to make contemporary music accessible to all without any aesthetic compromise. This is achieved primarily through their open score policy and the guidance they give to composers. In an 'open score' instrumentation is left flexible with scores indicating musical lines that cover several pitch ranges. It allows scores to be accessible to a range of ensembles and gives the composer a particular set of compositional challenges. The use of mobiles, graphic scores and other experimental techniques are common in the COMA catalogue with nearly half of the pieces in the publication *Open Score* (COMA, 2016) contain chance-based techniques. These are used as both a contemporary technique, but also as a way of writing challenging music for amateurs by creating more complex rhythms. The interactive nature of the scores, and the open score compositional process, can mean that the role of the

composer and the musicians is realigned compared to a traditional commission. As Howard Jones says on the concept of open score:

> The old hierarchical relationships of composer, conductor, performer and listener give way to a new paradigm, which is collective, consensual and co-operative in nature. It demands a new set of disciplines, no less demanding than those we apply to more traditional composed music, but more holistic, and more related not just what we can do, but also to who we are as musicians.
>
> (Howard Jones, *Open Score (1)*: 2016)

Chapter 2: The complexity of the amateur participant

Understanding the musicians – characteristics of the 'amateur'

It is easy for the contemporary composer to enter a creative relationship with an amateur ensemble with a preconceived notion that issues around the technical ability of participants is the primary concern. Certainly, this will inform compositional technique and – to a certain extent – define what will be technically possible. In a similar way, an 'enthusiasm' is often attributed to amateur musicians and given as a reason to write for amateurs. However, to characterise the amateur musician in this limited way is simplistic and devalues the concept of the amateur, possibly already putting a barrier between composer and ensemble before a note has been written.

Any discussion of amateur music making inevitably begins with a comparison with professionals and a definition of the two concepts. In his survey of amateur music making in the UK, *Joining In*, Everitt (1998) starts by contextualising his exploration of 'participatory music' by highlighting the tensions between the terms amateur and professional. Traditionally the terms 'amateur' and 'professional' have denoted a clear separation in activities, possibly implying one is an activity completed for financial gain and the other a pastime. In music, as in other disciplines, there is often a negative association attached to the concept of the 'amateur', rooted in the notion of 'dabbling', and labels such as 'hobbyist', 'enthusiast' or a sense of lack of expertise and/or skills (discussed by Stebbins, 1992). Everitt points out the effect of adding '-ism' to each. 'Amateurism' highlights the idea of a pastime but with questionable quality or standards compared to an activity demonstrating

'professionalism'. Dictionary definitions of the adjective 'amateurish' also describes activities that are not done well, lacking skill and quality. On the other hand, 'professionalism' implies quality and could 'signify membership of a trained and exclusive elite of dedicated specialists' (Everitt, 1998: 38)

Drinker (1967) writing in the 1960s describes differences between amateur and professional musicians, pointing out that 'a musical amateur is one whose interest and participation in music is prompted primarily by his love for music', whereas a professional musician 'earns his livelihood by music.' (Drinker, 1967: 75) He does go on to acknowledge that, of course, professionals can also perform for the love of music, but that is possibly not always their primary concern. Booth defines an amateur pastime as 'any vigorous, demanding human pursuit *practiced* for the love of the pursuit itself rather than for any practical use or payoff' (Booth, 1999: 11). Keene and Green also acknowledge this 'love for music' in a study into amateur music-making at Dartington Summer School, observing that 'for many classical amateur musicians their goal is not monetary or peer recognition, but for the love of making music.' (Keene and Green, 2017: 364)

These distinctions are important, but do not explore the amateur 'identity' to the full. It is necessary to consider amateurs in terms of levels of commitment, knowledge, and skill. These qualities, whilst manifesting themselves in different ways and to varying extents, are deserving of a similar level of appreciation as those attributed to the professional. Whilst inhabiting a different stratum of musical life, amateurs are 'just as smart and perceptive' as professionals (Bullard, 2013: 2) Not only should the characteristics of amateurs be highlighted, but it should also be acknowledged that there is an interactive and interdependent relationship between the two identities. Musicians who participate in the activities of music societies are not 'dabblers', nor are they 'novices' who are starting out on their leisure activities (although music societies often bring novices into their fold) (Stebbins, 1992: 40-43): they are amateur musicians who participate in a serious-leisure activity, (Stebbins, 1992, 2007) and with that comes a range of functions that must be acknowledged separately, and also in relation to, their professional counterparts.

Amateur and Professional interdependency – the functions of the amateur

An understanding of the place of amateurs in the musical landscape, and particularly their relationship with professionals, is not new. Drinker's observations (1952, 1967) are still relevant and his consideration of the role of amateurs in relation to classical music, describing several 'functions' that amateurs fulfil (1952), are characteristics also acknowledged by more recent theorists (Stebbins 1992, Finnegan 2007). He argues that amateurs form an important part of the foundation of classical musical activity in society and that they are, as Drinker puts it, the 'plateau' to the professional's 'Everest'. Firstly, by forming a substantial proportion of the classical concert-going audience, amateurs operate as critics to professional performers who can push professionals to give their best (Drinker, 1952: 577, Stebbins, 1992, Finnegan, 2007). Stebbins claims that 'often, a sprinkling of skilled, knowledgeable, and concerned people among the spectators, readers, audience, or other publics is sufficient to draw the best from performing professionals.' (Stebbins, 1992: p. 40). Secondly, in enriching their own lives through the pursuit of knowledge and participating in music-making, amateurs also enrich the lives of others whilst also endorsing 'good taste'. Thirdly, amateurs are critical of professionals for over-emphasising technique rather than other expressive considerations. In addition, Finnegan, apart from acknowledging that amateur musicians contribute the necessary skills of appreciation to the audiences of local professional concerts, also recognises the far-reaching role they play in local classical music systems of non-school classical musical education and training. Amateurs preserve repertoire and encourage music appreciation through concert organisation and promotion (Finnegan, 2007).

Finnegan acknowledges the work of thousands of amateurs that goes largely unnoticed and , without which, the tradition of amateur music making in the UK would not continue (Finnegan, 2007: 3). In a similar way the functions outlined by Drinker and Stebbins are also largely hidden and difficult to measure. There are, however, more obvious and explicit interactions between amateurs and professionals. Everitt highlights an economic interaction when amateurs employ professionals and when music societies commission composers. He also places importance on the 'training ground' that amateur ensembles provide for professionals, using Finnegan to emphasise the point that amateur music activities feed directly into the classical professional world which would be 'impossible to sustain without them' (Finnegan, 2007: 17). It is not all one sided, however. Stebbins acknowledges an economic interdependence when amateur musicians employ professionals (Stebbins 1992: 39). Professionals will earn a fee; they will be given an opportunity to perform in front of an

audience and will get public exposure to further their career. Amateurs gain the prestige of a renowned performer that allows them to market and perform repertoire to a standard they may not normally be able to access.

Amateurs and professionals do not always exist in harmony. Tensions can arise between the two. An example is given by Everitt when amateur musicians, or 'semi-professional' musicians, undercut professional fees thus challenging the professional status (Everitt, 1998). Another example is when professionals take the roles of amateurs at a local level which can have a socio-political impact. This was observed by Finnegan in the context of a chamber orchestra aimed at local amateur musicians and disputes over their recruitment. Resentment and ill-feeling towards professionals occurred when the orchestra increasingly included fewer local musicians in favour of professional and semi-professional musicians. She states that the terms 'amateur', 'professional' and 'semi-professional' are 'not just of academic interest but can enter into the perceptions and actions of those involved in local music' (Finnegan, 2007: 16). Resentment and ill feeling can form part of the organisational politics within any ensemble but can be heightened within an amateur music society given the voluntary nature of member participation and their expectations of the experience they get.

There are clear practical interactions related to technical issues and professional musicians have historically been brought in to perform alongside amateurs. As noted above Tippett, continuing the tradition started by Vaughan Williams at Morley college, often wrote for amateur musicians. *A Child of Our Time* (Tippett, 1941) was premiered in 1944 by a mix of amateurs and professionals; the Morley choir, the London Region Civil Defence Choir, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and professional soloists (Moore, 2016). Music societies often employ soloists. This is especially common in choral societies (Finnegan 2007: pp. 17-18) Jonathan Dove's *Arion and the Dolphin* (Dove, 2016), commissioned by Making Music as a work for amateur performers, is written for an amateur adult choir and children's choir. However, it also has a solo countertenor part which is of a higher technical difficulty and was sung at the premier by a professionally hired singer. In my own work, *O Lord, Remember* (Long, 2006) an amateur choir was accompanied by a professional orchestra.

Amateurs provide an economic and social context against which professionals operate, and in so doing prove they are 'intelligent and worthy companions in music' (Drinker, 1952: 40). Definitions of amateur and professional often refer to quality, the earning of money from an activity, or participating for the love of it. Understanding the interdependence between the

two highlights that the concept of the amateur is a complex one, an understanding of which can aid in formulating an approach to successful socio-musical relationships.

The amateur / professional spectrum of practice

Small states that amateurs 'may perform in the home and in certain other limited fields—for example, choirs—but in the public domain, the dominance of professionals is virtually complete.' (Small, 1998: 71) Everitt argues that whilst it is still legitimate to speak of amateurs and professionals (whether conventional performers or community musicians), they 'increasingly occupy a broad interactive spectrum of practice' (Everitt, 1998: 39), or as Finnegan describes, the 'amateur-professional continuum' (Finnegan, 2007: xii). What is meant by the public domain? Are the thousands of amateur concerts that take place each year not public concerts? Whilst indicating that professionals occupy an unassailable position at the top of the public concert ladder, Small's view seems narrow. Everitt and Finnegan, on the other hand, acknowledge that from the top rung downwards, a rigid dichotomy of identity between amateurs and professionals becomes less and less applicable.

An amateur group can encompass musicians with a whole range of social and artistic backgrounds. Rather than view the difference between amateurs and professionals as opposites, Keene and Green suggest that the differences can be considered 'a spectrum upon which individuals are placed according to their context'. (Keene and Green, 2017: 364). Most amateur societies will have an audition process, recruiting musicians from the local area that most closely fit their requirements. They may recruit from local colleges and schools and may have a mix of amateur musicians and semi-professionals (Finnegan, 2007). Many musicians who participate in amateur music societies will have a non-musical job and will perform as a leisure time activity. A significant number of participants may earn their living from music, and may be, for example, instrumental teachers and school music teachers (Finnegan, 2007). There is an inevitable broader range of ability within amateur ensembles compared to a professional ensemble, and membership is more varied and changeable. Some amateurs may embark on a journey where they see their participation as serious enough to invest in further training, and some may eventually become semi-professional, and be paid for their services (Susana, Tedrick and Boyd, 1996: 55). Musical directors are often appointed according to their skill and reputation and can receive fees for their services. Many are also teachers, instrumentalists, composers, and make their living from a variety of musical activities. Each amateur music group will have a different ratio of amateurs and semi-

professionals, different technical requirements with lower and higher ability limits dictating differing ability spectrums within each ensemble. Whilst it can be argued that professional and amateur musicians rarely perform together through choice and are socially distinct (Burnard, 2012: 148) ensembles include a wide range of performers, including semi-professionals who make their living, not necessarily from performance, but from a variety of musical activities (Finnegan, 2007: 12).

The amateur spectrum and organisational issues

The activities of amateur ensembles are determined by many important factors, many of which are of a lesser concern to professional ensembles. Resources, technical ability of current membership, funding, the musical tastes of the ensemble members, the tastes and experiences of the musical director, the committee members, interactions and relationship with the local community, programming and potential audience numbers, and a whole range of internal social considerations, are all important issues in the organisation of an amateur ensemble (Finnegan, 2017). The mixed ability character of amateur ensembles also affects the choice and presentation of repertoire. Choirs, wind bands and brass band activities outside of the constraints of competitions, tend to be freer in their allocation of parts and may adjust or alter a score given the strengths or limitations of their resources. Ensembles may only play certain sections that are technically feasible, or they may repeat sections, cut sections, or change instrumentation. There is an aesthetic impact that can have a 'large cumulative effect on the shape and impact of the work as actually performed' (Finnegan, 2017: 175). Burnard also highlights this aspect of amateur choral societies and the many versions of *Messiah* heard up and down the UK. Rather than existing as a concise work, 'it exists as a series of events for which sometimes substantial changes are made' (Burnard, 2012: 32).

Amateur musician motivations and the rewards that participation can bring

An observation amongst composers is how passionate and enthusiastic amateurs can be towards their music making and how they can be open minded towards new music (see Campkin, Mealor and Webb cited in Bullard 2012). Describing his experience of working with amateur ensembles, Stephen Montague says that from his own experience 'the real joy of writing for amateur groups […] is the genuine enthusiasm that the musicians bring to rehearsals and performances.' (Montague, 2016: 75). It is an often-cited aspect of working with amateur musicians. Rather than assume this quality, it is important to question what

drives this passion and enthusiasm. Is it simply a love of music? After all, professional musicians must also enjoy performing music. Understanding what it is that motivates amateurs to participate is important to any socio-musical relationship between composer and amateur ensemble.

Whilst the practical aspects of rehearsals and performance, as well as individual practice, form an obvious focus for participants, involvement in a music society is a demanding leisure time activity and amateur musician participation is driven by complex personal motivations. In her book *Valuing Musical Participation* (2016), Pitts identifies eight motivations musicians had for participating:

- Confirmation and confidence
- To demonstrate and acquire skills
- Promoting and preserving repertoire
- To perform with others
- Social interaction and friendship
- A way of enhancing everyday life
- A way of escaping everyday life
- Spiritual fulfilment and pleasure

Some of these motivations may apply to professionals, and in some cases may be of great importance to them. Most professionals, after all, started as students and amateurs. However, for the professional, being paid negates the importance of these motivations. For the amateur, they are the reason they overcome the challenges and pressures of everyday life to be able to participate in music making.

Music societies fall under the concept of 'serious leisure' as formulated by Stebbins (1992, 2007). According to Stebbins, serious leisure activities are differentiated from all other leisure activities (e.g., dabbling, hobbies, general spare time activities) because they offer motivations to participants in terms of self-improvement, developing talents, skills, and knowledge. They offer an escape from everyday life, taking the mind off other problems and, particularly in the case of music societies, develop friendships and camaraderie (Stebbins, 1992). They therefore attain a high level of importance in the life of the participant that goes beyond any notion of a 'hobby'. As Pitts describes:

> Amateur performers choose to engage in the processes and practices of music because that is where much of their enjoyment lies; in the self-development, group solidarity and companionable pleasures that contributing to a musical performance can bring.
>
> (Pitts, 2016: 64)

The motivation for self-betterment and increasing knowledge that characterises serious-leisure music making is also emphasised by Everitt in the third of his three levels of music participation. The first is an inert 'joining in' such as a sing-along. The second refers to participation that involves reflection and choices that are made with regards how, where, when and with whom they play. This level would include choral societies, brass bands, and amateur orchestras as would the third, which overlaps with the second, but goes further than participation just 'for the fun of it', and adds a developing understanding of style, history and context: 'participation in music can be, at its most intensive, a serious business of learning' and a process of 'extending and developing one's knowledge and creativity' (Everitt, 1998: 20-21) This is also acknowledged by Stebbins who argues that amateurs may have more time on their hands to maintain knowledge of their leisure pursuits, sometimes having a broader expertise than their professional counterparts who are busy practising and earning a living from their skills (Stebbins, 1992: 39). Personal challenge is described in terms of musical difficulty by Pitts, observing that, for many amateur musicians, it is desirable for a musical activity to be difficult and challenging:

> Musical participation that is not difficult, exhausting and challenging is apparently less satisfying; a self-destructive premise perhaps, but one that sheds new light on the dedication felt by amateur performing groups to their shared endeavours.
>
> (Pitts, 2016: 65)

This is reinforced by Everitt's third level of participation and for the composer, highlights an important motivation for many amateurs who participate in music societies.

Despite being driven by musical, personal and social motivations, the amateur faces challenges in pursuing their serious leisure activity. Pitts surveys the motivations of participants in four contrasting amateur music case studies, observing that many amateur music participants experience a fine balancing act between the rewards of the participation, and the personal and social strains of musical involvement. Unlike professionals, amateurs

participate in their leisure time, but the challenges of doing so are worthwhile because of the rewards available. Personal and social strains are far outweighed by 'transcendent moments of enjoyment, achievement and fulfilment, felt to be unattainable by other, "everyday" means.' (Pitts, 2007: 141) Just to 'be onstage and performing for an appreciative audience could be one of the main thrills that motivate the participant to stick with the pursuit' (Susana, Tedrick and Boyd, 1996: p55). These aspects of serious leisure activities are described by Stebbins as 'rewards' and 'thrills' (Stebbins, 1992) and they attract amateur performers to societies and ensembles up and down the country. Charlotte Higgin's, chief cultural writer of *The Guardian*, observes of her own experience of amateur music making:

> Some of the time we sound pretty ropey. But once in a while, something amazing happens: the endless complexity of those threads of Brahms, Schumann or Schubert come together and our individual lines become one. It's almost embarrassing to use the word, in our cynical times, that best describes this feeling: joy.
>
> (Higgins, 2010)

Professional musicians are no doubt motivated by similar aspects of performance, however, it is not just the performances that motivate. Susana, Tedrick and Boyd conducted a survey of various amateur activities that highlighted how, for amateurs, all aspects of the music making process are viewed as part of the leisure activity. In contrast, professionals would view most aspects as work. Comparing whether amateurs and professionals viewed rehearsals and performances as leisure or work, they concluded that amateur musicians were driven by the 'intrinsic motivation factors such as the fun, enjoyment, and satisfaction' that rehearsals and performances gave, whilst musicians who view these activities as work were 'motivated by the pay-off received from the activity.' (Susana, Tedrick and Boyd, 1996: 53). As Pitts observes, the processes involved in creating musical performances, individual practice, rehearsals, and social camaraderie, are all part of the rewards that motivate participants (Pitts, 2016: 64).

A final consideration that is linked to motivation is the payment of subscription fees. Not only do amateur musicians overcome the musical, personal, and social challenges and strains that come with participation in a serious-leisure time activity, they will also pay a fee to be a part of a music group, such is the value of the rewards and thrills that involvement can bring.

As composer John Woolrich points out: ‘amateur musicians pay to perform in an orchestra. This creates a quite different relationship with any composer who is brought in for a commission’ (Woolrich, 2015: online). It is humbling to know that participation on the part of the performers carries such a personal financial commitment; for the composers an appreciation and understanding of this, along with the motivation outlined above, become central to an understanding of the nature of amateur music societies.

The concept of ‘the amateur’ is a complex one for the composer to consider. The composer must embrace the challenge of writing for musicians who are motivated by the rewards and thrills they get from being part of an amateur music group and see every aspect of the production of a performance, including the journey to its realisation, as part of the challenge and enjoyment. The composer must consider not just the final performance, but the rehearsals and the social interactions during the development and rehearsal of a piece. They must acknowledge that amateur musicians want to be challenged, want to further their knowledge and skills, and these motivations are the reasons that they are participating. The composer must also realise the responsibility and privilege of writing for musicians who are stakeholders in the ensemble, who pay for the opportunity to participate. As will be discussed next, these non-musical characteristics can be related to community music and a consideration of the skills required by a ‘facilitator’ can inform an approach to commission projects with amateur music societies.

Chapter 3: Community Music and the facilitator skill set

The amateur music society and definitions of Community Music

The purpose of this section is not to consider community music in terms of technical solutions to writing for amateur music societies, but to identify the characteristics of inter-personal and social interactions found in community music that can inform socio-musical relationships between composers and amateur ensembles:

- Can amateur music societies be brought under the community music umbrella?
- Are the inter-personal and social concerns of the interventionist model relatable to the serious-leisure concept of the amateur?

- Can the role of the community music facilitator contribute to a socio-musical approach that can inform how composers interact with amateur music groups?

With its precursors in the experimental work of various composers and music educators since the 1960s, the revision of the national curriculum and the development of a creative workshop approach to music education in the 1980s, community music is a field of amateur music making that has emerged and gathered pace in the United Kingdom over several decades (Higgins, 2012). Ranging from music education programmes to a variety of theoretical frameworks, the concept of community music varies (Velben, 2008). Whilst at first glance the idea of 'community' music seems to be aligned with leisure-time amateur music making, community music largely inhabits a quite different area of practice and encompasses a huge range of activities and has often defied precise definition.

To place classical music societies within the spectrum of community music we need to consider a range of perspectives. Higgins has suggested three definitions of community music activity: '(1) music of a community, (2) communal music making, and (3) an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants.' (Higgins, 2012: 3). We can place serious leisure-time music making, as characterised by amateur music societies and brass bands, within perspective 2, although there are many overlaps and variations. A useful distinction between categories 2 and 3 can be identified as communal music making (where the emphasis is on people and place, and the shared music making experience) and community music as an 'active intervention with a group of participants led by a skilled facilitator' (Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017: 3). Velben (2008) and Higgins (2012) both acknowledge that the kinds of activities undertaken by choral societies, brass bands, amateur orchestras, and other leisure-time music ensembles, do overlap and appear under the community music umbrella. However, in his discussion of the growth of community music in the UK, the activities of such groups are treated as 'marginal' (Higgins, 2012: 43) and much theory on creative music making is focussed on the interventionist model (the active intervention between a music leader and participants) of community music making (Velben 2008; Higgins, 2012; Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017).

The serious leisure individual and 'community'

In considering the idea of amateur musicians' motivations whilst participating as part of a community, it is of use to compare the terms 'community music' and Everitt's notion of

'participatory music'. Matarasso argues that a transition between 'community' and 'participatory' can be traced back to the rise of individualism and the social-political movements running through British politics in the 1970s and 1980s (Matarasso, 2013). Everitt (1997: 22-23) acknowledges that changes in society and the way in which individualism has changed prior notions of community and he suggests the abandonment of the categories of 'amateur' and community in favour of 'participation' (1997: 16). Jeffers (2017) also suggests that 'participatory arts' is a more useful label, negating the ideological history that community music suggests. Higgins, on the other hand, is less enthusiastic about such a change in terminology. He argues that the historical significance of the term 'community music' is something that should be acknowledged and embraced. Community music, as a term, carries with it political baggage and the term 'participatory arts' has emerged as a less critical and politicised movement, where the focus is on the experience gained by the individual, 'often signifying work that is less politically driven or that does not place ideas of change at its centre' (Jeffers, 2017: 135) Today the term 'participatory art' applies to a wide variety of activities, of which community arts is just one (Matarasso, 2016).

Whilst serious-leisure motivations have been discussed from an individualistic point of view, it is important to note that for amateur musicians 'participation is a means of asserting and enjoying one's membership of an identifiable community' (Everitt, 1997: 21). Motivation to participate is also driven by a sense of community, not only in an intrinsic sense, but also with the surrounding locality. Membership of an amateur music society is a way of 'showing one's loyalty to one's own village, neighbourhood, or town' (Everitt 1997: 21) When it comes to brass bands, these ties with the local community, and the community of brass band musicians, are even more profound (Finnegan, 2007). Whilst there is value in the removal of outdated political significance through the term 'participatory art', and in aligning serious-leisure activities with the idea of participation, we must acknowledge that music societies have a clear relationship with local communities as well as their own internal community identity.

The importance of community interaction is recognised in both participatory music and community music. Amateur musicians participate not only for individualistic motivations such as enjoyment, challenge, and self-improvement, but also for the rewards that come from being part of a self-contained group with shared aims. Pitts observes that participants in amateur music are 'able to define and pursue individual challenges within a supportive group

context, bringing together in musical activity the pleasures of friendship, shared goals and mutual interests which are all valued highly in daily life.' (Pitts, 2017: 144) Very similar goals are identified in the concept of excellence aimed at in community music interventions. Whilst musical excellence can refer to the quality of performance outcomes, Howell, Higgins and Bertleet argue that community music also considers excellence in reference to "the quality of the social experience—bonds formed, meaning and enjoyment derived, and sense of agency that emerges for individuals and the group—alongside the musical outcomes created through the music making experience." (Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017: 23) The motivations of community music participants outlined by Velben resonate clearly with the motivations of serious leisure-time amateurs outlined by Pitts, being based on a combination of one or more of 'music making for personal satisfaction, enjoyment, self-expression, individual creativity, artistic excellence, self-esteem, joy and/or the enhancement of individual and/or group identity.' (Velben, 2008: 3)

The music facilitator and socio-musical considerations: A socially-conscious composer

Community music has given rise to the role of the community musician, music leader, or facilitator. In many ways, the community music facilitator and the interventionist structure are the opposite to the traditional commission model which embodies a hierarchical structure. This traditional role of the composer, his creative authority and the role of the performer/listener within the performance and reception of a work, has been thoroughly questioned and explored by composers and theorists alike (for example Sessions, 1950; Meyer, 1956; Britten, 1964; Small, 1989; Nattiez, 1990; Norris, 1990; Rosenau, 1990; Tarasti 1994), with some composers (for example, Nancarrow and Cage) going as far as removing performer, composer and, in some cases, the listener, from the discourse (Reekie, 2015: p.258). This has led to post-modern theoretical revisions of artistic discourse and a move from a modernist passive reading (Rosenau, 1990: 34) to a more personally creative reception and interpretation of music, involving various notions of creative listening, co-authorship, and collaboration (Higgins, 2012: 31).

Aspects of this shift are observed from a practical point of view in Laycock's book *A Changing Role for the Composer in Society* (Laycock, 2005). By tracing collaborative creative music making in the UK, beginning with the Scratch Orchestra and the political activities of Cardew, through Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies, composers in classrooms, COMA and community music, Laycock describes how the composer's role has changed

since the Romantic 'heroic' figure, to become a more socially conscious individual, a facilitator and catalyst for creative music making (Laycock, 2005). Laycock reviews the role of the composer in relation to what he terms 'creative music-making', which is used as an umbrella term to incorporate community music, composing in the community, composing in education and any other situations that are not traditional contexts for music. His focus on the 'composer' contrasts with the community musician as a general term. This revised concept of the composer is linked to criteria, described as 'conditions of openess', that ensure the motivations and needs of all participants in a creative relationship are addressed (Laycock 2005: 224-225). Several of the conditions outline themes common in a community music project, issues surrounding technical difficulty and appropriate challenge, the development of personal self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, involvement in the creative process and the support of appropriately skilled workshop leaders and support musicians. In addition to this focus on creating the correct conditions for participants, Laycock also retains the role of the composer as one that has an elevated role within the relationship. He believes that the socially conscious composer brings their specific musical skills to a socio-musical relationship and that the composer has two principal responsibilities when it comes to working with a group:

1. To respond to, and interpret creatively, the musical needs and desires of the host community in relation to their chosen form of music
2. To educate the members of that community and open their ears and minds to forms of music which lie beyond their previous existence.

(Laycock, 2005: 253)

Higgins also describes successful social relationships between community facilitators and music participants which resonate clearly with Laycock's conditions and hierarchical placement of the composer. Higgin's discusses changes in leadership hierarchy and the questioning of ego in relation to the importance of environments based on trust and respect. The sharing of a gift by both the facilitator and the participant, encounters that can be characterised as friendships, and open, committed, and respectful relationships all contribute to successful creative relationships between facilitators and participants (Higgins, 2012). Higgins discusses the position of the facilitator within the hierarchical framework of a project and the relinquishing of ego in relation to admitting faults and mistakes. He suggests that by accepting constructive criticism, and therefore demonstrating vulnerability, trust and respect

between a facilitator and group can be deepened. Higgins also points out that being able to do this as a music leader does take an amount of maturity and experience, without which working relationships can sometimes lead to difficult confrontations (Higgins, 2012).

Amateur music making can be viewed as participatory music-making, or 'communal' music-making, and it does not normally fall into the interventionist model of community music. However, if we are to recognise that amateur musicians have different motivations and needs from their musical activity, based on a development of knowledge, musical challenge, and a desire for high quality social interactions both within the community of the ensemble and the wider local community, all of which are recognised in community music, then Higgins' ideas surrounding open relationships based on trust and respect and the notion of Laycock's socially-conscious composer should be considered in the context of composing for an amateur music society.

Composer expertise and the facilitator skillset

Acknowledging the importance of socio-musical relationships with amateur musicians, the socially-conscious composer can consider how the skills of the composer fit into the skillset of a facilitator. Velben describes the role of the community music facilitator (also worker, educator, musician, trainer) as flexible and elastic, possibly drawing on a huge range of skills (Velben, 2008). Howell, Higgins and Bertleet suggest the role of the facilitator working in the interventionist model, encompasses skills in 6 categories:

> Facilitation is a role that requires a combination of the attributes of a musician (able to perform, arrange, compose, improvise—to name but a few), a teacher (able to communicate information and support the development of new skills, with a highly flexible pedagogy), a community development worker (skilled in reading group dynamics and cultivating collective emancipatory action), a social or youth worker (sensitive to the practical and structural obstacles that members of the group may face, and factors that could reinforce marginalization), a health worker (attentive to the diverse physical and mental health needs of participants), and a leader (a personable individual with certain qualities of charisma and persuasiveness).
>
> (Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017: 162-163)

Composition is not the first discipline that springs to mind when discussing social interactions, as it has traditionally been seen as a solitary activity, hence Laycock's use of the term 'socially conscious', and not all these categories are of relevance to the composer working with amateur music groups. However, several categories are worthy of attention when effectively approaching participant motivations and the social interactions that may arise. In addition to a composer's own specialised skillset, we can also consider the communication and pedagogical skills of the teacher, awareness of group dynamics of the community development worker and the personal qualities of charisma, persuasiveness of the 'personable' leader. All of these resonate with the challenges faced when entering the socio-musical environment of an amateur music society project. Sensitivity to the practical obstacles musicians face is also useful, but manifests itself in a different way in the context of the music society where composers must be considerate of technical ability and resources, as well as rehearsal schedule and practice time.

When comparing a professional commission with an amateur commission it can be argued that ''non-professional' commissions foreground the social situation more directly' than professional commissions, and that whilst these issues are probably inherent in any commission, they are 'amplified in the 'non-professional' situation' (McKeon, 2020: personal communication). This is evident from the motivations and characteristics of amateur musicians already discussed. When a composer works with an amateur group, the relationship can benefit from a socially conscious individual with an awareness of the motivations and characteristics of the amateur musician identity. This leads to a consideration of social skills not normally the focus of the contemporary composer. With a background as a community music facilitator, composer Judith Weir describes the two sides of writing for amateurs, the composer skill set and the need to be a socially conscious individual:

> When non-professional performers have approached me for new work, I know that they partly want to be given direction, clarity, someone with the musical experience to say 'we'll do this, I'm confident it will work well'. Naturally, it's good if that message is delivered in in interactive and sympathetic way!
>
> (Weir, 2020: personal communication)

This blend of composer expertise and a 'sympathetic' approach to the socio-musical situation that amateur commissions create will vary from project to project. It is the responsibility of the composer to address the motivations of individuals within a social situation, as well as

provide musical expertise that can be related to the way in which skilled community music facilitators 'consciously engage with people to find pathways through which music making opportunities might allow them to personally flourish with full and engaged participation' (Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017: 605).

A mix of skills is highlighted by Webster (Webster, 2016) in her account of her involvement in the Community and Education Programme for the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra through the 1990s (continuing outreach programmes established by the London Sinfonietta and linked to revised National Curriculum programmes of study in the previous decade). The composer brings 'an ability to order musical elements in an engaging way' and to 'tease out beauty and meaning from simple means' (Webster, 2016: 150). Webster points out that in her past experiences of the RPO outreach programmes, the best conditions when working in a community or educational music environment can exist when a composer is working alongside other appropriate professionals, such as music facilitators, teachers and youth workers, all of whom bring complementary skills.

In an amateur music society commission, it is expected that a composer brings their compositional expertise to the relationship. Laycock argues that in creative music-making it is not enough for composers to be excellent musicians, composers must also be educators with inspirational leadership skills too. Resonating with Higgins and the establishment of trust through the acknowledgement of strengths and weaknesses, Laycock (2005) believes the composer must show humility, recognising that they also have something to learn along with the participants, that we all have something to learn, and something to teach, and are willing to take risks. The composer must be an 'expert diplomat […] responding to, and interpreting creatively, the musical needs and desires of the host community.' (2005: 385). The composer must also demonstrate personal qualities, 'possessing virtues of infinite patience, self-effacement, and an ability to keep a cool head in a crisis' (2005: 385). All of these are qualities recognised in the music facilitator and this is echoed by the views of John Webb who believes that: 'it's important that the composer's personality is open to ideas, that the composer is generous with ideas and willing to listen, and being able to be like this in the sessions is as important as being as being able to write a good piece for them [the ensemble]' (Webb, 2021: personal communication). Andrew Hall also acknowledges the skills necessary when working with an amateur ensemble, describing how he had to 'find ways of managing a collaborative relationship between myself and all those individual players. I had to very

quickly learn important lessons about leadership, communication' (Hall cited in Bullard, 2013)

Chapter 4: Practical considerations and socio-musical relationships

The Adopt a Composer Scheme (AAC)

In 1997-98 Making Music ran a Choral Composer Scheme, pairing composers with choral societies, and from this emerged the Adopt a Composer scheme. Established in 2000, it was run by SPNM (now Sound and Music) and the Performing Rights Society. The scheme pairs emerging composers with interested amateur groups. It partly aimed at giving emerging composers the opportunity to write for amateur ensembles, but also aimed at promoting the positives of commissioning new works for amateur ensembles.

Amateur societies have a tradition of being conservative when it comes to contemporary music or serious 'art' music. At the end of the millennium there was encouragement from funding bodies to engage with the community, young people and to commission new works (Everitt, 1997: p. 41). Making Music (formerly The National Federation of Music Societies) was formed in 1935 and represents over 3,700 amateur groups. In their commissioning guidance they acknowledge that music societies may be reluctant to work with contemporary composers. I was asked to contribute a presentation entitled 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad World of New Music' at the annual Making Music conference in 2007, aimed at addressing these issues (Long, 2007). In this I argued that the risk of commissioning new works was outweighed by the wide-ranging benefits gained from being part of an interactive creative relationship. Making Music encourage their member societies by promoting the positive aspects of commissioning new work and giving guidance over the commissioning process (Making Music, 2015).

In 2008 a report was commissioned into the effectiveness of the AAC scheme (Churchill, 2009). At the stage the report was commissioned, the scheme had seen 8 years of composer/ensemble pairings. The scheme was organised so that a pool of 6 composers were drawn from an interview process, and 6 ensembles from an application process. A committee then paired the composers with the ensembles taking into account geographical locations, experience and musical style. These 'blind-date' pairings were unveiled at a meeting with

composers and ensembles, and a mentor was attached to each of the pairings (Churchill, 2009).

The report acknowledges possible preconceptions towards contemporary music. It states that AAC has contributed towards 'promoting the view that new music is within the reach of amateur musicians, and not something only for academia or professional performers.' (Churchill, 2009: 6). It also notes that composers on the scheme saw a divide between contemporary music and the musically-interested public 'who apart from a relatively small niche market of enthusiasts are not especially interested in contemporary music, and many actively dislike it.' (Churchill, 2009: 25) The report gives an account of varying characteristics of successful collaborations (the vast majority) and issues in less successful collaborations (the minority).

The Adopt a Composer scheme is a successful initiative in creating work that bridges the gap between serious contemporary art music and amateur musicians. Whilst some projects encountered difficulties, the scheme has been 'substantially positive' (Churchill, 2009: 3) and successful projects resonate clearly with the characteristics of serious-leisure participation, Laycock's conditions of openness and the approach of the community music facilitator. The report divides the characteristics of projects under the subheadings briefing, ownership, musical collaboration, relationship building and audiences. I have summarised below:

Successful collaborations were characterised by:

Briefing

- A clear briefing about the group interests, context of performance, expectations of the audience.
- The composer creating a work that the performers will enjoy and find rewarding to learn.

Ownership

- Ownership strengthened by a group of opinion-formers and decision makers, along with the musical director, driving the project.

- There must be an ‘in principle’ interest in contemporary music and working with composers.

Relationship building

- The composer attending rehearsals to understand the group’s technical capabilities and how they work with the musical director.
- The composer getting to know members of the group to develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, often with friendships developing.

Musical collaboration

- Compositions have been composed with specific ensemble skills in mind rather than a more generic new work, taking into account ensemble strengths and weaknesses.
- Performers try out sketches or drafts before developing the rest of the work
- After trying out sketches, composers have been able to subsequently develop and refine the composition based on workshopping it.
- Composers seek advice from section leaders, principles, and conductors to ensure their writing is appropriate.
- Choral singers contribute ideas and suggestions about suitable texts.
- Enough rehearsal time is allocated to rehearsing the new work.

Audiences

- Winning audience trust is essential in the success of a new work. Pre-concert talks were met with a favourable audience response.

Principle reasons for less successful collaborations are:

Briefing

- Lack of clear briefing leads to a disappointment with the outcome.
- The musical director has not been realistic about the capabilities of the group.

Ownership

- Ownership is driven by a few people who do not have the full support of a group. Lack of a unified approach from the ensemble can leads to inter-personal issues.

- The musical director has not been committed.
- The group has little or no experience of contemporary music.

Relationship building

- The new work does not relate to the group and is generic in its approach.
- The composer spending little time with the ensemble. A feeling the composer isn't engaged with the group.
- Geographical distance or work pressures result in less frequent visits from the composer.

Musical Collaboration

- Collaborations less successful when there has been a breakdown of musical trust and respect. The role of the Musical Director is emphasised as being critically important.
- Composers ignore or reject advice from performers.
- Choral writing underestimating amateur singers in pitching entries.
- Composer's style has been too uncompromising.
- Late delivery of the score causes anxieties and difficulties in rehearsal schedules.
- Musical Directors plan sufficient time for rehearsals, more than for more familiar styles.
- Amateur orchestras only bring in some players for a performance.
- Composers sometimes required additional instruments that had financial implications.

Audiences

- The needs of audiences have been overlooked.
- Relying only on programme notes to introduce a new work is inadequate.

The categories into which Churchill organises the responses to his survey clearly demonstrate the interactive nature of the socio-musical relationship that the AAC projects foster. Understanding the interests of the group, giving a sense of ownership through shared creativity, creating work that will be enjoyed by both participants and the audience of their local community, creating work that will provide a challenge and a reward to learn all resonate with the motivations of amateur musicians. Other characteristics emphasise an open

creative relationship between composers and groups, which have established relationships based on trust and respect.

Successful projects were dominated by successful socio-musical relationships based on trust and respect and an open approach to the creative process, whilst less successful projects were dominated by socio-musical relationships adversely affected by musical collaboration issues, the relationship with the musical director, issues of style, taste, musical opinion, and so on.

Ed McKeon, who was involved as a mentor in the early years of AAC, was approached for his thoughts on the AAC scheme. In reference to composers making use of facilitator skills more commonly developed in community arts he argues that the cultural situation of any commission must be understood, and that involves 'not only the identities of participants, but also relevant history, networks, relationship with the wider community and so on' (McKeon, 2020: personal communication). This is reinforced by the fact that the AAC mentor fulfils the role of facilitator and/or mediator within the creative relationship. Positive working relationships are crucial, and composers must consider the motivations amateurs have to participate, the thrill and rewards that encompass the quality of social interactions and relationships they gain from their leisure time activity. Weaker collaborations are evident when this is not the case:

> The community arts and education model also demands respect for the participants. Some [AAC] composers took the opportunity as a chance to get their ideas performed without due consideration of the participants as people situated within a given environment and with a particular social history.
>
> (McKeon, 2020)

Composer motivation was an important factor in the success of the projects. When composers were asked why they wanted to be involved in the scheme, very few were motivated by the unique characteristics of the serious-leisure amateur musician (Churchill, 2009: 17). After the projects had been completed, however, opinions had invariably changed, and successful projects were often characterised by an appreciation of the participants:

> The most successful projects were where composers had a real belief in and commitment to helping players and audiences engage in new music; some of the weakest were where composers were perhaps more interested in their own musical development.
>
> (Churchill, 2009: 18)

In pairing ensembles and composers, AAC has, from its first year, used a 'blind date' system. Whilst the report highlights that the blind date system of pairings has produced successful projects, it has also been a cause of weakness in less successful projects (Churchill, 2009: 30). There is a greater sense of risk, despite pairing being overseen by a more knowledgeable committee. There is also a sense of the unpredictable that was noted as being exciting. McKeon believes that the blind date structure is an unsatisfactory model. In keeping with the philosophy of Third Ear's commissioning advice, he believes that everyone in an artistic relationship must care about the outcome of an overall artistic concept. In a similar way to Higgins' notion of musical and social excellence, McKeon believes that there must be discussion, sharing and respectful negotiations (McKeon, 2020). The blind date does not include these characteristics at the initial stages of a project and therefore socio-musical relationships are put at risk as the project progresses.

There is also the role of the mentor to consider. Not normally an element of a composer/ensemble relationship, in the AAC projects mentors operate in a supportive role to the composer, and, to a certain extent, the ensemble. Not all composers wanted their work to be 'overseen', whilst others valued another point of view (McKeon, 2020). In some cases, the mentor helped to ensure the working relationship between composer and musical director was effective, and in others the mentor acted to resolve difficulties in relationships, or to prevent them occurring in the first place (Churchill, 2009, McKeon, 2020). By its very inclusion in the AAC project model, the mentor highlights the importance of socio-musical issues. It must be remembered that the AAC scheme is aimed at composers at the start of their career, and ensembles who may never have commissioned a new piece. In this way the mentor can be a valuable mediator in ensuring successful socio-musical relationships, possibly pre-empting, and in some cases preventing, any breakdown of relationships.

Definitions of collaboration

Churchill's evaluation of the AAC scheme cites various aspects of collaboration as characteristics of successful projects. This is linked to the positive role it can play in relationship building, creating excellent social-musical experiences and a sense of musical ownership. This notion of collaboration, however, is different to a conventional creative-musical relationship as described by Laycock or the community music interventionist model described by Higgins. With its origins in educational settings, the creative music workshop is a standard method employed by community music facilitators (see Curry and Webb, cited in Bullard, 2013; Laycock, 2005; Paynter, 1982, 1992; Higgins, 2012; Gregory, 2015; Barber, 2015; Howell, Higgins and Bertleet, 2017). In comparison to a traditional commission model it reduces, or removes completely, hierarchy within the creative process. The resulting music is usually a standalone project and this level of collaboration is not necessarily required, or even desired, by ensembles or composers: 'collaborations between composer and ensemble varies enormously and can be fruitful. However, it is not always a particularly rewarding experience or even appropriate in many cases.' (Montague, 2020: personal communication)

There are, of course, different levels to which the composer can retain, or relinquish, the creative process and there are a wide range of opinions as to what constitutes collaboration. It is possible to introduce collaborative elements whilst not working within a truly interventionist framework, where the composer will retain control of the final compositional outcome whilst also adopting themes around the more socially conscious individual. This may not necessarily be the creation of musical material but will involve aspects of the socio-musical relationship that can feed into the development of a work. The differences between a professional commission and working with an amateur ensemble often necessitates a different socio-musical relationship which is inherently 'collaborative' in nature, but this will vary from ensemble to ensemble:

> The collaborative element is always there, but it varies in degree and style. It depends on the ensemble and the composer, what their essential attitudes are. Some composers/ensembles will find a freely collaborative approach helpful and want more, others will not.
>
> (Weir, 2020)

Ideas around collaborative composition that are commonplace in the classroom have been explored in contemporary art music by composers for several decades and form part of the contemporary composer's tool kit. For example, in his article, 'Only Connect', Weigold (2016) describes several compositional approaches that invite the performers to add their own improvised parts to pre-existing material. These are common music classroom techniques, with examples of such ideas given by Paynter (Paynter 1982, 1992). Another common concept of collaboration is the co-creation of musical material in a workshop setting with the composer knitting the material into a finished work. One such example is John Barber's community opera *We Are Shadows*. (Barber, 2016: 115). This highly collaborative approach is no doubt a valuable activity when creating a sense of shared ownership but the co-creation of musical material is a specific compositional approach and is closely related to some aspects of Laycock's creative music-making and the community music interventionist model. It creates compositions that are usually only performed by the project participants, or similar ensembles. Their meaning and relevance are rooted in the processes and social interactions that took place during the collaboration. This is emphasised by Humphries in his compositional research *Composing in the Community: Creative Dialogues with the Amateur Music Vernacular*, observing that in this form of collaboration, when relinquishing control is a key element in the creation of material, a composer shapes 'materials into a finished product, however, it is the process which often offers the greatest value to those who make the music' (Humphries, 2019: 115). In a traditional commission relationship between a composer and an ensemble, such methods are not generally applied to amateur music societies unless the creative aims of a commission brief specify such a collaborative approach, or either party bring these ideas to the table at the briefing stage. Whilst there are changes in approach and attitude in recent years as exemplified by changes in the AAC scheme and changes in Making Music's award categories where 'music creator' is used in preference to the traditional term 'composer', Montague holds the view that there is a place for one-off projects, but argues that composers want their music to live beyond such relationships:

> Most composers I know want their work for any group to be a stand-alone product that could be published and performed by a many other ensembles. My experience with amateur/non-professional collaborations is that they are one-offs which can be fun and exciting but are just that, once only.
>
> (Montague, 2020)

Composers working collaboratively, and relinquishing some, or all, artistic control are discussed by Haydn and Windsor in their study *Collaboration and the Composer* (2007). They suggest three main categories of collaboration: directive, interactive and collaborative. The directive category is related to the traditional communication between composer and performer. Based on the written score consisting of composer instructions, collaboration is limited to issues surrounding interpretation. The collaborative category is where music is creative through collective decision making. There are no hierarchical roles in the creative relationship, and this is where we could place interventionist creative music projects. Interactive collaborations are described as when:

> the composer is involved more directly in negotiation with musicians and/or technicians. The process is more interactive, discursive, and reflective, with more input from collaborators than in the directive category, but ultimately, the composer is still the author. Some aspects of the performance are more 'open' and not determined by a score.
>
> (Haydn and Windsor, 2007: 31)

This concept of collaboration resonates clearly with a composer who wants to involve the amateur music society in the creative process, to make the compositional process 'interactive' in some way, whilst also retaining creative control. It shares the same characteristics of successful AAC projects, and it is this approach to collaboration that addressed the characteristics of amateur musicians and Everitt's third level of participation.

Project duration: Interactive creativity supporting socio-musical relationships

The duration of an AAC project and the interaction a composer had with the ensemble allowed opportunities for an interactive creative approach which in turn contributed to positive socio-musical relationships. This is not usually possible in a professional commission relationship where a composer traditionally works in isolation and delivers a score by an agreed date. Long-term projects, where interactive creativity can take place allow for opportunities to build in processes that will foster successful interactive creativity and also allow the composer to assess and develop their own technique and compositional approach informed by the characteristics of the group.

By exploring interactive creativity during a long-term project, the community music theme of reducing ego between participants and leader can be addressed, positively affecting socio-musical relationships by giving a sense of shared ownership and an environment where everyone is in it together. Interactive creativity can enable the hierarchical position of the composer to be controlled and reduced through the demonstration of creative openness and vulnerability, and whether intentional or not, can deepen the level of trust between composer and amateur ensemble.

The importance of interactive creativity is cited by several composers in *Composers Talking: commissioning new music for voluntary performing groups* (Bullard, 2013), a document prepared by composer Alan Bullard on behalf of Making Music and the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors (BASCA). The document contains advice for composers that is focussed mainly on the technical challenges of writing for amateurs. Whilst the relationship between composer and ensemble is suggested as an important consideration and is described as 'broadly collaborative', discussion of the development of socio-musical relationships and interpersonal skills are limited to general notions of cultivating good working relationships (Bullard, 2013: 2-3). Whilst some composers highlight a facilitator skill set, citing leadership, communication, and the quality of working relationships as part of successful commissions, there are also links made between cultivating relationships and interactive creativity. Composer John Webb, like Higgins, emphasises the building of trust between the composer and the ensemble through shared ownership, where musicians feel part of the compositional process. Webb describes building relationships built on trust by using rehearsals as a way of exploring the new work, advising that composers should 'try out ideas with them [the ensemble] in rehearsal before the piece is complete, so they can hear it developing and feel part of the composition process, and they can hear any changes which occurred as a result of the rehearsal.' (Webb, cited in Bullard: 2013).

In formulating an approach to a long-term project, the relationship should address the needs of all participants and stakeholders, including the composer, and must be balanced. Whilst interactive creativity has positive benefits for the ensemble participants, from the composer's viewpoint, this should not be viewed simply as a way of addressing the needs of the group, but also an opportunity to develop a socio-musical approach, and also reconsider compositional technique. Whilst the composer has a responsibility to respect and understand the characteristics of amateur musicians, the composer will also have their own aesthetic aims. Composers will want to retain their own musical aesthetic principles and interactive

creativity can bring benefits to both sides of the relationship. Montague acknowledges that 'what is really rewarding […] is trying out things with a group, working with them, and of course considering the group's ideas when appropriate' (Montague, 2020: personal communication). 'When appropriate' is a key point here, as interactive creativity ultimately retains the composer authority, and the composer decides the extent to which an ensemble exerts an influence on the final creative outcome. John Webb emphasises that, for composers, an interactive relationship 'encourages us to come out of our ivory towers a bit, where we are working in the echo chamber of our heads'. He also acknowledges the consideration of ideas from an ensemble where a composer may find solutions to writing for amateurs that could be 'suggested by others which we might not have thought of ourselves'. (Webb, 2020: personal communication) A strength of the AAC model is that long term relationships give the composer the opportunity to explore musical ideas in a way that may not normally be possible:

> A number of AAC composers commented on the value of being able to try out ideas and discuss them with players in an atmosphere of trust and without embarrassment in a way which is much less likely to happen in working with professional ensembles other than where there is a long-term relationship.
>
> (Churchill, 2009: 18)

Adapting technique - The issue of composer technique

> So much great music of the 18th and 19th centuries was written for amateurs, and so much music of the 20th century is written for professionals. […] making music challenging but doable for amateur and young fingers is one of the interesting questions of our time. Who should play our music?
>
> (Woolrich, 2015: online)

John Woolrich highlights the importance of making contemporary music challenging, but also performable. The issue of technical challenge is often evident in some contemporary styles which can make demands on the performer that other historical styles do not, contributing to the notion that contemporary music is difficult to perform. Woolrich argues that this could be because 'musical language has become more professionalised and people write harder pieces.' (Woolrich cited in Weigold and Abis, 2016: 164).

Professional ensembles in the Western classical tradition are based on 'undifferentiated collectivity' (Small, 1998: 70). Small likens this unified purpose to an industrial enterprise, and that the ensemble is driven towards 'the making of a product, in this case a performance.' (Small, 1998: 68-67). For composers, this allows technical freedom. When working with amateur musicians, however, that freedom 'is restricted considerably by their more limited technical prowess and often, and more importantly, by an uneven range of abilities within the group. The amateur spectrum is very wide, ranging from the bottom rung of the ladder up to near professional standard' (Montague, 2020: personal communication). The amateur musician spectrum means that the range of technical ability, and levels of musical understanding, will be far wider than in a professional setting. Laycock argues that for a creative music-making project to be genuinely open to age and ability, a project must meet his conditions of openness. Whilst some of the conditions are more appropriate in community music style interventionist projects, there are several that a composer can consider in an interactive creative relationship. In Laycock's opinion, projects should 'contain material at appropriate levels of difficulty for the different abilities of the participants' and should also

> present an appropriate level of challenge to each participant so that he or she can achieve a degree of progression in musical understanding, technical ability, creativity, personal self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships.
>
> (Laycock, 2005: 225).

Whilst the technical difficulty of the music is always important when writing for amateurs, the second of these conditions has an interesting resonance with pedogeological theories. Making the music accessible to all, whilst also building in an element of progression which is differentiated for individuals, is a variation of Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development'. Performers can access material, gain a sense of achievement, and are able to develop their skills and/or understanding further. Understanding the ability of an ensemble is emphasized by by John McLeod: 'make it a priority to go and listen to them [the ensemble] to see where their technical and musical skills lie.' (McLeod cited in Bullard, 2013: 8). The problems that can arise from a technically difficult musical language and a lack of understanding of an ensemble is highlighted by one AAC musical director discussing a choral piece:

> It had some interesting effects but these were hard to execute and the whole didn't endear itself either to the choir or audiences… The piece was hard to rehearse, with difficult intervals and counterpoint that didn't reward… similar 'effects' could have

> been achieved by much simpler means, that were less time-demanding of the choir. It is a shame for [the composer] and for us that the work for all these reasons did not receive a second or subsequent performance.
>
> (anonymous, cited in Churchill, 2006: 10)

Laycock's conditions have more in common with interventionist collaborations, but the idea that the composer must work within a technically acceptable 'zone' is important. Having said this, the idea that composers should not 'dumb down' has been highlighted as an important requirement of new amateur works, being mentioned several times by various composers in *Composers Talking* (Bullard, 2013), allocated importance in the evaluation of AAC projects by Churchill (Churchill, 2009) and with COMA emphasing a 'no compromise' approach when commissioning new open score works for their ensembles.

We could consider the possibility that technical difficulty and contemporary music are inseparable, and Weigold suggests that 'the distinction between music for amateurs and 'art music' is virtuosity.' (Weigold, 2016: 164). Certainly, a large amount of contemporary art music from the 20th and 21st centuries is only realistically accessible to professional musicians and the best amateur players. There have been movements to address this, including the formation of COMA and their open score policy in the mid-1990s and the unique legacy formed by the *Spectrum* series of solo piano books where composers have been commissioned to write pieces that were specifically aimed at graded ability levels.

Weigold's distinction does not necessarily hold true, however, and there are many composers whose style is not inherently virtuosic, where another aesthetic quality, technical or otherwise, forms a focus of the work. Questions arise, therefore, around compromises a composer may make when adapting their technique. Should such adaptations be considered a compromise? Are the styles and techniques used by some composers more suited to writing for amateurs?

Montague believes that undoubtedly composers should adapt their technique when writing for amateurs. This is, he argues, a real challenge and something that professional composers do not always achieve. He describes his time as Artistic Director of COMA (2005-06) and that pieces he commissioned from leading UK composers were not all usable, showing 'little feel for the group they were writing for.' (Montague, 2020). He describes the COMA catalogue as 'full of pieces that are above the technical level appropriate to COMA ensembles, and most of those were written by professional composers' (Montague, 2020). He

goes further to suggest that a lack of consideration, or understanding, of the technical characteristics of an amateur group may have its roots in the musical education gained by young composers in the UK, stating that:

> No composer seems to be taught how to write for amateurs. Every composition student I know in his or her head is writing for the LSO and is invariably disappointed when a student orchestra struggles. Rarely have I seen a young composer write an easy orchestral work or an easy work for large chamber group
>
> (Montague, 2020)

Judith Weir also agrees that repositioning their style is what composers should do for every piece, and in relation to amateur musicians claims that 'adapting musically towards a non-professional group should be a pleasure, an opportunity – and not with the feeling that you've had to simplify and leave out all the interesting stuff you really wanted to write' (Weir, 2020) John Rutter's music is long established in the amateur choral repertoire. Whilst occupying a more accessible musical sound world than most contemporary art music, Rutter acknowledges adapting his musical language when writing for amateurs. He suggests that working with amateurs means you can distil and simplify your thoughts, and that adapting to address the technical ability of performers means 'you may have to strip away some layers of needless complexity' (Rutter cited in Bullard, 2013: 7). John Webb also highlights the idea of focussing technique describing the 'opportunity here for composers to look at their style and to distil it to a more fundamental essence because we are working with amateurs and not everything is possible' (Webb, 2021).

When virtuosity is an element of style, adapting technique can be more challenging and there is the question of whether some composers are more suited to writing for amateur ensembles than others. Harrison Birtwistle, for example, acknowledged that his music is difficult to perform. Many of his pieces demonstrate formidable virtuosity. He does not alter how he writes for the performer and any technical difficulty is a result of the musical idea: 'I do stretch performers but I start with a musical idea. If a musical idea by some form of necessity is difficult, so be it.' (Birtwistle cited in Weigold and Abis, 2016: 164) The language of other contemporary art composers, however, can seem more accessible to amateur musicians. For example, the challenge of a Skempton COMA open score composition such as *Sirens* (Skempton, 2006) lies not in its technical virtuosity, but in its other musical characteristics. Based on a harmonic progression scored for a wide range against a simple overlapping

rhythmic scheme, it is the sound world created by the procession of chords that is the aesthetic heart of the piece. For this piece, a successful performance relies not on virtuosic brilliance, but on precise intonation and a unified approach from the ensemble, with the piece sometimes requiring longer rehearsals than may be expected (Skempton, 2016).

The question for the composer is not one of 'dumbing down', with all the negative implications this may have with regards aesthetic integrity, but one of adapting whilst retaining artistic integrity both for themselves, and in giving the ensemble a challenging musical experience whilst making the music technically accessible.

Adapting technique - Finding the solution is the art

Peter Weigold emphasises that the process of finding solutions for amateur groups should not only be a major part of the compositional activity, but an aesthetic aim. An important idea that reinforces the concept of the amateur as a serious music maker is suggested by Weigold, who says that he feels there is a 'unique sound latent in any grouping' (Weigold, 2016: 162). Unlocking this requires an in-depth understanding and appreciation of a group: 'the thing is to make things completely work for themselves, on their own terms, treat everything seriously' and 'the most interesting thing is finding the solution. Finding the solution is the art.' (Weigold, 2016: 162-163) Bullard also recognises how the characteristics of the group should inform the compositional process and that 'it's not always possible to separate technical, musical, and stylistic aspects. Musical ideas can themselves grow from the strengths and the limitations of the players' technique' (Bullard, 2013: 7).

Adapting musical language is recognised by COMA's dedication to commissioning new contemporary art music that is performable by amateurs, but also aesthetically uncompromising. The COMA 'open score' catalogue contains many pieces where complex musical language has successfully been adapted to suit amateur musicians. For example, Michael Finnissy's scores are generally rhythmically and harmonically complex, virtuosic in their demands on the player, yet an early COMA piece such as *Plain Harmony* (Finnissy, 1993) creates textures and cross rhythms based on simpler rhythmic ideas, but is still recognisably in keeping with his usual approach. As an early COMA piece, and in contrast to other CoMA pieces, it is precisely notated in terms of rhythm and pitch but adheres to the open score policy, leaving instrumentation and some structural decisions open to interpretation. As a standalone piece, it is a challenging Finnissy composition. There is no

aesthetic compromise. As a technical representation of his language at the time, it contains fingerprints, but is technically less complex.

Audience

> Amateurs seem to have a limited range of musical appreciation: it's basically Bach till Britten, and with difficulty and suspicion they listen to other things. I regard them as people who are basically not interested in contemporary music, though I might be wrong.
>
> (Goehr, cited in Palmer, 2015: 198)

Despite Drinker and Stebbins championing the amateur's 'good taste', Alexander Goehr's observation is relevant when considering contemporary 'art' music. Amateur good taste can be limited to the traditions of the classical music societies and the role they play in celebrating and maintaining traditional repertoire, despite some ensembles demonstrating more progressive programming. Commissioned works by amateur ensembles may involve some high-profile contemporary composers, but this is not the standard. Amateur commissions vary greatly and more commonly take place on a local level where some new compositions may not even be classed as commissions. Instrumental teachers composing new music for their youth ensembles, choir directors and organists composing new carols at Christmas, student works from local schools and colleges or new hymns composed by church choir directors (Finnegan, 2017). Making Music give a principal consideration to whether musicians like, or are stimulated, by the music of a composer as the first consideration for a potential collaboration. Whilst Making Music state that 400 new works are commissioned by its members annually (Making Music, 2015) and the Adopt a Composer scheme runs each year pairing contemporary composers with amateur ensembles, there can be an uneasy relationship between amateurs, their audiences, and composers. Giving respect to the audience of an amateur music ensemble is an import factor in the socio-musical relationship. Churchill recognises a divide between contemporary music and the wider general listening public, believing that concert goers of amateur music ensembles are 'not especially interested in contemporary music, and may actively dislike it' (Churchill, 2009: 27). Tensions and conflicts were highlighted in the AAC scheme when, in the initial stages of a blind date relationship, an ensemble referred generally to contemporary music as 'squeaky gate music' (Churchill, 2009: 27).

Should the composer consider the audience of an amateur ensemble? Birtwistle humorously states that 'the problem of making music acceptable to the masses is that you're always going to be pitching it to the lowest common denominator. I'd be banging two stones together.' (Birtwistle, Weigold and Abis, 2016: 172) Artistic alignment within the contemporary world may mean that different composers have different views. Some composers will be uncompromising when it comes to considering the audience, and that may be because of their style and artistic vision, others may be more sympathetic or embrace the audience as part of their own compositional approach. It is, however, important to note that the audience is included as an element of successful collaborations in AAC projects:

> Where the needs of audiences – who may have relatively little experience of hearing new or contemporary work – have been overlooked they are more likely to be perplexed unmoved by the work even if not downright unsympathetic.
>
> (Churchill, 2009: 29)

Amateur audiences are not the same as professional audiences. As has already been discussed, amateur musicians make up a large proportion of professional audiences, thus furnishing it with a level of expertise not always present in the audience of most amateur groups. Amateur audiences on the other hand are made up of a large proportion of friends and family in addition to patrons and local community 'followers'. A notable exception would be ensembles who specialise in contemporary repertoire. When writing for CoMA, for example, the composer starts with an ensemble already open to contemporary art music, and an audience attendance motivated by similar interests.

It is necessary to consider the nature of an amateur ensemble and the connection that programming has with the viability and continuity of the ensemble, in particular where financial issues and concert attendance are concerned. The impact of commissioning and programming a new work is risky to an ensemble. Will the audience like the music? Will they sell tickets? Will they cover the financial cost of the commission? As Webb describes: 'there could well be less risk in writing for professionals – it's just another piece they are going to play in a series of performances […] Amateurs have to live with the piece for longer – it may dominate a term's activities – so composers need to somehow meet the amateur ensemble on their own ground" (Webb, 2021: personal communication). Whilst Birtwistle's comment is at one extreme, there is a middle ground where a composer can consider the usual repertoire that may draw an audience and be sympathetic to the styles that the ensemble

enjoy and excel at, finding common ground with the wider local community that the ensemble operate within.

Extra-musical References

The effect of extra-musical references cannot be underestimated in connecting to participants of an ensemble, and also drawing in an audience. Extra-musical references can give an accessible starting point to experiencing the new piece. One of Laycock's conditions of openness suggests that composers should 'focus on an appropriate non-musical theme or idea which can engage all participants at an intellectual and emotional level.' (Laycock 2005: 225) The extent to which we can measure such success criteria is hard to say. What moves one person can have a completely different effect on another. He also suggests that projects should 'leave a memorable and lasting impression with all those who took part.' (Laycock, 2005: 225): In addition to the positive socio-musical experience that should be developed, the introduction of extramusical references, ideas, texts and emotions can be a powerful tool in galvanising an ensemble and leave a lasting impression after the event.

Technical solutions - Aleatoric processes

Composers need to find solutions to adapting their technique for what will undoubtedly be a mixed ability ensemble compared to a professional group. Weigold's notion of solutions being part the 'art' of writing for amateurs is not linked only to issues surrounding technique and musician ability level. Technical solutions depend on individual composer technique and whilst it is an important consideration in making the music technically 'doable', technique should not be viewed in isolation, but instead should be seen as being inseparable from other aesthetic concerns, and should be informed by strategies that incorporate interactive creativity and the characteristics of successful socio-musical relationships. Technical solutions and the adaptation of technique will therefore differ greatly from project to project.

There are many words of wisdom that composers can give, technical 'tricks' that may help in some situations, but ultimately, this is done in the context of their own musical language and particular commissions. Bullard's document contains snippets of advice, for example: 'it can be good to double lines in other instruments so they can latch onto them. And it's very important to give cues' (Joliffe cited in Bullard, 2013: 6) and 'keep the time signatures simple. Don't hide behind complexity' (Campkin cited in Bullard, 2013). Such advice is

useful. However, knowing the ensemble, reacting to the socio-musical situation and offering interactive creativity gives the composer an opportunity of discovering, as Weigold describes, the latent 'sound' of each group. The compositional process is intertwined with the characteristics of the ensemble.

There are some approaches, however, that have consistently been employed. Virtuosity can often be a principal feature of contemporary 'art' music and when a solution to creating more virtuosic writing and been deemed necessary, it is common for composers to employ aleatoric processes. The COMA catalogue is full of pieces that use such ideas in various ways, highlighting the extent to which composers use, or possibly resort to, this process as a way of dealing with technical ability. Aleatory allows composers to remove some performance limitations when it comes to pitch, rhythm, and coordination between parts. Despite Haydn and Windsor referring to open score elements and performer decisions as part of interactive collaboration, composers need to approach aleatoric techniques carefully as their use can almost seem a cliché, an easy fix, when writing for amateurs. Humphries (2019) proposes that aleatoric process are used as a way of engaging amateurs in the creation of sound and should not be used as a solution to technical ability. Philip Cashian highlights the technique as a possible solution to creating denser musical textures, but also that it can be reduced to a 'trick for people who can't play in time with each other.' (Cashian cited in Weigold and Abis, 2016: 163)

Function

Woolrich points out a comment from Britten's Aspens speech, highlighting that 'Britten talked about *function*. Perhaps we are obsessed with self-expression, expressing our own ego and personality.' (Woolrich cited in Weigold and Abis, 2016: 173) ('We' being composers, and in particular, contemporary 'art music' composers). An example from an AAC project saw a choral piece that contained some contemporary techniques performed at a British Legion remembrance service, which the audience did not feel was appropriate for the occasion (Churchill, 2009: 14). Writing for the occasion, or for a specific function, can be more common with amateur projects. As Finnegan points out, many commissions are connected to community events, church services or education and it can be the case that ensembles link a project to a forthcoming occasion. This gives the project more meaning for the participants and the audience and should be fully considered by the composer. The

function of a piece can inform the technical language, as well as aesthetic and extra-musical themes. Artistic principles must be balanced with the function of the project.

The function of a piece can inform the technical language, as well as aesthetic and extra-musical themes. Pieces that are accessible to amateurs often find a solution where the technical language, as well as aesthetic and extra-musical themes are seamlessly intertwined. Recent choral repertoire has many examples of contemporary composers writing for specific liturgical functions (for example Judith Weir, John Rutter, Alan Bullard, Paul Mealor, James MacMillan). This function affects aesthetics depending on the event, and technical difficulty music be considered if the piece is to be performed by church choirs, and maybe congregations. An example of a solution to incorporating the congregation is demonstrated in Weir's carol *My Guardian Angel* (Weir, 2008), in which she employs a repeating semibreve harmonic line, sung in octaves by the congregation that continues through the entire piece. This 14-bar melody is designed to be memorable and technically accessible so that the congregation can participate. It also provides sufficient harmonic interest over which the rest of the piece unfolds. A four part choir add further parts that harmonise with the congregation, weaving a contrapuntal texture that culminates in both choir and congregation singing a full harmonic embellishment of the original melody. This is a piece where differentiated parts that fulfil the participatory function of a sacred vocal piece combine with more advanced vocal lines.

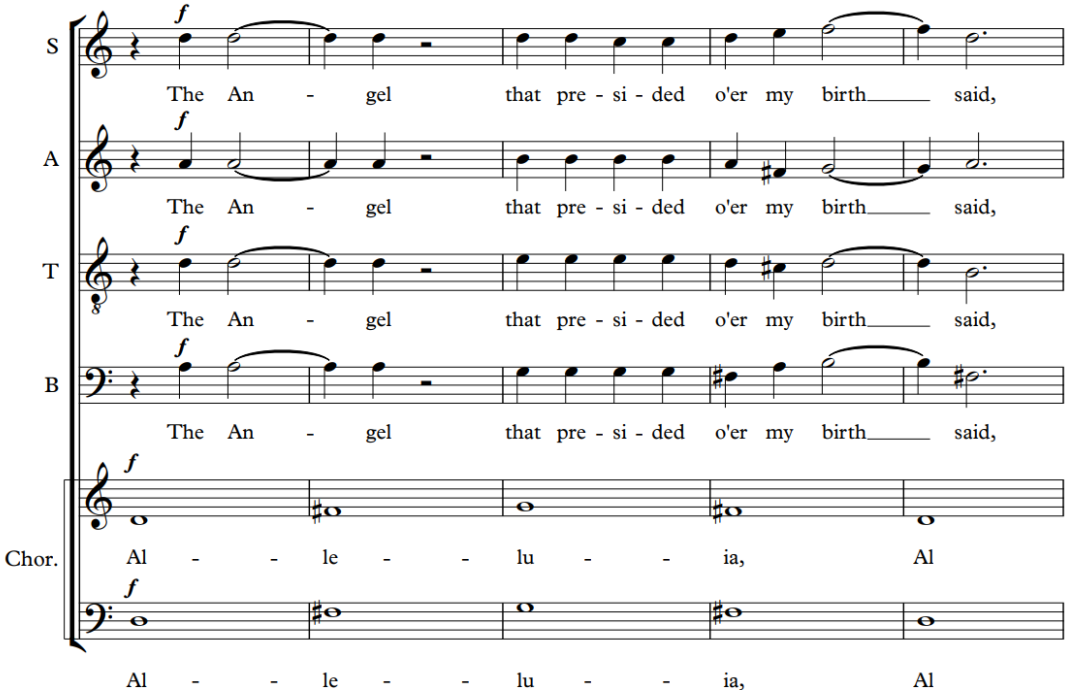

Figure 3: Bars 43-47 of Judith Weir's My Guardian Angel (2008)

Effective pieces written for singers often incorporate comfortable musical material whilst at the same time introducing a structured expansion into less familiar areas. James MacMillan's *O Radiant Dawn* (MacMillan, 2008), introduces modal harmony alongside familiar triads and intervals. MacMillan uses sequential phrases that can give singers a way of accessing and memorising the music. The sound world, whilst powerful and exhilarating at times, fulfils its liturgical function. Also composed for a specific function, John Tavener's *The Lamb* (Tavener, 1982) is a piece that contains several technical and aesthetic challenges for amateur singers. First performed at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in 1982, the piece is constructed in such a way that it leads both the performers and the audience into more challenging musical areas, but in a logical and structured way. Using an accessible tonal opening melody and applying strict processes of inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion, Tavener alternates between unison and dissonant two-part harmony. Unusual intervals can lead to problems when rehearsing but the phrases resolve in unison, always giving the singers a returning reference point.

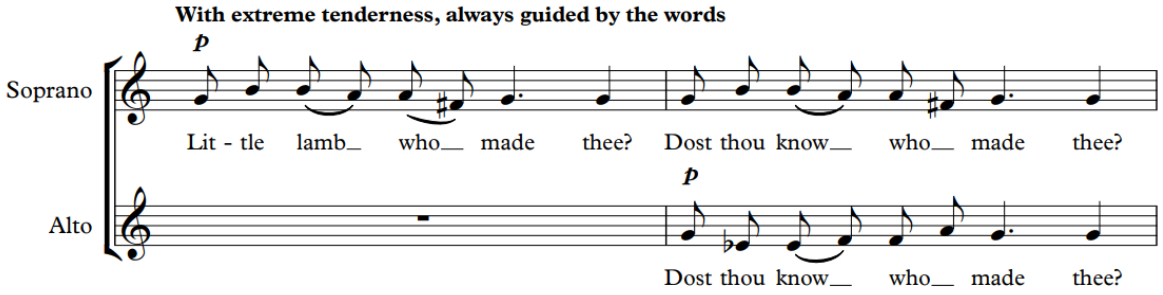

Figure 4: The opening two bars of Tavener's The Lamb (1982)

Chapter 5: Practical Enquiry

Methodology

Formulating an approach – An interactive creative process and socio-musical relationships

In a long-term socio-musical relationship, the composer is entering into a commission relationship where they will not only communicate with the conductor or musical director, as is usual for a professional commission, but will also interact with individuals of the group, who may be suspicious of contemporary music in general, and will have their own deeply rooted motivations for participating in *their* music society. The composer is an outsider and –

unlike a professional ensemble where commissions are commonplace – the idea of working on a new piece for the amateur musician can be a completely new experience. There will be hopes, fears, excitement and anticipation from individuals making personal sacrifices to invest their own serious leisure time into the ensemble. The decision to programme a new work is not taken lightly when rehearsal time is limited, and the few concerts that an ensemble will produce are highlights in the annual social calendar of the participants and the local community. The composer, therefore, has a responsibility to look beyond the activity of composition, to acknowledge, engage and nurture the socio-musical relationships that arise when working with an amateur group.

An effective way to foster successful socio-musical relationships is to adopt a long-term interactive creative approach. This notion of collaboration, which includes aspects of a socio-musical relationship such as discussions, rehearsals, suggestions, trying out of ideas and reflecting on the music and project as it progresses, can successfully by applied to ensure that the motivations and needs of individual amateur musicians and their ensembles are successfully met, whilst still retaining the role of the composer as the creative decision maker. This approach is placed between Everitt's second and third categories of participation, and between Higgins' second and third categories of community music and encompasses the idea of the socially-aware composer, as outlined by Laycock and the community music facilitator skillset.

The projects aim to establish a working relationship based on mutual respect and trust, and the community music concept of 'excellence' demonstrated in the quality of social interaction and experience. In fostering interactive creativity my approach to each composition will consider the themes discussed in relation to the concept of the amateur and the motivations, rewards and thrills of serious leisure time music making, the skills embodied by the music facilitator, and Laycock's socially aware composer.

I will be assessing my own technique and development as a composer against these projects. There is personal development and aesthetic integrity to consider, also how my technique and approach is adapted to find a solution for each project. Technical and aesthetic approach are important considerations in each project but will feed into interactive creativity in ensuring successful socio-musical relationships.

To evaluate each project, participants will be asked for feedback after a project and responses will be analysed against four themes.

- Theme 1: Individual Enjoyment
- Theme 2: Individual Challenge
- Theme 3: Socio-musical relationships
- Theme 4: Interactive creative relationships

Reduced risk

As with all creative endeavours that involve the bringing together of different groups and individuals, the projects in this portfolio include an element of risk. Personal creative risk on my side as they are fully committed compositions performed to public audiences, and risk on the side of the ensembles, as they have willingly embraced my approach to programme a new work into their concert season, and with that brings risk to reputation, participant enjoyment and motivation, and risks to socio-musical relationships within a group. This has meant that the stakes are higher than for a purely research-based approach and, whether conscious or unconscious, these factors have had some impact on how I have composed and the relationships that unfolded.

The projects have been run without any commission fee or financial commitment on the part of the ensemble. This reduces the risk factor for the ensemble who often operate within fine financial margins. Despite the composer not receiving a fee, there is, on the level of individual musicians, a sense that they are entitled to the experience due to their own subscription fees and invested time. There is also an expectation from other stakeholders that this will be a high-quality experience. In the absence of an economic contract between the composer and the group individual experiences becomes paramount. McKeon relates this to a ‘gift’ economy (McKeon, 2020) where satisfaction needs to be gained in different ways. The community music concept of excellence in social experience is important, as are the other thrills and rewards on offer, for example, it is important that ‘performers enjoy the process of presenting and performing the new piece, and ideally they can take some pride in this.’ (McKeon, 2020).

The projects are a relationship between the composer and ensemble but differ from most commissions, and the guidance given by Making Music, in that the composer has approached

the ensemble, rather than the ensemble approaching the composer. Following initial contact, the ensemble has had the opportunity to assess the suitability of the composer. Commitment has been left open until after the first visit of the composer after which there has been a mutual agreement of terms. The first point of contact in all cases has been the musical director. By following this procedure, I have ensured that both parties are best informed as to the nature of the relationship, removing the problematic 'blind date' risk inherent in AAC relationships.

Project Organisation

1. Initial contact between composer and ensemble. This includes introducing the research context, an outline of the project and expectations from the composer and the ensemble. Key points are:
    - The new piece will be provided free of charge
    - After an initial meeting the ensemble has the option to withdraw before any further commitment

2. Initial introduction by the composer at a rehearsal session. The ensemble is given the option as to the extent they want to interact with the creative process, and how this may manifest itself at the start of the project. This may involve:
    - An introductory talk, inviting questions and discussion
    - An invitation for individual musicians, and musical directors, to put forward likes and dislikes and ideas about how the new piece may appear.
    - Attending rehearsals to promote trust and make the composer visible
    - Attending rehearsals to discuss ideas and progress with the group and with individual players.

3. There will be an offer of an interactive creative relationship which will allow flexibility as to the extent to which interactivity takes place and the in the various ways it may be implemented. Interactive creativity should not be forced and not all ensembles will want to contribute to the same extent. During the project, the composer will continue to attend rehearsals where interactive sessions may include:

- Exploring ideas to gain opinions, suggestions and to promote reflection and discussion
- Introducing musical ideas and exemplify progress.
- Exploring how appropriate material is for the group from a technical point of view.
- Opportunities for the composer to listen to sketches to refine and develop the piece.

4. Performance of the new work.
    - The composer will attend the performance.
    - The performance will be preceded by a composer introduction to the new piece.

5. Evaluation surveys will form the principal method of participant feedback and will be distributed via an online survey, by email and through paper copies at rehearsals. Questions will be linked to the 4 themes outlined above. Data will then be analysed thematically in relations to the four themes.

    Each project will then be evaluated, considering the findings from the data, and the following methods:
    - Observations during rehearsals
    - Observations during performances
    - Conversations with the musical director
    - Conversations with participants

      Personal correspondence with the musical directors and ensemble participants will also inform each evaluation.

Project 1

Equinox – Cultures in Harmony

Following the AAC relationship with the City of Birmingham Choir I was invited by the group to compose a piece for a proposed concert celebrating the diverse range of musical cultures in Birmingham. The concert, *Equinox – Cultures in Harmony*, was structured around performances from several choral and percussion groups representing musical cultures in

Birmingham. The concert culminated in all groups coming together in a performance of a new work entitled *Koinonia*. The piece was premiered at Symphony Hall on 17 March 2012 as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad event. The project involved the following groups:

- The City of Birmingham Choir
- Bourneville Young Singers
- Chinese Community Centre Birmingham Wan Cheuk Choir
- Birmingham Conservatoire Chinese and South Asian Student Group
- Echo Doliny Polish Folk Choir
- Sanchita Pal Ensemble
- SHAAM
- Town Hall Gospel Choir
- World Music Youth Choir and Black Voices
- Fieshah Amlak Drummers
- Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble
- Birmingham Schools' Azaad Dhol Group

Initiated and organised by members of the City of Birmingham Choir, this project forms an exploration of organisational issues and socio-musical relationships that can arise within an unusual and highly ambitions project. It also provides a useful point of comparison to later projects.

Initial Meeting

An initial meeting took place in September 2010 with the project leader and project committee members. The following points were discussed:

- The concert was to take place at Symphony Hall in March 2012
- Dates for two half day rehearsals prior to the performance had been proposed.
- There was to be no fee paid to the composer.
- Not all participants had yet been approached and the make-up of the final ensemble was still unknown.
- There was a possibility of forming new performance groups specifically for the event.

- A detailed 2-page brief was provided that outlined the content and structure of a 30 minute three-movement work. This had been created by the project leader with the help of the project committee (Appendix 1).
- A working group of ensemble representatives, representatives from the project committee and the composer would be formed and would meet at monthly intervals.
- The composer would visit all participating ensembles to facilitate their integration into the final composition.
- The composer would lead a workshop for participants in September 2011 as part of Birmingham ArtsFest.

The Project

A detailed two-page brief was drawn up for the Equinox commission (Appendix 1) by the project leader. It was then passed through a project committee. The brief outlines an imaginative musical concept and reduces risk through its detailed account of the proposed composition, describing the duration, structure, the musical and dramatic content, and associated research for each of the three movements of a 30 minute work. The level of detail was an understandable attempt to reduce risk given the logistical ambition of the project and the vision the project leader and the committee.

During the 18 months of the composition process, I attended a range of meetings and rehearsals including:

- Monthly meetings with the project leaders and group representatives
- Visits to rehearsal sessions from the participating groups
- Two full ensemble Saturday rehearsals
- A rehearsal on the day of the concert

The idea of finding a solution being the art (Weigold, 2016) was initially my aesthetic focus during the first months of the project. However, as the project developed my work was less about finding an aesthetic solutions and unlocking the latent sound of the groups, and instead was about finding compositional solutions to the logistical ambition of the project. The number of groups, their contrasting forces and experience, their differing musical identities,

and the undefined final ensemble, meant that the music had to be written taking these into account.

Whilst I was not organising the event, I was drawn into logistical discussions around the event itself and around the formation of new participating groups. As part of an interactive approach, and also to streamline my involvement in meetings, I set up and hosted an online forum for participating groups to engage with, where group members were invited to submit any thoughts or ideas regarding the project and the new composition.

The issue of ensembles not being established, or decided upon, at the beginning of the project, and a vocal group pulling out halfway through, was a reoccurring challenge during the compositional process. I formulated a structure that would ensure I was able to compose whilst the ensemble was being finalised. The solution was a 'procession' where each group had a spotlight moment. This meant that I could write those sections for the confirmed groups whilst leaving space for others to be added later. Groups were added to the texture one at a time, starting with the City of Birmingham Choir, so that a conventional score could still provide the framework. This was a method dictated by the logistical circumstances. Whilst individual groups had time to rehearse in isolation, they would not rehearse together until two Saturday rehearsals prior to the concert. The composition had to take this into account. The sections for each ensemble had to be released in isolation and in an order that fitted their rehearsal schedules, all of which were different. Anything outside of the individual group spotlights was composed with the full ensemble in mind and relied on the CBC and their sight-reading skills to hold the other groups together.

In the relatively short time gained with each vocal group, meetings were mainly focussed on gaining a flavour of the character of the ensemble, a discussion of the proposed brief and discussions about how each group could be represented. The intention was to compose within an interactive framework but the nature of the relationship with each group was interactive in a relatively superficial sense.

Arts Fest

The Arts-Fest workshop took place in September 2011 and was open for the general public to attend and observe. The hour-long event had several aims:

- To promote the forthcoming concert.

- To build social relationships between participants.
- To explore a sample of material from the new composition.

Using my experience in the classroom and knowing that an hour was a short amount of time to achieve the aims of the session, I decided to keep things simple and use a cohort of singers from the CBC to support the other groups. I led a short ice-breaker rhythm exercise that used the percussion instruments and clapping that was taught by ear, followed by a short self-contained exercise that was conventionally notated for three vocal parts (S, A, B) that I knew the CBC could lead. Other groups could then join in if, and when, they felt able to. The vocal exercise was composed to fulfil the following criteria:

- To enable participants to become familiar with a mode that would be employed for the final composition.
- Used repetitive and simple vocal lines so that as many participants as possible would be able to contribute to the workshop.
- Provided a more challenging, but accessible, part with an alto line harmonised in parallel thirds.
- Used a repeating phrase suggested by the project leader to introduce the idea of a universal language.
- Provided a solution to creating a sense of achievement and unity within a very short session.

Figure 5 shows the opening of the Arts Fest exercise, showing features designed to make the music accessible to all singers: modal harmony, a sustained drone, a limited rang, stepwise motion and parallel harmony in thirds. The text was provided by the CBC. This formed the start of the 2nd movement of *Koinonia*:

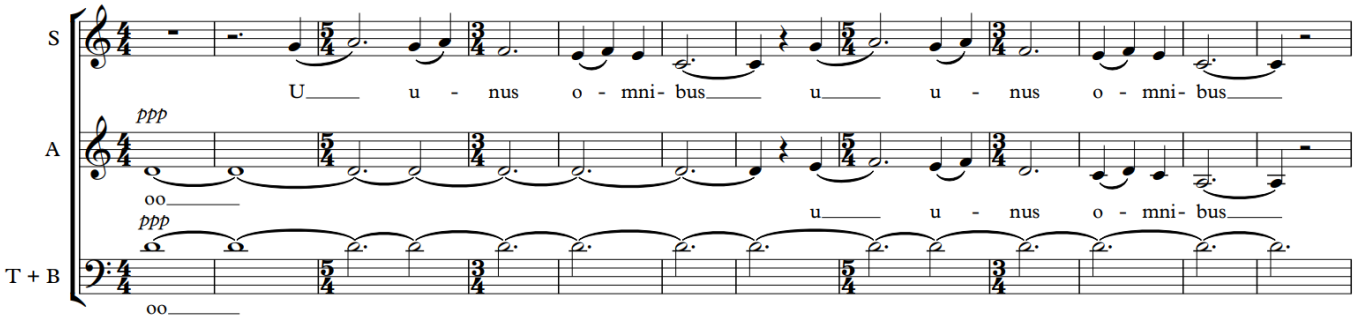

Figure 5: Opening of the Arts Fest vocal exercise.

I recorded the session and took photographs. I then edited them into a video clip that was used to promote the event and to help secure the participation of other groups:

https://youtu.be/7ZW3F1Hwq2w

Arts Fest - evaluation

The session had an informal atmosphere. The vocal element of the workshop was conducted by the CBC workshop 'facilitator' who directed sympathetically. A striking problem that arose, however, was the reliance on western choral rehearsal language and techniques, that, despite the facilitator being flexible, patient, and open, formed a barrier to the participants from non-western musical traditions. This was also due to the material being in standard notation. Whilst a solution to making best use of the time available, I felt that using the CBC as the lead group went against the spirit of the collaborative aims of the project.

The large number of participants and the musical diversity of the groups meant that an hour was not long enough for any meaningful rehearsal, or to solve issues groups may have had with the material. The resulting recording is led by the small group from the CBC who were able to fully access the score and found the format of the rehearsal familiar.

Arts Fest – Impact on the compositional process

It was at the workshop that I realised, late in the compositional process, that the compositional and logistical challenges were greater than expected. Material that had been written was discarded, and there was a lot of reworking of material and rethinking of structure and logistical solutions. Through observations and subsequent conversations, I learned that some groups found the process of the rehearsal difficult to access, and that it went against the way in which their music operated, finding the rehearsal contradictory to their musical sensibilities. Whilst I was aware of some of the potential issues through my knowledge and research of the different musical traditions and my meetings with groups, the make-up of some of the ensembles within those traditions added a further layer of compositional challenge: varying ability levels within groups, varying performing experience, different musical interests, and varying levels of understanding as to what is involved in creating a new composition for a concert in a western classical tradition.

***Koinonia* - 1st Movement**

The title of the piece was suggested by the project leader. Derived from Greek, it refers to joint participation, sharing and fellowship. Due to various compositional challenges the final piece is in two movements rather then the three-movement structure outlined in the brief.

The brief describes chaos and conflict. I considered aleatoric processes and number systems to create contrasts and unity and disorder which I felt would achieve the dramatic effect the brief was looking for.

The idea was based on number sequences to aid performance, negating the necessity of a purely notated score, with visual and aural signals and simple rhythms, creating complexity and subtly in the spatial arrangements. The plan was to use percussion instruments not linked to any ethnic tradition. Inexpensive large plastic storage barrels, capable of a range of pitch from thudding bass tones to Indian dhol type high pitched tones, and also lengths of sawn wooden broom handle to be distributed to many of the singers. This was tied to using the 360 degree balconies in Symphony Hall and placing instruments around the hall. For a variety of reasons, including financial and logistical, this idea did not find it's way into the final composition. What remains is shorter and simpler than that original concept.

The movement opens with the spiritual like vocal theme that re occurs at the end of the second movement. The percussion is then introduced, using silence for dramatic effect, giving way to vocal interruptions until the SATB choir take a rising texture which resolves with a descending figure, again looking forwards towards the end of the second movement. A loud unison percussion figure interrupts any further development, and the second movement begins.

The percussion patterns are kept deliberately simple. The woodblock sections were performed by a western percussion group (Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble) who could read notation. The SATB section was sung by the CBC and any other singers who were comfortable with the parts.

Rehearsal letter 'C' through to 'F' alternate aleatoric textures with measured percussion patterns. Whilst aesthetics drove the use of aleatory, another reason behind this was to create contrasting textures through simple means. This seemed to be the best solution to creating a dramatic effect at the time. The textures contribute towards a simple structural goal as the percussion interjections shorten and the vocal sections in free time lengthen.

Koinonia – 2nd Movement

The second movement can be split into three broad sections. It begins with material from the Arts Fest workshop and the CBC enter first followed by the Chinese choir focussing on pentatonic figures and dotted rhythms, the Polish choir with melodies inspired by the folk music I heard at their rehearsals, and the Indian choir with space for improvisation around a rag. The Arabic group SHAAM begin the second section, entering with a percussion cycle, and melodies informed by Arabic maqam. They are followed the Town Hall Gospel group and Black Voices. The material for the groups was composed following meetings and interactive discussions and contains elements of each musical tradition as well as melodic shapes that refer to the Arts Fest material to tie the themes together. The texts were suggested by the participants.

At rehearsal 'K' the final section begins with a juxtaposition of figures from each group and the re-introduction of the percussion. This leads to a final section where all groups form a texture which reaches a climax and resolves on a single note as suggested by the brief.

Group Leader Feedback

A survey link was sent to the project leader to be circulated to the group leaders 5 responses were received. One was submitted anonymously; the others were received from:

City of Birmingham Choir (the Equinox project leader)

- Bourneville Young Singers
- Black Voices and the World Music Youth Choir
- Polish Choir Polonez

Group leader feedback - Rehearsals

There were two Saturday morning rehearsals in the lead up to the concert. These were an achievement in themselves with the massed choirs meeting each other for the first time. The CBC conductor led the choral part of the rehearsal in the main hall whilst the percussion groups were in other rooms rehearsing their parts. For the percussion I had created MIDI recordings of their parts using music software, as an aid to learning the music. There was a challenge during the rehearsals with performers not working within a western tradition

having difficulty anticipating and internalising structures. Respondents used words such as ‘confusing’ and ‘chaotic’ to describe the rehearsals, but also words such as ‘good’ and ‘excitement’. Responses include:

- I found them somewhat confusing at times, especially for the younger singers. More attention to detail was needed to iron out rough edges.
- a little chaotic in its organisation actual rehearsal went well
- Helpful.....started to make more sense to the children, and they were able to get more of an idea about what it was about...started to get a sense of excitement

When asked to evaluate the full day rehearsal at Symphony Hall responses include:

- No thought was given to singers hearing percussionists and vice versa, so there was a delay in sound, which was never really resolved.
- Good, but needed longer.
- Inevitably meant a lot of time not actually doing anything... always a challenge for some children!
- Good, but more time working together would have helped ensure that all the groups were confident about their own parts and how these fitted into the whole piece.

Group leader feedback - Challenge

Three respondents felt the music was challenging and rewarding to rehearse and perform whilst two respondents felt the music was easy and provided little technical challenge.

Group leader feedback – Enjoyment

When asked if the composition was rewarding to perform several respondents pointed out that the enjoyment of the performance outweighed the difficulties in rehearsals. Responses include:

- I did not enjoy the rehearsal process because things never seemed to sound right, despite this the performance was enjoyable and my youth choir loved performing on stage at Symphony Hall
- rehearsing was difficult performance was enjoyable and rewarding

- Rehearsals challenging, but obviously essential. Once they were performing it with everyone, they found it much more enjoyable

Group leader feedback – The Composition Brief

The group leaders were asked abut the appropriateness of the composition brief. Responses include:

- The composition brief seemed interesting, but I was sceptical that the composer would be able to demonstrate elements of each genre/culture/style authentically in one piece
- Good, but needed a lot more time
- I think it was adequately fulfilled.
- I developed the brief with the help of the Equinox Planning Group and I think it worked well in respecting the distinctive cultures of the six community groups and involving the performers in the creation of the final work.

Group leader feedback – Creative Contribution

When asked if leaders felt their group made a creative contribution to the final work, four responded positively. One respondent referred to the musical content of the work in relation to their own musical culture:

- I think the composer tried to accommodate us, but I still feel they played it way to safe and could have experimented even further with polyrhythms, harmonies and sounds/lyrics, etc..

The project committee collated feedback received after the event, and this was sent out to stakeholders and participants. Feedback describes the event, rather than the new composition or the process of its realisation, and, as they were selected specifically for promotion, are all positive. Only one comment specifically highlighted the new work, whilst another referenced it in relation to enjoyment of the event:

- BYS had a great day...a very positive experience. Everyone really enjoyed Koinonia, and thank you so much for your dedication in seeing this project through to such an excellent conclusion. (Bournville Young Singers)
- Still coming down to earth after the buzz of Saturday, the finale piece still ringing in my ears. (SHAAM)

Evaluation

Making Music recommend that commissioning groups determine the level of creative freedom given to the composer (Making Music, 2015). This is to reduce the risk of the final composition not being what they originally envisaged. There is, after all, a significant financial and organisational commitment to commissioning a new work. Third Ear suggest that the idea for a project comes from the ensemble but must allow creative freedom for the composer. It is essential that creative freedom is built into a project, and this should be agreed between both sides of the relationship. The extent of that freedom can be discussed, and defined, but there must be room for the composer to operate as an artist, rather than a facilitator, craftsperson, or project leader. Whilst my approach is always to interact creatively with ensembles, the sheer number of performers, all with different characteristics, technical ability, organisational restraints and ethno-musical characteristics that largely went against a Western goal-orientated structure, meant that the compositional process was more about logistical solutions.

I feel that I relinquished too much control over the course of the project and I should have stuck to my aesthetic vision at certain points. The main aesthetic barrier that emerged was the difficulty in following through my idea to base the piece on the circular space of the balconies in Symphony Hall. Changing this idea negated the possibility of bringing the sheer number of timbres and diverse performers under a more manageable system.

The three-movement outline suggested a developmental dramatic structure, a feature of western symphonic goal orientated music. Only two of the participating groups were from that musical tradition. The brief was a natural approach in creating an extended work for musicians who are used to working within this tradition. Challenges were highlighted by discussions with some of the groups who felt they could not access the material. As an example, I composed a section for the Indian group using a rag, incorporating their tradition and musical features after having met with the group. The first barrier was that some of it was

notated using western notation as part of the full score. The second was the idea of having a composed melody that could link to the other sections. Although this was written sympathetically it doesn't appear in the performed version. In the recording the leader of the group fills a gap with an improvisation over a drone.

The composition is often a result of circumstances. Structurally it struggles to hold together, with the 2nd movement being a procession of spotlight moments and sections towards the end that, despite being simplified, were beyond the scope of rehearsals and some performers. It is a half-way house between a vision of what I wanted to achieve and making the piece performable. In the performance there are timing issues with percussion which means that at times, the music doesn't drive achieve its structural goals. The recorded performance is enthusiastic, but there are several important sections that 'go missing' due to this being the first time the full piece had been performed by all involved. Ensemble leaders were positive about the ambition of the project but pointed out certain challenges in rehearsals. The organisers must be congratulated on their commitment to bringing the performance to the stage, which, on the evening, involved three conductors to bring the piece together.

The event was a success and as it was about the spirit of unity and bringing together diverse cultures (and performers of different abilities), I think the piece, and the project, was very successful. There are some beautiful moments in the piece and on a personal level, I gained a huge amount from meeting different musicians and felt privileged that I was made so welcome by so many different cultural communities.

Project 2

Brackley and District Band

With a history that spans over 40 years, Brackley and District band are a brass band based in Brackley, Northamptonshire. They perform throughout the year locally, and at regional and national events and competitions. They have a youth development group, the Majors and Minors, and they own the Brackley Band Supporters Club which provides rehearsal accommodation, a bar and a social hub for the band and supporters. Whilst an exploration of the genre led to my discussions of other larger scale pieces with the band, the focus for this project was a short piece and I set the task as a personal learning exercise in which I would aim to write effectively for the ensemble.

Initial discussions

Initial communication was via email followed by a meeting with the musical director. The research project was presented and there was a discussion of the practical organisation of rehearsals and a potential concert date. In keeping with the concept of establishing trust through a shared acknowledgement of strengths and weaknesses, I was very open and clear regarding the fact that I hadn't written for brass band and that this was as much a test for myself as it was an experience for the ensemble. The musical director was very enthusiastic, open, and helpful in suggesting ways forward, and acknowledged the fact that the world of the brass band is unique. Popular and standard repertoire, repertoire the band enjoyed, the layout and instrumentation, as well as some of the unusual characteristics of brass bands, were all discussed, giving both the composer and the musical director a clear basis on which to build the relationship. There was excitement regarding the project with a discussion of possible further pieces after the initial project.

Interactive creativity

I introduced the project to the band at a rehearsal in Brackley and I discussed how the relationship could be interactive. I invited participants to contribute any thoughts or ideas they may have with regards a new piece. The tone I aimed for was friendly and inviting. I described the project in a way that was relevant to the group, referencing ownership of a new piece written for the group, as well as introducing the context of the wider research project.

Interactive creativity was presented as a way of participants having the option of contributing to the creative development of the new piece. In the interest of maximising the response, paper copies of forms were distributed which provided an outline the project and an email address, offering options on how thoughts and comments could be contributed. I explained that my experience of writing for brass instruments was limited to orchestral brass, and not brass bands. I admitted to the group that this was a learning curve for me as well as for the ensemble. Whilst such openness would always be my natural approach, this is a clear link with Higgins and Laycock in reducing hierarchy to foster relationships build on trust. The players allowed me to photograph the instrumental sections and placement of instruments for my own reference. During their break I had the opportunity to chat to band members regarding the project. At this first rehearsal it was interesting to observe that half of the performers were not in attendance and that some players swopped roles within the ensemble to deal with absentees, highlighting how brass bands often operate if a part is missing. I

stayed during the rehearsal to assess the technical challenge of their current repertoire**.** My first meeting with the band was very enlightening. The power of the brass band cannot be underestimated. I was surprised by how 'bottom heavy' the ensemble is, with subtle variety in tone and range in the lower registers. Idiosyncrasies I noted included the role of the Euphonium, the role of the third cornets, and the role of the soprano cornet.

I was made to feel very welcome by the musical director and the players and it is always a privilege and humbling experience to be invited into what is obviously such a close-knit group of players. My overall perception of the players at the first meeting was that they were quite tentative in their willingness to communicate with a composer although leaders made themselves apparent through their contributions to the rehearsals and in conversation during the break.

The first sketch rehearsal was a run through of two ideas, the first half of the melody, and a 'bell' effect with overlapping sustained notes. The session was partly intended to build trust between composer and ensemble and also at getting the view of the ensemble on the compositional starting point. At the suggestion of the musical director, I was unexpectedly invited to conduct the session, something that he felt would further contribute to building trust. I was quite open that my conducting experience was mainly in an educational setting. Band members gave their opinion of the sketches during the session, and it was encouraging to leave the workshop with both the band, and myself, reassured as to how this piece may progress.

Further rehearsals presented more of the piece, and again band members commented on their parts, on the piece, and on the style and content. At each rehearsal I obtained a recording of the theme which I presented on You Tube for band members to access and listen to, giving the opportunity to reflect on the music outside of the rehearsals. The video was well presented with a photo of the band meeting place, the 'Band House', giving a sense of ownership and identity:

First half of theme: https://youtu.be/7o4AQIGr9K4

Completed theme: https://youtu.be/ztyjXHwaqg8

Farewell

The piece is about instrumentation and expressive details, and, in getting these right, giving the band and their regular brass band concert audience a fulfilling musical experience. Since

my experience of the AAC scheme, expression and emotional content have been concepts I have reconsidered. The piece is not challenging for the listener in the way that some experimental music may be, but it also isn't superficial. There is an expressive clarity that leads to an emotional response, as is evident from the feedback from the players. As a composer who has written rhythmically and harmonically challenging music, this piece was a refreshing exercise in focussing on fine structural details.

Referencing familiar textures and figures are common in effective brass band writing. The band themselves pointed this out and feedback acknowledges that *Farewell* addressed this. For a three-minute piece that was intended to be a learning curve for both myself and the band, it made sense to simplify, and write as effectively as possible. I therefore returned to the historical significance of the hymn tune, and the lyrical and expressive qualities of the brass instruments. My starting point was a melodic phrase which then grew into a four-phrase melody. After starting off with various modal versions, the melody fell into a standard tonal setting:

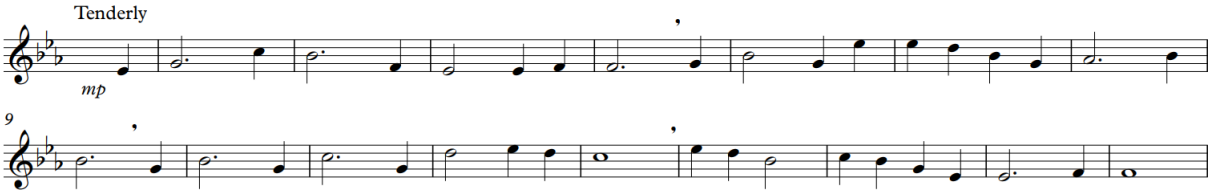

Figure 6: Main lyrical theme in Farewell *inspired by traditional hymn melodies.*

Through observations in rehearsals, I perceived several players who seemed to take a more prominent role (flugelhorn, euphonium, bass trombone) and the opening melody exploits these. The piece starts with the melody on flugelhorn and this is accompanied by sustained chords on the baritones and euphonium. To demonstrate the subtly of the different choirs within a band, the next section moves to the tenor horns accompanied by the introduction of a triplet crotchet figure. The distant sound of the horns is a subtle and effective change from the opening texture. Harmonically, a pedal in the bass from bars 18-21 and a secondary dominant are carefully placed to provide an expressive point of interest. The full band then present an altered version of the melody. The introduction of the full cornet section treating each line correctly. The repiano part follows the solo cornets until providing a more elaborate version of the melody at bars 42 and 43. Traditionally a supporting line and often given to younger

players, the difficulty level and range of the 3rd cornet part had to be considered. To give the 3rd cornet part a point of interest, they are challenged by following the repiano at certain points. A repeat of triplet crotchets is used to rhythmically bring the climax at bar 44. The 'bell' texture I had originally discussed with the band at a rehearsal appears as overlapping sustained notes. This provides a way of resolving the climax with cascading staggered entries leading into a four-bar euphonium figure and a final reprise of the melody on flugelhorn. The piece finishes with a single timpani note, a suggestion from the musical director who is also a percussionist. This is a musically significant detail that and arose from creative interaction.

Participant Feedback

There were 8 responses to the online survey. On average there were 15 band members present at the rehearsals. The standard brass band number is 25 and vacant places were filled by musicians from other bands at the concert.

Theme 1: Participant enjoyment

All respondents were positive about their initial feelings towards the project. Words used include 'exited', 'positive' and 'nervous'. One respondent saw it as an 'opportunity' and 'privilege'. One respondent described how decisions are usually made with regards repertoire and reflected on how the project would fit into this:

- Wondered what benefit it would be for the band because we either play music for a purpose or music by choice. The purpose being dictated by whoever wanted us and choice usually dictated by the musical director based on personal taste. To be performed any new piece therefore needs to tick one or both of the boxes.

All respondents expressed positive feelings towards the final composition. Typical comments include:

- A beautiful piece which I am looking forward to performing.
- Beautiful and thought provoking.
- Love it for what it is, a beautiful, slow, emotive piece that we will certainly perform again, and already have done so at the recent Remembrance Service.
- Liked it. We have now given it at least three outings.

- Yes, we all liked and enjoyed playing the piece.
- Farewell is a nice piece of music so playable in various instances. It's already been performed at a concert and used as a reflective item of background music on Remembrance Day.
- We have a 7 piece group that often requires quieter pieces of music. I would happily nick it for them. Surely a sign that we would wish to perform the music again.

When describing the response of the audience, respondents referred to 'positively', 'immediate applause', 'positive' feedback, and an appreciation of the 'apparent simplicity' and emotional aspects of the piece.

Theme 2: Challenge

None of the respondents saw the piece as being technically difficult for themselves as individual players. Challenges were identified in other areas:

- Challenged us to play together slowly and accurately.
- My part has a lot of sustained notes some of which are towards the higher end of my register. It is quite challenging to play these on musical phrases at the quiet dynamic required. This is not a criticism, just an observation.
- Although the piece wasn't the most technically challenging, to get the phrasing, dynamics and chording right was very demanding.
- Looked very easy at first, but there were great demands on accurate intonation and playing together.
- When I first saw the piece I thought it looked boring and thought 'oh no, another composer who thinks just having every instruments playing long notes and chords sounds nice', but when I played the piece I was astounded at the delicate instrumentation and beautiful chord progressions. It is a very enjoyable piece to both perform and listen to.
- Technically the composition is straight forward (easy to read and easy fingering). However, brass players find slow and quite difficult so the musical demands of the music were present.

Two respondents would have liked 'a bit more of the tune':

- It would have been nice to see an element of solo feature as Euphonium often has some aspect in any musical piece.

Theme 3: The Socio-Musical Relationship

There were no negative references to the relationship between composer and the ensemble with the majority giving a positive response. Responses include reference to the working relationship, leadership skills and a musical understanding of the ensemble:

- He seemed very open to suggestions, and very sympathetic to the needs of the group.
- It was very good, he was very good at listening to our thoughts and ideas.
- Interaction in rehearsals was also positive, I think from both points of view as changes/suggestions were made etc.
- He also had a good understanding of the way the various sections can act as contrasting choirs.
- The composer understands his lack of experience with brass bands and the band understands its lack of experience with composers. Relationship at the outset was therefore naturally reserved. As we could both learn from each other, hopefully we will become more honest and open with each other.

1 respondent commented:

- I think that I had expected more interaction and time spent together trying different ideas.

1 respondent did not comment as they were new to the band.

Theme 4: Interactive Creativity

5 respondents felt that trying sketches were beneficial to the composer, the ensemble, or both. Positive comments included:

- it showed the composer the strengths and weaknesses in the band.

Yes [trying sketches were beneficial]. Initially there was a 'bell-like' section in the cornet parts near the end (after the solo/rep had stated the main theme loudly), but it seemed to have disappeared in later versions, and I had rather liked it.

- Yes [trying sketches were beneficial] because the composer was open about his lack of experience in writing for brass instruments. It appeared useful for him to see/hear where the different parts sat within each. Also good for us to point out things which are more difficult on certain instruments, or offer tips of what particular parts blend well or not etc.
- When we tried out the preliminary sketches a few of the lower end players were missing so we didn't get to hear all of the parts. As the composition included interesting harmonies would have benefited from hearing them at the outset.

5 respondents felt that they had the opportunity to contribute to the creative process and that this contributed to the way the piece was composed:

- the composer was very open to our views and ideas

1 respondent felt that they had the opportunity to contribute but wanted to let the composer take the lead in the relationship:

- We were encouraged to contribute but, as this was a new experience for both of us, I think it was appropriate that the composer be left to take the lead.

1 respondent commented that not many band members contributed despite the opportunity:

- Yes [the opportunity to contribute ideas was given]. Although as this was a new initiative for most of us, I don't think there was much input from members in general.

1 respondent felt they would have liked the project to be more collaborative:

- I felt Chris worked on the piece, tried out some of the ideas and then worked on the piece some more. I guess I thought the process would be more collaborative.

Evaluation

The idea of mutual respect through the sharing of strengths and weaknesses played a subtle, but important role in this project. This was acknowledged by several band members who recognised my openness regarding lack of experience in writing for brass band. Conducting the sketch rehearsals further developed the relationship, as did frequent attendance at rehearsals. Being 'on view' and available for discussion and reflection normalises the experience and enhances the socio-musical relationship.

Participants enjoyed the project and the piece was well received by the audience. The music itself was not technically challenging on first sight, although several members recognised the challenge of expression and the intonation in the sustained accompaniment. I was very pleased that the players saw beyond the simplicity of the material, and that there is a challenge in presenting music where the value lies beyond technical difficulty. This reinforced the idea that the compositional approach and technique of some composers may be better suited to successful amateur music projects.

It is understandable that a response describes the process of reading through a sketch, going away and writing more, rehearsing again, until the piece was completed, as being less interactive than expected. The issue here may be the form of interaction, as a 'workshop' often suggests a different 'hands on' approach more akin to a community music model. In an interactive relationship, all participants are given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on any aspect of the piece. The majority of respondents felt that they were given the opportunity to respond, and, importantly, several indicated the benefit of trying out sketches to both the ensemble, and the composer.

The piece was appropriately written for all players, although it was pointed out that the Euphonium often has a larger part to play. There was an acknowledgement of this in the piece where the instrument has a four bar spotlight in the final section. The 'bell' effect of overlapping sustained notes that was explored at a sketch rehearsal did appear in the piece, but not in its original form. The piece has had three performances by the band and is published by Wright and Round. For the band, this was a success story, and their name is in the dedication, contributing further to a sense of ownership over the piece. This was an enjoyable project, and the feeling of respect is very much mutual. It is always a humbling experience to be brought into a tight knit community like a brass band.

The project led me to composers and music that I may not have otherwise been aware, and the brass band environment very much resonates with my own personal ideals. The relationship has continued with sketches for a new work having already been performed (Appendix 2) although a second work has been held up by other PhD pieces and the band having several different musical directors in quick succession. There are plans to continue the project and write the test piece I had sketched out when initially exploring brass band repertoire.

Project 3

Leamington Chamber Orchestra (LCO)

The Leamington Chamber Orchestra are an amateur orchestra based in Leamington Spa in Warwickshire. There are usually around 45-50 players but this varies depending upon the current repertoire. A small number of the players (approximately 6-7) are semi-professional players in that they earn their living from music as peripatetic teachers and occasional freelancers. There are also individuals who are currently, or have previously been, Heads of Music in schools. Subscription fees are £25 per concert or £65 for the year, and the orchestra perform at local venues including Leamington Spa Town Hall, St Peter's Church in the town centre, and a museum in nearby Warwick. In keeping with the tradition of an amateur music society, repertoire celebrates tradition, covering standard classics, but also explores lesser-known repertoire, and the occasional modern classic such as Schonberg's *Chamber Symphony No. 2* and Ives' *The Unanswered Question*.

Initial Discussions

All initial contact was via email and phone calls. The musical director was very enthusiastic and saw an opportunity to include a short piece to open a concert in the orchestras forthcoming 40th anniversary concert season. The fact that there was no commission fee also had an effect in the project being established and was detailed in email correspondence to the orchestra members highlighting how this project should be seen as an unusual opportunity. As has already been stated in the methodology section, the lack of a commission fee alters the relationship, reducing risk on the part of the ensemble, increasing the sense of good will and the concept of a 'gifting'. After the orchestra committee agreed to the proposal the project began without a formal contract being drawn up, and an agreement over email regarding the duration of the piece and it's place within the 2017-18 concert season.

Interactive Creativity

Initial discussions took place at the start of 2017 and in March a proposed concert date in February 2018 was agreed. However, in June the piece was moved to a concert date in September 2017. The musical director stated he understood that this may now be too soon, and whilst it challenged the timescale I had previously been working to, I endeavoured to complete the piece in time. Alterations to the schedule meant that the methodology I had hoped to employ could not be followed through and any interactive creativity would be largely limited to an email based discussion. With the summer break imminent I completed an introductory talk at a rehearsal. The musical director was continually active in his attempts to get the orchestra to interact. I presented the research aspects of the project and players were invited to contribute thoughts and ideas on the character and content of the new piece. This was done via a sheet that was distributed at a rehearsal (Appendix 3), and through email. Responses covered favourite repertoire, links to the 40th anniversary, key players to exploit and potential musical quotes that could be hidden within the piece. There was also a request to make the percussion section manageable in terms of space and budget.

Clarion

The agreed duration of the piece was three to four minutes. One response from an orchestra member was the idea of a fanfare, or an opening extravagant statement, to open the 40th anniversary season. When the concert was moved to the first concert of the season this formed the main idea behind the opening brass motifs, and the title of the piece.

The piece contains large scale orchestral gestures but these are compressed within a short structural time span. In 2006 I wrote a solo cello piece for an SPNM workshop, *Caprice* (Long, 2006). The call for works had an imposed limitation of a 2-minute duration. Within a limited duration the piece moved through several motifs and characters that were aimed at a dramatic shape that twisted and turned, but ultimately, came to a satisfying conclusion. It was an attempt to miniaturise a large scale dramatic structure with musical gestures that could easily be expanded to form a much longer piece.

With a three-minute timespan I endeavoured to do something similar in this project, moving quickly through several musical gestures, texture and involving all of the instruments. The compression of ideas into a short time span means that the listener is not given time to rest until the frantic final cadence. The piece is in 3 sections. It opens with loud, strident brass motifs leading to the title of the work and linking to the idea of a fanfare. The middle slow

section presents phrases to be performed by some of the players identified as key members in an email. The piece quickly moves into a rhythmic motif that leads to a final melody that drives towards the final rhythmic cadence.

Prior to this research project I would spend a proportionally large amount of time on pre-composition, in particular determining a harmonic structure through systematically organising pitch class sets. This would involve categorising according to interval content and giving myself a 'pool' of possibilities that would inform the harmonic structure of the piece. In contrast to this approach, *Clarion* makes use of a standard Lydian mode with a flattened 7th (Figure 7). This mode is constructed from the 8th to the 14th partials of the harmonic series, sometimes referred to as the acoustic scale, and is one that I happened upon when writing an earlier piece. This mode contains elements of the whole tone scale and the augmented scale, and intervals can be isolated to give a sense of major and minor modes. This provides a compositional system that negates a strong sense of functional diatonic harmony, whilst still working within a harmonic sound world that is not overly dissonant:

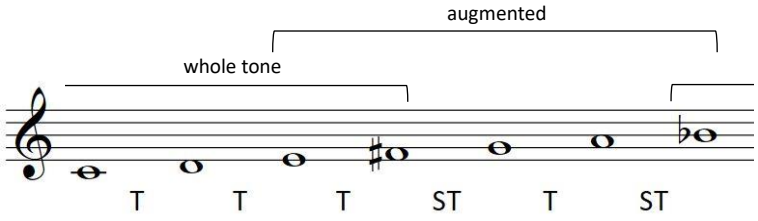

Figure 7: Mode demonstrating whole tone and augmented scale characteristics

From this mode I constructed a variety of four and five note chords with specific intervallic structures that gave a particular aural characteristic. These characteristics are used structurally depending on their consonant or dissonant characteristics.

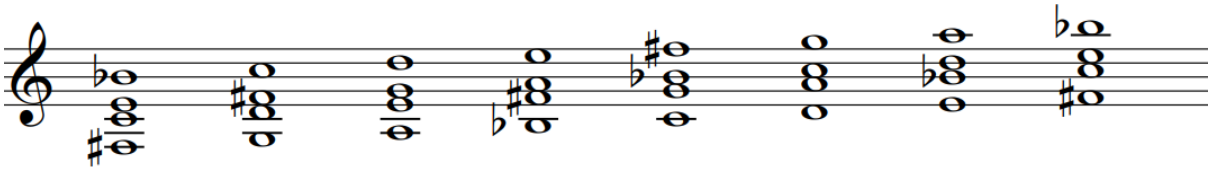

Figure 8: Vertical harmony with 5ths and 3rds

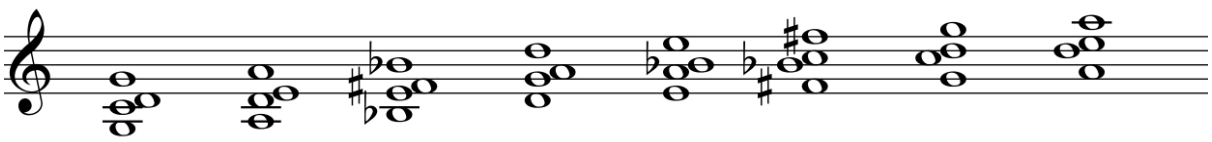

Figure 9: Vertical harmony with 4ths and 2nds

Figure 8 and Figure 9 demonstrate resulting chords when following a systemised vertical stacking of certain intervals. These vertical structures in various transpositions are freely employed expressively depending on their consonant or dissonant characteristics. At times they are also revoiced through octave transference and combined to create chords with a greater number of pitches. These harmonic resources are freely drawn upon depending on the expressive, structural or dramatic context. In starting this project it was clear that technique would be adapted for the ensemble when compared to the Brackley and District Band project. The LCO had played modernist works before and so non-functional harmony and a variety of orchestral textures are something I aimed to include.

Evaluation

There were 9 responses to the online survey.

Theme 1: Participant enjoyment

Eight respondents were positive when asked about their initial feelings towards the project. The most common words used were 'positive', 'excited', and 'interested'. Examples of other words used were 'nervous' and 'anticipation'. One respondent was 'unsure' of their feelings. Responses include:

- Particularly good chance for an amateur orchestras to engage with a composer who invites ideas from the orchestra
- An exciting idea and particularly appropriate as a celebration of the LCO's 40th anniversary year.

Six respondents were positive when asked about their view of the final piece, with the most common word being 'fun'. Responses include:

- The piece was fun to play
- It was fun
- I'd perform it again without question. It used a range of dynamics to good effect (although I am sure we could have made those more extreme in performance)

One respondent cited an issue in a part, and another issues in scoring, as affecting their enjoyment of the piece. One respondent did not like the piece and suggested that being a part of a research project may have been part of the reason:

- I didn't love the piece, so no, but I understood that this was part of a research project.

All respondents felt that the piece was appropriate for their group and five commented that they would like to play it again. Other comments linked to appropriateness include:

- It was appropriately festive for the occasion.
- It was a worthwhile project.
- We were looking for premieres for our 40th anniversary season, so this fulfilled that need as did the fanfare type nature of it.

When describing the response of the audience, all respondents were positive apart from one who was 'unsure'. The most common words in responses refer to enthusiasm and enjoyment. Other comments include:

- Very positive. I think a few were apprehensive about a brand new piece, and seemed to be pleased that they enjoyed it.
- I think they were surprised they enjoyed it.

Theme 2: Challenge

None of the respondents felt that the piece was too difficult or challenging. Three respondents linked the difficulty level with other positive views:

- The piece was ideal for a good amateur orchestra – technically sensible demands, judged perfectly by a composer who had a very good grasp of the playing standards.
- Not very challenging (a welcome thing in an otherwise difficult concert)
- Fun to play, not too demanding

Three respondents described the demands of the piece in relation to their experience of their part, noting that the music was not too challenging. A string player commented:

- Not too challenging. The string parts could have been more interesting and varied.

Six respondents felt their part was appropriately written with the most common word being 'fine'. Positive comments include:

- The part was well written for violin. It covered a few different techniques in a very short space of time.
- It was very well done.

One respondent referred to a technical issue in their part:

- Technical demands had not been thought through – e.g. with notes beyond the instrument's compass being scored.

Theme 3: The Socio-Musical Relationship

Five respondents specifically referred to the positive nature of the relationship, describing it as:

- Friendly.
- Positive but a little more personal contact would have been good.
- Friendly, open and creative.
- There was good communication.
- This is how it should be, collaborative, partnership and open exchange of ideas. I particularly liked the honest 2-way approach during the rehearsals.

Three respondents referred to a distance between the composer and ensemble:

- Not close enough.

- Remote. Until a week before the piece was presented at a rehearsal, the only contact had been by email which many people won't have found engaging.

One respondent was negative about the relationship:

- Composer was unbelievably patronising. He may think of us as 'mere amateurs' but many are professional musicians, even if not professional in the sense of full-time performers.

Theme 4: Interactive Creativity

Eight respondents felt they had the opportunity to contribute to the creative process and that this contributed to the way the piece was composed. One respondent commented whether the opportunity was there, and on a possible lack of take up on the opportunity:

- Absolutely, but I am not sure how many took this up. I'd be disappointed if they did not.

Another commented that the relationship was:

- Conductive to creating ideas.

Two respondents commented that contributing via email alone was not sufficient:

- Asking for ideas by email was not the best way to get people to respond. Personal contact at a rehearsal would have been more productive.
- Only by email, which meant people gave you their thoughts and you went away and considered them which isn't what I think of as real collaboration which needs more of a conversation.

In the absence of sketch workshops the orchestra were asked whether or not, in hindsight, they thought the activity would have been beneficial to the project. Four respondents didn't feel that it would have been beneficial. Other respondents cited various benefits that may have been gained:

- Some ideas about different instrumental techniques could have been suggested by the players.
- It might have been possible to get more variety in the bow strokes for increased tension in the music.

One respondent felt it may have been but referred to issues around the number of rehearsals available:

- It may have made the project more collaborative, but it's hard to see how that could have worked with an orchestra that only meets three times a year, with four rehearsals each time.

One respondent felt it would have been beneficial and that issues could have been pointed out by musicians before the first rehearsal:

- the problem with the instrumentation was pointed out to the composer at the first rehearsal, but apparently there was no time to fix this.

There are a couple of contradictions in the responses and the reality of the project. Firstly, one respondent states that:

- I'm not sure it was a short time scale. The committee set the project in motion quite a long time in advance of the concert.

whilst the conductor states that there was a:

- very short timescale.

Another contradiction is that despite a pre-performance talk to the audience a respondent commented in relation to the project:

- perhaps an explanation at the concert, by the composer, would have worked well.

The Musical Director gave this response following the project:

- I was very pleased to have the opportunity of working with Chris Long, who accepted my invitation to write a short work to help Leamington Chamber Orchestra celebrate its 40th anniversary. Despite a very short timescale Chris prepared a piece full of vitality and atmosphere which the players really enjoyed working on and performing. Chris was at all times easy to work with, flexible and good-humoured. I hope we may have the opportunity of working with him again.

Evaluation

Despite opportunities for interactive creativity being limited due to the changes in the schedule, the project still addressed the themes surrounding amateur participation and, in relation to the brief, the needs of the ensemble. Respondents indicated that they enjoyed the piece and that it didn't present too much of a challenge. It is worth noting that any lack of challenge was not described as a negative feature, and one respondent specifically stated that this was welcomed in an otherwise difficult program. The piece fulfilled the requirements as a celebratory piece for the occasion, and this is reinforced by participant feedback. The piece was viewed by players as appropriate, fun to play and a worthwhile project.

Interactive creativity was limited to online discussions and there was no opportunity for a sketch rehearsal. Several responses were forthcoming by email but the number of responses were small compared to the size of the ensemble. Despite one respondent stating otherwise, I gave also gave an introductory talk to the audience at the concert.

It is not clear that changes in the schedule were made known to all members of the orchestra. This appears to have caused some negativity in the responses. The pressure of the changed schedule is acknowledged in the response from the Musical Director. The socio-musical relationship is described in positive terms with only a couple of respondents reacting differently. In particular, one member seems to have perceived a negativity towards amateur status during the project. This is not how I described the research project in my introduction, or in subsequent correspondence. It may indicate that the initial introduction to the work, or the accompanying emailed information was not clear. Given that I repeated the successful format from project 2, it seems this is a subjective response. It may also suggest the uneasy

relationship between amateurs and professionals that has been highlighted in the literature review.

The project highlights organisational challenges when working with different ensembles. Brackley and District Band rehearse twice a week and were therefore always able to adapt rehearsals to create a free time slot. The LCO have four rehearsals per concert, and one of these is with the string players, putting a lot of pressure on the time the orchestra have together. How a project fits into the rehearsal schedule of the ensemble must be given adequate consideration so that potential issues flagged up in advance. The limited time the orchestra have together was also highlighted in the feedback from one participant as standing in the way of a more involved interaction with the creative process.

Sitting in the audience and listening to the response, an audience member in front of me laughed as the final chords rang out and started to applaud. This was the intended effect. A short breathless whirl through the orchestra. Despite issues with the schedule, the project was enjoyable and fulfilled the requirements of the brief.

Project 4

Ex Urbe Chamber Choir

Ex Urbe are a chamber choir based in the West Midlands. The choir was originally formed by a small group of members of the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus. Past repertoire has covered music from the Renaissance through to the 20th and 21st Centuries. Members are drawn from across the West Midlands and many perform in other regional choirs. Their website summarises their philosophy towards singing: ‘We share a love of small ensemble singing, working to create a sound that reflects both the hard work and the pleasure of doing this together.’ (Ex Urbe, 2021)

Initial Discussions

I contacted the choir by email and then spoke to the musical director over a phone call. After consideration, the musical director agreed that the project was something Ex Urbe wanted to get involved with. A date was set for an introductory visit to a rehearsal in Hampton in Arden. This was the first meeting between the composer, musical director and the choir members. At this rehearsal I explained the research element of the project and that it would

involve interactive creativity. I invited the choir to contribute to the initial stages of developing ideas for the piece. I suggested a proposed duration of four minutes and that the piece be unaccompanied. We also discussed the possibility of being a single movement, or a series of shorter pieces and whether the piece would be sacred or secular.

Interactive Creativity

The value of a musical director who is sympathetic to the project and who can act as a mediator between composer and ensemble cannot be overstated. In the case of this project the musical director set up an online document that could be edited by the composer and all choir members. Appendix 4 shows the final version of the document. The enthusiasm for the project and the creativity of the choir is demonstrated in the response the document had. The musical director created sections dealing with musical themes, making suggestions that the singers could contribute to. Several members contributed and one wrote a poem specifically for the project.

Early in the relationship it was clear that the project would expand into a cycle of several pieces. The choir provided two of the texts and, after the choir decided on a secular song cycle, I suggested an overriding theme to the texts relating to aspects of the human condition. I added two other texts to form a cycle of four pieces. This was far beyond the original four-minute suggested duration and meant that initial timescales had to become flexible. The final duration of the work was 12 minutes. As both myself and the choir were very open to making the project a success and acknowledging that original brief had expanded, there was always a sympathetic approach on both sides regarding timescale, and rehearsals were always available for the project.

For these pieces I wanted a choral sound that had little vibrato. The first material that I took to a rehearsal (Appendix 5) was written to give me a base line as to how the choir would react to splitting sections into parts, and how this would affect tone. On observation at the run through of this material I felt that the tone of the upper parts suffered most from splitting the resources at a higher pitch range, whilst the lower parts were less affected.

There followed six rehearsals where sketch material was explored. The relationship with Ex Urbe was such that they were very flexible and accommodating and would always make time to work through the material. I was invited to as many rehearsal sessions I felt necessary and, through observations, there seemed to be a genuine enjoyment and sense of anticipation from many of the singers when a new version was presented. I brought each piece to the rehearsal

in it's draft state, and the choir sight read in the rehearsals. *Infant Joy* was the first piece to be completed and went largely unchanged as a result of rehearsals. Feedback on the piece from the choir and the musical director was positive and reinforced the direction I was taking with the cycle. *A Birthday*, went through several versions and there was surprise that the music changed so much between sessions. *Be Still* also transformed over time and *Dreams* was the last piece to be completed. During the sessions I would talk through my approach and explain what I was trying to achieve, especially in relation to the expressive nature of the music. Discussion and reflection was always encouraged and some choir members did offer feedback in relation to their part. It was rare that there was an input into the aesthetic direction of the pieces other than singers referencing their likes, or dislikes. During these rehearsals, the musical director was enthusiastic and made every effort to explore the music in the time available. He always gave his opinion and helped to bring the singers into a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of the pieces.

Songs of the Soul

As with my previous choral music, homophonic textures and simple rhythms dominate in order to let the texts be communicated clearly.

Infant Joy fulfils my own desire to set a William Blake text to music. The piece looks to express the overwhelming reverence a parent has as they hold their new-born child for the first time, a specific emotion that was very personal to me. Under the surface is a restrained but intense feeling of joy and overwhelming love. The piece is understated with gentle surges in melody and dynamics. At one point the music does reach a climax with the words 'sweet joy but two days old', only to quickly be hushed again in the presence of the sleeping baby.

Dreams is by James Mercer Langston Hughes and brings the cycle into the twentieth century. This was also my choice of text and follows the theme of birth in *Infant Joy* with the theme of having dreams and aspirations. The repeating phrase 'hold fast to dreams' attracted me to the text and is used as a repeating musical idea. Staggered entries in the opening with repeating harmonic and melodic patterns make the music technically accessible whilst the modulation to a new mode and a layered textures adds a challenge for the singers.

A Birthday is by Christina Georgina Rossetti and was suggested by one of the choir members. The piece has sacred undertones. This interpretation, at the request of the choir, is purely

secular, and focusses on a simple melody first sung by the sopranos. The music rises and falls in intensity, whilst the phrase 'because my love is come to me', drawing on idea in my earlier piece *O Lord, Remember*, is repeated at the end to form a melodic and rhythmic cadential phrase that contains restrained joy and excitement for the impending event.

Be Still was the most challenging of the pieces to compose. The poem was written by a choir member, and in my attempt to pay respect to the poet, I kept it intact, without any editing. This made it a challenge to make it work with more repetitive poems in the other pieces. I established a repeating motif that linked with the idea of the earth revolving and this formed the basis for the composition.

The pieces are written for the singers of Ex Urbe, but also with a view to them being performable by other amateur choirs. Like *Farewell,* the music isn't technically too difficult for the choir. The challenge lies in the expressive qualities of the music. I wrote the pieces so that a less accomplished choir would be able to access music that moves away from functional tonality but remains in an accessible modal sound world. It is also familiar through the use of tertiary harmonic structures, although occasionally chords built with 4ths are used to provide contrast.

To make the music technically accessible the idea of emerging from a single note, using voice leading as a way of introducing closer harmonic intervals, runs through all of the pieces. This is a method I have used in both choral and instrumental pieces in the past, both for technical and expressive reasons. The opening of *Infant Joy*, the gradually expanding opening of *Be Still,* the opening soprano phrases of *Dreams* and the accompaniment to the opening soprano melody in *A Birthday*, all start from a single note and expand to a major or minor third, and beyond. Sections of *The Pale Blue Dot* (project 5) and *Clarion* (project 3) use this gradual expansion for expressive purposes. In *Songs of the Soul*, this also acts as a musical motif that links the pieces thematically. My experience as a director of a high school choir has frequently led me to this solution. Less experienced singers find it difficult to pitch intervals without preparation. They are more able to follow a simpler line that inadvertently leads to a more complex harmonic sound. The following is an example (Figure 10) where bars 1 and 2 contain dissonant vertical harmony that are the result of conjunct motion. This resolves on a C major triad which acts as a familiar 'signpost' for the singers to aim for:

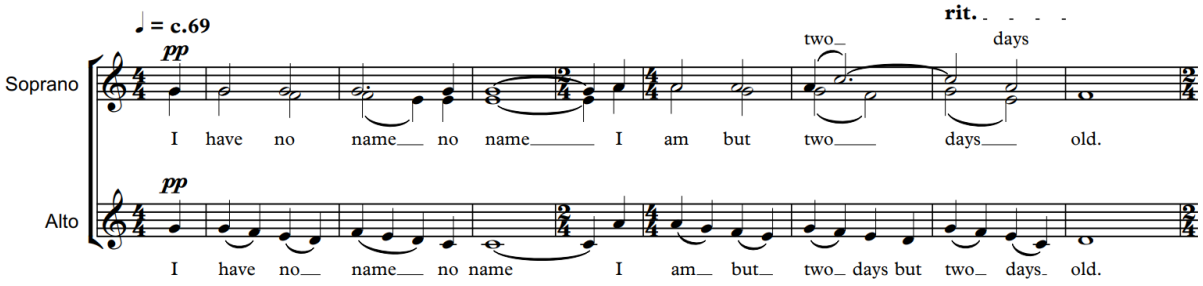

Figure 10: Conjunct motion resulting in close harmonies in the opening of Infant Joy

Stepwise motion crossing sustained notes also gives rise to more difficult intervals, but through voice leading ensures the singers have an accessible route through the harmony. This can be seen at bars 50 – 53 of *Dreams,* where a quick change of mode, accompanied by close, almost cluster like, harmonies in the soprano and alto parts, are made technically more accessible through the use stepwise descending lines:

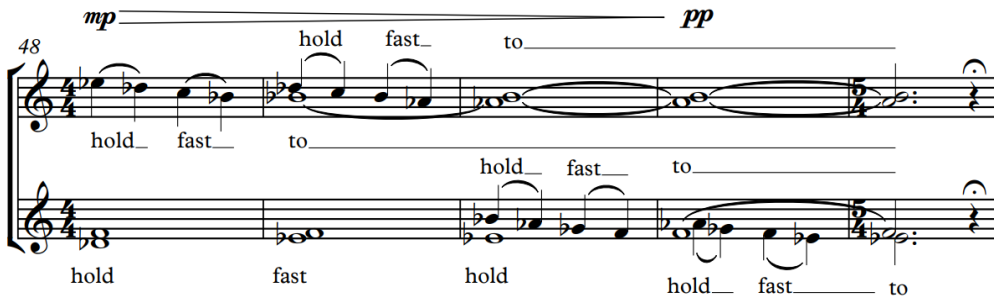

Figure 11: Close harmonies created through conjunct movement and sustained notes.

Participant Feedback

There were 13 responses out of a membership of 24.

Theme 1: Participant enjoyment

Twelve respondents were positive when asked about their initial feelings towards the project. One was not present at that time. The most common words in responses were ‘excited’, ‘interest’, ‘curious’ and ‘very positive’. Other words used to describe participant feelings were ‘trepidation’ and ‘anticipation’. Responses include:

- Interested, ready to be involved. Initially not content with the idea of typically sacred text, inspired me to write some words and suggest alternative poems etc.
- Excited and pleased, though with some trepidation about whether it would work for us and be something that the choir would enjoy doing.

Nine respondents were positive when asked about their view of the piece. Comments include:

- Chosen poems were lovely especially as one was written by a choir member. The pieces overall are really lovely to sing and I've no doubt we will sing them many times in the future.
- When we really paid attention to what we were singing some of the chords were quite 'delicious'!
- Loved the subject matter - relevant to absolutely any human being. Was great that we could use words written by one of the choir. I especially enjoyed singing 'Infant Joy'. The whole quartet was very gentle and mesmerising, both to sing and listen to.
- Great choice of words which truly represented the theme of 'love and loss', and the musical settings were sympathetic to the beauty of the poems being chosen.
- I loved the composition. I appreciated the opportunity to perform a secular work. Great choice of poems. I particularly liked Infant Joy.
- It came together very well indeed and left the desire to perform the work again.
- I liked the choice of texts and how they related to each other. Chris's music linked them through tonality and style whilst maintaining their distinctive characteristics. I really enjoyed singing the four pieces together and can also see how they can stand alone.

Two respondents were positive towards the piece with some reservations:

- I liked 3 of the 4 – the last was too long and didn't quite gel for me.
- Pleasant and not too demanding for the audience but ultimately lacking in distinctive character.

One respondent expressed negative feelings towards the piece:

- I didn't feel that the musical setting of the words worked very well. For me there was a failure to communicate 'joy'. I had no emotional response to it.

When describing the response of the audience, 10 respondents were positive. The most common words used in responses were 'positive' and 'warm':

- Feedback I received was all very positive – they really liked the pieces.

Two respondents felt 'unsure' and that they 'can't really say'. One respondent gave a negative response, describing the reaction of their own audience members:

- My audience were disappointed.

Theme 2: Challenge

Twelve respondents described the composition as being aesthetically and technically appropriate for the choir. Comments include:

- There was good use of voice parts, often focusing more on vocal quality rather than quantity which I appreciated.
- Very suitable for our chamber choir. We are a very good acapella choir, with voices that naturally blend.
- yes indeed - very much - it encapsulated what we are about in terms of soundscape and what we could contribute - a nice balance.
- I think Chris got it about right in terms of our choir, the sound we make and our abilities.
- The music was straightforward to learn. I wouldn't have changed anything.

Twelve respondents felt that the piece was not technically difficult, with one respondent linking that to a negative experience. One respondent felt that there wasn't enough musical

interest for the singers in the group. Two respondents felt the piece was not technically challenging by that this was part of the overall aesthetic:

- The music composed was not overly challenging but nevertheless there was beauty in its 'simplicity'.
- Relatively easy, but effective

Opposite views linking enjoyment with technical challenge was highlighted in comments by two different respondents:

- Technically not demanding and rather dull to sing.
- It was not technically demanding. Very enjoyable to sing.

Theme 3: The Socio-Musical relationship

Twelve respondents referred to the positive nature of the relationship, with the two most common words in responses being 'open' and 'positive'. Other words included 'optimistic', 'enthusiastic', 'relaxed', 'friendly', 'very close' and 'cordial'. Responses include:

- Chris has a gentle, considerate approach which was appreciated.
- It was a comfortable, easy relationship, and I believe from the start that the composer was interested in our views

One respondent described a lack of time as a negative aspect of the relationship:

- We lacked the time to develop enough of a relationship to give useful feedback during the process.

Theme 4: Interactive Creativity

Twelve respondents felt they had the opportunity to contribute to the creative process. Reponses include:

- Yes – both through feedback at early stage and in contributing to text and ideas for the texts used.
- very much so – it was a thoroughly interactive process at every stage
- Yes, some individuals contributed significantly. One of the poems set to music was by one of the choir members

Two respondents were positive but with reservations:

- To a degree, but I think our choir would have enjoyed the opportunity to offer more.
- I would have liked more time to talk with Chris. I wrote some words rather quickly as a starting point for ideas and didn't realise Chris was using them 'as written' until too late. I think we could have edited/revised the poem together.

One respondent commented that:

- I think that was the intent but in reality we were not equipped to do so.

Eleven respondents felt that trying sketches were beneficial to the composer, the ensemble, or both. Positive comments included:

- It very usefully provides a vehicle for conversation about the composition and an opportunity for the choir to have some influence over the direction of it.
- Yes, it was interesting to see how the ideas developed, and to get to know some of the musical themes. This is one of the things that make the project a relationship rather than a commission.
- it was interesting to see the thought/composing processes.
- Yes, it allowed opportunities for feedback and changes.
- Absolutely essential.
- The workshop sessions were an important part of the experience, being part of the birth and growth of the pieces.
- Chris was responsive to what he heard in rehearsals so the final version was much better than I had expected.

One respondent gave an insightful response linking their social and hierarchical position within the choir to their ability to participate in the creative process.

- I never felt able to say what I genuinely felt about the music, partly because of a desire not to be hurtful and partly as there were a few key members of the choir who were relentlessly, as least outwardly, positive.

Making Music Awards Nomination

The Choir entered the pieces into the Making Music Awards 2020 where it achieved a special mention in the category of Best Music Creator. Whilst these extracts are directed towards a competition nomination it is worth considering them as they were compiled by the choir and the musical director and is their testimony of the project as presented to Making Music.

- Chris` approach from the start was to come and listen to the choir in rehearsal and then compose music which was sensitive to our sound and strengths. For example – we are not scared of unusual harmonies!
- Chris remained fully engaged with the choir and MD Ben Hamilton, with multiple iterations of the pieces as we tried out his drafts and provided feedback. There were magical moments for the choir when he returned with revisions which sounded so right. In one case, this involved a complete change of metre. Chris was hugely enthusiastic about involving the choir, through online surveys, and in the selection of texts, which included one piece written by a choir member, and another based on a poem we suggested. He also sought our feedback at the end of the project and was an integral part of our performances, introducing his composition to the audience and emphasising its collaborative process.
- these 4 pieces work so brilliantly together as a coherent composition, and yet hold their own individual style, each with a sound world which reflects their text. There is a clarity and purity of the composer`s voice within the music, which also supports the coherence of the composition. We found the music both approachable and enjoyable to sing, yet strikingly fresh. We loved it so much that we are determined to complete a professional recording as soon as we can.

Evaluation

The project was a success as is evident from most of the feedback, observed audience response, a special mention at the Making Music Awards and that the choir still plan to record the pieces. It was appreciated that the project was allowed to grow beyond the original brief and the flexibility on both sides of the relationship was mutually appreciated.

Sketch rehearsals allow the composer to try things out and to hone and refine the composition in relation to the characteristics of the ensemble. It also gives the performers the chance to engage with the music whilst it is being composed and the opportunity to participate in discussion and reflection, or to make suggestions. For some, this can often be a passive interaction with the creative process, more as an interested observer than a creative contribution. The positive aspect of this, the importance of a passive interaction as part of the overall experience, is acknowledged in the feedback. This aligns with the rewards and thrills of serious leisure and was a valued experience for the singers, some of whom enjoyed the experience of observing how the pieces developed.

An open invitation to take the opportunity to interact was also appreciated and it is of interest to note how some singers actively took the opportunity, whilst others saw their passive involvement as equally valuable. The online document was valuable for encouraging the collection of ideas and contributions and was especially useful in developing the idea for the full cycle.

As drafts of the piece were worked on, there was a sense that the performers wanted to perform them as best they could. Led by the musical director, the group were motivated by the challenge and wanted to give the rehearsal their best effort. The motivation was possibly greater due to the rehearsals being in the presence of the composer. Through observations I perceived a pride and an attention to detail when rehearsing the sketches, and it was clear that singers had practiced the material outside of rehearsals. This meant surprised reactions towards the extent of some of the changes between sessions. Whilst not given as a negative issue, making it clearer what was being changed, and why, may have reduced the investment in time that singers gave to each version.

The sketch rehearsals gave me several opportunities to try out ideas. Some of the pieces fell into place quickly, but *A Birthday* and *Be Still* went through several versions, exploring different approaches to the text. An idea for *A Birthday* was put to one side after I heard the draft, realising that it would be difficult to achieve the sonority I wanted with such a small

choir. In the interest of a more homogeneous sound, I restarted the piece following the rehearsal. There were several versions of *Be Still* as I tried to find the best way to accommodate the text. If there is an issue with the piece it is that it is too long, as is acknowledged in the feedback. The opening and the ending were put in place very early in the process, but the middle sections are lacking in a definite dramatic shape. The choir member who wrote the text for *Be Still* felt that there could have been a discussion regarding how much of the text was used, but this was made known after the first performance. I have since cut sections to make the structure more concise.

There were single negative responses that came from the same choir member. These highlighted their own personal response to the pieces, but also highlighted how a performer may affect their own audience members view, and highlighted issues that may exist in the social hierarchy of the ensemble itself. Whilst there is subjective opinion regarding the music and the relationship within these responses, the comment regarding too many choir members being overly positive is worth considering in relation to an interactive relationship. If the majority of what is explored gains positive responses, then it is difficult to establish an interesting two-way dialogue on how the process may progress and the interaction can become overly passive. This may be put down to the appreciation an amateur ensemble may have of being involved in a creative project. It may also indicate that 'not being hurtful' affecting interactions with other choir members, the musical director, or the composer, may have been more widespread than the single acknowledgement in the feedback.

The socio-musical relationship was very strong during this project and continued in the preparation of the Making Music Awards submission. The relationship would support further projects and a refinement of the work has been discussed.

Project 5

Kensington Symphony Orchestra (KSO)

The Kensington Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1956 and has a reputation as being one of the leading amateur orchestras in the UK. It's founding aim is to provide students and amateurs players the opportunity to participate in high quality concerts and the orchestra prides itself in its programming of contemporary music.

Initial Discussion

I was put in touch with the Kensington Symphony Orchestra by Making Music and this project differs from previous projects in that it was not initiated by the composer. Email correspondence outlined the research project and a potential 20-minute work. Communication with the Musical Director was very positive and discussed potential concert dates, the impact the venue may have on instrumentation and the potential characteristics of the new work. I attended a rehearsal and spoke to the orchestra after their break. I described how the new work would fit into the overall research project. Having received consistently positive feedback on my approach to introducing each project I followed the same method with KSO with the same open and respectful manner, adjusting my talk according to the context of the orchestra.

Interactive Creativity

I followed the same process for inviting contributions towards the piece. This took the form of the introductory talk with the group and then an interactive online document that was emailed to the orchestra to be forwarded to the musicians. There was an important difference to previous projects, and that was my suggestion of an extra-musical programme. This was presented at the introductory talk and was also included in the online document. A limited number of orchestra members took the opportunity to communicate via email to discuss the ideas presented and there were no responses to the online document. The following ideas were collected via email:

- A suggestion for a structure that started with violence, gradually ending in serenity.
- Suggested orchestration with some instruments that members had that they may like to incorporate.
- Thoughts regarding a workshop to create ideas but with the acknowledgement that this would be difficult to organise.
- Lists of pieces, including modern works, that the orchestra had played and that they had enjoyed.
- A requested limitation on percussion and the agreement that a piano could be used. This had financial implications.

I attended four rehearsals following the introductory talk. For the first rehearsal, I put together a sequence of ideas that I wanted to explore, including some aleatoric sections that I

was not fully committed to. As there wasn't a full orchestra at the rehearsal it was difficult to get a sense of the impact of the music, and as a result I don't feel the players had a sense of how the music should sound, or how it could progress. I also presented the ideas that had been received by email and gave my thoughts on the structural idea of ending with a single point. This suggestion was not in my original plan but I used it as a principle creative focus in structuring the second half of the piece. These changes were communicated to the orchestra and I invited comments and discussion. The second rehearsal ran through some key sections, in particular, the rapid string sections. I used the session to test whether or not this material would give any technical problems before committing to the idea. The first two sketch rehearsals were relatively brief, with the second not allowing for any real interaction with the players. The third and fourth rehearsals ran through the full composition. Feedback at rehearsals was mainly regarding the formatting of parts and any technical issues in individual parts.

There was a strong sense that the conductor had trust in the composer and that creative freedom was expected. There was, therefore, no agreed brief other than an agreement of duration and instrumentation, with several possible schedules suggested. The timescale changed several times as the committee shuffled concerts and programs to create their season. Due to other circumstances affecting the schedule, the score was delivered a week later than agreed. This meant that the rehearsal schedule had to be adapted, putting a strain on the socio-musical relationship.

At the first performance I introduced the piece and the overall research project to the audience

The Pale Blue Dot

The piece is for a standard small orchestra. It was a joint decision between myself and the musical director to make the piece as accessible to other groups as possible, with the hope of ensuring future performances, whilst also writing appropriately for the KSO. This is evident in limiting the orchestration to standard instrumentation, despite some suggestions by orchestra members. Writing for specific players within an ensemble can add to the sense of ownership, but can also limit it's appeal to other ensembles. Percussion resources were limited to that which any percussion player, or orchestra, would likely be able to assemble. After initially requesting some form of large tuned percussion, financial constraints meant that this was not included and a piano is used as a compromise.

I have wanted to explore a specific extra musical idea for a while. The American astronomer Carl Sagan wrote his book 'The Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space' (Sagan, 1994). In 1990, NASA gave the Voyager 1 space probe a final mission: to photograph the solar system from deep space, at a distance of around four billion miles. The astronomer Carl Sagan had campaigned for years for the probe to take these photographs, and when the resulting image was processed, the planet was shown as a tiny, bluish-white dot against the blackness of space, hanging in what seem to be rays of sunlight (actually reflections across the camera lens). Sagan went on to write a book entitled Pale Blue Dot (1994), the opening lines of which are now as famous as the photograph itself. The words and the image are a humbling reminder of our place in the universe, highlighting the need for wonder and awe to have a place in our lives.

The piece has an arch structure. It starts with slow descending figures in the strings and the woodwind, expressing stillness, vastness and inevitability. The strings start with sustained notes. A cascading effect is achieved with a quasi-appoggiatura technique of moving from 4ths to 3rds, an example of a systemised approach that is often used to organise texture and pitch in earlier works, and is used in several places in this piece. The opening presents three statements of the descending figures each of which are interrupted by an underlying tension. There are punctuations that gather momentum as our viewpoint rapidly cascades into less elegant music that broadly represents the inconsistencies of human existence. With confident self-importance, the music twists and turns, never settling, with rapid changes of metre and rhythm, melodic fragments appearing and then disappearing. Sagan's quote summarises every aspect of human existence, something I do not think it is possible to do within a single piece of music. There is time, however, to acknowledge the positive, transcendental qualities of the human condition, as the music pivots around a slow central section. The camera slows to focus on 'every young couple in love', 'every mother and father', every 'hopeful child'. We pan away and again move through ever accelerating changes, clashing and abrasive, until suddenly we are back in the stillness as the strings ascend, only pausing at the end to take in the sight of that 'mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam'

I returned to the mode employed in *Clarion*, extracting a four note motif Eb – D – B – C first heard in the flute and this motif is developed and reused throughout the piece. These pitches also form part of an augmented scale, which is used in the rapid string sections. As with *Clarion*, vertical pitch organisation is based on building chords with specific interval characteristics that are then freely transposed and revoiced to suit the dramatic context.

The middle section is the most explicit in it's use of the mode. Revolving around two sustained major third intervals in the cellos and the violas, this static harmonic progression gradually moves to the background before disappearing completely as a systemised overlapping scalic texture imposes itself in the lead up to a key climactic moment.

Other sections that demonstrate a systemised unfolding are the rising string layer of the slow middle section and the final rising string figures that lead to the final sustained note.

In bar 328 the original mode is altered to contain an E natural. This mode never settles on a tonic and with various pedal points hinting at possible tonalities. The piece ends on a single note, punctuated by distant chords on the brass, and a gently pulsating piano note representing the *Pale Blue Dot*.

Participant Feedback

Theme 1: Participant Enjoyment

Fourteen respondents were positive when asked about their initial feelings towards the project. The most common words in responses were 'excited', 'interested' and 'positive'. Other words used to describe participant feelings were 'neutral', 'responsive' and 'accepting'. Responses include:

- I was looking forward to it.
- Different opportunity to standard rep
- Interested - always nice to try something new.
- Interest, wondering what it would be like
- Positive - it's part of 'What KSO is known for'

Other responses refer to themes surrounding amateur ensembles: organisation of personnel and the passion to learn new repertoire:

- Fairly equivocal - we've done this once before fairly recently and it worked quite well from the orchestra's perspective, but on the other hand if it wasn't successful this time we would have missed out on playing another piece of existing repertoire, and we only get to play about 18 pieces per year.
- Neutral but don't get me wrong! As a percussionist I don't have a very close relationship with the orchestra and aren't party to these discussions.

Fourteen respondents were positive about the composition. Two respondents described technical issues they had with the piece and two expressed a negative reaction.

Positive comments include:

- I thought overall the piece was successful and a great entry piece for audience members to get to grips with conceptual music.
- Effective in the link with the title and subject matter. Thought the opening particularly beautiful.
- I thought the piece came off well in performance, particularly perhaps the end section. Members of the audience I spoke to said they'd enjoyed it and I enjoyed playing it in concert
- I found it to be a marvellous piece, especially after reading the programme notes. I felt it would fit in perfectly with a performance of The Planets, Op. 32 by Holst on a programme. For me, it was an extremely humbling experience. I found the piece had challenges standing on its own, but when paired with the background of The Pale Blue Dot, our solar system, our galaxy, and our universe, it really puts things into perspective. I actually found one of Chris' notes from the programme to be so powerful, I printed it off and put it up on my office at work. It's a good reminder of putting things into perspective.

Sixteen respondents felt that the audience enjoyed the piece. One said they couldn't tell and another said they had a mixed response from people they spoke to. Comments include:

- I think they loved it!
- I think they liked it. The performance was convincing, and the story was compelling and aroused a strong emotional response I believe. It certainly did for me.
- My friends quite liked it, even though they tend to be rather conservative in their musical tastes.
- I think it went down very well!

Some of the comments refer to performer's friends and family in the audience:

- My audience members really liked it. Programme notes and an introduction from Chris really helped to personalize it for them too.
- My partner came and loved it
- My audience members really enjoyed it.

Theme 2 – Challenge

Fifteen respondents described the composition as being aesthetically and technically appropriate for the orchestra. Two of these respondents added that it was appropriate, but they could have coped with a more difficult piece. One respondent wasn't positive or negative, describing it as being appropriate due to it being contemporary. One respondent had no view, and one respondent was negative.

Of the fifteen positive responses, comments include:

- I was challenged in the second violin part, and yet, at the same time it was approachable. I'll confess I didn't hit every note perfectly in concert.
- I think it challenged us well.
- It was not as challenging as many other works we have played but as it was the end of the season that suited us just fine!
- We do a lot of modern music so it was well suited on both points [aesthetically and technical difficulty]
- Lots of comments from my audience members about how it suited us. I think it could have been more technically demanding though.
- I think the piece could have been more challenging in places, however it suited the venue and I thought the orchestra carried it off.
- I think that technical demands were within our reach. Some tricky passages but not impossibly so.
- Technically accessible for KSO.
- I think the piece suited KSO well!

The negative response was:

- Too little technical and musical challenge. Range of tempi, dynamics and expression seemed formulaic. A failure to use the potential of the orchestra. Had the composer heard us play?
- There was absolutely nothing that challenged our skills as an orchestra, and we love a real challenge.

Theme 3 – The Socio-Musical Relationship

Responses to the quality of the socio-musical relationship between ensemble and composer fall into three areas. Positive responses (6), neutral responses (8) and negative responses (3). Positive responses include:

- It was great to see the composer at the rehearsal, even if it was a 15 minute rehearsal – it shows the composer really cares about the whole process and passionate about it.
- I really enjoyed (and appreciated) Chris Long coming down in November to talk with us about his initial concepts. I felt the greatest connection was revealed through the programme notes.
- It is always helpful to have the composer present at at least one rehearsal and to have the overview and background to the work from them. Perhaps some more direct feed back about style of execution and approach would have been helpful and/or reassuring, but difficult for someone who doesn't know the group.
- Great to meet you on rehearsal day and get some direction 'from the horses mouth'
- I thought we had a good relationship - very friendly. It was a bit last-minute and we didn't have as much time to prepare as we might ordinarily have liked, but on the whole, I think it all ran very smoothly.
- Chris was personable when he came to talk to us but I don't feel a relationship really developed between him and the orchestra

Neutral responses generally describe the relationship as not close enough due to several factors. Responses include:

- we were not consulted about the piece as it progressed (e.g. after the preliminary exercise or during the remainder of the rehearsal run). I'm not sure if it would have been appropriate for us to volunteer opinions midway through the writing of the piece, but it would have been interesting to liaise with the composer during the process, when there was a skeleton to work with, rather than simply beforehand, when the project remained in the abstract.
- I think we needed more regular contact, even if that was just update emails. Possibly you may have gotten more interaction across the orchestra if each section had a representative and more time was spent with them as a smaller group so they could feed back views from the wider group.
- perhaps with more meetings with sample ideas or material we could have contributed more.

Negative responses include:

- He didn't seem interested in finding out what we could do. I didn't feel any sort of link between him and us was established.
- The process then felt rushed, so it seemed as though we'd missed an opportunity to liaise with the composer on any initial thoughts and queries.
- Personally I did not feel that that I had enough interaction with the composer to be able to say I had a 'relationship'
- I didn't feel there was much input when the composer was at rehearsals.
- Not as strong as it might have been.

Two comments suggest a lack of mutual respect between composer and performers:

- Initially Chris came and spent 10 minutes rambling about his compositional style, which didn't sound promising.

Theme 4 – Interactive Creativity

10 respondents felt that they had the opportunity to contribute to the creative process, contributing to the way the piece was composed. Three respondents felt that the way in which the creative relationship unfolded was inadequate:

- We were given the opportunity by email.
- I liked the fact that we were asked to have input, but in practice, I wasn't quite sure what I could contribute. I find it hard to suggest things without much of a context.
- I expected more interaction - possibly some experimental alternatives to sections of the piece. I expected that the orchestra might help the composer to figure out some innovative sounds (that may be difficult for him to imagine or emulate with piano/MIDI). That would have been fascinating.

Several responses refer to not receiving the online consultation document, or to not being at a rehearsal.

- We were given chance through the initial survey which I did not get around to completing.
- Wasn’t aware that we were, but I play in a section of 16, so I probably didn't notice.
- I missed the consultation rehearsal.
- I don't recall any opportunities to do this. But I haven't been in the previous few concerts so perhaps I missed something.
- I believe some members did, but I never saw an email or any other means of contributing.

Some respondents pointed out their personal view on a interactive creative approach:

- Personally I find it a bit difficult to contribute meaningfully to a discussion of ideas about new pieces. Maybe that's because I have an inherent assumption that a composer has inspiration, ideas, skill, talent, and energy to create a work, while I really have none in this area!
- I didn’t really feel I had anything to contribute to be honest. Really as an orchestral player I’d rather just be given a completed work to play. The composer does his/her bit and I’ll do mine.

- Personally I am there to give voice to someone's creative vision and genius. I'm not convinced that composing by committee works.

Audience feedback

In this final project, I asked the orchestra to forward a survey to friends and patrons who were at the concert, to give feedback as audience members. There were seven responses. All responses were positive towards the piece. Comments include:

- Overall, an impressive piece. In general I particularly liked the quieter passages (including the opening). Some exciting effects. I've attended quite a lot of KSO concerts (a friend plays in the orchestra), and this struck me as very much the kind of piece that the orchestra likes to get its teeth into, and puts over well.
- As an untutored listener, I found this piece more than held my attention, it seemed to define the mystery of space surrounding that Pale Blue Dot and left a lasting impression. I'd very much like to hear it again.
- I felt refreshed after listening to the piece, like going through a difficult time and coming out the other side stronger. The brass/horn chords near the end of the piece felt like the dawn of a new day, and a realisation that if we just take a step back from our busy lives, that what we have is beautiful. The music conjured images of travelling through space.
- Quite an emotional rollercoaster. Left several of us slightly emotional at the end.
- Was very interested by the construction of the music and the way it chose to evoke the theme. The ending was especially effective.

Six respondents felt that the composers pre-concert introduction was a valuable exercise in introducing a new work, whilst one responded commented that it didn’t add to the program note but it was good to see the composer in person. Comments include:

- I really enjoyed it; it made me feel valued as an audience member and being told about the context of a piece, especially verbally, helps me connect with the music and appreciate it more. I think it is definitely a valuable activity.
- It was very helpful to hear the words of the Composer himself, he spoke of the fragility of this beautiful planet as was expressed in the atmosphere of his music.

- Very much enjoyed and appreciated the introduction by the composer. New music on hearing for the first time may be more difficult to understand for some listeners. So I am all for it.

Musical Director Feedback

This feedback was via personal correspondence following the performance:

- I hope you [the composer] were pleased with the performance; I thought the orchestra really got into it and it felt like the performance came off really well.
- When they [the orchestra] heard it all come together and in the proper atmosphere of a performance venue it was obvious that they really enjoyed playing it. The audience was tremendously enthusiastic (and lots of people have passed on praise for your introductory talk, which was just spot on: relaxed, informal and witty too!).
- It's been a great pleasure meeting and working with you (even though things have been a bit briskly hurried through at times, on our part) and I very much hope our paths cross again. And of course, thank you so much for writing such an exciting and uplifting piece for us; I very much hope that it has a performance life in the future

Evaluation

The Kensington Symphony Orchestra can rival some professional orchestras in their technical ability and musicianship. Whilst I was already aware of the reputation of the orchestra, the rehearsals reinforced the high standard of the players. Rehearsals also highlighted how their approach to the project was different to a smaller group. Through my observations and interactions with the players I perceived a less intimate atmosphere, less a sense of 'community', when compared to a group such as Ex Urbe or Brackley and District Band. This could be due to several factors including the size of the group and some players being on a rota for different concerts. Orchestras naturally vary in size depending on the current repertoire and this is very different to a group like Ex Urbe. Being choral, all can participate in the concerts and singers have known each other for a long time.

Out of all the ensembles, the KSO best represented Small's notion that Western classical performance is based on 'undifferentiated collectively' (Small, 1998: 70). There is much less

variation in the technical standard of players when compared to Brackley and District Band, for example, and this has much in common with a professional orchestra. Some responses resonated with another of Small's points regarding professional orchestral performers. The creative position of the performer within a musical discourse is concerned with performing and that other creative decisions are the domain of the musical director and the composer, believing that performing the music 'is their job, to play what composers have provided for them to play, and the composer's job to provide it.' (Small, 1998: 68) It is interesting that this is the only project where I had responses aligned with this view. The response that described the composer 'rambling' about technique may also indicate that an attempt to invite some players in the preliminary discussions may have been falling on deaf ears.

It is possible that this form of creative relationship is not wanted by some amateur musicians playing at this level and it is only in hindsight that a question could have been added asking that, prior to the project, would they have preferred a piece of standard repertoire or a new composition. Some responses do suggest this. One response indicated they felt the project was imposed upon them, another that they were putting their trust in the musical director and one response highlights concern over risk put to the thrills and rewards expected of their membership:

> 'if it [the project] wasn't successful this time we would have missed out on playing another piece of existing repertoire, and we only get to play about 18 pieces per year'
>
> (orchestra member)

Responses referring to challenge focus mainly on technical difficulty. Many responses state that they felt it was aimed at the correct level whilst a minority viewed the difficulty level as a very negative issue. Considering that one of the aims of this project was to produce a work that was performable by other amateur orchestras, this seems to have been missed by several players, who may think more around their individual personal experience, their motivations for being a part of the KSO and expectations of their membership.

Some members wanted a more interactive relationship. Despite the best efforts of those organising projects such as this, there will inevitably be disruption to the regular structure, and fitting in time for sketch rehearsals was difficult. My own commitments aside, the schedule was dictated largely by the orchestra, and similar constraints were evident when

compared to the LCO project. In the run of rehearsals prior to those scheduled for the concert there was a guest conductor working with the orchestra which meant that those rehearsals were not available. This meant that a series of sketch rehearsals where the orchestra could see progress was difficult to achieve. For this reason the composition of the work took priority over interactive creativity, resulting in greater distance between composer and ensemble in their sense of ownership and the closeness of the socio-musical relationship. What needs to be taken into account when presenting sketches for an orchestra, is the preparation of orchestral parts, and how labour intensive this is. Questions need to be asked around the balance of time and the impact and value on the schedule and structure of the project that sketch rehearsals have. Interactive creativity based around discussion and reflection of sketch workshops is easier and more dynamic when working with a choral group.

It is difficult for a composer trying to fit with an orchestral rehearsal schedule as was seen with the LCO. This is especially so with an orchestra such as the KSO where members rotate, there are guest conductors, and relatively little time to spend working on and discussing ideas. The first sketch material was run through within a ten-minute slot, and there was no follow up time offered to explore opinions or thoughts. It was essentially forced into a rehearsal and the orchestra continued with what they were working on for a forthcoming concert. This project also differed to previous projects due to its geographical limitations. Whilst this was understood in advance by both the composer and the orchestra prior to the project, in one instance a four-hour journey to and from a rehearsal resulted in a fifteen-minute run through of sketch material which seemed to prove more of a disruption than a creative session. There was no personal contact between composer and orchestra members during this rehearsal and no invitation to stay on a social level. This was a very unusual experience, and much more akin to a professional commission. It felt like the orchestra was doing me a favour and that the run through was next in a line on a to do list. The musical director was always appreciative of the time and effort and gave this run through his full attention and commitment. Responses citing the relationship as ‘distant’ will no doubt be based on these experiences and not the fact that invitation, or the ‘offer’ of a closer relationship was always there. The invitation to participate on a social level must come from the orchestra. The composer is, after all, the outsider.

The socio-musical relationship was very one way. Opinions were voiced after the event despite inviting discussion, contribution and conversation, with several participants stating

they hadn't had any correspondence. Whilst I had set up an online document that was designed around the system that was very successful with Ex Urbe, it does require the ensemble to send this material to their members. The scale of the KSO and the nature of such an organisation does not lend itself to such interactions and the suggestion from an orchestra member that designating members of sections to discuss with fellow players and then feedback in sections is one that seems a logical solution.

Mutual respect and trust have already been explored and identified as being important to successful socio-musical relationships. I spoke to a small number of performers at a rehearsal and all were polite and interested in the new work. Whilst the majority of responses from musicians were very positive. Two respondents were predominantly negative towards the project in all aspects other than audience response and there was a perceived lack of respect for the composer in several responses.

The pre-concert talk was successful in making the new composition more accessible. This is evident from the positive feedback from the audience and feedback from the musical director: 'lots of people have passed on praise for your introductory talk, which was just spot on: relaxed, informal and witty too!'

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of my research project is to explore theoretical concepts linked to successful socio-musical relationships and amateur musician motivations, and then explore through practice-based enquiry. Through concepts identified in participatory music, serious-leisure and community music, I have highlighted four principal themes that should be considered by composers and ensembles in establishing successful socio-musical relationships. Interactive creativity has been defined in relation to collaboration and explored practically as a method that can be employed to address several amateur musician motivations as well as retaining composer authority within a creative project.

In this chapter I make links between the concepts explored in the first two chapters with and the outcomes of practice-based enquiry. I discuss the research from the point of view of my individual compositional journey and I discuss ways in which some elements may have been done differently. I discuss how the research can provide a resource to inform future

collaborations between composers and amateur music societies, and I outline future post-doctoral projects that this research will hopefully lead to.

Critical Reflection: Synthesising theoretical and practice based enquiry

Theme 1: Participant Enjoyment

It should be a primary concern for a composer that participants enjoy a creative project. Opinions on the new work and its performance are very subjective, and enjoyment can be affected by personal taste in relation to style and subject matter. This is the most common point of reference when discussing participant enjoyment. It is, however, important to consider enjoyment during every stage of a project, not just the final performance. Enjoyment manifests itself in different ways, from the sense of achievement of performing technically challenging music, to participating in a creative relationship, or simply in lifelong learning, furthering knowledge, and observing the creation of a new work. Alongside all of this are the social characteristics of an ensemble, its self-contained 'community', and the sense of a shared endeavour that an ensemble embodies. Participants want to enjoy the experience on a social, as well as intellectual, level.

A principal difference with a professional commission and the practical methods employed in these projects is the interaction between composer and ensemble. Interactive creativity offers opportunities to discuss the work in progress, to reflect on various elements of the music and to make suggestions as to how the piece, and the project develops. These are not usually possible, or desired, in a professional relationship. Projects that demonstrated greater levels of enjoyment (Ex Urbe and Brackley and District Band) explored interactive creativity to a greater extent than those where both the socio-musical relationship and participant enjoyment received neutral, or negative, feedback.

Theme 2: Challenge

The challenge of writing for amateur musicians is often described in terms of technical difficulty and from a purely practical musical point of view. Not only that, treating an ensemble as a faceless resource for a new work, thinking of instruments rather than people, as one may do with a professional ensemble, negates consideration of the characteristics of the

amateur musician. It is important that composers understand a full range of amateur musician motivations to participate, and that challenge is not only linked to technical difficulty. Participating in the creation of a new work contributes to the desire to further knowledge, lifelong learning and a motivation to be challenged by new experiences. There is the challenge of performing and rehearsing a new work, but interactive creativity facilitates these additional motivations, and participants can decide on what level of interaction best suits their own individual motivations Individuals can be active or passive in their participation allowing for differentiated socio-musical challenge to be built into the process. As was demonstrated with *Farewell* and *Songs of the Soul*, some participants enjoyed passively observing how the pieces developed. Discussion and reflection were part of the interactive experience. Some participants enjoyed a more active interaction and were involved in discussions and reflections. Some participants went further and made suggestions that shaped the way in which the piece developed.

Theme 3: The Socio-Musical Relationship

The quality of social and musical experience is an important amateur musician motivation that resonates with themes found in Community Music and a successful socio-musical relationship with an amateur ensemble is a principal challenge for the composer. The value of the composer as a socially-aware individual in creative projects is highlighted by Laycock. Composers, however, vary as individuals and not every composer has the skills, confidence or personal characteristics that Laycock describes, and not all composers are comfortable working in this way. As composition is often an isolated activity, there is a need for composers to consider the facilitator skill set prior to an amateur music group collaboration. This aspect of the composer has developed over the decades as creative music making and has permeated not only the contemporary music scene, but also education. My own background as a classroom teacher means that many of these skills are already embedded and I take them for granted. I am in no doubt that the positive responses that were received with regards socio-musical relationships and the way in which I approached the ensemble are a result of this prior experience.

The need to consider facilitator skills is not simply to ensure positive social interactions, but also, the composer must have the skills and confidence to position themselves correctly

within the social and creative hierarchical structure of the project, ensuring they can influence the establishment of mutual trust and respect by accepting constructive criticism, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, demonstrating humility and sharing a willingness to learn. Embarking on a learning journey with the ensemble was a fundamental aspect of the relationship with Brackley and District Band and immediately established a more equal project hierarchy, making the band members feel valued, and increasing my own confidence in trying out ideas.

Socio-musical relationships must be based on mutual trust and respect. Respect from the composer towards the ensemble who must always appreciate that they are being invited into what is often a close-knit social community. Respect from the ensemble towards the composer as a creative artist, and in the expectations of the ensemble with regards creative freedom. The Equinox project demonstrates how several factors created strained relationships between composer and organisers. The project with Ex Urbe demonstrates trust and flexibility towards expectations as the project developed, resulting in a strong relationship.

A positive socio-musical relationship with the musical director is important as they form an important mediator between the composer and the ensemble. Projects suffer where relationships become strained. Composer introductions at performances formed a useful way of bringing the audience into the relationship. Feedback from the KSO project highlights how an introduction can make the new work more accessible to the audience and that the presence of the composer is valued.

Theme 4: Interactive creativity

The invitation to discuss and reflect during a project, the composer being present at several rehearsals, a pre-concert interview or introduction, and subsequent opportunities to reflect and feedback after the project, have all been used with the primary aim of addressing motivations amateurs have for participating in order to maximise positive socio-musical relationships.

Haydn and Windsor's categories of collaboration have been very useful in defining a methodology that is flexible in addressing the motivations of amateur musicians. I have used the term interactive creativity throughout, rather than interactive collaboration, due to the

interventionist workshop connotations the term ‘collaboration’ often carries. Interventionist models of creativity are well known, as are many of the composition techniques involved in creative music workshops. Aleatoric processes, graphic scores, improvisation, musical fragments are all used to stimulate collective composition. In comparison, interactive creativity can be viewed as being overly passive to be described as a truly creative collaboration in the way a creative music workshop may be. Where its real value lies, however, is as a highly effective method in addressing a range of amateur musician motivations, which in turn contribute to positive socio-musical relationships. Whilst the use of sketch rehearsals is a common way of enabling creative interaction, this method, also common in many AAC projects, are usually seen as a means to an end in informing the composition of the final piece. Shared ownership, whilst a desired outcome in a project, is often the reason given for running through material. Their impact can be greater than this. In the environment of an amateur music society rehearsal, using sketches of work in progress and open forums for discussion, reflection and evaluation enables participants to construct their own experience and participate at the level that suites them, giving them ownership of their own participation and addressing their own motivations.

Critical Reflection: Logistical Considerations

Where socio-musical relationship became strained, this was down to logistical issues. The Equinox Project highlighted this through a prescriptive brief, an overly ambitious project leading to unrealistic expectations on a composer and a strained relationship with the project organisers. When ensembles understood the nature of the creative process, they were flexible in the allocation of rehearsal time and the way in which the project progressed.

Critical Reflections: The Composer

I am a composer who feels that they are brought into a project to share their skills and to serve the ensemble, and the exploration of their own aesthetic principles within this environment is seen as a desirable challenge. This is not a philosophy shared by all composers and probably owes a lot to my experience in education. It is an approach that very much gives to the ensemble in many ways and establishes a relationship based on respect for the ensemble from the outset. Composer John Webb, who also has an interest in composing

for amateurs and working within education describes a similar view: ‘Why should my musical ideas be more important than other peoples? I like to put the musical skills I have (and my enjoyment and persistence in terms of creating pieces of music, and solving the knotty issues contained in that process) at the service of the community I happen to be working with at that moment’ (Webb, 2021). This philosophy on the hierarchical nature of a relationship is a natural part of my approach and overlaps with the community music facilitator and Laycock’s socially aware composer. On reflection, the extent to which composers will be able to put their own aesthetic concerns, or stylistic tendencies, to one side, in favour of addressing the motivations of amateur musicians will vary greatly. My own compositional approach seems to fit this methodology. I have adapted and simplified at times, but this has been in the interest of my own development, and my interest in writing more immediately expressive music.

Interactive creativity is an effective approach in enabling the composer to achieve aesthetic aims whilst also addressing the motivations of amateur participants. My own compositional process has benefitted from sketch rehearsals and having the opportunity to try out ideas has benefitted the compositions. The strengths of the ensemble could be explored, and any characteristics that could be exploited. This was the case of Brackley and District Band, I learnt a lot about the sound of the instrumental families and with Ex Urbe where the first sketch (Appendix 2) looked at splitting parts at different ranges to explore the tonal characteristics of the singers.

In the pursuit of establishing relationships based on openness and trust, I have at times been too open with a group and presenting the research project has resulted in some members of one ensemble questioning the experience of the composer. This can result in resentment considering I am, after all, not a professional composer. When looked at outside of the context of the PhD, projects have been completed without a commission fee and with a lot of goodwill and sacrifice. Open discussion remains, however, the most effective way of ensuring trust and respect.

I have treated each project as an opportunity for me to reflect on my own compositional processes and techniques whilst also serving the ensemble that I am working with. I am, however, always less interested in the technicalities of *how* something is created, and more in what it sounds like. It is the immediacy of experience that moves me as an artist. For this

reason I found the audience responses from the KSO particularly pleasing, and audience feedback is something I would add to future projects.

Critical Reflection: Methodology

Electronic methods of contributing ideas, discussing and reflecting upon a project are useful, but only when an ensemble commits to it's use. Ex Urbe took the initiative and set up an online document themselves. Many participants contributed to this, and it formed an online location where the composer and choir members could communicate (Appendix 4). This was largely down to the musical director facilitating the process. The successful use of this method to create a discussion forum for their project is in stark contrast to the other projects and indicates the social character of the group, as well the investment the choir had in the project. I repeated the method with another group where it was much less successful.

Sketch rehearsals are often seen as a way that a composer can involve an ensemble in the creative process and are described as a method used in several AAC projects. For the process to be less passive, several sketches need to be presented, discussed and reflected upon. This has an important logistical impact that varies greatly depending on the nature and size of the ensemble. The number of different parts in an ensemble make very different demands on the time needed for planning and in the printing and binding of parts. In the KSO project, this had a direct impact on the progress being made with the full composition. Whilst useful as an exercise for the composer, this was lessened due to the impact of time spent creating material for the sessions, some of which wasn't used in the final piece. Exploring textures with large instrumental families means that the preparation of material for a sketch rehearsal is a challenge in itself. A choral group, on the other hand, requires a part that all singers can use. This made it possible to run six sketch rehearsals with Ex Urbe. The choir enjoyed discussing and reflecting on how material was updated and developed. Making changes to a choral score is not an arduous task and several sketches used with Ex Urbe were changed substantially as a result of interactive creativity. There are alternatives to a full score sketch rehearsal with a larger ensemble. For example, rather than trying out a fully scored sample, melodic phrases, chord progressions, rhythmic material, can all be arranged as an open score, for example. The appropriateness of any approach must be evaluated against the overall purpose of the sketch rehearsal. Interactive creativity is most effective when it successfully addresses participant motivations. It should be enjoyable, provide insights into how the music is developing, and benefit the composer.

Discussion and reflection within a large group may affect the willingness of individuals to contribute and the use of online forums and personal communication, as well as informal conversations prior to rehearsals and during breaks can facilitate the needs of all participants.

The interactive creative methodology employed in the projects has participant differentiation built into it. It is designed to give the best experience to the majority of participants. Some responses indicated a preference for a more engaging experience when it came to the creative process. Balancing this, however, are those who were happy not to engage at all. The approach I have taken is to employ a method aimed at the majority. All participants will vary in their motivations, interests, expertise and creativity and it is not possible, however, to constantly adapt for individuals. As one musical director suggested after a project, you can't please everyone.

The desire from a small number of participants in each project for a greater input into the creative process can be looked at in two ways: that offering choice addressed the needs of the majority, or that a differentiated approach could be a method employed in the future. The suggestion from a member of the KSO of forming a creative group, or think tank, is worth pursuing with larger ensembles.

Critical Reflection: The journey forward

My dedication to working with amateur ensembles will continue. Two of the ensembles from this research project have indicated that they would like to continue the relationship, and a second piece for Brackley and Brass Band has been started. I would like to revise the methodology used in establishing interactive creativity. The inherently differentiated approach of sketch workshops when providing an experience for individuals can be expanded to ensure a greater range of experience. Participants who want to contribute more and be involved in a more interactive dialogue with the composer can form a think tank group who can then also feedback to the ensemble. This would ensure that individuals at opposite ends of the spectrum are catered for: those who want a passive involvement, and those who want to be more actively involved. Discussion leaders, who will collate feedback from a section of a group, will also be explored to facilitate a more organised feedback process, as well as utilising ensemble members to encourage discussion.

My research has implications for future amateur music commissions and creative projects. An awareness of the underlying themes that motivate amateurs, and the way in which a self-sacrificing socially aware approach, using interactive creativity to address amateur motivations, demands further consideration. For composers, ensembles and organisations wishing to engage in creative projects, this research can be used to promote discussion and reflection on the nature of amateur music participation. As the success of such projects rely to such an extent on successful socio-musical relationships I would suggest that funding bodies and representative organisations consider the theoretical findings presented in this project. A summary of this will be extracted from the research and both Making Music and Sound and Music have expressed an interest in presenting the findings of research project through their organisations. Making Music have also expressed interest in making scores from the practical projects available to their membership. The start of my project involved a survey of the AAC scheme that picked up from where the last survey left off. This data has been collated but has not yet been presented. It is hoped that this feedback from composers and amateur music ensembles can be formatted into a report.

There is a legacy from the practical projects. *Farewell* being a published work and *Songs of the Soul* gaining a special mention at the Making Music Awards. This only strengthens the relationship with the groups, and their sense of ownership they have over the works. During the research project I have met many individuals and been invited into the social community of many groups. For this I am incredibly grateful. Musical directors have been supportive, and ensembles have been overwhelmingly welcoming. There have been many occasions when I have been left speechless by the response to the projects by both the participants, and the audience. There are instances when feedback really made the project seem worthwhile. The comment from a KSO member who found the piece so inspiring that he stuck the program note on his wall at work. Whilst there are compositional decisions, I would have changed given different circumstances, I am proud of the resulting pieces. The experience of the projects has changed my approach to compositional technique, freeing up my approach to style and expression. The supporting theory has also led me to reflect on my work as an educator and how I can continue to develop my work in education. My experience of my PhD has brought together two strands that I had always kept separate, changing how I move forward both as a composer, and as an educator.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Equinox project commission brief.

COMMISSION BRIEF

Agreed @ Project Team Meeting on 280611

1. Basic Details

- Title: Equinox
- Length: c. 30 minutes
- Performers: c.400 singers arranged in up to 6 choral groups reflecting the cultural diversity of people living in Birmingham and the West Midlands: Chinese and South Asian; African Caribbean; Arabic and Middle Eastern; Indian; East European; and West European.
- Selected traditional percussion/drums from the contributing cultures to be decided by 1st September 2011 so that performers etc can be recruited.
- Text as appropriate to be decided by composer.
- First performance: Symphony Hall Birmingham on Saturday 17th March 2012.
- Composer: Christopher Long inspired by ideas from members of the 6 choral groups.
- Date for final score to be delivered to Adrian Lucas, Conductor, to be agreed.

2. Equinox and the Cultural Olympiad

Equinox' symbolises equality. It is the twice yearly time when the sun crosses the celestial equator, when night and day are of equal length. It is celebrated across the world with festivals marking creation, fertility, rebirth, family, world citizenship and the spiritual move from the world of suffering to the world of enlightenment.

The new work will also be part of the Cultural Olympiad made up of surprising, exciting and innovative projects leading up to the 2012 Olympic Games. Equinox reflects the Olympic values of respect for different cultures; excellence in the power of people to create experiences that

motivate and inspire; and friendship through forging links between people based on a shared passion for humanity.

3. Outline Structure

1st Movement Working Title: 'DAWN CHORUS'

Theme: ***creation and fertility: the power of people to create experiences that motivate and inspire*****.**

Compositional ideas: Emergence of communication through sounds, calls (e.g. ululation, hunting calls, love, joy, sadness), singing and speech.

Historical Context: Human life began in Africa some 2 million years ago. The Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize-winner, Wangari Maathai has stated that "The information we have tells us that we came from somewhere in eastern Africa. Because we are so used to being divided along ethnic lines, along racial lines, and we look all the time for reasons to be different from each other, it must be surprising to some of use to realize that what differentiates us is usually very superficial, like the colour of our skin or the colour of our eyes or the texture of our hair, but that essentially we are all from the same stem, the same origin." [1] The first section will reflect the development of humans from these early origins as they created language, adapted to a multitude of environments and spread from Africa into the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

2nd Movement Working Title: 'TOWER OF BABEL'

Theme: '*drifting into confusion and conflict: the world of suffering'*.

Compositional ideas: Increasing sense of confusion as groups create different distinct languages and cultural identities; sense of battle; battle cries; choral with clapping, stamping and selected traditional percussion/drum instruments from the contributing cultures.

[1] Neil MacGregor (2010) A History of the World in 100 Objects. Page 13

Historical Context: As peoples settled, they developed different languages which both identified and differentiated communities. In many cultures, there are traditions and stories about how a divine confusion changed one original human language into several separate cultural identities and associated languages.[2] The world's first cities and states emerged in the river valleys of North Africa and Asia about 5000 to 6000 years ago. Some, such as those on the Indus valley, lived peaceably whilst others became warlike.[3] By 1000 BC "Warfare was conducted on an entirely new scale. Egypt was challenged by its former subject peoples from Sudan; in Iraq a new military power, the Assyrians, built an empire that eventually covered much of the Middle East; and in China, a group of outsiders, the Zhou, overthrew the long established Shang Dynasty"[4]. Such conflicts ebbed and flowed, culminating in two World Wars in the 20th Century.

3rd Movement Working Title: 'EQUINOX'

Theme: '***rebirth and respect: the world of enlightenment with a shared passion for humanity'.***

Compositional ideas: Communication through singing and rhythm; voice the main feature with key words reflecting different cultures and languages in the first part of the movement, merging into a final wordless aspirational harmonic equality.

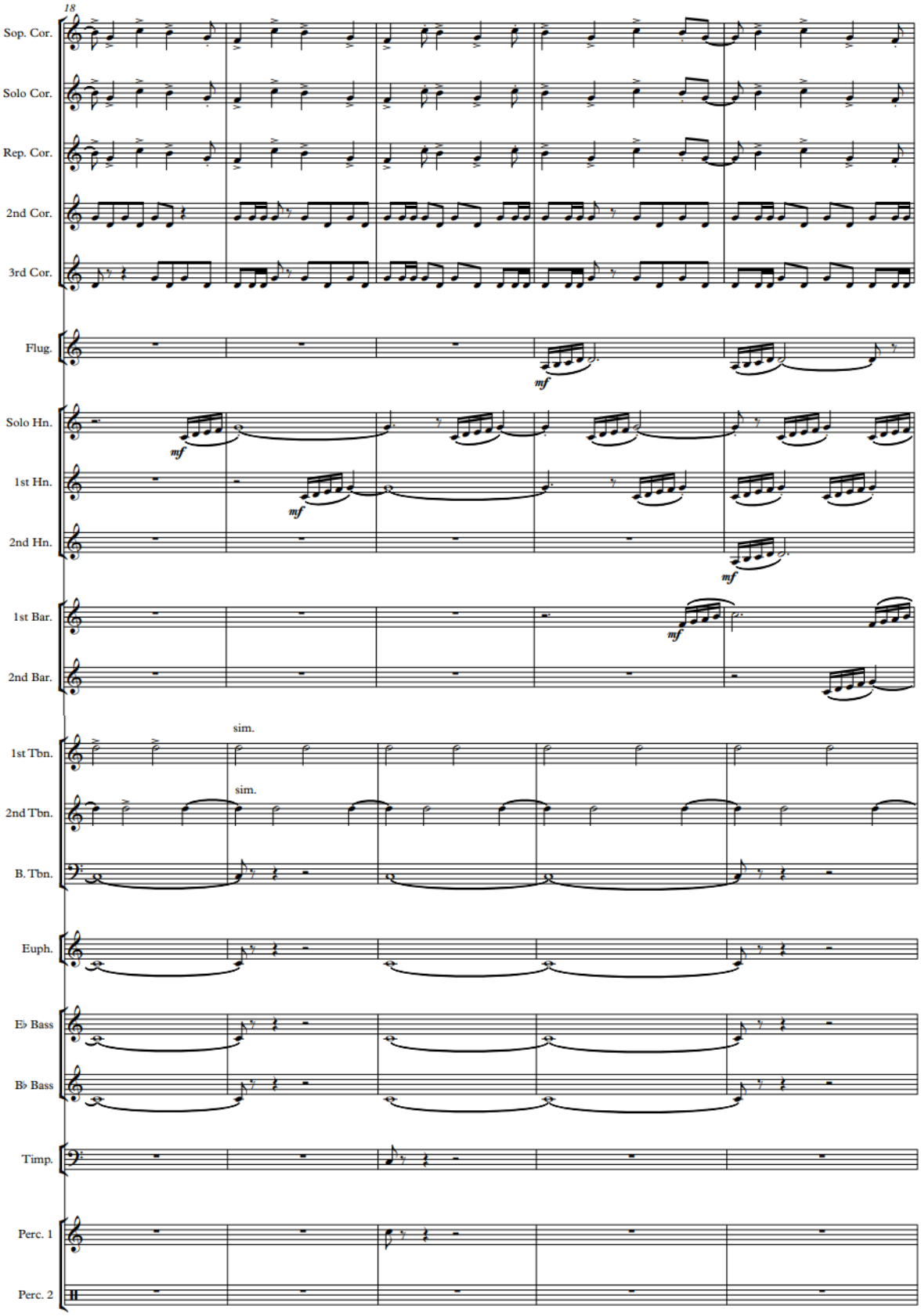
Historical Context: Across the world different civilizations evolved models for government of society that have remained influential for thousands of years. Confucius propounded his philosophy of harmony in China and the Persians found a way for different peoples to coexist under their vast empire.[5] The world was drawn together by trade epitomised by the Silk Road connecting China to South Asia, India, the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean and Eastern and Western Europe.[6] 1000 year old pot sherds found in Kilwa, Tanzania contain Chinese porcelain and pottery from Iraq, Syria and Oman whilst "Arabic and Persian words were absorbed into the local Bantu language to create a new lingua franca – Swahili".[7] Can singing communicate the full range of human emotions and create a universal language which unites citizens in a shared passion for humanity?

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel
[3] A History of the World in 100 Objects Page 61
[4] A History of the World in 100 Objects Page 131
[5] A History of the World in 100 Objects Page 163
[6] A History of the World in 100 Objects Page 293
[7] A History of the World in 100 Objects Page 389

4. Time Line

- **April – July 2011:** Co-creation through discussion, message board, social networking etc
- **August 2011:** Initial composition
- **11th September 2011:** Joint Workshop @ ArtsFest
- **September 2011 – January 2012:** Finalisation of composition; Group rehearsals
- **4th February and 3rd March 2012:** Full joint rehearsals @ Trefoil House, Blutcher St. B1 1QL
- **17th March 2012:** Dress Rehearsal and Performance @ Symphony Hall

Appendix 2: Example from 2nd piece composed for Brackley and District Band



Appendix 3: Leamington Chamber Orchestra invitation to participate in the creative process.

Dear orchestra member,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my PhD research project.

Project Context

I am exploring the relationship between composer and non-professional music groups within creative composition projects. Part of this relationship is the option to interact creatively with the development of the new piece. The nature and extent of creative interaction varies from ensemble to ensemble and takes into account the aesthetic and logistical concerns of both the composer and the performing group.

Some groups have a very defined idea of what kind of piece they want whilst others want a more superficial involvement in the composition project. Part of the project also involves groups working through initial composition ideas and giving both technical and aesthetic feedback to the composer. After the project I invite the orchestra to evaluate the piece and the project as a whole.

Leamington Chamber Orchestra new work

NEW WORK: 3-4 MINUTE ORCHESTRAL PIECE

I would like to invite you to contribute any ideas, or themes, stylistic preferences, textural or instrumental ideas, or any other thoughts you may have on the project (I am aware of the 40th anniversary which may be a good springboard).

You can send your thoughts via my website contact page (which also has examples of my work), Or email directly. Or alternatively print this sheet, write below, and hand to your musical director:

Chris Long: July 2017

Appendix 4: Ex Urbe online document facilitating creative interactivity with responses from choir members and the composer.

Hi Guys,

Thoughts in any form are very welcome. Feel free to edit the below and add your thoughts or contribute in a different way (by email or by just writing your thoughts below. Either free-form contributions or more structured thoughts are encouraged. I've tried to put a few headings that might be useful. You have until the end of our next rehearsal day (April 15th) to make suggestions. Do contribute to make this our piece :)

Just add as many bullets as you like! If you'd like to be anonymous, just put your initials in bold at the beginning of each point. I've started us off but please ignore these when you write your thoughts - I'll add more later.

Please add your thoughts to the bottom of the list so that we can use the bullet numbers to reference comments (as in bullets 2, 4 and 5 in the form section below).

This was done in haste - so do feel free to change the structure/add ideas/suggestions.

Ben

Form/Structure/Length

1. **A triptych** - based in religious art, I love the idea of a coherent choral work of three miniatures which take three different views on the same theme. eg. Christianity, Judaism and Secularism; East, West, Alien; Thoughts, Feelings, external presentation.
2. All music is rubbish
3. A complement to another work - eg. Matthew Martin's new setting of Sanctissima vs Guerrero's Ave virgo Sanctissima
4. I don't agree with point 2.
5. I love the idea of point 1.

6. HR: I really like the triptych idea

Instrumentation

(if you want to vote for a particular one, or several, just increase the number that is next to it - you have 4 voting points each to split as you see fit! eg. 1 each if you like each equally or 1 for organ and 3 for solo instrument if you only like those two but prefer the solo instrument idea.)

- A capella 6
- With Piano/organ 6
- Solo instrument + choir 3
- String 4tet and Chamber choir 9
- (oddly rare combination - cf Beethoven Elegischer Gesang)

Tonality/Compositional techniques/Style

- Happy with any tonality - Ex Urbe sings things from every period.
- Aletorism was included in a workshop with Brum Conservatoire PhD Student Daniel Galbreath - might be nice to have a (small) exploration of this is part of the work.
    - SH: Not wild about this myself & not sure how it would be for the audience. I hope people come to hear us for a nice evening out not to take part in something experimental
- Everyone loves a bit of neo-Baroque.
- SH: Some tunes please
- SK Happy to be experimental, but not challenging for our audience
- HR: any tonality but definitely some
- DdW connecting with choir and audience and then something surprising

Text

- Possibility of Di workshopping the writing of a text
    - less keen on this
- Possibility of Di writing a text/identifying a poem she likes
    - good idea to use the knowledge of the choir to find the right text
- A Birthday by Christina Rossetti
    - I like this - it's joyful (see below re audience)
    - I like this too SK

- SH: my preference for a text that is not primarily religious - there are dozens of masses, ave marias etc...can we find something that is thoughtful but secular?
- SK Agree with SH, we sing a lot of sacred music for obvious reasons, but here`s a chance to do something secular, more about being human, and preferably joyful, or with some relevance to ourselves and our current way of life
- HR: I also would like this to be secular, perhaps celebratory/ perhaps humanistic. I would like text - one that is potentially recognised by the audience.
- DdW I'm for secular and contemporary - text by dead writers/poets may be free but not contemporary: I'm writing something to offer for consideration.
- JC: Secular please! This is a great opportunity to diversify.
- JC: loving the Birthday poem and also Di's offering.

Other comments/ideas/thoughts

- I'd like to see the process of the composition - either live or by being explained afterwards - can we write it/produce the ideas in a workshop session, perhaps?
- SH: there were things about performing Britten's Hymn to St Cecilia that I really liked & that I think would be good features in a new work:
    a. the text had multiple layers of meaning
    b. the text wasn't solely a sacred text
    c. the interplay between the different voice parts was good (if may be a bit on the challenging side…)
- SH: we need to think of the audience, so a known text would be easier to "sell" than one we have workshopped, and it would be nice if we chose something joyful / celebratory.
- SK LIke the idea that the process of the composition can become part of the final art form in some way, and we need to think how best we could record and present that process.
- SK -would hope that whatever we do does involve interplay between voice parts, to showcase what we can do.
- DdW would love to showcase voice parts in conversation

Composer thoughts (12th April 2018)

Hi, I just wanted to add a few thoughts regarding the discussion above.
Thank you so much for taking the time to add this to the document, this is a great idea!

As a composer, there are a few points above that I want to try and work towards.

INSTRUMENTATION

I would much prefer to write a Capella. This is for aesthetic and logistical reasons. I love the purity of the choral sound and I can concentrate on the voices. Whilst the addition strings can be exciting, it will double composition time and means that a lot of attention needs to be paid to writing for the instruments and their role within the texture.

There is also the legacy a piece would leave. Adding an instrumental group can limit future performances whether by Ex urb, or other choirs.

TONALITY / STYLE

All great ideas. Whatever is written will have it's roots in my own language. This will be unavoidable unless I write pastiche. There will be a strong tonal sense (modal, or even pentatonic) but the harmony will be stretched at points for expressive purposes.

TEXT

This is the main area that will affect other compositional decisions. I am really interested, not in pages of words, but in how the words can be set. I prefer a 4 line poem that can be worked into a texture, than a 10 stanza epic.

I read the "Birthday" poem and really liked it for several reasons. It is rhythmic, contains repetition and immediately suggests a strong structure.

I then started thinking about a set of short songs. Each one celebrating an aspect of the human condition. Birth, the child (something from Songs of Innocence?) love, death (but not in a morbid sense, a celebration of age maybe).

This idea speaks to me as a composer. I can visualise 2-3 minute 'songs', each with a specific musical motif/melodic idea/rhythm, that is explored within that time frame. It makes each piece concise and accessible to an audience.

We could also use a text for each song by a different writer. Separated by time / style and yet dealing with the ever present condition of being human. Texts for this could be as short as two lines, or a couple of stanzas. Or can be an extract from a text. "The Birthday" would be maximum length, and even now I look at that and think I could maybe use part of it. This

could maybe give the opportunity to include several texts, thus incorporating more ideas from the choir.

THESE ARE JUST INITIAL IDEAS, LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

DdW I've added some words written for this project - before I read Chris' input so longer than he has in mind. Any part of this could be used, not necessarily kept as a whole. Please ignore the open spacing, that's the technology not my choice.

Be still and listen

Be still and listen, can you hear the Earth
revolving at a thousand miles an hour?
Not while the mind is rushing past the point
of peace and quiet in its haste to know
the answer to all questions, past, present
and future, pressing on until our thoughts
take flight beyond the pull of gravity
the grip of pain, the certainty of death.
Minds such as ours were never meant to bear
the encumbrance of our imperfect bodies.
Our thoughts should take their place among the stars
exalted for the progress we have made.
Be still, before we lose more than we gain.
Let senses speak through touch and sight and sound,
guiding our steps into the dance of life
reminding us to hold each other close
to bend and sway with night and day of love
our pulsing hearts have always understood.
Be still and linger, hear the Earth revolving
through the softly whispering numinous.

Di de Woolfson
April 2018

Composer update October 2018

Hi everyone,

firstly my apologies for the concert date being moved, partly due other things going on, but mainly because the pieces have expanded a little to what we had originally expected. Creatively, it is nice to be in a project where we have a little leeway to let the pieces grow.

You have heard “Infant Joy”, except the last phrase which is now complete bar any slight revisions once I have heard it. The idea for that piece has come directly from the text, with each phrase hopefully encapsulating the emotion of the text. The indescribable love a parent has for a child. The child’s phrases are still and quiet, whilst the parent’s phrases rise and surge, the climax being on the ‘joy’ phrase.

The tonal palette in that piece has informed the others so that we do get a sense of a ‘suite’

“A Birthday” is complete but I am just working out a few textural details. “Be Still, and Listen” being the longest text, is also proving to be the longest piece.

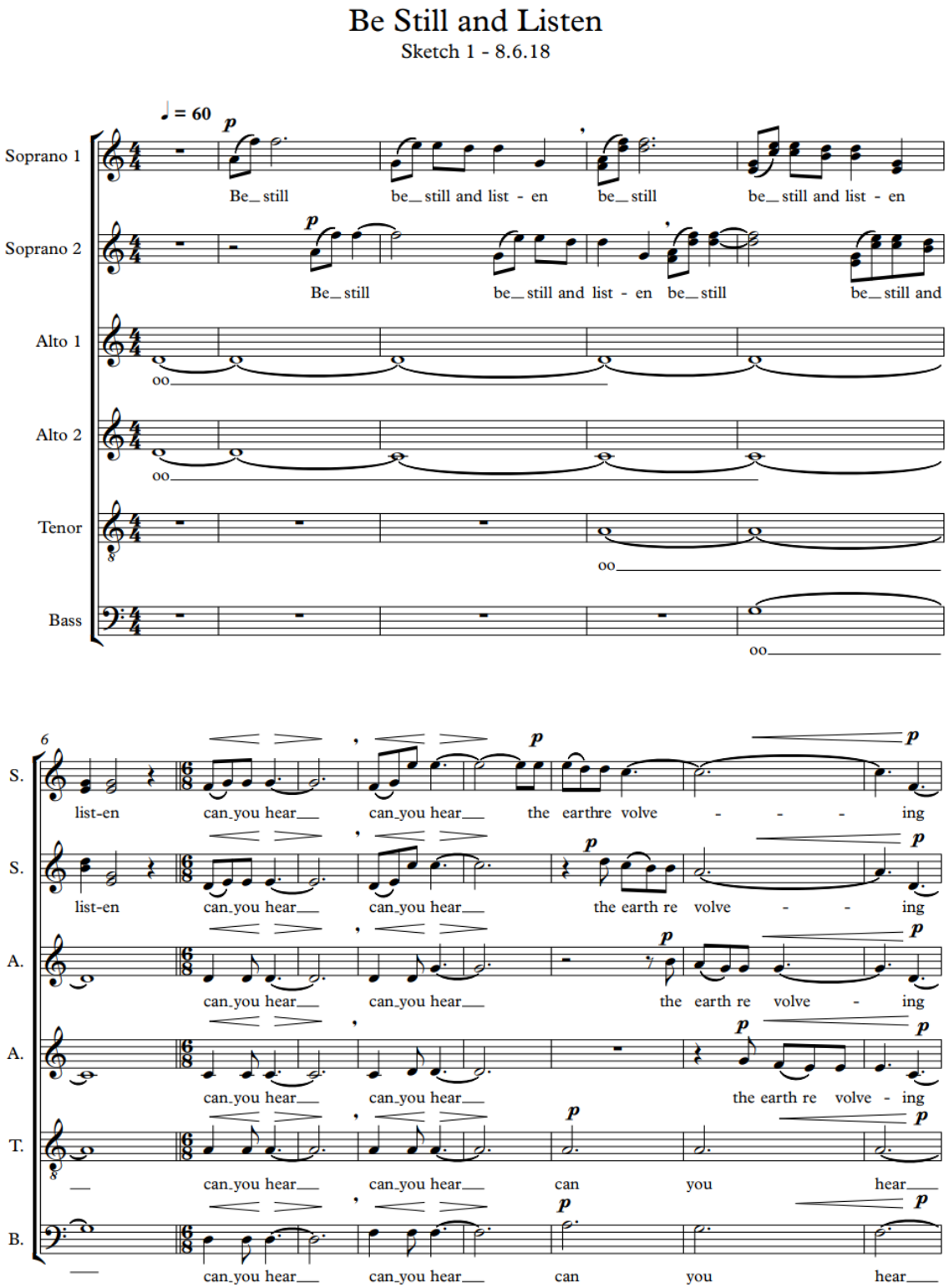
The overall title of the suite is “Songs of the Soul”. The soul being that character which makes us human, rather than any sacred connotation.

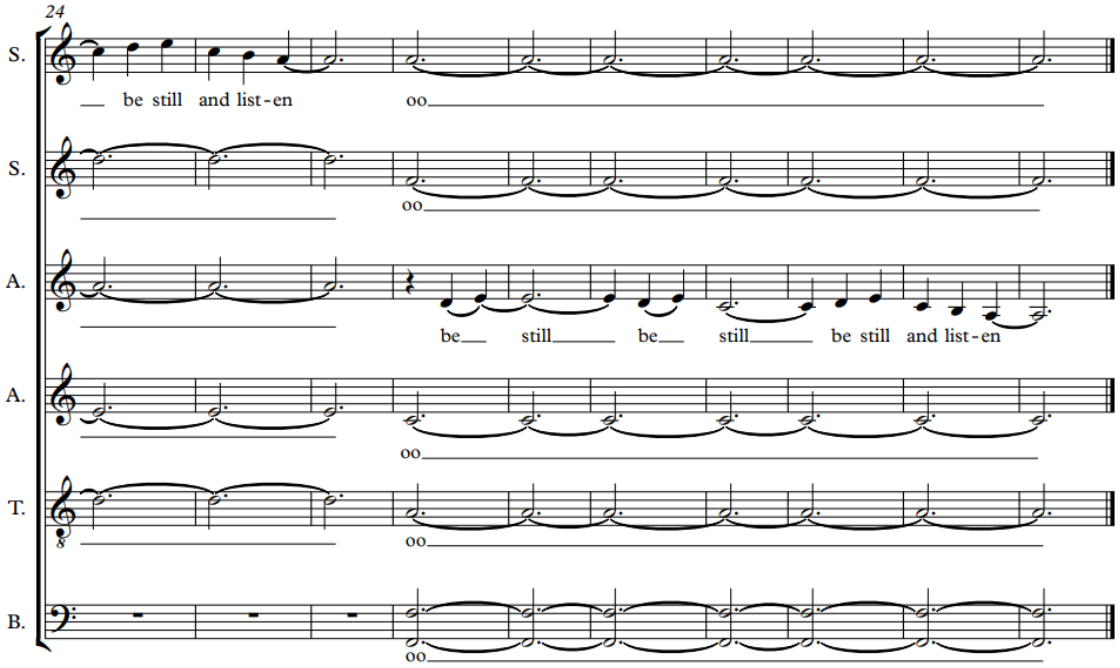
There is a fourth text, “Dreams”, by Langston Hughes (see below). This is a lovely poem, contains repetition and is short and concise which is perfect. I have most of the music for it but my only reservation is the negative nature of several lines. I do, however, like the refrain “Hold fast to Dreams”. Any thoughts on this welcome :-)

Chris

DREAMS
Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Appendix 5: Ex Urbe first rehearsal sketch material




24
S.
be still and list-en
oo
S.
oo
A.
be still be still be still and list-en
A.
oo
T.
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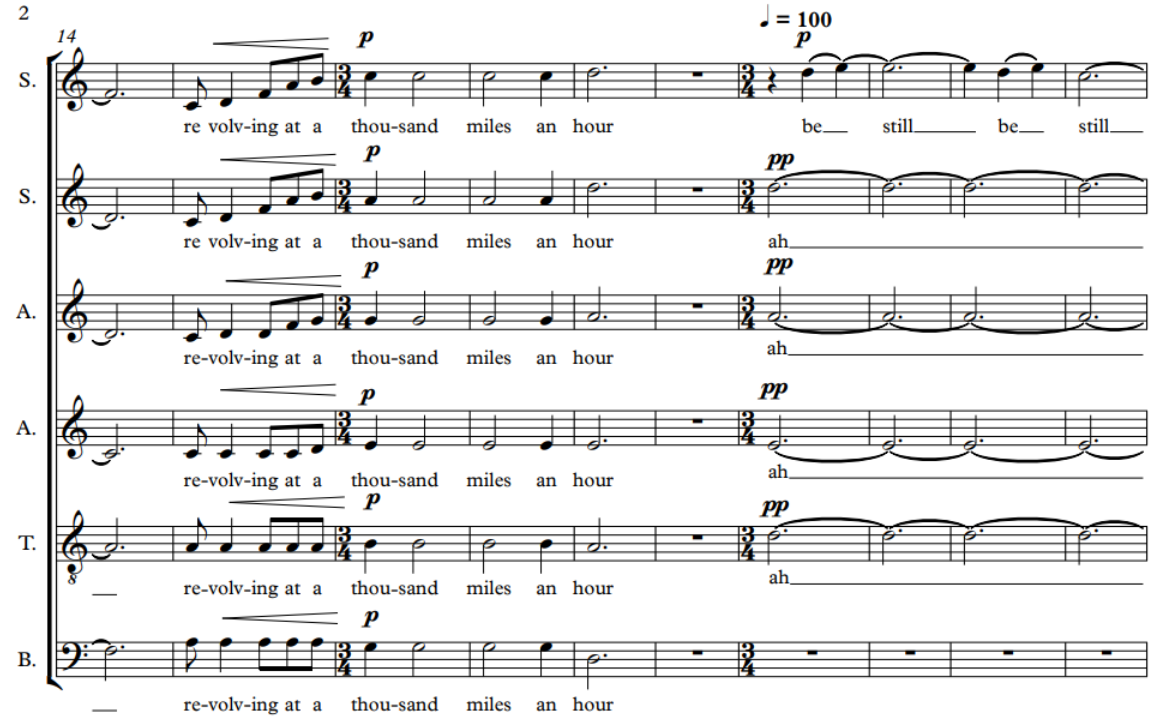
B.
oo


2
14
S.
p
re volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour
♩ = 100
p
be still be still
S.
p
re volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour
pp
ah
A.
p
re-volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour
pp
ah
A.
p
re-volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour
pp
ah
T.
p
re-volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour
pp
ah
B.
p
re-volv-ing at a thou-sand miles an hour

Appendix 6: KSO interactive online document inviting musicians to participate in the creative relationship.

ENSEMBLE

Kensington Symphony Orchestra

PROJECT CONTEXT

The role of the musicians within the compositional process will be explored. This will involve giving the musicians the opportunity to give creative suggestions and to offer feedback during the composition of the new piece. This may be quite involved, or relatively superficial, depending on the needs of the project and the ensemble, and the logistical constraints.

During the compositional process, preliminary draft ideas and sketches will be rehearsed. This gives the ensemble the opportunity to comment on the technical and/or aesthetic elements of the new piece and to be involved in a work in progress. It also gives a composer a rare opportunity to try ideas out before committing to a final version. Rehearsal schedule and the creative/logistical needs of both composer and ensemble are taken into account.

A brief will be agreed between the composer and the ensemble, meeting the needs of both.

The Interactive Creative Relationship

NOVEMBER 2018

- Composer attends a rehearsal to establish the performance characteristics of the group.
- Composer gives an introduction to the project, including research context.
- The ensemble is invited to make a creative contribution to the composition. There is a discussion of the requirements of the ensemble and composer, and a brief is agreed upon.

NOVEMBER 2018 - MAY 2019

- The composition process begins (a 20 minute piece)

- Play through of material at ‘sketch’ rehearsals.
- Opportunity for the ensemble to feedback, discuss and reflect on the work in progress.

MAY-JULY 2019

- Rehearsal of the new piece
- Performance
- Ensemble evaluation of the project

Thoughts and ideas can be emailed directly to Chris Long or filled out below…

I have put a few headings just to spark off a conversation. Many of the musical consideration in a new piece are usually left to the composer, each of whom has their own style and way of working. Having said this, it would be good to hear thoughts, ideas, preferences etc. These can be regarding technical issues, musical ideas/gestures/textures, or subject matter for the piece.

- Structure / Form
- Instrumentation
- Tonality / Compositional style or techniques
- Theme / subject matter
- Other comments

Composer thoughts

Hi,

Thanks for giving me the time to speak yesterday, lovely to meet the orchestra.

Just to summarise one of the extra musical ideas I mentioned. “The Pale Blue Dot” is the title given to a photograph taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft which left the solar system many years ago. Scientists fought to get the spacecraft to turn one more time and take a final photograph of the earth, from outside the orbit of Pluto. The photograph shows a grainy darkness, but in the darkness is a tiny blue speck, the Earth. Adding to the poetry of the image is what appears to be a shaft of sunlight. It is in fact an anomaly in the camera that has caused it, but makes the image even more powerful, highlighting how utterly small we are, but also highlighting how precious we are. The astronomer Carl Sagan wrote a passage summarising his thoughts on the image, entitled “A Pale Blue Dot”:

“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Carl Sagan, The Pale Blue Dot (extract)