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ETHNICITIES OF SOUND

ANALYTICAL NOTES

Stephen Lalor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Sydney Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
2013

Statement of originality

I declare that the research presented here is my own work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

Ethnicities of Sound is a commentary on a folio of four sets of musical works by Stephen Lalor which comprise the Doctoral submission in Composition.

The six movements of the *Suite for Solo Mandolin* embrace a cross-cultural and pan-historical approach to exploring the unique tonal features of the mandolin, presenting an alternative view on writing for the instrument.

The *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar* is a set of six movements specifically written for concert performance on unamplified plectrum guitar (as opposed to ‘classical’ or finger style guitar). It similarly embraces a cross-cultural and pan-historical approach exploiting the use of the plectrum.

Quincerto for Mandola and String Quartet is a contribution to the repertoire of the mandola (octave mandolin), which is a rarely heard instrument in a formal concert setting. *Quincerto* explores the mandola’s timbral qualities, which are deeper and richer (with more of a visceral essence) than those of the mandolin, often employing techniques and gestures drawn from Balkan and middle-Eastern plucked string instrument performance traditions.

Troika for Cymbalom, Cello and Plectrum Guitar, a set of three movements, is the first concert piece specifically composed for this combination of instruments, and explores the rich possibilities and challenges inherent in composing for an ensemble of hammered, plectrum and bowed string instruments.

The composition of these works has been concerned with creating an innovative body of work for plectrum-played stringed instruments, reviving ancient techniques and exploring new ones drawn from diverse traditions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank The Chanterelle String Quartet for their support for my work generally and in the recording of *Quincerto* for this portfolio; The Volatinsky Trio for the rehearsal and recording of *Troika*; Dr Christopher Sainsbury for layout, proof-reading and practical advice; Keith Harris for assistance with mandolin history research; and my supervisor Dr Damien Ricketson for his critical guidance.

FOLIO CONTENTS

Ethnicities of Sound is a presentation of four sets of compositions by Stephen Lalor.

The folio consists of the following items:

ANALYTICAL NOTES

- *Ethnicities of Sound*: written thesis (including two CDs)

PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS

- *Suite for Solo Mandolin*: musical score
- *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar*: musical score
- *Quincerto* for Mandola and String Quartet: musical score
- *Troika* for Cimbalom, Plectrum Guitar and Cello: musical score

RECORDINGS

CD 1

Suite for Solo Mandolin
Stephen Lalor – mandolin

- Track 1: I ‘Reverie’
Track 2: II ‘Spiral’
Track 3: III ‘Descending Mist’
Track 4: IV ‘Four-String Swing’
Track 5: V ‘Wake in Light’
Track 6: VI ‘Fantasia VI’

Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar:
Stephen Lalor – guitar

- Track 7: I ‘Ab Ovo’
Track 8: II ‘Manouche Waltz’
Track 9: III ‘Lament’
Track 10: IV ‘Bop Waltz’
Track 11: V ‘Kaleidoscope’
Track 12: VI ‘Kharkiv Café’

CD 2

Quincerto for Mandola and String Quartet
Stephen Lalor - mandola
Chanterelle String Quartet: Fiona Ziegler
- violin I; Léone Ziegler - violin II; Jane
Hazlewood - viola; Fenella Gill - cello

- Track 1: Movement I
Track 2: Movement II
Track 3: Movement III
Track 4: Movement IV

Troika for Cimbalom, Guitar and Cello
The Volatinsky Trio:
Lucy Voronov - cimbalom; Stephen
Lalor - guitar; Anatoli Torjinski - cello

- Track 5: I ‘Troika’
Track 6: II ‘Kavkaz’
Track 7: III ‘Flying’

Total Duration: 70 minutes

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Ethnicities of Sound

A presentation of four sets of pieces by Stephen Lalor

Preface

The pieces that comprise this folio have emerged from my background as a performer specialising in plectrum instruments; my training and professional engagement with musicians in many countries and from a wide range of musical traditions; my academic training in musicology and ethnomusicology; and, most importantly, from my increasing fascination as a composer with the creative possibilities offered by plectrum string instruments in a solo or small-ensemble setting.

Structurally and stylistically, I see the individual movements, and the pieces as a whole, as akin to musical poems. This is partly reflective of my creative journey as a composer. Having written for larger-scale forces in the past (opera, standard symphony orchestra and choral), I find that I am increasingly drawn to writing for more intimate instrumental combinations including non-standard western instruments, primarily exploring colour and articulation.

I would describe the aesthetic approach to the composition of the pieces in this folio as being a representation of my interest in the crystalline level of detail in acoustic, plectrum-generated sound, with a further dimension being an engagement with the vernacular. 'The vernacular' may have connotations of something less cultivated in a concert music sense. However, I use it in the sense of bringing a more elemental voice to the music, one which contains the traditions and character of the instrument(s), rather than suppressing or ignoring such qualities.

In practical compositional terms, I aim at economy: creating maximum expression from a minimum of core material. In terms of choice of musical forces I am drawn to writing for what I feel are the overlooked and under-appreciated

instruments found at the fringes of the European music tradition such as plectrum string instruments.

The mandolin is a case in point. While many composers have created viable and detailed concert works for this instrument over several centuries, I feel that many (arguably the majority) of these works ignored or failed to grasp the unique possibilities inherent in the instrument. Even in the works of several contemporary composers which imaginatively employ extended techniques on the mandolin, I often find a lack of engagement with an instrument which is, to me, very different from the instruments of the mainstream of Western classical music. My aim is thus to write for or rather *to* the instrument, drawing not only on my playing experience across the classical mandolin repertoire in solo, ensemble and orchestral settings but, just as importantly, on a range of traditions outside this musical world. My approach to composing for the instrument has been influenced by performing in, and interacting with players from, ensembles from Slavic eastern Europe in which ornamentation and improvisation on mandolin-like instruments play a major role, plus periods spent studying composition and plectrum instruments at the Tchaikovsky Conservatorium Kiev (Ukrainian *Kyiv*), a long-established centre for the study of such instruments. These elements in my creative and professional background also led me to create music in this folio for a combination of hammered, plucked and bowed-string instruments (cimbalom, plectrum guitar and cello).

One of the main motivations for writing for the mandola (octave mandolin) is that, despite its great compositional potential as a sound source combining timbral aspects of both mandolin and oud, it has very little solo concert repertoire.

Similarly, I have set myself the task of writing a set specifically for the plectrum-played, unamplified steel-string guitar not least because, despite the guitar

in its various forms being arguably the most widely-played instrument of the twentieth century, there is virtually no tradition of writing notated solo concert pieces for this version of the guitar. There have been several concerti composed for electric guitar and orchestra, and 'jazz' guitar has been used in a largely chordal, accompanying ensemble role in theatre and concert music since the 1920s, for example in the works of Kurt Weill (1900-1950) and B.A. Zimmermann (1918-1970). In solo concert/recital terms, it has been completely overshadowed by the nylon-string or Classical guitar.

The instruments and vernacular traditions from which I have drawn to create this portfolio of compositions have been with me since childhood. I happened to grow up in an area south of central Sydney with a large proportion of migrants from southern and eastern Europe, particularly the Balkans, and from an early age I was drafted into playing a variety of plectrum instruments in groups from these regions. This music of my neighbours and various ethnic community music groups made a great impression on me, through playing music with them and their children and listening to their recordings of artists little known in the West. I now consider some of these, such as Esmā Redžepova (born 1943), Šaban Bajramović (1936-2008) and Petro Ivanović (born c. 1950), to be important figures in twentieth century popular music. From my frequent exposure to music from a variety of community settings, I have always considered plectrum stringed instruments and the way they are played as inseparable from the cultural traditions and events in which they are a central musical feature. Through my later, formal musical training, I came upon a substantial Classical mandolin repertoire which seemed curiously devoid in the main of any sense of the instrument and how to write for it. It stood in stark contrast to what I had heard, seen and played in the non-Classical environment.

As such, the music of this folio does not comprise sets of pieces created in an abstract setting or from a contrived starting-point, or derived from a particular compositional school, trend or regional movement. It is the visceral, character-filled nature of musical invention based on inherent physical instrumental features and cultural traditions which drives my creative approach, which I have called *Ethnicities of Sound*.

Introduction

Ethnicities of Sound consists of a folio of four compositions:

- *Suite for Solo Mandolin* (six movements)
- *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar* (six movements)
- *Quincerto* for Mandola and String Quartet (four movements)
- *Troika* for Cimbalom, Plectrum Guitar and Cello (three movements)

It is the central, underlying aim of this folio to create a particularly idiomatic contribution to the concert repertoire of plectrum-played string instruments (particularly the mandolin and mandola), conscious of their physical, cultural and historical antecedents and contemporary links with similar instruments. There are techniques outlined in eighteenth century mandolin treatises that I have revived in my writing, as well as the introduction of new approaches to plectrum use. Primarily I have sought to create an alternative way of approaching mandolin writing to the ‘plucked violin’¹ approach, which has dominated mandolin writing since the eighteenth century, often driven by the fact that many players and teachers were violinists first (due to the shared tuning system), and therefore many mandolin instruction manuals were written with a violinist’s mindset. This, I believe, resulted in the inherent timbral character and sound-production possibilities of the mandolin (and its tenor variant, the octave-lower mandola) being largely overlooked by many composers through much of the instrument’s history. While composers of more recent times have explored a greater range of sound production techniques, my approach takes into account the origins and character of the instrument when writing for it. By re-considering the Classical or Neapolitan mandolin’s pre-Classical origins and associations with Arab, Balkan and Mediterranean instruments, plus adopting

¹ Stephen Lalor, *The Mandolin Is Not A Plucked Violin* Lecture Demonstration for Classical Mandolin Society of America, Minneapolis, MN, July 3 2012.

techniques and approaches used to play its various offspring and related instruments from the USA to Russia, I have produced a suite of pieces for mandolin, and a set for mandola with string quartet, which re-define the nature of writing for these instruments.

In the case of the solo guitar pieces, I have composed specifically for the steel-strung *plectrum* guitar. I have chosen to write for the plectrum guitar (for want of a better term) for several reasons, not least among them being that there is little, if any, music written for it with solo concert/recital intent.² While the classical guitar's finger-style of playing on nylon (formerly gut) strings has obvious antecedents in the lute, the lute itself is derived from the Arabic oud (or 'Ūd), physically and etymologically.³ The oud was and still is a plectrum-instrument; its tonal character is derived largely from the variety of attack and expression that the plectrum and the player's right-hand technique affords. I am restoring this specific expressive option to the guitar music I have composed by writing music to be played with a plectrum. This not only provides a link to the cultural origins of the guitar as a plectrum instrument, but by writing for a steel-strung instrument it also acknowledges the plectrum-guitar as a major, often central, force behind rock music and jazz, the great popular-music movements of recent history. This connection has also led me to introduce elements of improvisationally-inspired and derived writing to the works produced.

² Despite extensive research, I have not been able to find any solo concert music for plectrum guitar.

³ Klaus Wachsmann, "Lute" *Grove Music Online* in *Oxford Music Online*, Ed. Deane Root, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40074pg4> (accessed 7 March 2012)

The composition and recording of the set titled *Troika* for cimbalom (in this case the Belarus variant of the *tsimbali* or hammer dulcimer of eastern Europe), plectrum guitar (steel-string) and cello, explores new musical territory, as it is the creation of concert music for the novel combination of hammered, plectrum and bowed string instruments.

My writing for these instruments is not based around a compositional trend or era or school, but is informed by my musicological training (Masters degree) plus many years of plectrum instrument performance in a wide range of professional contexts. These range from orchestral to chamber, world music and improvisation-based music from different cultural traditions, played or experienced in different parts of the world. Although not always overtly apparent, all of the compositions are underpinned by this musicological background, based on direct performance experiences and academic research.

With the four sets of pieces that comprise this folio I have composed music that is the sum of my background and musical philosophy/outlook in all senses. I am also producing music on instruments that have much meaning for me both as cultural artefacts and sources of sound.

CHAPTER ONE

Overview and Rationale

This portfolio of works is primarily concerned with the desire to provide an alternative way of writing concert music⁴ for instruments such as mandolin, mandola and plectrum-guitar, an approach which is essentially idiomatic and mindful of these instruments' origins. It is my contention that, historically, this has not generally been the case. My intention also encapsulates the creation of new approaches to writing for chamber ensembles including plectrum instruments, in the process integrating improvisational and cross-cultural influences into contemporary concert pieces for such instruments. In searching for ways forward for the plectrum string repertoire I am looking back past the bulk of the repertoire to the pre-modern techniques, timbral origins and cultural associations of the instruments. In this opening chapter, I will address the reasons behind my writing the pieces in the portfolio, before undertaking a more detailed commentary on each piece in the succeeding chapters.

1.1 Sound Universe

I have approached the mandolin, mandola and plectrum guitar (as opposed to finger-style or Classical guitar) as instruments which each have a unique but related 'sound universe', with close links to the styles, traditions and music of plectrum-string instruments of other cultures.

In the case of the works for mandolin and mandola, I have not viewed these instruments through the lens of Classical bowed strings or chamber writing, as these are approaches which I think have historically tended to dominate composition for the

⁴ I define 'concert music' as original notated music intended for recital and concert presentation

mandolin in particular. Instead I have considered the musical world from which these instruments developed, and written for the instrument using the techniques and timbral possibilities of related plectrum instruments, both past and present.

A different situation exists in the case of composing for the plectrum-played, steel-stringed guitar (commonly known as ‘plectrum guitar’) with regard to previous writing: there is little if any concert or ‘art’ music composed for the instrument, as described in the Introduction. The repertoire published or offered for examination on plectrum guitar by institutions in the very few places around the world where it is available (such as the Trinity Guildhall examination board) consists primarily of adapted Classical (finger-style) guitar music or arrangements of jazz or popular standards.⁵ Again, I have approached writing for this instrument by treating it as an instrument belonging to traditions outside the classical mainstream, rather than as an adaptation of finger-style, classical writing.

1.2 Historical Basis – mandolin and mandola writing

Like the guitar (via the lute), the mandolin’s origins are with the oud and other instruments of the Mediterranean, as noted by Tyler and Sparks when writing of the ancestors of the mandolin:

Together with the ‘ud’ (developed later in Europe as the lute), the smaller instrument was one of the many introduced to Europe through western Islamic culture in Spain and southern Italy, legacies of the Arab world ...⁶

It is significant that it is the southern Neapolitan (as opposed to the north Italian Cremonese or Roman types) which later became the standard ‘Classical’ mandolin.⁷ The instrument emerged in the mid-eighteenth century not from northern Italian

⁵ See www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1057

⁶ James Tyler and Paul Sparks, *The Early Mandolin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), v

⁷ Konrad Wölki (transl. K Harris) *History of the Mandolin* (Arlington VA: Plucked String, 1984), 5

culture but from a region which was part of a pan-Mediterranean culture, around the time the Spanish Bourbon army succeeded in uniting the southern part of the Italian mainland with Sicily itself in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the early eighteenth century. Thus Naples was the centre of a region with closer geographic, political and mercantile ties to Spain, Sicily, Greece and north Africa than to the rest of Italy, let alone northern Europe. To reinforce this separateness from the violin family's origins, it is worth noting that:

*Naples has had a long association with a variety of popular plectrum instruments, dating back to at least the fifteenth century, when Arabian wire-strung long lutes of the bouzouki type were introduced there, (and) were modified with characteristics of Italian lute construction ...*⁸

This physical, cultural and organological inheritance informs my writing for the instrument. Historically speaking, the Neapolitan/Classical mandolin has more in common with the oud, bouzouki, baglama et al. Nothing at all in its 'instrumental DNA' (apart from the adoption of the system of tuning in 5ths) is connected with the violin family.

The techniques central to the creation of the music I have written for this folio have in most instances always been part of the instrument's make-up, but for the various reasons discussed below, have been ignored or overlooked. My research into the extensive mandolin repertoire and historical mandolin methods made me realise that music for the mandolin falls broadly into three categories:

- i. Music written within stylistic and technical parameters governed by non-plucked string compositional thinking, examples being the four pieces for mandolin and keyboard by Beethoven (1770-1827) and the Sonata and

⁸ Tyler and Sparks, *The Early Mandolin*, 81

Concerto for mandolin by Hummel (1778-1837)

- ii. Music which reflected the desire of player-composers for acceptance of the mandolin into the classical mainstream, for example the *18 Preludes for Solo Mandolin* by Raffaele Calace (1863-1934)
- iii. Post-War composition approaches not particularly sympathetic to the instrument, an example being the *Suite for Mandolin and Guitar, Op. 242* (1989) by Ernst Krenek (1900-1991)

Over several decades as a practising concert mandolinist I have felt a general dissatisfaction with the mandolin's concert repertoire, and I am not alone in this impression: 'most of the classical pieces written for the mandolin are better suited for the violin ...'¹⁰

Without going into a detailed musicological analysis of each piece discussed, the following is my overview of historical currents in mandolin composition, which will provide context for my approach to writing for plectrum string instruments in this folio.

1.3 Historical Precedents (i): commissioned works

The vast majority of composers of concert or art music for the Classical mandolin have written (understandably, given the times in which they lived) using standard models from the mainstream of period compositional styles, but without much consideration for the instrument itself. I would suggest that this was due to a number of factors: the composers' training, the shared tuning system of mandolin and violin and because the mandolin was mainly the provenance of amateur musicians or

¹⁰ Chad Kimbler, "Concerto for Amplified Mandolin, String Orchestra and Percussion" (Master of Music Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2006), ii

‘moonlighting’ violinists. Significantly, it was also because mandolinists themselves, in commissioning pieces, wanted pieces that would (in their view) help the instrument to gain acceptance in the concert hall, as indicated by a number of references such as the following contemporary observation about the mandolinist Silvio Ranieri (1882-1956):

Why had he selected the mandolin? A secret and patriotic sentiment told him that he could ennoble it by turning it into a concert instrument.¹¹

One of the chief ways this view manifested itself was through the commissioning of, or request for, mandolin works from major composers of the day by prominent mandolinists, amateur and professional (including Beethoven’s mandolin-playing physician Signor Fr. Mora de Malfatti, the recipient of Hummel’s sonata).¹² Unfortunately, such an approach was not of benefit to the instrument, as the mandolin’s strengths and unique qualities were largely overlooked. Instead, this approach produced a repertoire mainly based on practical techniques and assumptions regarding sound production developed for the composition of music on other instruments, such as the violin. These were techniques to which the mandolin was largely unsuited. In short, it was a case of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, compositionally speaking.

As examples of this I would cite the four pieces composed by Beethoven for mandolin and keyboard c. 1796: *Sonatine C Moll (C Minor)* (WoO43a), *Adagio ma non troppo Es Dur (Eb Major)* (WoO43b), *Sonatine C Dur (C Major)* (WoO44a) and *Andante con Variazioni* (WoO44b). The *Sonatine in C Minor* (an Adagio of modest achievement) would clearly be better suited to the sonority-sustaining capability of a bowed-string or woodwind instrument, as tremolo is both unsuited to

¹¹ Paul Sparks, *The Classical Mandolin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 67

¹² Tyler and Sparks, *The Early Mandolin*, 1

the writing and, as the playing method-manuals of the day tell us, ‘Classical players in the salons of Europe used the technique sparingly’.¹³

Example 1.1: Beethoven *Sonatine C-moll* bars 1-4

Adagio

As mandolin historian Konrad Wölki delicately observed:

*The C Major sonatina and the variations do justice to the character of a plucked instrument, a claim which has to be qualified in regard to the C minor sonatina and the Adagio.*¹⁴

The fact that the *Sonatine in C Minor* is often found on the concert programs and recordings of cellists (such as the 2011 Berger and Galliardo CD *The Unknown Beethoven*, Challenge Classics, CC72504) is also significant. Both this piece and the *Adagio ma non troppo in Eb* (the two noted above by Wölki as unsuited to the mandolin) are particularly suited to bowed string instruments. Further, not only the writing, but the very keys of the pieces also arguably suggest clarinet, particularly taking into account the slow, soaring Eb arpeggiated phrase which opens the Adagio:

¹³ Tyler and Sparks, *The Early Mandolin*, 121

¹⁴ Wölki, *History of the Mandolin*, 14

Example 1.2: Beethoven *Adagio ma non troppo Es-dur* bars 6-9

The image shows a musical score for four staves. The top staff is labeled 'Mdlm' and contains a melodic line for the mandolin. The bottom three staves (treble and bass clefs) contain the keyboard accompaniment. The music is in E-flat major and 6/8 time. The mandolin part consists of four bars of music, primarily using eighth and sixteenth notes. The keyboard part features a dense, arpeggiated texture in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

I would suggest that the mandolin part in this excerpt is very suitable for a number of instruments, least among them being the mandolin. Seven bars of the mandolin's arpeggiated figures drawn from the keyboard part later in the piece could arguably be regarded as more mandolin-like, but this is a very short passage in terms of the whole piece, and one which is similarly also very suited to the clarinet. Example 1.2 would work well on bowed string instruments, which enable the performer to sustain sonorities on fingered notes in such passages. Given the above, I think it unlikely that piece was originally conceived for the instrument it was purportedly written for: the Cremonese or Brescian instrument of Beethoven's time with four single gut strings (tuned the same as the violin and the double-coursed metal-strung Neapolitan mandolin which shortly thereafter largely superseded it).

These pieces are certainly playable on the mandolin (and several other instruments for that matter), but not at all idiomatic for the instrument, apart from the rather superficial insertion of a 2-note chord on the penultimate note of the *Sonatine in C Minor*, and similarly in one bar in the middle of the *Sonatine in C Major* and the final chord of the piece. To reiterate: in my opinion these are pieces that were almost certainly not conceived with the mandolin in mind, and definitely without much (if any) knowledge of or consideration for the instrument's inherent qualities. Instead,

they are professionally produced, generic works a for solo instrument and keyboard in the prevailing style of the period, paying little or no heed to the nature of the solo instrument in any but a cursory way.

Similarly, the pieces by Hummel (a sonata and a concerto) from the same era, while quite playable, are simply not particularly suited to the mandolin, as noted in the following observation about the *Grand Sonata in C (Op.37a)* of 1810:

*As with the concerto, the writing is not particularly idiomatic to the mandolin and could have easily been adopted by a second keyboard or other instrument.*¹⁵

The following remark about the manuscript parts of Hummel's *Concerto for Mandolin*, composed for the same virtuoso Bortolazzi, is illuminating:

*An interesting aspect of the mandolin part is the many markings, elaborations and alterations, which are apparently Bortolazzi's own, and by means of which he sought to make his solo part more virtuosic and idiomatic to the instrument.*¹⁶

Considered as a whole, the large mandolin repertoire (particularly that commissioned from established composers) is dominated by works that are not essentially considerate of the instrument's nature. Notably absent is exploitation of the ringing possibilities of open strings in sustained two, three or four-note chord voicings; harmonics (seldom if ever encountered); any indication for or suggestion of employing vibrato; or the use of the plectrum in any way save for the most straightforward playing of single note lines or tremolo employed for extended melodies.

Further examples of the tendency of composers to write music of a non-idiomatic nature is found in the multitude of pieces written in Germany and Austria in

¹⁵ Richard Walz, program note for *A Recital For Mandolin and Fortepiano*, Boston Early Music Festival June 16 2007 gamutmusic.squarespace.com/concert (accessed 12 August 2012)

¹⁶ Wölki, *History of the Mandolin*, 13

the early twentieth century for predominantly community-level performers drawn from the very large *Jugendbewegung* (‘Youth Movement’) of the time which produced a sprouting of mandolin orchestras run along social-club lines.¹⁷ Even the more imaginative and technically challenging pieces for mandolin of this era, composed by figures such as Alfred Uhl (1909-92), Norbert Sprongl (1892-1983) and Ernst Guido Naumann (1890-1956), could for the most part be mistaken for engaging student-level pieces for violin. Clearly the composers were writing for their communities’ needs, and for the level and style of playing of soloists they heard around them. This was particularly so in the case of Uhl, who held positions in the folk music department of the Reichsmusikkammer during the period of National Socialism in Austria.¹⁸

1.4 Historical Precedents (ii): mandolinists’ compositions

A second body of work produced a similar result. These are not pieces by major composers from outside mandolin-playing circles, but written by professional mandolinists (particularly from the steel-string period c.1850-on) composing in the bravura style of the Romantic era instrumental showpiece. Having studied and performed this repertoire it is my observation that they were, quite deliberately, attempting to raise the standing of their instrument by demonstrating that the mandolin could do anything the violin (or flute et al) could do.

In this category I include works such as the *Eighteen Preludes for Solo Mandolin* by Raffaele Calace, which are mainstays of the Classical mandolin repertoire. Pieces by Calace (a publisher as well as performer, composer and scion of one of the famed mandolin-making families of Naples) have stood the test of time and

¹⁷ Wölki, *History of the Mandolin*, 18

¹⁸ Alexander Witeschnik, “Alfred Uhl”, *Komponisten unserer Zeit* 8 (Vienna: Lafite, 1966), 72

are still more often than not required works in mandolin competitions. In my opinion, this is mainly because Calace clearly gave thought to the compositional options offered by the instrument, reflected in several passages throughout these works. They are generally acclaimed as the high-point of mandolin writing by mandolinists, as they ‘demonstrated a sophistication of compositional skill and instrumental technique through these eighteen preludes that has seldom been equalled in the unaccompanied mandolin repertoire’.¹⁹

Calace’s works demonstrate evident compositional skills and certainly take the mandolin repertoire in a more idiomatic direction. They feature passages of chord changes underneath a sustained tremolo upper note melody (often referred to by American players as ‘duo style’), many passages of chordal writing, Neapolitan folk-like tremolo passages and exploration of harmonics in some of the Preludes. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, they reinforce the general perception of the mandolin’s standing by being for the most part stylistically very similar to violin showpieces of the nineteenth century, with definite echoes of the Paganini Caprices through a great deal of writing clearly derived from bowed-instrument thinking. In my opinion, the ‘Grand Prelude’ (Op. 175) stands out as the most idiomatically-considered work by Calace. Several passages actually recall balalaika writing to the extent that I would speculate that Calace was influenced in this work by the Russian folk instrument orchestras which were very popular in western Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, part of an interest in all things Russian sparked by the Ballets Russes. Ironically, the clear imitation of balalaika writing is arguably the reason this piece, of all the Preludes, sounds most like a plucked-string work in essence, or rather it sounds most unlike the violin-style writing which pervades the

¹⁹ Sparks, *The Classical Mandolin*, 74

other works. However, viewed as a group, the Calace Preludes always veer back at some point to clear emulation of violin flourishes. Even in this otherwise most idiomatic of the Preludes, the Grand Prelude finishes with a final gesture which is almost parodic in its very violin-like idiomatic unsuitability for the mandolin.

In an attempt to create a serious concert repertoire for the instrument which would stand comparison with that of the late Romantic violin or flute concert repertoire, ultimately Calace and other such composers ended up merely confirming the view that the mandolin is a poor cousin of the violin. Of course, Calace's pieces are creatures of their time, and certainly of a far higher standard than almost all other contemporary writing for the instrument, but while extending the horizons of the mandolin it is still somehow done self-consciously and in the shadow of the violin. Other mandolinists from the Calace era, such as the Italian Ernesto Rocco (died after 1950) and the American Valentin Abt (1873 - after 1940) composed pieces employing techniques such as left-hand pizzicato, duo style and arpeggiated chord passages which certainly extended the vocabulary of mandolin composition. However, as with Calace, these techniques were largely borrowed from violin writing.

A clear idea of Calace's own view of the mandolin is found in an article he wrote in his journal *Musica Moderna* (1908), hailing Mahler's recent employment of the mandolin in his Seventh Symphony:

*Mahler however gives it [the mandolin] a post in the orchestra; he declares it in short necessary on a level with the brass, the woodwind etc. a part of the full instrumentation of the orchestra ...*²⁰

This is a very debatable statement. While Mahler's writing for mandolin (typically in the *Nachtmusik* movements of the Symphonies nos. 7 and 8 as well as *Das Lied von der Erde*) adds a beautiful and almost other-worldly aspect to these gargantuan works,

²⁰ Sparks, *The Classical Mandolin*, 76

to declare the mandolin's role in a Mahler symphony to be 'on a level with the brass, the woodwind etc.' is, to be charitable, an instance of a zealot overstating his case. It illustrates perfectly the overwhelming desire common among mandolin players and composers to see their instrument validated as a 'legitimate' instrument in classical concert circles. I think this is reflected in his mandolin writing.

Of works in more recent times, I would nominate the *Estampes* for Solo Mandolin (1997) by the mandolinist Juan Carlos Muñoz (born 1965) as an example of a composer striving to write with some sense of the mandolin's further possibilities. In this set, Muñoz makes use of harmonics, some varied placement of plectrum contact and multiple hammer-ons. Similarly, *Preludio e Danza* (1989) by Oliver Kälberer (born 1964), a non-mandolinist but a composer and conductor involved with mandolin orchestras over a long period, uses a range of mandolin techniques not often found in earlier repertoire, and explores the ringing qualities of sustained notes and variations of tone colour. Interestingly, this relatively recent work was proclaimed in the foreword to the publication of the piece (by German mandolin authority Professor Marga Wilden-Hüsgen) as:

..... *das mit Klangsinn und bewegter Rhythmik alle Möglichkeiten der Mandoline und ihrer Technik ausschöpft.*²¹

While the absoluteness of this statement is questionable, the Kälberer work is nevertheless clearly like many of recent times which seek to extract more from the instrument than comparable works of previous eras. Whether such works produce an idiomatically substantial piece is debatable, as such an achievement is not based solely on employing certain techniques, but also in the underlying approach behind

²¹ "a piece which exhausts all the sonic and moving rhythmical possibilities of the mandolin and its technical make-up" (transl. Stephen Lalor). Marga Wilden-Hüsgen "zur Komposition", introductory notes to *Preludio e Danza* (Schweinfurt: Vögt und Fritz, 1995), 1

their application. *Preludio e Danza* heads somewhat in the direction of my writing for solo mandolin in this folio, but explores various technical features quite briefly and in a cursory way, such as brief passages of simple natural harmonics, but with (for instance) no use of artificial harmonics to develop the use of this technique further. As observed with works discussed above, a great deal of the work is indistinguishable from a violin piece.

A large number of works for mandolin, both solo and in various combinations, have been produced by Japanese composers since the instrument was introduced to Japan in that country's embrace of all things Western in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these pieces emulate Calace's writing, while others opt for a neo-Classical/Romantic approach often mixed with references to Japanese folk melodies. *Harugakita con Variazioni* ('Spring' variations for solo mandolin on a Japanese folk melody) by Jiro Nakano (1902-2000) deliberately treads the Romantic path, to the point of the composer making *'his request that this is interpreted in the High Romantic Tradition'*²² in the introductory notes for the piece. It was published in 1998, shortly before the composer's death in 2000. I think this example is representative of how Japanese mandolinists and composers have absorbed and continue to emulate the Calace tradition.

Another piece of Japanese writing for solo mandolin is *Improvised Poem* (2001) by Yasuo Kuwahara (1946-2003), an energetic, often frantic piece characterised by its use of loosely tonal European composition techniques of the early twentieth century. Its episodic nature (as the title suggests) makes it a series of fragments held together by a motif strongly recalling Stravinsky's *The Augurs of Spring*. This is an example of a composer absorbing European compositional currents

²² Jiro Nakano, *Haruhakita*, Op. 36 (Schweinfurt: Vogt und Fritz, 1998), 1

of his time and trying to re-work these ideas by getting the mandolin to do a lot more than most earlier composers asked of it. Like the Kälberer *Preludio e Danza* it is, in a limited sense, a work which projects in the direction I am taking, in that the composer has set about exploiting different aspects of mandolin sound production and possibilities. However, it is the fundamental approach, philosophy and framework that is different from mine.

1.5 Historical Precedents (iii): non-mandolinists' works of recent times

The third dominant strand in mandolin writing, particularly from the mid-twentieth century, is similar to the first category. As the growth in state or institutional funding for the arts led to commissions for predominantly academic composers, this has produced pieces which are informed primarily by a professional composer's career-defining style or school of writing, such as serialism, modernism, minimalism or complexity. This is not to say that such pieces are unsuccessful or unimaginative musically (often quite the contrary). At the same time, it has become increasingly the case across much contemporary writing that composition has shifted from being the domain of highly trained musicians with a particular gift for composition (the case for most of Western musical history) to increasingly being a field dominated by composers who have taken this path from early in their careers, operating primarily from academia and teaching. This twentieth century composer/performer divide has been described colourfully by Lukas Foss:

*..... composer and performer became like two halves of a worm
separated by a knife, each proceeding obliviously on its own course*²³

²³ Lukas Foss, "The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship: A Monologue and a Dialogue", *Perspectives of New Music* Vol.1 No.2 (1963), 45

As a result, there has arisen an approach to composition which, one could argue, has not been beneficial to the mandolin, particularly through a prevalence in the use of extended techniques as the primary feature of a piece. Composers have often used the mandolin imaginatively and effectively in textural writing in ensemble settings, such as *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970) by George Crumb (born 1929). But in compositions across the spectrum from the mid-late twentieth century, including pieces for solo mandolin, the writing of academically-based composers has often emanated from a particular stream of composition, be it derived from an atonal, aleatoric, serial, electro-acoustic platform²⁴ or other schools. *Suite for Mandolin and Guitar* Op. 242 (1989) by Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) is a good example of almost ‘anonymous’ writing for the instrument, as is the *Partita for Mandolin and Piano* (op. 56a) by Hans Gal (1890-1987), one of several works this composer wrote for mandolin in various combinations. They are well-written pieces but the mandolin parts could have been composed for just about any treble instrument, while the *Trio* for mandolin, guitar and harp (1974) by Hans Werner Henze (1926-2012) contains an unplayable five-note chord for the mandolin in standard tuning. I find Hedwig Roediger’s reflection on Gal’s writing for the mandolin in general as expressed in the notes to the 1966 Hladky edition of the *Partita* slightly puzzling:

*The composer’s chief tendency, to use the mandolin as a fully developed instrument of a peculiar colour in a highly organized texture of genuine chamber music, seems to have been realized in the works.*²⁵

This statement aligns closely to my way of thinking, but in practice, Gal’s mandolin writing doesn’t seek to explore the ‘peculiar colour’ of the instrument. Instead it is

²⁴ Don Michael Randal, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 183

²⁵ Hedwig Roediger, Notes accompanying Hans Gal, “*Partita für Mandoline und Klavier*” (Vienna: Hladky 1966), 3

writing that is virtually interchangeable with that of the other instruments. Presumably Roediger means that Gal writes for mandolin as for any other instrument, relying on the basic instrumental colour as the point of difference, rather than writing idiomatically. It is essentially the same as the approach of Beethoven and Hummel discussed above, but with the added use of tremolo, as in the Gal *Partita*. Such an approach has produced quite a quantity of works which are interesting in their own way, but not conceived with the thinking behind the direction I am taking.

1.6 Approach

When composing the *Suite for Solo Mandolin* in particular, and the pieces for other plectrum instruments in this folio, I have sought to exploit techniques rarely, if ever, found in the published solo mandolin repertoire. These are not ‘extended techniques’ in the way generally understood by twentieth and twenty-first century composers and performers. Rather, my aim is embrace the instrument as a multi-faceted source of rich timbral and compositional options; an instrument which emerged from a range of primarily pan-Mediterranean traditions, not as a side-show to the Classical mainstream. Although not setting out to do so overtly, I nevertheless hope to avoid the rather one-dimensional writing styles historically dominant in the mandolin repertoire, the result of composers misunderstanding or misconstruing the nature of the instrument for which they were composing. In taking this approach, I also hope to make an innovative contribution to the very small existing mandola (octave mandolin) concert repertoire, and to that of the virtually non-existent plectrum guitar solo concert repertoire.

Many of these techniques have occurred to me through my professional

performing life. These include Russian domra and balalaika techniques acquired as a student in Kiev where such instruments were taught at the Tchaikovsky Conservatorium (and elsewhere in the then USSR) to a technical level unmatched in the West²⁶; Balkan decoration and improvisational techniques with links to the tambura, acquired through lifetime exposure to such music as well as performing professionally with Bosnian, Macedonian and Rumanian musicians including Rom (gypsy) musicians²⁷; observation of and professional performance with oud players; and performances and discussions with Celtic-tradition players and American players of mandolin from bluegrass and jazz backgrounds.

A further spur to my interest in exploring sound production on the mandolin has derived from having to make the mandolin project musically (that is, without forcing the sound and ruining the timbre) through a symphony or pit orchestra when playing works by Mahler, Prokofiev, Respighi, Mozart and a host of other composers who have employed the mandolin.

Thus my experimentation with sound production on the mandolin (often adjustments and simple re-thinking of accepted methods regarding left-hand technique and plectrum use), combined with inspiration from different cultures in which mandolin-like instruments are central to the repertoire, has led me to create this music from a particular and individual starting point. Essentially I intend to explore dimensions of the instrument(s) which have always been there, but of which composers perhaps have not been aware (or interested in). In a way, I am moving the repertoire forward, and at the same time looking back to the roots of the instrument for inspiration.

²⁶ As evidenced by the disproportionate dominance of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians in mandolin performance competitions since the fall of the USSR and subsequent elimination of travel restrictions

²⁷ *Rom* (pl. *Roma*) is used by European gypsies as the preferred term for describing themselves. See Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York: Vintage, 2010), 100

Another contributing factor to my approach in writing for mandolin in particular is the almost complete absence of any academic or pedagogical writing about the mechanics of sound production on the mandolin, despite the publication of many (almost countless) ‘Mandolin Methods’ in the past 250 years. Examples such as the 1768 ‘Methode’ of Pietro Denis²⁸ touched little on plectrum or right-hand technique, despite paying a great deal of attention to picking patterns (the use of down and up strokes). As for left-hand (fingering) technique, the published methods essentially assumed the application of violin technique, due to the shared tuning system (G₃ D₄ A₄ E₅, in paired metal strings).

The mandolin has historically been taught mainly by semi-professionals or violinists/guitarists who played mandolin as a second or third instrument. A typical example is Giuseppe Branzoli (1835-1909), a Roman violist who produced a two-volume mandolin method and a number of mandolin pieces in 1875.²⁹ As a result, the consideration of technical sound production issues has usually been minimal at best (as in Gautiero’s ‘Metodo’, which allots just 6 lines of generalities to the vital topic of ‘Posizione Delle Mani’).³⁰ It follows that this must have had a negative impact on composition for the instrument, as composers could only assume that the sound they heard from players raised on such instruction was all that the instrument was capable of producing. While there is almost constant informal discussion today about technique and other matters on mandolin forum internet sites (such as www.mandolincafe.com), there is little informed writing. It is only comparatively recently that any serious thought seems to have been given to left-hand (ie fingering)

²⁸ Pietro Denis, *Methode Pour apprendre a Jouer de la Mandoline sans Maitre* Band I, Paris (1768)

²⁹ Phillip J Bone, *The Guitar And Mandolin* (London: Schott, 1914 reprinted 1972), 58-9

³⁰ Raffaele Gautiero, *Metodo per Mandolino Napoletano* (Milan: Ricordi, 1957), 3

issues by credible writers such as the German-based Australian Keith Harris (born 1949).³¹

In what might be described as a ‘parallel universe’ (due to the almost complete lack of contact or interaction between the two musical worlds) throughout the time of the ‘Classical’ history of the mandolin and mandola, a range of non-Classical performers in different countries and regions continued to create tradition-based regional music that spoke of the mandolin’s (and related instruments’) origins and utilised a range of techniques, ornaments and methods of sound production which were idiomatic to the instrument. This has been primarily an oral tradition, but can be heard in the recordings of more recent players such as Petro Ivanovič (playing a balalaika in very mandolin-like manner with a plectrum), ethnographic recordings of often state-supported eastern-European ensembles in the post-World War II era, plus recordings of oud music from a number of regions and countries. These techniques remain almost entirely absent in published music, but are known among performers. Added to this are the ways performers such as Wes Montgomery (1923-1968) and Django Reinhardt (1910-1953) turned the plectrum-guitar from a purely accompanying instrument to a solo one in a jazz setting through exploring timbral and technical features of the instrument quite different to those of the classical guitar. Further, it must be remembered that, unlike in the Western world, ‘the distance between folk and art music is not great in the ... nations of the Middle East’.³² This has many implications, not least of which is the high level of sophistication brought to ornamentation and articulation detail among players of oud, tanbur and similar fretted instruments. Among these techniques are several that I have employed in this folio.

³¹ see Keith David Harris, “Die Mandoline und die Violine – Apfel und Birnen?” *Phoibos Zeitschrift für Zupfmusik* 1 (2010), 149-168

³² Randal, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 529

1.7 Technical Basis

The Suite for Solo Mandolin, while not programmatic, reflects the very essence of the instrument, featuring techniques not normally associated with the mandolin, such as:

- Techniques from eighteenth century French mandolin manuals, forgotten or out of favour for centuries, such as playing two notes per pair of strings.
- Balkan (primarily tambura) decorative gestures.
- Making more use of ringing open strings. The double-course, steel stringing of the mandolin can create swirls of bright, relatively slowly-decaying sound. Curiously, many schools of mandolin playing sought to avoid the use of open strings, believing them to make too harsh/jangly a sound (perhaps because many of the writers were violinists first and mandolinists second, with not the best of plectrum techniques). But with the right strings, plectrum technique and instrument, the open-string facility of the mandolin is a rich sound source.
- Varying the point of application of the plectrum during passages of repeated notes, which is a common oud technique, but rarely if ever found in published mandolin music (apart from *sul ponticello/tasto*).
- Use of the left-hand thumb to enable cleaner chord playing in certain circumstances, as well as enabling the playing of chords not possible if played (as is customary on mandolin and mandola) without using the left-hand thumb (derived from balalaika technique).
- Celtic and American folk-traditions' cross-picking³³, often directly criticised in mandolin methods, and in my own experience as a student in Sydney when advised by a well-regarded teacher of the time to avoid cross-picking.

³³ maintaining the flow of a melodic line by commencing a new string with an up-stroke

Across the writing for mandolin, mandola and guitar in this folio are several shared techniques and features, such as the exploitation of:

- *campanella*-style natural and artificial harmonics
- arpeggiated chords involving ringing, open strings in combination with melodic lines and simultaneous vibrato
- hammered and pull-off decoration (commonly used in guitar writing but rarely used or indicated in mandolin concert works)
- slide-guitar techniques
- gestures from folk and popular traditions
- innovative plectrum use to create a ‘shimmering’ timbral effect caused by the rapid brushing of the surface of strings with the edge of the plectrum rather than standard plectrum application
- plectrum applications and stylistic gestures derived from oud practices, particularly variations on tremolo, and variation of plectrum-striking points on strings to exploit timbral differences
- harmonics (natural and artificial), bi-tones (where a note ‘hammered’ by a left-hand finger without the use of the plectrum sounds two pitches) and ‘back-tones’ (where the string is plucked between the fingered note/s and the nut of the instrument)

In addition, the folio contains pieces which include non-tradition-based techniques which accentuate the possibilities offered by plectrum and steel-string use. These are predominantly explorations of sonic possibilities created by the use of the plectrum on steel and steel-wound strings.

1.8 New Writing for Solo Plectrum Guitar (Steel-String)

In the *Suite for Solo Guitar* I have set myself the task of writing a set specifically for the plectrum-played, unamplified steel string guitar. Despite being virtually ubiquitous in much of the popular music of the twentieth century, there is no tradition of writing solo concert pieces for this version of the guitar, despite the existence of a galaxy of gifted performers playing mostly semi-improvised, jazz/popular/folk styles, from the time of Wes Montgomery and Django Reinhardt.

Apart from occasional instances of sixth string *scordatura* (re-tuning a string), I have avoided writing for a range of tunings for the mainly practical reason that in live performance, frequent retuning of guitars destabilises the instrument's tuning. Additionally, while finger-style players and composers of both steel and nylon-stringed guitars have successfully exploited composing with different tunings in finger-style writing, for example the DADGAD tuning of Pierre Ben-Susan (born 1957), it is the application of different thinking to standard tuning (EADGBE) which is at the heart of my work. Like Andrew York (born 1958), whose classically-based writing embraces a range of styles on nylon and steel-stringed guitars, I prefer to write mainly in standard tuning.

I have explored the guitar as a plectrum-instrument first and foremost, shifting the approach from the Classical/finger-style of writing to a more vernacular style in terms of techniques, forms and improvisational influence, with a more episodic, single-line and block-chord focus, and lines which emerge from rhythmic flow, reminiscent of *style brise* (see below).

As stated above, there is little, if any, formal concert music composed for solo, unamplified plectrum guitar. The material that has been published for plectrum guitar consists primarily of arrangements of jazz standards or transcriptions of popular

music.³⁴ In guitar-playing circles, ‘plectrum guitar’ usually, but not exclusively, implies a steel-strung instrument, rather than nylon. It covers the gamut from purely acoustic to hollow-bodied (semi-electric with pick-up) or solid-bodied (that is, electric) guitar with steel strings that are positioned closer together than on a classical/Spanish/nylon-string guitar. In practical terms, there is no reason why music for plectrum steel-string guitar can not be played on a nylon-string guitar using a plectrum, but the steel strings give a particular colour to the sound, which attracts my interest both as a listener and a creator. In one of the pieces (*Ab Ova*) the steel strings make a significant difference in the execution of major passages in the work.

A further reason for writing for plectrum guitar is that, despite their immense and innovative contribution to the playing of the instrument as a soloist in a group context, the few recorded examples of major plectrum guitar figures performing without accompaniment are surprisingly disappointing. Reinhardt’s *Parfum* (recorded in Paris 27 April 1937) is a succession of short, often stylistically mismatched ideas based on chord-patterns. *Improvisation No. 2*, despite its title, appears to have been a more or less composed piece (Reinhardt was not only musically illiterate but in the general sense as well, so the piece was not committed to paper in any form). It was recorded by Reinhardt in 1938 in Paris and (confusingly) performed in basically the same form with the title *Improvisation No. 7* by him during a concert with the Duke Ellington Orchestra on 10 November 1946 at the Civic Opera House in Chicago. In both versions, Reinhardt plays finger-style, alternating between jazz progressions and melodic connecting lines, plus some faux-classical and faux-flamenco styles, on a steel-string guitar. The result of Reinhardt’s excursion into playing finger-style is disappointing in its limited scope. *Naguine* (1939) is also surprisingly hesitant for a

³⁴ Most prominently, compilations of solos from popular songs, medleys of show tunes and the like for semi-acoustic guitars, such as *Masters of the Plectrum Guitar* (Missouri: Mel Bay, 1995)

Reinhardt performance, essentially a series of linked jazz gestures, alternating between plectrum lines and some finger style playing. Certainly, none of the various *Improvisations* or other solo, unaccompanied works by Reinhardt show anything like the level of invention and accomplishment evident in his solos in an ensemble setting. The artistic challenge I set myself is to see whether a viable set of solo pieces can be written for an acoustic, plectrum-played instrument.

1.9 Plectrum Type

The very nature of the employment of the plectrum as the sound-instigator both limits the way in which one can write for an instrument and opens up other paths for writing, principally by adding options regarding projection and incisiveness of attack, as well as a range of timbres. Historically, tortoise-shell was (and in some places still is) the material of choice for use as plectrums, particularly in the case of mandolins. In current times, plectrums are almost universally made of synthetic materials. Many American country and jazz players use either very light plectrums, or thick, heavier plectrums with which they make minimal string contact. This allows very fast passages to be played comfortably, as the plectrum only brushes the strings, but is really only feasible on amplified or closely microphoned instruments. In this case, the microphone or built-in pickup does the sound production work, making performance at speed very comfortable as long as there is such amplification, but not really viable without (unless performing in a very small space).³⁵ As a performer in a purely acoustic setting I use a heavy but thin synthetic plectrum for reasons of projection and clarity, switching between two types depending on the type of piece being played

³⁵ See Chris Thile playing Bach Sonata No.1 in Gm BWV 1001 (Presto) on an American flatback mandolin: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxsqtoNTLTo> and Adagio http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIZFzEsdX_Q

(slightly thinner for pieces with substantial tremolo and cross-picking content, slightly thicker for Baroque & Classical works with little or no tremolo).

The material, thickness and design of plectrums can have a marked effect on the sound and the outcome of the music in this folio but, like composers for bowed-string instruments, I choose not to specify which type of plectrum to use. This choice is left to the performer. Any type of plectrum can be used in the performance of the pieces in this folio. However, I have composed these pieces assuming the use of a single, heavy plectrum for the acoustic performance of the pieces, whether for mandolin, mandola or guitar.

1.10 Organisational and Structural Models

Another compositional choice made, particularly in the case of the two sets for solo instruments, has been to create a collection of contrasting pieces that reflect the Baroque meaning of ‘Suite’. To summarise, this is a collection of movements with common structural and key centres, based on dance forms.³⁶ Thus most movements in these Suites take as their starting point a dance, song or stylistic type, each movement being composed in or around a common key. Furthermore, as plectrum-played instruments have antecedents among middle-Eastern instruments, a set of pieces along these lines is a fitting organisational structure for a collection of mandolin or guitar pieces. The normal full performance of a program of Arabic music also typically consists of a sequence of pieces of different character cast in one *maqam*.³⁷ A *maqam* roughly equates to a Western mode, consisting of a scale with a hierarchy of pitches,

³⁶ Randal, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 813

³⁷ Randal, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 530

characteristic melodic contours, motifs and interval sequences, ascribed with a specific musical or nonmusical character.³⁸

Another reflection of the traditional notion of the Suite is in the predominant movement structure (A A1 B A2), which gives the movements a sense of coherence and at the same time intersects with the oud tradition of using themes or root material as points of departure through improvised decoration, ornamentation and extrapolation, rather than ‘development’ in a Classical, western sense of compositional method. It also recalls the jazz origins of the structures in which the plectrum guitar is primarily employed. In a typical jazz performance, section A is the ‘head’ or main melodic content, which is varied (and could thus be represented as A1) before moving to a second section and working back to a restatement of the opening, or at least a reference to it. In keeping with the overall approach I have brought to writing this folio of works, I have utilised structures from the various contexts of the instrument(s) for which I have composed.

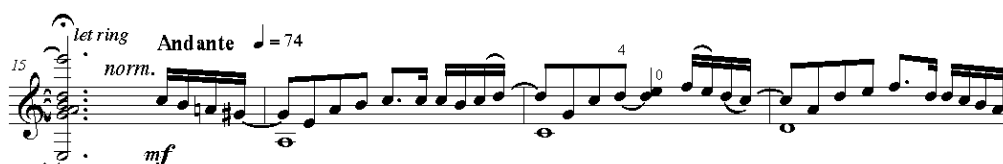
Apart from this organisational format, the other structural feature found in the folio (particularly in the latter mandolin pieces and the *Quincerto* for Mandola and String Quartet) is a cell-based, episodic constructional style based on the development of ideas by decoration and increasingly incremental additions, in dialogue between the instruments. This use of ideas has parallels with the ruminative, reflective nature of oud improvisations, in which the plectrum is used in an utterative style, repeating and going over ideas in explorations of timbre and rhythmic attack rather than harmonic/tonal development in a Western sense. This feature is explored further in section 1.12 below.

³⁸ Randal, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 529

1.11 Style

As will be discussed in more detail in individual chapters, one of the features linking the folio pieces together as a whole is style. This is manifested in the widespread employment of a version of *style brisé*, ‘a texture in which melodic lines are subservient to the broken chords and composite rhythms they create’.³⁹ In my work, this is evident in melodic lines, or the suggestion of melodic lines, emerging from arpeggiated figures. Common in seventeenth century French lute music, it is also at the heart of much improvised plectrum guitar playing in the swing jazz style to which I make reference in both the solo mandolin and solo guitar Suites. I have adopted it to create an organic unity not only in the solo Suites, but in the set *Troika* as well. It is a style particularly suited to plectrum instruments, which can often imply notes through left-hand hammering, the sustaining quality of notes articulated on steel strings, ornamentation and other articulation practices. These are all signature elements of the non-Classical and non-Western performance traditions which I have drawn on in the creation of this folio.

Example 1.3: Bars 15-18 from ‘Ab Ovo’ (Movement I) from the *Suite for Solo Guitar*, illustrating Style Brisé



³⁹ Randal, ed., *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 812

1.12 Improvisation and Notation

As stated above, an aspect of the writing in all the pieces in this folio comes from ideas generated through practical performance experience in ensembles in which improvisation (both in the broader semi-compositional sense and in subtle timbral variations and decorations upon a motif or idea) is central. Throughout the folio, this influence manifests itself in similar ways.

One is the manner in which the development of ideas in the pieces comes from first creating ideas and frameworks, which are then honed through a kind of controlled improvisation. This takes the form of improvisation-like additive writing, which to some extent replaces conventional notions of development of cell material, and which is further refined by more traditional methods (such as occurs in Middle Eastern music), in which

*Improvisatory techniques stress development of short motifs through variation, extension, contraction and melodic sequence.*⁴⁰

Sometimes this leads to instances of augmentation, diminution, inversion and other notions of cell development in an almost classical Western sense. Across all the pieces in the folio the aim is to create a cohesive link between the initial or core material and the manipulation of that core material.

Another is in terms of notation. Ideally, I would like to produce a notated score with a minimum of performance directions, in order to let the performer add his/her own character to a realisation of the work. But, while I welcome individual performer input, producing scores with little or no performance indications is not possible for a number of reasons.

⁴⁰ Randal, ed., *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 531

The first is that many of the techniques I employ in the music are either rarely in use or largely forgotten, or are techniques only known among some performers and notated here for perhaps the first time. Some are techniques I have developed myself, which I imagine may have been employed previously by others but simply not documented or notated. I address these techniques, including the use of symbols to indicate them, when dealing with their implementation in succeeding chapters. One which I think is entirely new is that of turning the plectrum on its edge to create a transformation of timbre during tremolo, indicated by the symbol: ♣.

A second reason for the need for more performance direction than I would ideally like to include with my scores arises because contemporary and future concert performers will almost certainly not have the training and/or cultural background to interpret aspects of the pieces without specific direction. Further, unlike earlier times in Western music, in which considerable performer input was expected in the realisation of music:

The precise designation of all the ornaments which were to be played, a compositional practice which began in the late Baroque period, was initially regarded by musicians as a degrading insult. During the Middle Ages every good musician had to master the rules of composition and improvisation, and so it was taken for granted that the latest form of a work would emerge only on the occasion of its current performance.⁴¹

This also meant that composers (who emerged from the ranks of fellow musicians) were secure in the knowledge that they shared a common store of gestural and interpretive knowledge with the interpreters of their music. In my experience, this is probably less the case in the modern era of the performance of notated music. With the increasing pursuit of ‘total outcome control’ in music by many composers from

⁴¹ Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *The Musical Dialogue* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1989), 9-10

the mid-twentieth century avant-garde onwards the composer/interpreter relationship changed significantly, as observed rather caustically by Michael Nyman (born 1944):

*... the avant-garde composer wants to freeze the moment, to make its uniqueness un-natural, a jealously guarded possession ... Boulez, seemingly disconcerted by the impermanence of his sounds, constantly trying to fix them in the hope of sculpting his sounds into more permanent finality.*⁴²

I have had to provide specific directions for the performance of decorations in pieces in this folio for the reasons outlined above but hope that performers will bring their own adjustments and differing interpretations to the music, as I share Brown and Norrington's view that:

*the late 20th century's rather strict adherence to the literal meaning of the notation is often unfaithful to the composer's expectations and (the author) invites a freer, more creative approach to the performance of this repertoire.*⁴³

Several movements are notated *senza misura* (with notional bar numbers for reference purposes) to convey a sense of freedom from strict tempo.

1.13 Conclusion

This opening chapter has examined the large body of composition for the mandolin from Beethoven to Krenek, particularly the fundamental faults in attitudes and mistaken assumptions which I feel composers have made when writing for the instrument. Essentially, I seek in this portfolio to provide an alternative view of writing for plectrum instruments, and thus create a more idiomatic repertoire for these instruments by writing music which draws on the common inheritance in techniques and styles they share with like instruments going back to the oud, as well as incorporating regional and ethnically-based techniques and approaches. I have applied

⁴² Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music* (London: Cassell and Collier MacMillan, 1974), 8

⁴³ Clive Brown and Roger Norrington, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1

this same thinking to my writing for the mandola and plectrum guitar, for which there is little existing solo repertoire. In some way, all the pieces seek to address the essence of the instruments written for, rather than considering them as purely vessels or 'sound sources' for the delivery of abstract ideas.

CHAPTER TWO

Suite for Solo Mandolin

The *Suite For Solo Mandolin* consists of the following movements:

1. 'Reverie'
2. 'Spiral'
3. 'Descending Mist'
4. 'Four-String Swing'
5. 'Wake in Light'
6. 'Fantasia VI'

The mandolin for which I have written is the Neapolitan or Classical mandolin, but the pieces can also be successfully performed on an American-style flatback mandolin.⁴⁴

When composing this set of pieces, I have sought to exploit techniques rarely, if ever, found in the published mandolin repertoire. The pieces combine a respect for the enduring qualities of traditional techniques and forms, as well as recognising and exploiting the paradox inherent in combining traditional writing with technical innovation (which is in itself often rooted in regional and generic traditions not normally found in notated music). I seek to provide evidence for an alternative approach to composing for the solo mandolin, where the techniques, structures and gestures emerge from a consideration of the essence of the instrument, an approach in which the starting point is the sonic character and traditions of the music. I have not come to it through the distorting prism of formal bowed or keyboard writing, but out of ethnically-based repertoire and idiomatic performance traditions.

⁴⁴ The instruments share the same stringing (double coursed metal strings) and tuning (G3 D4 A4 E5)

Most of the techniques central to the creation of the music I have composed for this Suite have always been available for composers to employ in their works, but for the various reasons discussed in the previous chapter, have been ignored, or simply not exploited. My research into the extensive mandolin repertoire and historical mandolin methods made me curious that music for the mandolin was overwhelmingly written within very narrow stylistic and technical parameters, or with post-War approaches largely focused on new compositional processes rather than the instrument itself.

2.1 Origins

In the first four movements ('Reverie', 'Spiral', 'Descending Mist' and 'Four-String Swing') I have taken traditional forms and in some cases ancient fragments of melody as the starting point and framework. By consciously developing pieces from these foundations, I have explored the method of creating the music out of natural or 'organic' techniques that come naturally to a player versed in the instrument and its traditions. There are several particularly effective techniques rarely, if ever, found in the solo concert repertoire for the mandolin. These techniques are primarily associated with decoration, fingering, plectrum type and use, and chord voicings. Exploration and application of these have formed a major part of the composition of this Suite.

Added to this are regional methods of playing the mandolin and kindred instruments from other countries. I have drawn stylistic and thematic influences from related instruments and traditions across the Balkans, Appalachian Bluegrass, Russia and French Gypsy Swing, embracing as much as possible of pan-cultural idiomatic techniques.

Another aspect of this Suite is the exploration of techniques and expressive gestures in writing more abstract pieces such as Movements 5 ('Wake in Light') and 6 ('Fantasia VI'). These are explorations of the mandolin's unique sound palette, the former without overt reference to historical or regional techniques or stylistic/formal traditions, and the latter loosely based on the formal outlines of Telemann's solo instrumental suite Allegro movements. Nevertheless, the techniques utilised in these pieces again grow out of the naturally available sound resources of the instrument. In addition to these are some techniques drawn from the non-Classical tradition of playing the instrument. These include the use of a metal slide on a left hand finger, a technique borrowed from American country music (specifically slide or lap guitar), and also used as a performance tool by Gypsy musicians on mandolin and balalaika, an example being the Paris-based Serbian Rom musician Petro Ivanovič.⁴⁵ In all these cases, I believe the shape and character of the music comes directly from using these mandolin or plectrum instrument-specific techniques.

Although the content and approaches I have adopted are new for the instrument in relation to the published repertoire of the past, this suite of movements for the mandolin is grounded in, and makes reference to, many long-standing instrumental techniques, song/dance forms and some songs. These include Balkan *pripevs* (linking melodies) and the mournful *Sevdelinka* song-type; Celtic/American bluegrass mandolin style cross-picking;⁴⁶ the forms, structures and improvisational styles of so-called 'Gypsy Swing'⁴⁷ jazz instrumentals; and the formal organisational structures of the Baroque Suite movement.

⁴⁵ Petro Ivanovič: *Romano Drom* CD (Hot Club Records 1990), Les Tziganes Ivanovitch: *Jagori* (Philips LP 6332120)

⁴⁶ Commencing a new string with an up-stroke to continue the musical flow of a line – a technique I was actively dissuaded from employing as a student in Sydney, but which is fundamental to many styles.

⁴⁷ The term applied to the jazz guitar tradition which began with Django Reinhardt

2.2 Organisational and Structural Models

As noted in Chapter One, this is a Suite in several senses of the term. Several movements have their stylistic origins in dance forms and/or rhythms, share common or related keys, and are in contrasting meters and character, very much akin to the conception of the Baroque instrumental suite. Further, it also reflects the oud-centred Arabic performance tradition, in which pieces of shared maqam (roughly equating to the European concept of key or scale) in contrasting characters and tempos are the settings for explorations of colour, gesture and improvisation.

Rather than exploring each technique in turn as used across the entire Suite, I will analyse the techniques of the first two movements ('Reverie' and 'Spiral') in detail. The analysis of the subsequent movements will refer to this initial analysis in terms of techniques and creative aims, while dealing with additional aspects which arise in the later movements. This will provide musical context for the discussion of the playing as well as the compositional techniques involved.

2.3 I 'Reverie'

He is a guslar. Or minstrel, as they call them in Croatia. The Yougo-Slavs (sic) dedicate all male children who are born blind, from infancy, to the Muses. As soon as they are old enough to handle anything, a small mandolin is given them, which they are taught to play...and when grown up are sent forth to earn their livelihood ...⁴⁸

A significant non-Italian and non-Classical mandolin tradition located geographically close to Italy is that of the tambura of Balkan countries, particularly those of the former Yugoslavia. The tambura is often (understandably) mistaken for a mandolin by foreigners, as illustrated in the quote above, due to its similar size and

⁴⁸ Charles Godfrey Leland, *The Gypsies* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1882) 286

construction. The musical culture of the countries of the former Yugoslavia (the ‘southern Slavs’ of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia) is quite distinct from the rest of Europe for a number of reasons, despite these countries’ proximity to Italy, Austria and Greece. With a different language base (Slavic), religious mix (Eastern Orthodox in Serbia and Macedonia, Roman Catholic in Croatia and Slovenia with Bosnia a mix of Orthodox, Catholic and, primarily, Islam), long occupation of much of it by the Ottoman Turks, plus a large Gypsy population, the culture and particularly the music of the former Yugoslavia is complex and rich. This is manifested in a variety of modes and meters (particularly 7/8 and 9/8) as well as a different folk ensemble tradition, in which the tambura is central.

Found predominantly in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia (and neighbouring parts of Hungary), the tambura has been a mainstay of these countries’ folk ensembles for centuries. The instrument is often found in ensembles of different sizes/voices called *tamburitsi* (as is the case with mandolin orchestras, or Russian domra and balalaika ensembles). It is thought that the main prototype for the instrument was the Persian *tanbur*, brought to Bosnia by the Turks from the sixteenth century, from where it spread.⁴⁹ My own view is that this means the tambura is also more than likely linked to a similar Central Asian instrument, called *dombira* (which was transformed into the *domra* in Russia and Ukraine), as the etymological connection and physical similarities seem very strong. (The Turkish saz, a similar but longer-necked instrument sometimes called *baglama* was also introduced to the Turkish-controlled Balkans, but is found more in eastern areas closer to Turkey itself.) Elements of tambura-playing which I have adopted in

⁴⁹ See Scheherezade Qassim Hassan et al, “Tanbūr”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, xxv (London: Macmillan, 2001), 61-62

‘Reverie’ include notably less use of tremolo than is the case with similar instruments such as the mandolin; strong-beat plectrum emphasis drawn from the characteristic 7/8 and 9/8 dance music of the region; plus employment of slides, decorations and the re-iterative use of plectrum strokes also reminiscent of oud music.

A particularly noteworthy part of this tradition is the stock of *pripyevs* known and passed around between Balkan musicians, including *tamburitsi*. Usually these *pripyevs* originated in the melodic refrains of folk songs (the strict meaning of the term) but ‘*pripyev*’ is also used more loosely as a term meaning one of a commonly known aural library of musical introductions to or links between songs. For example, at the conclusion of one song or section, the singer in an ensemble will commonly call out (or indicate by gesture) at the point where instrumentalists (already anticipating the approaching linking section) will take up the *pripyev* and either play it several times as a way of transferring to the next song/section, or use it as the basis for extended solo improvisations. This may seem a haphazard practice to the outsider or even a musician not familiar with the practice, but in the hands of skilled performers it can be a seamless process, apparently unfolding organically in the ears of the listener.

Another tradition which has influenced the composition of *Reverie* is the *Sevdalinka*, a melancholy song form particularly associated with Bosnia/Herzegovina:

*In its original form Sevdalinka was a solo song, without accompaniment. With the arrival of the Ottomans, solo Saz (or tambura) accompaniment of a solo voice became popular form of interpretation. Some modern interpretations of Sevdalinkas are performed using various accompaniments (including) Mandolin (ie tamburitsa) orchestras.*⁵⁰

In *Reverie* I have employed a fragment of a well-known *pripyev*, often used as an introduction and refrain for Bosnian 7/8 *Sevdalinkas* such as *Zapjevala sojka ptica*,

⁵⁰ Mirza Basic, *About Sevdah and Sevdalinka*, <http://worldofsevdah.com> (accessed 6 May 2012)

II (Eb major), iv (G minor) and vii (C minor). V (A diminished) is avoided, except as a quasi-V7 when it is extended to A diminished 7. It is akin to the Arabic *Hijaz* maqam and, given the occupation of Bosnia by Turkey over several centuries, also probably derived from a mix of the Turkish *Chahargah* and *Shur* dastgahs (the Turkish equivalent of maqams).⁵¹

Apart from the bars of free, unmetered, reflective sections using harmonics (such as the introductory four bars), the movement is almost entirely in the characteristic Balkan 7/8 meter (3+2+2), which is used for both form dancing such as *Kolos* and in slower, mournful songs such as *Sevdelinkas*. This is a particularly comfortable meter for Balkan performers (and dancers) and affords great ebb and flow in phrasing. It also lends itself particularly to *stile brise*-like writing, in which the melody comes out of flowing broken-chord figures.

As outlined above, my intention with this movement, apart from creating an artistically satisfying piece of music, is to acknowledge and draw on the Balkan tambura-style of playing and improvising in a piece for the unrelated but very similar (and often interchangeably used) Classical or Neapolitan mandolin. On a more personal level, this music comes out of a tradition with which I have been engaged since childhood.

As a feature of the writing in this portfolio as a whole, I have sought to exploit the effect of plectrum-induced natural and artificial harmonics (in which, while simultaneously effecting a plectrum stroke, a right hand finger lightly touches the same string 12 frets above the indicated note which is stopped by a left-hand finger):

⁵¹ Randal, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 530

Example 2.3: 'Reverie' bars 1-4

Freely
R.H. Harmonics: touch at 12 frets above note -----

ppp

In the overwhelming majority of published concert mandolin music, this effect is absent. It is hardly found at all in the bulk of the mandolin repertoire, particularly before Calace. Even that champion of writing for the instrument made scant use of the technique. This is probably simply due to the fact that producing artificial harmonics on a fretted instrument is a difficult skill which takes some time to master, and requires a right-hand technique in which the hand does not impede the ringing of the strings. The passage serves as an atmospheric introduction, providing intimation of the main material to follow, and is also something of a statement of intent for the Suite as a whole.

These introductory bars of harmonics are essentially an inversion (bar 1), augmentation (bar 2) and extension of the main thematic material, derived from my treatment of the *privey*, which begins the piece proper (bars 5 – 8):

Example 2.4: 'Reverie' bars 5-8

f

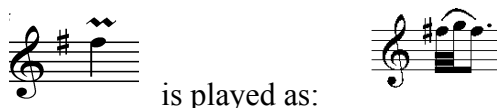
These opening bars of theme employ other idiomatic features of the plectrum-string instrument, listed below. The bar numbers refer to Example 2.4 above.

2.3.i Arpeggiated chord (bar 5, beat 1), utilising the ringing qualities of open strings (D and A).

Unlike violin or cello, the strings of which must be more-or-less continually engaged to produce a sound, the mandolin's open strings ring out for some time after being excited, creating a 'bed' of ringing sound underneath the melodic layer. I have reinforced this in every bar in this fragment and elsewhere through frequent re-engagement of these open strings (a technique also common among oud players).⁵²

2.3.ii Hammered decoration

This is employed in the style of the eighteenth century *Schneller* (indicated here by the mordent symbol above F#, bar 1 beat 4), in which the written note is produced by plectrum stroke, followed quickly by a 'hammer-on' or striking of the note above (G) by left-hand middle-finger (alone) and thereafter immediately released. Thus:



A common decorative technique among Balkan, Russian, Celtic and American country and jazz players of the mandolin and related instruments, the hammer-on/pull-off (called *ligado* in Spanish guitar technique) is never found to my knowledge in the published Classical/Romantic mandolin repertoire or the overwhelming majority of twentieth century compositions for the instrument. In Classical mandolin writing as a whole, trills and other decorations assume a plectrum-strike per note.

⁵² This is why the choice of keys such as C minor and Eb Major for two of Beethoven's four pieces for mandolin puzzle me so much: they largely negate the use of open strings, one of the mandolin's strongest features.

Given a reasonably sympathetic acoustic, and the bright reverberation of double-course metal strings, these techniques (common in classical guitar writing) are particularly effective on the mandolin. Along with pull-offs (dealt with below) these techniques are commonly used by tambura players, and players of domra and balalaika, as a way of adding an idiomatic flavor to passages.

These and other techniques were specifically mentioned in eighteenth century French mandolin tutors (for example, Leone's of 1768), but almost never represented in music for the instrument in music printed in subsequent centuries. Even the simple technique of playing two or more notes (as found throughout the movement) with a single plectrum stroke (that is, striking the string for the first note, then hammering on or pulling off the second) is rarely encountered in music for the mandolin from 1800 on. Yet this very hammer-on technique is clearly explained and illustrated in Article VII of Leoné's 1768 treatise (revealingly titled *Method for Switching from Violin to Mandolin*).⁵³ By using this technique, a much more legato effect is created, minimising the constant 'pick' or plectrum noise produced for every single note sounded.

2.3.iii Rising Glissando

Bars six and eight feature another technique which adds a particular flavour and sense of flow and line to the melodic content: the glissando up to a note.

Example 2.5: 'Reverie' bars 6-8



⁵³ Leone, *Methode Raisonnee pour passer du Violon a la Mandoline* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1983 reprint of Paris, 1768), 5

In bar 6 the glissando is from a tone below the ultimate note (that is, a specific starting point, the same note as the preceding one). This produces an emphasis through the brief repetition of the note (G⁴), before sliding up a tone to A. In bar 8 the slide up the A string is from an indeterminate lower note. In both cases, the melodic line is given much more character, almost an extra dimension, from this simple technique. A similar effect can be created on a bowed instrument, but the effect on the mandolin is quite different. Perhaps because the second note is voiced as the initial plectrum-stroke decays, the effect is lighter and less emphatic than on the bowed instrument. Without a second plectrum attack, the note tapers off naturally. In both these instances (bars 6 and 8) and elsewhere, glissandi to a non-voiced second note is employed at the end of a phrase: deliberately so, as it creates a natural ‘tailing off’ of the musical idea. The absence of this technique elsewhere in the mandolin repertoire is a simple example of composers not knowing the particular idiosyncrasies of the instrument.

2.3.iv Sul Ponticello (sul pont.)

Bars 5-8 (see Example 2.4 above) are repeated in bars 9-12, but the latter are played *sul ponticello* (abbreviation: ‘*sul pont*’). ‘At the bridge’ on the mandolin creates a markedly more brittle, metallic sound compared to playing over the sound hole (‘*norm*’). It is a particularly useful technique, as it can make the mandolin sound almost like another instrument, such is the contrast in tone colour; hence its effectiveness in creating an almost antiphonal effect after the first statement of the same material in bars 5-8.

Example 2.7: 'Reverie' bars 29-30



2.3.vii Utilising the full range of timbral contrasts in plectrum-striking areas.

In bars 33 and 34, apart from the echoing of the previous phrase an octave lower, I have concentrated on tone colour, exploring contrasts from *sul ponticello* (as discussed above) to *tasto* (plectrum applied over fretboard) and the 'normal' (*norm.*) range (over the sound hole). I would expect the performer to move their point of attack around in this and other passages to enhance the melodic content. Again, this is a rarely used technique among mandolinists, but is a staple of tambura and oud players, with single pitches (particularly at the end of a phrase) being repeated as the point of plectrum down-stroke contact moves up and down the string.

Example 2.8: 'Reverie' bars 33-34



2.3.viii Techniques Summary

What results from the employment of these techniques in 'Reverie' is the transformation of a piece of relatively narrow range in terms of pitch and dynamics into one with several layers of sound character; a piece which is an essay in sonic expressiveness, based on traditional forms, melodies and techniques. The principal

result of the technical exploitation has been a much greater reserve of sustained sound, and a fullness not usually associated with the mandolin. This drive to exploit sustained sound patterns has in turn led to the piece having a singing-like melodic line, with chordal patterns (either actual or inferred) underpinning it. Another layer of sound character is in the shifting tone colours created almost note-by-note in some passages, as the point of plectrum contact during repeated down-strokes is varied. While sequences, repetition and phrasing patterns have been employed, I have avoided conventional compositional distortions of the original style/structure's features in ways commonly found when composers of notated music employ traditional or established forms, styles or folk songs (one thinks of Stravinsky's *Ragtime* or *Petroushka Suite* for instance). The lack of modulations or other common compositional tools for 'developing' a piece echo the folk origins of the work's root material; it focuses more on exploiting the sustaining strength of open string patterns and drawing attention to the subtlety of tone production (highlighting the manner in which notes are played rather than simply what notes are played).

2.4 II 'Spira'

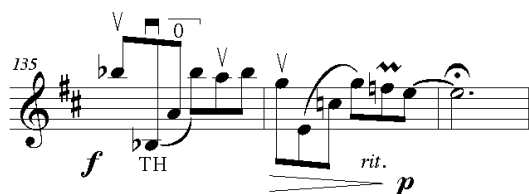
'Spiral' takes its name from the way a constantly churning and tumbling figure dominates the opening, twists itself into a contrasting tonality and atmosphere through the introduction of different techniques, unfolding and spiraling into a sound-world built on plectrum-instrument techniques of a very different nature to those used in 'Reverie'. The movement takes, as its starting point, the spirit and techniques of the American bluegrass or Appalachian mandolin style of playing, which is itself derived

from British and Celtic styles.⁵⁵ The following is an examination of how these techniques are applied and for what purpose.

2.4.i Cross-picking at speed

This involves starting a new string with an up-stroke or playing on strong beats (beats 1 or 4 in 6/8) with an up-stroke, which is often frowned upon in Classical mandolin methods). This is a central feature of the rhythmic drive and flow of the movement. Displacing up and down-bows on violin has a similar effect, but on the mandolin it is much more pronounced, owing to the particular nature of the defined percussive impact of the plectrum stroke. The use of this technique, in conjunction with open strings exploits two of the main timbral strengths of the mandolin.

Example 2.9: ‘Spiral’ bars 135-137



2.4.ii Open strings

Making use of open strings allows composers and performers to exploit the ringing ‘swirl of sound’ created by the double-coursed steel-strings of the mandolin. This is characteristic of much of the movement but is particularly prominent in the middle passage (see score bars 51-101). The constant re-engagement of the A and D strings acts as a kind of bright, ringing middle-voice drone underlying the movement in the outer strings.

⁵⁵ Cecilia Conway, *Celtic Influences* chapter in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee, 2006), 1132

Example 2.10: 'Spiral' bars 67-74

2.4.iii Style Brise

As described above, this is where a melodic line emerges from the cascading arpeggios rising up from the lower strings. Thus the opening two bars contain the following implied melodic line:

Example 2.11: 'Spiral' bars 1-6 (upper-voice)

One could argue that the movement should be notated in one voice so as (a) to unclutter the score visually and (b) reinforce the sense that the two voices are so intertwined as to be inseparable. But I have notated it in two voices/layers or planes of action, as below, to make it clear to the performer that there is a more singing upper line which rises out of the lower, thus avoiding a possibly one-dimensional interpretation of the piece:

Example 2.12: 'Spiral' bars 1-5

2.4.iv Hammering-on, pulling-off and slides.

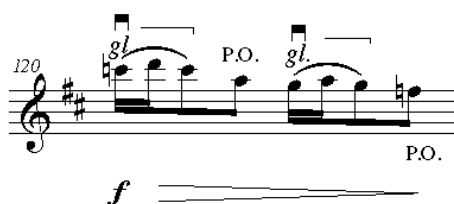
These staples of the American bluegrass tradition of Bill Monroe (1911-1996) et al are occasionally found in tablature versions of traditional songs, but rarely if ever in notation of a concert piece. An example of a slide followed by hammer-on can be found in bar 25:

Example 2.13: 'Spiral' bar 25



Bar 120 (below) is an example of a pull-off (P.O.) in which no plectrum contact is made. The note is sounded by the right hand finger 'pulling off' the previous note, the action involved in this being the sound instigator instead of a plectrum stroke. The opposite to a hammer-on, this effect is part of the musical language of all fretted instruments, and is particularly effective in creating a sense of a tumbling descending movement, without the definition of a plectrum stroke. In this example, it is used after what amount to glissando mordents or one-stroke sliding Schnellers, a particular and specific part of the musical language I have employed throughout the Suite.

Example 2.14: 'Spiral' bar 120



Mandolin music typically does not employ phrase markings, unless indicating a passage where tremolo is employed for all the notes. Therefore I have not used it in other movements in this Suite. However, I have used phrase markings in *Spiral* as the two voices and accompanying plectrum stroke indications make it clear that tremolo is not involved, and because the sense of phrase is so important in this movement.

2.4.v. Use of thumb to enable chord playing

In addition, there is the use of the thumb, a technique not employed in any Mandolin style to my knowledge, but which I have adapted from the Russian balalaika tradition. The use of the thumb (indicated by 'TH') to hold the root of the Bbmaj7 or Gm/Bb chords enables the open strings to ring clearly, eliminating the strong possibility that the strings will be accidentally touched by the hand trying to reach across to the G string as well as holding the upper note from the main melodic line.

Example 2.15: 'Spiral' bar 19



This greatly adds to the flow and drive of the movement, as the performer is completely physically unimpeded in executing this passage. I would speculate that two possible explanations for the absence of the use of the thumb in mandolin are (a) the preference of many mandolinists, particularly in Germany, for a wider, more guitar-like mandolin neck, which makes the use of the left-hand thumb physically problematic; and (b) because (as discussed in Chapter One and elsewhere) mandolin

methods have tended to be written by teachers who were violinists or guitarists first, and for whom the use of thumb is not considered a viable technique, if thought of at all. On Italian mandolin models with tapering necks such as Embergher or de Meglio, it is not a problem.

The first part of the middle section of *Spiral* (bars 51-66) departs from the Appalachian cross-picking swirl, in favour of a more subdued, reflective, tremolo-based section. This is not strictly in the character of typical bluegrass music. Normally an up-tempo piece would stay that way throughout, with instruments taking solo turns if in an ensemble setting. It is, however, probably the section which owes its character most to the use of the plectrum, combined with the mandolin's flat bridge (as opposed to the arched violin bridge). The tonality also changes from D Major to D Minor. The technique (used for structural contrast here) is found in the writing of music for Russian/Ukrainian domra and also balalaika. In effect, it involves a pedal point use of the open D string, to underpin the tremolo movement (in 3rds) in arched melodic phrases which recall the opening of the movement, but in a more compressed rate of chord change: the 'spiral is contracting.

Example 2.16: 'Spiral' bars 50-54

At bar 59, what appears to be a re-statement of the bar 51 opening of the passage continues its upward spiral to a peak at bar 66.

Example 2.17: 'Spiral' bars 63-66

At this point the music transforms into yet another character. As stated above, the open A and D strings form an inner voice or core of ringing sound throughout, shifting in parallel lines 2 octaves apart. This very expressive technique is made possible by the mandolin's level bridge which, unlike the arched violin bridge, allows the performer to build a dramatic storm of ringing chords. The level of volume and dramatic impact created with this technique is formidable.

Example 2.18: 'Spiral' bars 67-71

As the final *fff* chord of this section is held (bar 101), the ringing continues for quite some time as the spirals of reverberating sound from the accumulated chord-playing catch up with it.

Example 2.19: 'Spiral' bars 97-101

This is a particularly idiomatic mandolin technique, impossible to produce on the violin, its dramatic effect heightened by the double-coursed, high tension stringing of the mandolin.

Returning to D Major, a restatement of the opening (*mp*) follows, but what appears to be a straightforward re-iteration of the opening spirals again into further exploration of the bluegrass-like movement of chords around minor tonality, open strings and with 3-note slides and pull-offs, as in bars 119 and 120 (see Example 2:14 above). This final phase is dominated by a series of hesitations or false endings, before an emphatic rising D pentatonic arpeggio (which suggests a D6_{add}9 chord through the sustained, ringing and hammered notes) reinforces the folk-like, improvisatory flavor of much of the movement in a final, hemiola-inflected spiral which brings the piece to a strong concluding statement:

Example 2:20: 'Spiral' bars 121-141 (conclusion)

The musical score for Example 2:20, 'Spiral' bars 121-141 (conclusion), is presented in five staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The notation includes various techniques and dynamics:

- Staff 1 (bars 121-125):** Melodic line with a long slur and a fermata.
- Staff 2 (bars 126-130):** Continuation of the melodic line with a slur and a fermata.
- Staff 3 (bars 131-134):** Marked *Meno Mosso* and *p*. Features a TH (thumb) technique and a slur.
- Staff 4 (bars 135-138):** Marked *f* and *rit.*. Features a TH technique and a slur.
- Staff 5 (bars 139-141):** Marked *p* and *rit.*. Features a TH technique and a slur.

‘Spiral’ draws on a number of techniques, all built around the aspects of American country/jazz mandolin performance gestures that have made a strong impression on me for their inventiveness, idiomatic ingenuity and sheer musicality (particularly in terms of rhythms and textures). A further impetus for the creation of this movement is my predilection for exploiting the ringing qualities of open-string dominated chordal writing (writing which is almost carillon-like in its cascading, ringing build-up), giving both a rhythmic effect and a harmonic one through the preponderance of major 7th, minor 7th and other added chords. It adds another dimension to the way one can write a technically exploratory concert piece for the mandolin, based on a language which relates in an elemental sense to the heritage and nature of the instrument.

2.5 III ‘Descending Mist’

Like ‘Reverie’, ‘Descending Mist’ draws on Balkan influences. It is based on the haunting Macedonian song *Magna Padnala v Dolina (The Fog Descends Into the Valley)*. There is only subtle melodic development in the original song, and I have stayed true to this during the movement, with phrases operating for the most part in a narrow range, but with a great deal of decoration and expression, as well as a focus on colour.

As described in 2.3 above, Balkan music employs a range of modes. This movement is tonal but with a deal of ambiguity, being essentially composed in the sub-dominant mode of A harmonic minor (D-E-F-G#-A-B-C-D), but frequently employing passages suggesting other modes, such as D natural minor (Aeolian mode). It is overwhelmingly static harmonically, the line suggesting D minor, with occasional phrase endings navigating chords around the dominant (for example A major, Bb Major). In keeping with this character, I have concentrated on exploiting the

plaintive, uneven, repetitive phrases of the original song fragment, focusing on the texture of sound, on gesture and on musical threads left hanging, like half-suggested ideas, or figures only half-seen in the mist, as suggested by the lyrics:

*Магла паднала в долина
Од њума се нисто не Види
Само еден грм Зелен, грм Зелен
Под њија ми Седи терзиче
Терзиче Младо, комшиче*

The mist descends into the valley
Nothing can be seen
Just one green bush, green bush
Beneath it sits a tailor
Young tailor, neighbour

*Терзиче Младо, комшиче, терзиче
Да ми сашијес елечето
Дакле, Арсин да го не мерис
Дакле ношки да го не Резес
Дакле Игла да го не слуги
Од око да идем сашијеш*

Young tailor, neighbour, tailor
Sew me a vest
Do not measure it with a tape
Do not cut it with scissors
Do not sew it with a needle
Sew it as you will

*Бозана момо, убава Бозана
Це ти сашијем елечето
Ал Да ми умесиш погача
Кроз трепке брашно да сејеш
Дакле Солзи да идем замесиш
На груди да идем развијеш
Сос дуса да го испечеш*

My Božana, beautiful Božana
I will sew you a vest
But knead me some bread first
Sift the flour through your eyelashes
Mix it with your tears
Knead the dough on your bosom
Bake it with your soul

Translation: S Lalor 2011

Example 2.21: *Magna Padnala*: Macedonian folk song (opening)

Freely

Mag-na Pad-na-la v Do-li na Od nyu - ma se ne - shto ne Vi - di

As the tailor and the girl toy with and tease each other in the lyrics, so the very limited melodic source material is kneaded and turned in an almost tactile way, through hammered bi-tones, sliding notes and harmonics.

Perhaps more than any other piece in this portfolio, 'Descending Mist' best illustrates the primary aim of exploiting the mandolin's capacity to create a unique

sound universe. Essentially a multi-layered sonic essay, it demonstrates the propensity of all steel-string plectrum instruments to sustain ringing sound, enhanced by the double-coursed stringing of the mandolin and the many variations of timbre and attack this makes available to performer and composer.

Introductory harmonics begin the piece, *ppp*, acting as an aural intimation of the material later to emerge from the mist.

Example 2.22: ‘Descending Mist’ bars 1-4

Freely ♩ = 88

mp

After this introduction, the opening of the main body of the movement, taken from the original song opening (see example 2.21 above), is then played, and the character of the movement as a whole is immediately defined by the instructions directing the performer to make use of ringing sound, glissando, hammering and bi-tones in these four bars.

Example 2.23: ‘Descending Mist’ bars 5-8⁵⁶

mf

⁵⁶ In this example, ‘L.R.’ over an unconnected slur means ‘Let Ring’, and notes written as ‘x’ denote the upper bi-tones created by hammering the main notes indicated below them, as explained in the notes on the full score). Hammering is denoted by ‘+’.

By exploiting ringing strings over continued melodic movement, conventionally unstable combinations take on a stable character of their own (bars 5 and 6 above). Similarly, the ringing D string underpinning bars 7 and 8 serves as an aural backdrop to left-hand-only hammered notes high on the 4th (G) string, which create their own clear bi-tones at this point (indicated by ‘x’). This creates a ghostly converse movement which relates to the evocative title and original song lyrics.

Other devices used in this movement have been discussed above in relation to ‘Reverie’. An additional feature is found in bar 12, in which gradation of proximity to the bridge during repeated notes is represented graphically:

Example 2.24: ‘Descending Mist’ bar 12



In this instance the player should understand that, over four repeated notes, he/she will move the plectrum stroke progressively closer to the bridge, until commencing the next phrase *norm* (that is normally, or over the sound hole). Another subtle colour is effected by playing all the notes of the first two beats of this bar on the D (3rd) string, the last note of which is sustained under the immediately following open A string note (2nd string). Without these instructions, the player would probably just play the whole bar (except G#) on the A string, resulting in a blander, far less engaging phrase in terms of colour and articulation.

Similarly, in several places a ringing open string provides the backdrop to hammered notes as in bar 20: open A string rings over hammered G# and B on 3rd (D)

string. By employing these techniques, what would otherwise be a one-dimensional reading becomes rich and atmospheric.

Example 2.25: ‘Descending Mist’ bar 20



This simple musical gesture is then used as the basis of several bars of what is in effect an additive process in compositional terms, but owes as much to the varied use, speed and placement of the plectrum in passages such as the following, which also incorporates an improvisational approach to the building of material:

Example 2.26: ‘Descending Mist’ bars 23-28

The capacity to sustain a fluid, melismatic-like line is illustrated in bar 26:

Example 2.27: ‘Descending Mist’ bar 26

Example 2.29: 'Descending Mist' bars 45-56

The whole nature of this piece is concerned with developing expressiveness of rhythm, articulation and timbral character to complement the almost psalm-like, chanting nature of the original song material. I have taken the repetitive elements of the song's prosody and used them as stylistic 'cells' or 'motifs', which I have concentrated on exploring and developing (through varying plectrum application, hammering and sustaining) into a type of narrative: a 'Theme and Meditation' rather than a 'Theme and Variations'.

'Descending Mist' illustrates my desire to compose music which explores the mandolin's multi-faceted timbral character, a piece which is economical in terms of its use of core material and concentrates not on writing in a conventional melodic/harmonic/rhythmic sense, but on harnessing expressive techniques born of improvisation and variation on instruments of the plectrum family.

2.6 IV ‘Four-String Swing’

So called because mandolinists commonly refer to their pairs of like-pitched strings in the singular, ‘Four-String Swing’ takes as its starting point the format and ‘feel’ of an established form. The structural, harmonic, melodic and rhythmic template of instrumental works of the swing era (c. 1930-1945) is the foundation of the piece. This template was the platform which gave rise to the signature playing style of the great early twentieth century plectrum guitarists (Django Reinhardt in particular), which in turn has been the basis for the style of playing employed by mandolinists operating in popular forms to this day. As swing was originally dance music, its employment as a stylistic template aligns the movement as part of a Suite derived largely from dance and popular forms.

Typically the chord patterns and structures employed in this style are blues-derived, although this may not be immediately apparent as substitute and extended chords are commonly used. The structures consist primarily of binary or ternary presentations of a main melody (or ‘head’), the chord patterns of which are the basis for the subsequent solos or improvised variations.

A typical melodic feature in this swing style (for example in the recordings of Reinhardt) are improvisations based on arpeggios of both diatonic and extended chords, often manifested in solos beginning and or ending on the 6th and 9th of the underlying or implied chords. Another feature of the style adopted in this piece is the clearly defined chord pattern underlying the main body of the work (bars 29-74):

Example 2.30: ‘Four-String Swing’ chord-pattern

||: Am | Gm | E7 | Am :|| 1.-----| 2.
 :||: Dm6 | Fm7 | Am | Am :|| E7 | E7 | D.C.

This chord pattern, while fundamentally diatonic, is an unusual one for a swing piece. By moving away from more customary patterns (often limited to diatonic chords) it allows for certain ambiguities in tonality to be explored, principally through the inclusion of chromatic G minor and F minor chords in an otherwise A-harmonic minor setting. As mentioned above, the melodic material is based on arpeggio runs in swung dotted rhythms, with frequent anticipatory syncopated double- and triple-stopping chord ‘jabs’, particularly across bar lines and strong beats, which produce a great energy and vitality. The melodic movement of the piece serves to provide a sense of harmonic underpinning and progression, as was central to the swing instrumental style, with or without accompaniment.

To drive the momentum of the piece melodically, traditional compositional methods such as repetition, sequence and addition are widely employed, as follows:

Example 2.31: ‘Four-String Swing’ bars 43-46



Conventional writing in terms of melody, structure, harmony and rhythm thus form the greater part of the piece. The hammer-ons of triplet figures (as in bar 43), slides and sustaining ringing open strings are consistent with the plectrum-instrument characteristics central to musical expression in this portfolio. The extra and very challenging dimension is in writing in this style for solo mandolin. Reinhardt (and his jazz guitar successors) rarely played or recorded completely and literally *solo*. I do not know of any recordings of mandolinists playing swing style literally solo.

So while keeping the ‘bones’ of the swing instrumental, it is in the nuances of the writing that subtle differences emerge from the popular model. As in earlier movements, different applications of plectrum use and left-hand finger application create passages such as the opening:

Example 2.32: ‘Four-String Swing’ bars 1-4



Before launching into the body of the movement, introductory passages such as the above provide an intimation of what lies ahead, with the left hand hammer-ons of the rising arpeggio (indicated by slur) and the sustained ringing E open-string notes under recurring F’s a semitone higher (on the A string) being by now familiar parts of the sonic language of the Suite. This time they create an unresolved, ringing and tailing off of an idea rather than a fully-formed closed passage of consistently articulated notes. Up until bar 27, snippets of some of the main gestures to follow act as a ‘teaser’, linking the movement organically to the approaches used in ‘Reverie’ and ‘Descending Mist’ and elsewhere in the folio.

Rather as Baroque composers in particular didn’t stray far from the dance models used in solo instrumental suites, so this movement stays broadly true to the original template for much of time. Using the chord-based formal structure outlined above, bars 27-74 are a somewhat more convoluted and complex version of the usually simpler ‘head’ of the swing instrumental. In this case they hint at improvisational influences through exploration of characteristic arpeggio-based pitch-

movement coloured by the extra notes of extended chords, which are frequently used to end phrases ambiguously, in the style of Reinhardt et al.

Bar 75 heralds the beginning of what might be called a variation, taking the place of what would be an improvisation in a traditional setting. This section is not unlike the preceding main body, except for more playfulness and space in the writing, including flashes of colour not normally found in mandolin writing such as the multi-hammered ascending passages of bars 83 and 85:

Example 2.33: ‘Four-String Swing’ bars 83-85



As alluded to in Chapter One, although there are many instances of sweeping chromatic runs in mandolin music (in which every note is produced by a separate plectrum stroke), writing resembling Example 2.33 is something I have only encountered in published music for the Russian domra, and even then not in the prolonged form of the above example. This particularly idiomatic method of creating an exciting upward, essentially chromatic surge would be unworkable if the traditional method of constantly applying one plectrum stroke more-or-less per note was enforced.

Banjo-like chord strumming (a further reference to the origins of the form and the links between plectrum instruments) enlivens a later passage which, as in ‘Spiral’,

is made possible to play cleanly by the use of the thumb on the lower notes of four-note chords:⁵⁸

Example 2.34: 'Four-String Swing' bars 91-94

After this variation/improvisation section, at the point when it appears we are winding towards the close of the movement, the writing comes to a halt and introduces a change of character. From bar 115 the tempo drops from a lively 4/4 swing (mm = 165) to a slow, blues-like mm = 75 in 12/8. While still employing arpeggio writing based on an underlying, implied chord pattern, the whole character changes through use of the hand-dampened bridge muting of the strings, which accentuates the effect of slow slides up to notes and exacerbates the microtonal nature of the peaks of the phrase (for example the Eb and E in bar 116):

Example 2.35: 'Four-String Swing' bars 115-116

⁵⁸ This banjo-like writing is not used in a mannered or ironic way as in the pizzicato section of the *Burletta* of Bartok's String Quartet No.6, for instance. As the mandolin is itself a plectrum-instrument, it is simply employing one of the many facets of writing possible on the instrument, but rarely found in mandolin writing. While Stravinsky, Ravel and Bartok among many others sought to capture something of the character of the then novel style of jazz playing in some of their works, I have employed it as part of the natural language of the instrument.

This creates a timbre, articulation and ‘feel’ (or sense of muted, ‘swung’ beat) reminiscent of the very earliest blues-guitar recordings from the Mississippi delta. It reflects the pursuit of a unique sound palette which is both ancient and very modern. It also reflects my desire to capture through notated music something of the lightness and freedom of improvisation as opposed to a clearly worked variation. As if entering a realm between formal and informal music, this section further mutates into a passage of quick, alternating meters (three bars of 3/4 followed by one of 2/4) which seems to be another step in the dismantling of the triplet arpeggios which have dominated the movement. Now they stutter frenetically as the movement is disassembled into workings of core fragments:

Example 2.36 ‘Four-String Swing’ bars 123-127

123 Prestissimo ♩ = 180
 p cresc. poco a poco

Eventually a serpentine descending run (bars 137-144) restores a sense of unwinding, relaxation and balance after the twists and turns of the previous section before a virtual recapitulation of the opening of the main body of the piece (from bar 145) restores the sense of the original form and style. During the coda of the piece (from bar 159), itself a final nod to jazz gestures, the representation of a specific level of microtonal-like ‘bend’ (illustrated by the symbol \frown) is employed as a means to heighten the expressive power of a rising figure in bar 159:

Example 2.37: 'Four-String Swing' bars 137-164 (conclusion)

137 *f*

141 *rit.*

$\text{♩} = 165$

145 *mf*

149 *mp*

153 *f*

157 *p*

161

'Four-String Swing', unlike the other movements in this Suite, follows a harmonically-based structure which alludes to a standard template: the essentially ternary verse-chorus jazz form. It is not a superficial referencing. Within this framework, techniques drawn principally from the jazz tradition of plectrum-instrument playing have been used to create a piece which both sits within the stylistic parameters of the genre, and moves into unexpected territory through nuances of

articulation, ‘feel’, decoration and improvised-like gestures such as slides and bends involving indeterminate pitches. Just as it seems the piece is keeping to a recognisable format, it veers off into almost quixotic asides, a feature found in many of the movements in the folio. Although very different in outcome, it is somewhat akin to the approach of Damien Ricketson:

Just as the instrumental timbres of ‘A Line Has Two’ slide between the familiar and the unfamiliar, so too does the organisation of pitch slide between the controlled (absolute) and uncontrolled (relative).⁵⁹

Above all, considering the origins of Baroque Suite movements in popular and dance forms, there is a parallel between such pieces and the way I have created an idiomatic concert piece which takes a simple popular formal structure as its starting point, but significantly expands the scope of the work by making great demands on the technical and stylistic abilities of the performer, based on the implementation of an array of performance gestures.

2.7 V ‘Wake in Light’

As with other works in the Suite, ‘Wake in Light’ exploits idiomatic resonance. It illustrates the capacity of the mandolin to create a remarkable and unique sound palette of ringing sounds, a capacity which has been, from my survey of the repertoire, largely ignored by most composers for the instrument. The use of harmonics and unusual voicings are also staples of this piece, as is the selective use of silence to emphasize the short phrases and passages of cumulative chord groupings.

Whereas the earlier movements in the Suite are based in some way on an established structure, melodic fragment or style, ‘Wake in Light’ concerns itself solely with using the techniques discussed above to create an atmospheric, episodic

⁵⁹ Damien Ricketson, “Curious Noise” (PhD. Analytical Notes, University of Sydney, 2005), 105

work (the unique sound universe alluded to in Chapter One). It is largely comprised of probing fragments and musings on the very nature of the mandolin's sound. The instrument enters into what is almost a dialogue with itself: posing ideas, receiving a response, moving that response forward. Prominent among techniques used are additive techniques which owe much to the way a plectrum-instrument player develops ideas during an improvisational solo, as in the opening:

Example 2.38: 'Wake in Light' bars 1 - 3

The structure of the opening and closing sections is based around small groupings (two to four bars) of additive gestures (as in example 2.40 above) which link in ascending and descending pitch movement:

Example 2.39: Directional Impetus of Phrases in 'Wake in Light'

Bars (notional)	Directional Impetus
1-3	Rising
4-5	Falling
6- 10	Rising
11-13	Falling

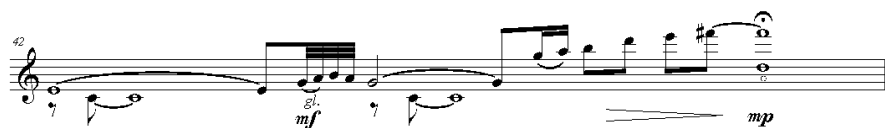
The middle section, as described below, takes on an altogether different character, before the contemplative nature of the opening returns in the final section (bars 36 – 44). This final section is dominated by a descending pattern:

Example 2.40: ‘Wake in Light’ bars 36-41



After this section, a quietly emphatic and uplifting final gesture takes us metaphorically towards the light:

Example 2.41 ‘Wake in Light’ bars 42-45



In between these calm, framing sections (that is, during bars 14 - 35) the movement becomes more driven and narrative-like, at times comic, although still episodic. The introduction of the slide at bar 20 (for the first time in the Suite) is a textural and timbral extension of the extensive use of glissandi in this and previous movements. It is also a reference to the employment of the slide by plectrum-instrument players in a variety of popular music genres, and although rare, has been used by composers when writing for the mandolin in more formal ensemble settings (for example in Crumb’s *Ancient Voices of Children*). In a solo setting, the slide is both a harsh and somehow ethereal effect, strident yet at the same time never quite

settled in a pitch sense. A uniquely plectrum-instrument technique, it is however very difficult to effect in performance (due to the low ‘action’ or distance between the strings and the fretboard on the mandolin, compared to the very high action on a lap or pedal-steel guitar).

Example 2.42: ‘Wake in Light’ bars 20-23

A subtle but significant technique, the playing of two different notes on one course of strings, is employed in this section:

Example 2.43: ‘Wake in Light’ bars 29-32

The technique of playing two different notes on one course of strings was documented as early as the Leone *Method*e previously mentioned. Here, it is particularly effective in highlighting unresolved minor second intervals as a prominent feature in the piece.

While not in any way a piece of program music, the title ‘Wake in Light’ reflects the splashes of tonal colour and light/shading in the piece, as well as being a reference to ‘Wake in Fright’, a remarkably atmospheric and evocative Australian novel full of the emptiness, desolation and mix of harshness and beauty found in

outback Australia. The techniques and compositional methods of the movement create a dialogue for the mandolin with itself, at times calm and ruminative, at other times uncertain, questioning, harsh and unresolved. Although a very different piece, 'Wake in Light' is arguably, along with 'Descending Mist', the movement in this Suite which best illustrates my search for a uniquely idiomatic compositional voice for the mandolin.

2.8 VI 'Fantasia VI'

To conclude the Suite, I have composed a movement that encapsulates a great deal of that which has been explored in the set. 'Fantasia VI' incorporates the full range of the musical language I have developed when writing for solo mandolin, based on techniques unique to the instrument, techniques which have fallen out of use, techniques influenced by those used on related plectrum instruments and, finally, writing which has absorbed the thinking behind the improvisational development of ideas on plectrum instruments. The whole idea of writing in a traditional format such as a suite has been reflected in underlying structures throughout the set, and in this final movement I have directly based the form on the structure of solo suite movements by G.P. Telemann (1681 - 1767), a composer for whom I have a high regard as a master of line and sequential invention.

'Fantasia VI' broadly recalls the structure and some of the shape of the Telemann Solo Violin Fantasia IV, movement 1, but the language used is only loosely tonal, and incorporates technical features discussed in the previous movements, as well as the use of bi-tones (in this case, applying the plectrum to the string between the fingered left-hand note and the nut, thereby creating whole passages of notes which sound different to those indicated on the score). These are commonly referred

to in guitar literature as ‘bi-tones’, but unlike the examples of bi-tones in ‘Descending Mist’ (which are produced by hammering with the left finger alone and actually produce two distinct notes), this technique produces only one. Hence the term is misleading in this context. Some writers have introduced other terms for this particular technique, such as ‘back-tones’, to distinguish it from the bi-tone technique which produces two notes⁶⁰. This creates an other-worldly, distant sound quality, with note combinations which would otherwise be unobtainable:

Example 2.44: ‘Fantasia VI’ bars 42-45 bi-tones (as written)



Example 2.45: ‘Fantasia VI’ bars 42-45 bi-tones (actual pitch)



I have not written the actual pitches in the main body of the movement to avoid confusion, instead inserting them (for the player’s reference) after the end of the movement. The reason for writing this passage in such a way is to create a pitched sound which continues the line of the preceding bars, but is of a completely different character, as if being heard through some sort of filter or altering agent. Through this, a new aural dimension is created as a means of musical expression.

⁶⁰ Christopher Sainsbury, “Bi-Tone Technique and Notation in Contemporary Guitar Music Composition” (Masters Diss., University of Sydney, 2001), 46-47

Like other movements in the Suite, ‘Fantasia VI’ uses arpeggio-based runs to create fluidity of line and implied melodic movement. Repetition and transformation through improvisation-like extension of simple cells propel the phrases, which again tend to be of between two and five bars in duration.

Another technique employed is the use of the metal slide, introduced in ‘Wake in Light’. In this instance, it creates a unique timbre and articulation while being an extension of the fluidity of preceding lines in the piece. Again, this leads the movement into that aural dimension in which phrases hover between clarity and indeterminacy, blurring the lines between articulation and timbre:

Example 2.46 ‘Fantasia VI’ bars 53-60

A particularly piquant effect, used to colour the response to a preceding passage, is the use of both *ponticello* and playing two different notes (G and Ab) on the same E string course, over the open A string:

Example 2.50: ‘Fantasia VI’ bar 19

This movement is akin to an anthology of the techniques, episodic writing, use of cells and structural references to past practices which comprise the creative identity of the Suite as a whole. Its achievement is that it has employed such a range of techniques innovatively, but without sacrificing the musical integrity of the movement. At the same time, it is steeped in tradition and past practices, as well as breaking new ground, with idiomatic considerations paramount.

2.9 Conclusion: *Suite for Solo Mandolin*

This Suite exemplifies primary features of the portfolio as a whole: to approach writing concert music for the mandolin in an alternative way to those commonly and historically used, which have as a rule differed little from writing for other instruments. The pursuit of this has led me to use traditional forms as a platform on which to build structures for the particular sonic attributes of my musical language, which is rooted in the very nature of the instrument; to explore aspects of microtonal nuances through bending, slide use and other techniques not normally regarded as anything but decorative gestures in popular forms of plectrum-instrument performance; and to incorporate something of the character of improvised playing in my writing. The technical focus and the concentration on exploiting the physical and sonic attributes of the instrument has had a great influence in shaping the individual movements. Rather than seeking to avoid or overcome the parameters presented by the nature of the instrument, I have embraced them and exploited them. The result is a Suite which is musically diverse and forward-looking yet based in traditions and united by the creation of this particular sound universe; a set which engages with the vernacular musical language of the instrument in a broader gestural and structural

sense and at the same time finds musical expression in crystalline details and nuances of sound production.

CHAPTER THREE

Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar

The *Suite For Solo Plectrum Guitar* consists of the following movements:

1. 'Ab Ovo'
2. 'Manouche Waltz'
3. 'Lament'
4. 'Bop Waltz'
5. 'Kaleidoscope'
6. 'Kharkiv Café'

There is little, if any, formal notated music composed for solo, unamplified plectrum guitar. The material that has been published consists primarily of jazz-oriented arrangements or transcriptions of popular music. This Suite aims to create a set of idiomatic movements for this specific instrument which are suitable for concert performance.

3.1 Definition

'Plectrum guitar' usually, but not exclusively, implies an acoustic instrument with steel strings, rather than nylon. More broadly speaking, the term covers the gamut from purely acoustic to hollow-bodied (semi-electric with pick-up) or solid-bodied (that is, electric) guitar with steel strings that are positioned closer together than on a classical/Spanish/nylon-string guitar⁶¹. This *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar* is written for the acoustic, steel-stringed guitar.

⁶¹ Even the term 'nylon-string' can be misleading, as it refers to only the three higher-pitched strings (G2, B3 and E3) on the Classical/Spanish Guitar, to differentiate between it and the 'steel-string' guitar, in which the corresponding strings are made of steel. However, both types of guitar usually have metal-wound (commonly bronze) lower strings.

3.2 Scope

Unlike the *Suite for Solo Mandolin*, the creation of this Suite is not written against the backdrop of several hundred years of repertoire for the instrument. As stated above, it is arguably a case of creating a whole new genre of composed solo concert music.

Writing for plectrum guitar is a very different proposition to writing for the Spanish or Classical guitar played finger-style. The very nature of the employment of the plectrum as the sound-instigator on steel strings both limits the way in which one can write for the instrument and opens up other paths and possibilities. Principally these possibilities arise from a different quality and level of projection and incisiveness of attack, while offering a range of timbres and technical devices unavailable to the classical, finger-style, nylon-string guitar. This range is explored in the Suite.

However, the writing doesn't emerge from a completely blank slate. Writing for guitar of any kind means inheriting a range of related traditions.

3.3 Influences and Models

Although this Suite represents an under-explored and potentially new genre of writing, there are a number of influences on the composition of these movements.

Apart from the music of a range of related plectrum instruments such as the oud, there is the music of popular guitar styles developed from the American blues tradition, encompassing various forms of blues, country, jazz and rock music. As referred to in the previous chapter, the improvisational originality and technical innovation of Django Reinhardt casts a large shadow over anything played on, or written for, plectrum guitar.

3.4 Structures

I have sought to incorporate both innovation and tradition in the structure of these movements. My focus has been less on the larger-scale issues such as form, and more on nuances of expression and colour. Thus freely-written sections based on improvisatory thinking alternate with and interact with established forms such as Variations, Ballade-like Verse/Chorus structures and Blues: all forms of instrumental works and songs in which the plectrum guitar has had a long association. In short, form in this work is dictated by the context of the plectrum guitar, hopefully achieving a sense of authenticity that a more complex form would not have rendered. On a larger scale, some of these structures have been employed in a broader Ternary form, which I favour when writing pieces which are primarily explorations of colour.

3.5 Tonality

The movements centre around A minor, in accordance with my desire to create a Suite unified by key and structures. Having said that, there is often a great degree of tonal ambiguity within that broad sense of key, through the use of extended and chromatic chords. This approach is derived at least in part from the historical tendency of plectrum guitar improvisers to base their creative work on essentially diatonic harmonic structures, which provide a platform for creating their melodic lines around chromatic and added chords. I explore this aspect of the Suite particularly in movements IV ('Bop Waltz') and VI ('Kharkiv Café').

3.6 Soundscapes

Part of the impetus for writing for this instrument is the attraction of the creative possibilities offered by a large and fresh palette of sounds. Some of these options are

almost soundscapes in themselves, primarily explorations of timbral character. In most cases, these are used in conjunction with more conventional writing as in the first movement, ‘Ab Ovo’. In other cases they have formed the greater part, if not the whole of a movement, as in movement V ‘Kaleidoscope’.

‘Ab Ovo’ is the first of this Suite of movements for solo steel-stringed plectrum guitar. In Latin the title means ‘from the egg’ (that is, ‘from the beginning’ or ‘from conception’). Found in Horace’s *Ars Poetica* and *Satire 1.3* (*‘ab ovo usque ad mala’*), it has been employed as a phrase for millennia. The title reflects the fact that, from the outset, it is clear that this is music for a very different animal than for the finger-style, nylon-string classical guitar, as conveyed by the instruction at bar 1: ‘tremolo using side edge of plectrum on surface of strings to create shimmering sound’. This continues for the first 15 bars. A related technique on classical guitar is to rub the fleshy pad of the thumb along the face of the strings, known sometimes as *thumb tremolando*.⁶² This creates a far more modest level of volume, and is quite different from the plectrum-created equivalent in terms of volume and timbre. On the plectrum instrument the very surfaces of the steel strings, when excited by the plectrum edge in this way, conjure a range of textures derived from the different thicknesses of the strings (particularly the wound lower strings). To the best of my knowledge, this is an entirely new technique in notated guitar music.

⁶² Robert Allan Lunn, “Extended Techniques for the Classical Guitar: A Guide for Composers”, (DMA diss., Ohio State University, 2010), 29

Example 3.1 ‘Ab Ovo’ bars 1-3: plectrum-edge tremolando

Plectrum-edge tremolando: use side edge of plectrum on surface of strings to create shimmering sound

Using a mixture of diatonic and extended chords in a range of voicings, the opening of ‘Ab Ovo’ creates a unique timbral and textural effect, that seeks to be both dramatic and calming, reinforced by being notated *senza misura* (notional bar numbers are included in the score for reference purposes). It acts as an anticipatory swirl from which, at its unresolved conclusion (bar 15), the cumulative sonic ‘clouds’ give way to a more clearly formed, almost naïve ballad-like instrumental movement from bar 16. The bulk of the movement is based on broken chord patterns, with phrase ends left unresolved but implied (metaphorically ‘hanging in the air’) as they merge into the following ascending chord pattern, as in bar 30-31.

Example 3.2 ‘Ab Ovo’ bars 29-32

This is reminiscent of the *style brisé* techniques discussed in Chapter Two. It creates a constant flow of combined and uninterrupted harmonic and melodic movement. Bars 31- 44 are a variation of bars 16-30, featuring the transformation of the earlier section’s harmonic outlines into melodic lines through the use of added notes such as 6ths and 9ths (for example Dm6 in bar 33):

Example 3.3 'Ab Ovo' bar 33



As the movement appears to be moving towards a conclusion, it instead takes a path into another section of 'plectrum-edge tremolando' which recalls the opening:

Example 3.4 'Ab Ovo' bars 47-53: plectrum edge tremolando

The movement concludes as quixotically as it began, with ascending natural harmonics outlining an unresolved dominant minor chord, *morendo*:

Example: 3.5 'Ab Ovo' bars 61-62

Movement V, 'Kaleidoscope', also presents the plectrum itself as a feature of the work. It is an aural journey through what is a constantly changing and transmuting series of harmonics. The plectrum is applied in one long, machine-like, continual tremolo favouring the plectrum edge, while the left hand's middle finger moves slowly from bridge to nut with minimal contact with the string. The effect is so pronounced that it creates a sense of combined melodic/timbral/textural progression,

or an unfolding aural stimulation, kaleidoscopic in effect. Again, the effectiveness of this technique is due to the combination of steel-wound string and percussively applied plectrum.

Example 3.6 VI ‘Kaleidoscope’

Favouring the plectrum-edge, tremolo as evenly and rapidly as possible on E (6th) string, adjacent to the bridge (ie sul pont).
At the same time, apply the 2nd (middle) finger of the left hand as lightly as possible to the same string (as when playing harmonics), next to the point where tremoloing.
Move it as slowly and evenly as possible until reaching the nut.
Aim to produce a changing flow of harmonics, "noise" and other overtones.

This is the most purely conceptual or abstract movement in the Suite. It makes a physical reference to the similar effect often employed by electric-guitar players scraping along the same string in a rock music context, such as the opening to *Road Runner* (1960) by Bo Diddley (1928-2008). Both ‘Kaleidoscope’ as a whole and ‘Ab Ovo’ in its introduction and middle section feature the purely sonic exploitation of the physical features of steel-string plectrum guitar, in a way which recalls acclaimed contemporary composer Kaija Saariaho’s work involving ‘pure’ and ‘noisy’ sound. The constantly shifting sound spectrum created also recalls Saariaho’s linking of such writing with Goethe’s *Theory of Colours*, particularly the transitional states between light and shade.⁶³ I experimented and improvised upon ‘Kaleidoscope’ in many contexts (in performance, in practice, whilst composing, on other instruments) and finally refined it into this movement.

⁶³ Anne Sivuola-Gunaratnam, “Miniatures and Tensions: Phenomenological Reverberations In and Around Kaija Saariaho’s *Lichtbogen*”, *Intersections* 2005:25, 1-2), 46

3.7 Developing ideas based on improvised figures over structural templates

Among the leading plectrum guitarists of the past century are those of the Manouche (French gypsy) tradition, which traces its origins and inspiration to Django Reinhardt, and is continued in the hands of a range of players such as Boulou Ferré (born 1951) and Elios Ferré (born 1956), Angelo Debarre (born 1962), Fapy Lafertin (born 1950) and Biréli Lagrène (born 1966). One of the ingredients in the style of playing and improvising in this style are the structures and gestures found in waltzes played in early twentieth century *Bal Musettes*, originally dances of provincial French origin for the poorer immigrant classes of Paris, which also absorbed Italian accordion playing influences.⁶⁴ These gestures include characteristic chord changes such as the descending chromatic chord movement iii (minor)/flat iii minor/ii/V); alternating minor-major sections in a ternary structure; cascading improvised solos based on diminished 7th chords; a great deal of decoration of the melodic line; and much use of extended chords such as 6ths and 9ths.⁶⁵ In performing with musicians working in the Gypsy swing tradition, I have been involved in playing music forged from such templates for several decades. Thus this music is, in a real sense, now my music.

Perhaps most importantly from my point of view, a major feature in this playing is the employment of a range of attacks using the plectrum from extremely strong full chord strokes to delicate *tasto*⁶⁶ lines. Such waltzes are usually performed with accompaniment (for example, another guitar or accordion) or in a small ensemble.

⁶⁴ “bal musette” in http://dictionnaire.sensagent.com/bal%20musette/fr-fr/#Artistes_du_musette (accessed 28.9.2013)

⁶⁵ Examples of the typical bal musette waltz are “Django’s Waltz” (*Mont St Genevieve*) by Romane (CD *Swing in Nashville*, Freméaux e Associés 1997) and “La Gitane” by Paul Vidal as played by Angelo Debarre (CD *Portrait of Angelo Debarre*, Hot Club Records HCRCR7, 2006)

⁶⁶ *sul tasto* – the plectrum stroke occurring over the end of the fretboard, rather than the sound hole or closer to the bridge.

To write in this style for a solo instrument without accompaniment, incorporating the features mentioned above but extending their scope while retaining the flavour and character of the model, is a great challenge. One of the defining features in this style is the contrast between brash, strongly rhythmic chord strikes (mixing diatonic and chromatic chords) and subtle, embellished lines. These embellished lines are typically improvised by players of such waltzes, so I have sought to capture in notation something of this character, which take the form of delicate, almost Baroque-like ornamentation around a triad, scale run or extended chord note. These aspects of the style can be heard in the introductory bars of ‘Manouche Waltz’, with strongly rhythmic chord strikes in bars 1-7 and embellished lines in bars 8-9:

Example 3.7 ‘Manouche Waltz’ bars 1-9

The musical notation for Example 3.7 consists of two staves. The first staff contains bars 1 through 7, starting with a tempo marking of quarter note = 70. Bars 1-7 are characterized by strong rhythmic chord strikes. The dynamics are marked as *f* (forte) in bar 1, *p* (piano) in bar 5, and *p* in bar 7. The second staff contains bars 8 and 9. Bar 8 begins with a dynamic of *sub. mp* (sub-mezzo-piano) and features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Bar 9 is marked *Freely* and *mf* (mezzo-forte), featuring a melodic line with a slur and two triplet markings (3).

The harmonic language of this movement is established in this opening. It is essentially diatonic (A harmonic minor) but with unusual movement to and from the unrelated Bb major chord of bar 2, coming to rest on a D6 chord in bar 7 before moving to the dominant at the end of the introduction.

In writing for solo instrument, I have taken advantage of the ear making ‘aural assumptions’, as did Reinhardt in his improvisations and compositions. By continuing a melodic line or repeating a phrase with extension or in a different octave, the sub-

conscious impression is that the pre-established rate of chord change is continued, given that the melodic lines usually outline a chord. This is exemplified by the simple, diatonic statement of the opening figure (bar 18) of the movement proper, repeated in different octaves in succeeding bars, which has itself been preceded by a chordal section establishing the harmonic and rhythmic momentum of the movement:

Example 3.8 'Manouche Waltz' bars 18-23



A feature of improvisations in this style is the use of single-line or chordal diminished seventh runs. These are featured in several places such as the following:

Example 3.9 'Manouche Waltz' bars 38-40



Example 3.10 'Manouche Waltz' bars 46-49



It is worth noting that the clean, crisp execution of bar 47 and similar arpeggiated figures creates an almost gliding effect in terms of note movement when played with a plectrum, as it slides from one string to the next. If attempted at tempo using Classical/finger style arpeggio or rasgueado, the effect would be markedly different.

At bar 88 an unresolved E (flat 9/flat 6) chord hangs metaphorically in the air after a reprise of the opening chordal figures seems to have brought the movement to an end. This heralds a complete change in mood and character through a shift from A Minor to A Major, in accordance with the *Bal Musette* template. Instead of continuing in the same tempo and character, the whole movement shifts into a more reflective mode, exemplified by the use of a gentle, singing single-line melodic figure, in free tempo, anchored by occasional chords.

Example 3.11 'Manouche Waltz' bars 88- 94



This whole section (bars 88-121) is something of a delicate, dream-like meandering after the deliberateness of the writing of the first section, making great use of timbral contrasts between *tasto* and *norm* (that is, 'normal' over the sound hole) playing.

After an apparent return to the opening figure in accordance with the Ternary form of the Bal Musette model, the movement veers off into what seems at first to be simple repetitions of the opening scalar figure underpinned by chromatic chord changes (bars 126-137) before its whole character changes, dismantling into a succession of chord substitutions, plectrum scrapes, Bartok pizzicato, chromatic runs and harmonics, a range of techniques which approaches the theatrical in terms of variety and execution.

Example 3.12 II 'Manouche Waltz' bars 138 – 197

Plectrum scrape

138 *towards nut* *nr bridge* *sim.*

142

Meno Mosso

146 *p*

150 *accel.* *A tempo*

154 *f*

158

162

166 *tr*

170 *tr*

174 *tr*

The coda following this extended passage (starting at bar 197, the final bar in the example above), recalls the opening before bringing the movement to a close with improvised-like lines and extended chords.

Example 3.12 encapsulates a major compositional feature of the Suite as a whole: taking material established earlier in the movement (which is in itself built on templates and styles derived from popular and other plectrum-instrument traditions) and creating improvisationally- and idiomatically-inspired flights down several related musical byways before rejoining the major route of the movement again. The movement eschews wholesale, self-conscious re-imagining of the style or model upon which it is based, choosing rather to stay true to the character of the model and retain the spirit of improvisatory flavour which is so much part of the instrument's history.

3.8 Meeting point of popular Western and traditional non-Western plectrum traditions

Movement III ‘Lament’ turns the focus of the Suite from modern usage of the instrument to the ancient links between European plectrum-instruments and the oud, links already discussed at length in previous chapters. In particular, it exploits:

- the ringing qualities of sustained lower open strings
- repeated notes with expressive use of plectrum attack (for example in bar 23), often in collaboration with mordent-like decoration (for example in bars 34 and 35)
- glissandi as a part of the melodic fabric

The movement is in two distinct sections and is to be performed in a metrically flexible and expressive way. Bars 1 - 37, as indicated in the performance directions, are to be played *Lento*, expressively, and in the style of the rendering of a *maqam*, which in the oud tradition is often explored by the performer in an expository way before launching into a piece proper. It is also not unlike the practice of *alaap* in the performance of North Indian ragas, an improvised, unmetered prologue to the formal expression of the piece itself.⁶⁷ As noted in Chapter One, writing in such an expository way allows for improvisation-like explorations of the key (basically E Aeolian in this case), which in turn suggest what would be more formally described as additive compositional processes. The score is notated *senza misura*. Notional bar numbers are included for rehearsal and analytical purposes.

Additive phrases build and come to rest briefly on typically jazz-derived notes, such as 9ths (bar 2), and the flattened 5th (bars 6 and 8), while 6ths (C# in bar

⁶⁷ Randal, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 27

7) are also prominent. Combined with the ringing open string drone of the low E string, these focus points of the phrasing create ambiguity but also a type of quasi-consonance, in which the theoretically unresolved become points of rest. The use of oud-like repetition of notes at varying speed and impact points (*sul pont* and *norm*) creates a further expressive dimension. Insistent, mordent-like decorations in bar 7 (and later) combine both European and Arabic-tradition senses of decoration.

Example 3.13 II 'Lament' bars 1-8

Lento - Espressivo - quasi Maqam

The second part of the opening section (from bar 17 to bar 28) begins with the other bass open string (5th or B₂, using *scordatura* technique to tune up a tone from the standard A₂), again recalling the oud players' practice of utilising open lower strings in the same manner to tonally underpin movement on upper strings. There is an extended passage of rising and falling, decorative and additive scalic patterns from bar 17 to bar 29.

Example 3.14 II 'Lament' bars 17-29

The opening is then recalled from bar 29 to bar 37. This concludes the expository opening section, after which the performer is instructed to re-tune the 5th string down a tone from B to A for the second section. Re-tuning is an unusual occurrence in the middle of a piece, but is not unknown among jazz/gypsy guitarists such as Bireli Lagrene in live performance, and is explored much further as a compositional device in this Suite in movement IV 'Bop Waltz'.

The re-tuning is due to the second section moving away from the largely drone-like dependence on 2 bass pitches featured in the opening 37 bars. Instead, the bars from 38 onwards feature more harmonic variety, building on the exploratory character of the opening to create a section which complements it with a more lyrical, singing character, while still using a language combining the elements and traditions described above.

After a further repetition of this figure, the descending line continues in a repeated, less harring, almost reflective answer to the frantic energy of bars 38-45, now with a relaxed, jazz flavor which on first playing (bars 46-47) ends on Am6 (chord IV) and on the second playing (bar 48-50) ends on B7 (chord V7) before coming completely to rest on Em in bar 51.

Example 3.16 III 'Lament' bars 46-51

After repeating this section (for reasons of structural balance, as well as to allow the listener to re-contemplate the material) the transformation is completed in the section beginning at bar 53. The writing has shifted from predominantly oud-influenced writing with limited harmonic movement to a jazz-oriented language from bar 52 to the end, exemplified by the phrases ending in bar 54 on the 6th (C#). The left-hand thumb is employed on one of the rare occasions in this Suite to enable the playing of parallel lines with the plectrum and finger-struck notes played simultaneously, two octaves apart (bar 58).

Example 3.17 III 'Lament' bars 52-62

This movement is one of the clearest examples in the Suite of bringing together technical and stylistic aspects of several plectrum instrument traditions to create an idiomatic language for a new repertoire. The first section is a particular embodiment of one of my larger aims in the Suite as a whole, which is to unite the apparently disparate stylistic traditions of plectrum instruments, in this case oud and jazz guitar.

3.9 Essays in tactile physicality and the vernacular

The movement entitled 'Bop Waltz' is an essay for solo plectrum guitar in the language of jazz and blues/rock forms, which are synonymous with the plectrum guitar in its acoustic and electric forms from the time when the first solo-line guitar playing emerged as a major element in popular music in the early twentieth century. Like 'Manouche Waltz', it is written using a structural template (blues form) associated with the instrument. Unlike 'Manouche Waltz', it does not concentrate

solely on the gestures of Reinhardt gypsy-swing, but delves deep into the range of guitar gestures from twentieth century popular music. The particular challenge in composing such a movement is to avoid an empty academic exercise, or an awkward marriage of styles, instead striving to create a solo work which acknowledges major currents in popular forms of writing for the instrument. It is a somewhat similar approach to Australian composer Graeme Koehne's approach to writing orchestral music:

*... Koehne set out to broker an encounter between the techniques of classical music and popular music. His music aims to reinvigorate traditional compositional methods and techniques through their re-engagement with musical vernacular and the diverse forms of popular culture*⁶⁸

However, I do not pretend to attempt 'to reinvigorate traditional compositional methods and techniques'. I am simply incorporating the musical language and heritage of an instrument into the creation of a solo repertoire for it, an act which has grown from my long engagement with the instrument and its associated vernacular forms.

Like 'Manouche Waltz', the soloist acts as his/her own accompanist, but in a unique way. One of the crucial differences between writing for solo classical/finger-style guitar as opposed to plectrum guitar is that much classical guitar writing approaches quasi-piano writing in its effect: an accompanying line of bass note and chords (often alberti-bass) under a melodic line, allowing the guitarist to play transcriptions of piano pieces, adapt Baroque and pre-Baroque lute music, or to play guitar music which is piano-like. The solo plectrum-guitarist can only do this to a very limited extent, which to my way of thinking is more a blessing than a curse. It necessitates a very different style of writing, one which combines melodic line with

⁶⁸ James Koehne, Biography www.graemekoehne.com/biography.html (accessed 14 November 2012)

rhythmic/chordal episodes, creating something approaching an antiphonal effect.

Such is the case in 'Bop Waltz', from the outset:

Example 3.18 II 'Bop Waltz' bars 1-12

Such writing creates a particular style, in which melodic line melts back and forth into chordal/rhythmic passages, and in which harmonic and rhythmic propulsion is implied rather than having an actual, unbroken accompanying figure sounding continuously underneath.

3.10 Physicality

A major feature in the composition of this movement in particular is a physical approach to the realisation of the chords used, relying on the application of a left-hand finger barred across a fret to create a range of added chords. Like many aspects of plectrum guitar language, this again leads us back to the earliest players of the instrument, particularly black American bluesmen tuning their often home-made guitars to open tuning (such as a major or minor chord) and applying one or two left-hand finger(s) or a metal slide across a fret to create simple chords as an accompaniment to singing. More relevantly, the practice used in standard tuning (as seen in bars 2 and 3 of Example 3.18 above) can be traced more directly to the influence of Reinhardt. Due to the disfigurement of his left hand in a fire accident, he

had the full use of only the index and middle fingers, with the ring finger limited to a simple cross-fret barred application as described above. Interestingly, the application of this approach on guitars using standard tuning (ascending E₁-A-D-G-B-E₃) combined with some adjustment led to the creation of a creatively inspired harmonic vocabulary of added and ambiguous chords with implied notes, which are at the heart of Reinhardt's, and swing guitar's, musical language. Having always been fascinated by the resulting voicings of this approach, I have deliberately used such chords in an almost physical or tactile approach to composition, an approach also investigated in different ways by contemporary composers such as Damien Ricketson:

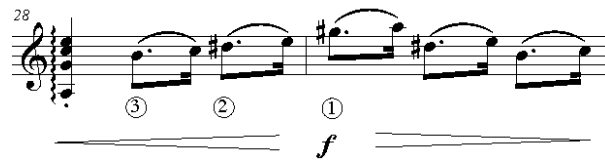
*Likewise, tactile facets of music, where musical structures arise from the composition of physical actions upon the surface of the musical instrument, are also investigated as a means of generating a corporeal form of expression.*⁶⁹

I have employed the harmonic/rhythmic template of the blues-pattern for this movement. This is arguably one of the most tactile of all musical forms, as it must conceivably have emerged largely as a result of the basic physical application of the fingers on simple, fretted instruments (as described above) in accompanying the basic AAB-structure chant as its basic structure. Similarly, the main, opening thematic idea is derived from the minor form of the blues scale (in this case, A C D D# E G). Clearly, 'Bop Waltz' approaches writing for the guitar in a completely different way to finger-style writing, through techniques described previously and others as illustrated in the examples below.

A linking line utilising hammer-on notes from a semi-tone below triad notes (in this case, A minor) is an improvisational and compositional device used by Reinhardt in numerous songs, most notably *Appel Direct*. Here it is used as a form of embellishment during a reiteration of the opening section.

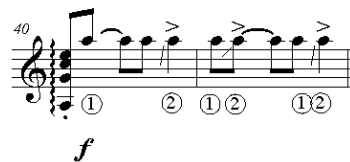
⁶⁹ Ricketson *Curious Noise*, ii

Example 3.19 IV 'Bop Waltz' bars 28-29



The following example, again an embellishment of the opening statement, is almost emblematic of plectrum guitar playing, one which I associate primarily with Chuck Berry (born 1926), in which syncopated energy is created through playing the same pitch note (A₄) alternately on the first and second strings (although rarely, if ever, in 3/4).

Example 3.20 IV 'Bop Waltz' bars 40-41



The opening, a fairly straightforward rendering of the blues-pattern with embellished repeat, is brought to a close in bars 47-58. This section marks a departure from the standard blues template. It takes the form of a winding down or dissolution of the standard blues harmonic/metrical structure by employing techniques such as the extension of the opening idea by continuing to ascend along the E (1st) string with alternate open E strings until pausing on the (implied) dominant chord (bars 47-53). Following this a descending chromatic run (another Reinhardt staple) leading to bars 54-55 which bring to mind the theatrical plectrum and arm movements of electric guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970) in creating great tonal contrast through

striking the string at different physical points during a passage of hammered notes. A further descending run finishing, unresolved, on the 6th in bar 57 leaves the movement hanging very much in the air, a metaphorical catching of the breath which paves the way for a further change of direction.

Example 3.21 IV 'Bop Waltz' bars 47 - 58

47

52 *f*

Freely- quasi cadenza

strike string at different place on each marked beat

55

From the relative strictures of the blues format, 'Bop Waltz' now enters free, almost reflective territory, incorporating chord-movement staples from the popular song tradition. This movement between stricter popular formal structures and freer, meditative sections is a feature of many works in the folio, and particularly this Suite (*Ab Ovo* and *Manouche Waltz* in particular). However, in this movement the change is most pronounced, as exemplified by the descending diminished chord passage over low E pedal point in bars 59-64. This is a feature similar to that of many linking passages in the solos of gypsy-jazz guitarists:

Example 3.22 IV 'Bop Waltz' bars 59-64

Non-swing feel

This passage, along with the preceding example, serves to 'unwind' the movement to the point where the established syncopated movement can only continue to descend if the low E string is literally unwound. This is exactly what the performer is instructed to do, in real time and in-tempo, so that the manipulation of the tuning peg becomes a way to create specific, pitched bass movement. The effect, which reaches its ultimate focus in bars 75 and 76, makes reference to many an electric guitar instrumental of the mid- twentieth century in particular.⁷⁰

Example 3.23 IV 'Bop Waltz' bars 67-76

*: manipulate tuning peg for notes below E

⁷⁰ Probably best exemplified in the Duane Eddy recording of Henry Mancini's *Peter Gunn* TV theme

The incorporation of a range of ‘vernacular’ plectrum guitar techniques into a set of movements for solo concert performance is one of the stated aims of this Suite. In the case of the example above, the re-tuning of the E-string during performance to create a musical line takes a signature sound of the instrument and extends it into a musical effect unobtainable on almost any other stringed instrument.

The final movement, ‘Kharkiv Café’, brings together the elements explored throughout the Suite, embracing many of the technical features drawn from across the guitar’s many related traditions. The title refers to the place where the movement’s opening figure was first sketched (Ukraine’s second largest city and former capital is Kharkiv, or ‘Kharkov’ in Russian).

Like many movements in the Suite, this is in A minor, but commences with a minor 3rd interval suggesting Bb major or G minor, alternating with repeated low open E string as a kind of pedal point, the latter being gesture being a feature of the Suite as a whole. The inherent tonal instability of this figure (essentially E minor 7th/b5 or ‘E half-diminished’ in common usage) creates a feeling of expectation through its lack of harmonic resolution and sense of a pulse being continually interrupted as it seeks to establish itself. This impression builds as further elements are added, ranging from harmonics (bar 6) to double-stopped hammering and double-stopped glissando figures (bars 7 and 8). The latter two techniques are very unusual but particularly effective in creating and maintaining fluidity along with an element of percussiveness in attack:

Example 3.24 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 5-10

The musical score for Example 3.24 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 5-10 is presented in two staves. The first staff begins at bar 5 with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tempo marking of *norm.*. It features a series of chords and melodic lines, including a double-stopped hammering (DH) and a glissando (gl.). The second staff starts at bar 8 and continues the piece with similar techniques, including another DH and glissando.

The introductory passage leads into what appears to be the establishment of a tonal centre on A through the bass note at bar 18. Despite some initial ambiguity derived from the harmonics on the 12th fret (suggesting E minor), the descending line which follows (in bars 18-19) dances around the notes of the A minor triad, establishing it in a manner recalling the Reinhardt improvisational figures discussed previously. Like the opening figure of the movement, these fluid scalic lines, hallmarks of solo plectrum guitar playing and improvising over a chord pattern, are possible to play finger-style on Classical guitar, but the flavour would be quite different, and much of the attack lost, unless played with a plectrum, particularly on steel strings. The same applies to features in the following passages, such as the heavily accented scalic tremolo run (bar 22) and double-stopped hammering (bar 29). What is created is a virtuosic movement exploiting the instrument idiomatically.

Example 3.25 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 18-26

A tempo

The opening is recalled from bar 28, again featuring double-stopped glissandi (as in bar 31). Bars 36-42 are not so much a bridging section or interlude, as a metaphorical catching of the breath. At this point the movement takes stock of itself, in a manner akin to the meditative sections described in earlier movement in the Suite. It mulls over material derived from the opening, played *la campanella* (bar 36) and particularly with the use of harmonics in bar 37's echo. A typically plectrum guitar jazz-influenced barre chord played with swelling tremolo at bar 38 (D6 over E bass) separates the first two bars from further *campanella* writing outlining E9 in bars 39 and 40. This reflective section is brought to an end by a tremoloed descending chromatic run (bar 40) leading into what at first appears to be a reiteration of the main A minor section from bar 41.

Example 3.26 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 36-42

Instead of being an exact re-iteration of earlier material, from bars 43-63 the music's previous flow is interrupted and dislocated chiefly through the insertion of 5/8 bars. This creates a melodic, rhythmic and metrical distortion of the earlier material, using characteristic plectrum-guitar techniques such as hammering on, pull-offs and tremoloed glissando. It seems to be building to a major climax or statement, but instead gives way at bar 61 to a 3/4 *cantabile* section which is based on a combination of held chord progressions and upper-note tremolo. In its lyrical character, this passage is a surprisingly benign intrusion into the character of the earlier music, not unlike the way Mahler inserts passages of naïve tremoloed mandolin music in the *Nachtmusik* movements of his symphonic works at a point when every other form of musical expression seems to have been explored and exhausted. Again, the implementation of this technique is only really possible if playing guitar with a plectrum, and requires a very secure tremolo technique. This section is most reminiscent of flamenco playing and the four bars which are the climax of the section (bars 73-76) are particularly drawn from this tradition, with E-F Major chord movement in different voicings and with added chromatic notes moving over a repeated E bass, again acting as a pedal point or drone.

Example 3.27 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 61-76

Cantabile

61

mf

64

67

70

Freely

73

pp

f

ff

V

VI *sul pont.*

Instead of launching directly into a climactic, final passage, the movement dwells on the dominant and the (altered) sub-dominant in bars 77-79, with very unusual imitative writing propelling the descending lines which build expectation for the climax of the movement.

Example 3.28 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 77-79

A tempo

77

f

The short, explosive final section (from bar 81) draws on the main material (from bar 18), with every second bar compressed into 2/4 and 3/4. Like 'Manouche Waltz', a sense of self-accompaniment is created, with percussive chords

on the first beat of the 4/4 bars acting as the anchors for passages of syncopated scalar runs which lead like a roller-coaster to the emphatic concluding bars.

Example 3.29 VII 'Kharkiv Café' bars 80-87

The image displays three staves of musical notation for 'Kharkiv Café' bars 80-87. The first staff (bars 80-81) begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature, featuring a syncopated scalar run. The second staff (bars 82-84) shows a change in time signature to 4/4, with a dynamic marking of *ff* and a 'V' marking above the staff. The third staff (bars 85-87) continues the 4/4 time signature, ending with a final chord and a 'V' marking above the staff.

This analysis of 'Kharkiv Café' has illustrated the range of idiomatic plectrum guitar techniques used and the gestures drawn from the instrument's historical associations, in order to highlight the distinctive musical expression that results from approaching composition for an instrument in such a way.

3.11 Conclusion: *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar*

As stated at the outset, this Suite aims to draw on a range of traditional musical influences and ingredients to create a new type of concert repertoire for the guitar played with a plectrum. These include templates drawn from the popular music styles in which the plectrum guitar has played a central role; inspiration from the plectrum guitar's rich tradition of improvisation; non-Western plectrum instrument techniques, figures and embellishment styles; and the sheer physicality, innovation and vibrancy

that a range of performers have brought to the playing of the instrument which in many ways defined the major streams of popular music of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 4

Quincerto for Mandola and String Quartet

Quincerto for Mandola and String Quartet is a work in four movements.

As explained in Chapter One, the mandola in modern usage is an octave mandolin, tuned G₂ D₃ A₃ E₄ in pairs of metal and metal-wound strings.⁷¹ The term *mandola* has been applied to lute-like instruments for centuries, but the modern form of the instrument developed with the rise of mandolin orchestras from the mid-nineteenth century, also discussed previously. The mandola's role is that of the alto/tenor voice in these orchestras, roughly equivalent to the viola in the string section of a symphony orchestra or chamber ensembles. Similarly, the mandola has been used in chamber-like plucked-string equivalents of string quartets, such as quartets of two mandolins, mandola and guitar. Some solo works and a few concertos (played with mandolin orchestras) have been composed for the mandola, but its solo repertoire is very small.

My aim in this four-movement work aligns with my approach to the folio as a whole. It is to write for the mandola as a unique instrument, not as if it were a quasi-bowed string (or any other) instrument. The range of the instrument, allied with its size (substantially larger than a mandolin) and combined with the use of a plectrum to produce the sound, provides a wealth of timbral possibilities for composing idiomatic music. The mandola could be described as being something of a combination of the mandolin and the oud, both in appearance and sound. It has the lower range of the latter, with the double courses and tuning system of the former.

The work's title is *Quincerto* because it is a concerto-like work in quintet form. My research has revealed the existence of several pieces for mandola in chamber combinations with other instruments, but I am not aware of any written for

⁷¹ In the USA the mandola is often tuned as a viola

mandola and string quartet. I have chosen this combination of instruments for several reasons. The plectrum instrument working with and sometimes against the timbres of the bowed strings is highly effective in terms of instrumental balance without requiring amplification, and in the way I have written, highlights the very different natures of the plucked and bowed string instruments, which is one of the central themes of this folio of works. The string quartet is one of the most complete and malleable small ensembles, for which I have written several pieces in the past.

4.1 Idiomatic Writing

In this piece, one of my main focuses is on the unique voice of the mandola. Its capacity for light and shade are exploited, in the process exploring the ‘ethnicity of sound’ I have used as the title for the folio as a whole. In the first 21 bars of solo mandola writing, the piece announces the timbral character and much of the gestural vocabulary of the piece. A number of specifically plectrum and fretted-instrument techniques are employed:

- tremolo, often on more than one string simultaneously
- ringing open strings in unison with a fingered note of the same pitch or a semitone higher or lower
- bending notes
- tremolo with the side of the plectrum
- passages of campanella-like harmonics
- multi-note glissandi and hammered-only notes

From the opening hammered and bent notes based on one pitch played on adjoining string courses, phrases build in length and in their sense of ascending shape. These short phrases recall Chinese *pipa* or Japanese *koto* techniques more than any

other instrument. Two symbols have been created to convey (a) the specifically *slow* bend of a note (half-moon under second fermata) and (b) gradually turning the plectrum onto its edge during tremolo (third fermata). The short, fragmentary nature of phrases in the opening creates an unsettled, inquisitive, probing nature, at times questioning hesitantly and at other times advancing urgently. Due to its free exploratory nature, it is notated *senza misura* until bar 22, with notional bar numbers included for reference.

Example 4.1 *Quincerto* Movement I bars 1-2

Freely ♩ = 88

Mandola

MdlA

MdlA

MdlA

accel.

urgently

Meno Mosso

a tempo

let note(s) ring

let note(s) ring

let note(s) ring

Following this, bars 22–45 essentially see the mandola revisiting this opening material in modified form as it engages in dialogue with the string quartet, initially with the cello, then violin I and eventually the quartet as a whole. Like the opening, the second half of the movement exemplifies my compositional approach, which I believe is at least partly derived from having a background in ‘ethnic’ plectrum instruments and improvisation: rather than long, sustained melodic lines, I favour

shorter, highly rhythmically and timbrally-charged motifs which develop through repetition, addition and varied accentuation.

Example 4.2 *Quincerto* Movement I bars 21-30

The musical score for Example 4.2, *Quincerto* Movement I bars 21-30, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 21-25) features Mandola and Cello. The Mandola part starts with a melodic line, including a triplet and a natural harmonic. The Cello part has a pizzicato section marked *ff*. The second system (bars 26-30) features Mandola, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The Mandola part continues with a melodic line, including a forte section and a pizzicato section. The Violin I part has a triplet marked *mp*, *cresc. e accel.*, and a forte section. The Violin II, Viola, and Cello parts are marked *con sord.* and *pp*.

The first three movements of *Quincerto* have what may be described as a tonal centre, primarily A (aeolian/natural minor for the most part), and G (moving between harmonic minor, major and pentatonic) for the final. Within this broad framework, the variety of tonal language is often based on my exploiting the open strings of the mandola and using them to produce ringing streams of chords (both diatonic and chromatic), a particularly effective and idiomatic technique on the mandola.

Example 4.3 *Quincerto* Movement II, bars 170-174

arpeggiate as one continuous stream of sound,
moving spectrum between *tasto* & *pont*

Mdlra

170

mf

sim.

TH

rit.

Ringling open-string mandola chords are often sustained over different harmonies in the quartet instruments, as in the G minor 7th over A minor created in bar 182 of Movement III:

Example 4.4 *Quincerto* Movement III bars 181-182

Mdlra

181

mp

Vln I

mf

4.2 Timbral Language and Cells

As noted in Chapter One, my writing falls broadly into two structural templates: one in which a theme is worked and varied, and one which manipulates cells in short, timbral-focused statements and dialogue. *Quincerto* falls into the latter camp. The second movement continues in the somewhat enigmatic manner which ended the first. The mandola's trailing line of harmonics at the end of Movement I hands over to five bars of unison strings playing slowly in high register, *non-vibrato* at the opening of Movement II. This austere, stripped-back language is in complete

contrast to the previous section. In many of my works, I preface movements with introductory statements which play the role of settling the piece (and the attention of the listener) before launching into the main section. Examples of this can be found in the solo mandolin pieces ‘Reverie’ and ‘Descending Mist’, the introductory bars of which similarly use material from later in the piece, albeit in these instances played as harmonics. The taut, disembodied sound of the opening bars of the second movement of *Quincerto* (which eschews the over-ripe quality which would result if the same passage was played *con vibrato*) is akin to cleansing the palate between one course of a meal and the next.⁷²

Example 4.5 *Quincerto* Movement II bars 46-50

The passage is an example of how I use cells or motifs in this piece. Being drawn from material introduced in a completely different context towards the end of the piece, Example 4.5 also serves to frame the movement. In the later appearance of this material, the string quartet’s pitches are the same but are delivered in an aggressive, rhythmically more frantic and syncopated, *con vibrato*, 5/8 passage:

⁷² It is also perhaps a subconscious *homage* to Shostakovich’s 8th String Quartet theme, as reflected upon after the composition of ‘Quincerto’.

Example 4.6 *Quincerto* Movement II bars 134-135

Mdla

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Cello

ff

Similarly, in Movement III the string responses to the mandola (from bar 179) as seen in Example 4.7:

Example 4.7 *Quincerto* Movement III bars 179-182

Mdla

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Cello

$\text{♩} = 112$

mp

mf

are modified versions of the opening pizzicato exchanges of that movement (bars 150-154 (Example 4.8).

Example 4.8 *Quincerto* Movement III bars 150-154

Example 4.8 shows a musical score for five instruments: MdlA, Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Cello. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 112. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 and back to 4/4. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, and *p*. Performance instructions include *pizz* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco).

Example 4.7 also illustrates my frequent use of modal and pentatonic scales, a staple of improvising plectrum instrument players in many traditions, from traditional regional musics to rock and pop music. A pentatonic scalic run is used in the following example, which heralds the conclusion of Movement III. It also features a plectrum-striking pattern in bar 159 reminiscent of these related plectrum-instrument traditions in creating displacement of the beat.

Example 4.9 *Quincerto* Movement III bars 186-190

Example 4.9 shows a musical score for MdlA. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 112. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *rit.*, *ff*, and *p*.

There is also a link between the falling figure in bar 179 of Movement III (Example 4.7) and the linking figure which leads into Movement IV (Example 4.10

below). The violin line of the latter is an intervallically compressed version of the former. Although the character is different (due to the use of pizzicato and the bitonality created by the simultaneous playing of the viola line) it serves to link the piece organically.

Example 4.10 *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 191-193

Further use of such material is found in the rising figure of bar 216:

Example 4.11 *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 215-216

In the cases discussed to this point, the string quartet uses the cell material to function as dialogue or to link major passages presented by the mandola. They serve as the tonal and structural ‘glue’ which binds the piece as it moves from a lyrical reflective phase (Movement I and III) to more rigorous, driving and explosive lines

(Movements II and IV). However, these ideas are also used by the soloist: dissected, extended and manipulated through meter change in the almost stuttering manner noted in my use of material in the Suites for Solo Mandolin and Plectrum Guitar:

Example 4.12 *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 202-208

The musical score for Example 4.12, *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 202-208, is presented for five instruments: Mandola (Mda), Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Cello. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex meter change from 2/4 to 3/8 and back to 2/4. The Mandola part starts with a plectrum strike (pizz.) and a forte (mf) dynamic. The Cello part is marked pizz. and mf. The Viola part has a forte (mf) dynamic and a plectrum strike (pizz.). The Violin II part has a forte (mf) dynamic and a plectrum strike (pizz.). The Violin I part has a forte (f) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

4.3 Groove as Idiomatic Cell

After the slow, unison passage at the opening of Movement II (described above in relation to Example 4.5) the piece plunges into the material which drives the movement, first played by the mandola. This writing is very much representative of my compositional language. It consists of material which is short, highly rhythmically charged, exploiting repeated notes varied by strong plectrum-applied accents and with something of a dance-like nature. This statement also makes particular use of non-pitched plectrum strikes which continue the rhythmic drive and momentum of the notes preceding it, acting as a percussive element. This technique (first used in bar 51) is rarely, if ever, found in the published mandolin or mandola repertoire in this way. It is a technique drawn more particularly from rock guitar playing, in which the player

seeks to establish a ‘groove’ (a motif with a particular rhythmic feel and drive) by continuing the rhythmic propulsion in the plectrum (right) hand on strings dampened by the left-hand.

Example 4.13 ‘*Quincerto* Movement II bars 51-53



These three bars form the basic material for the movement. Although notated as $3/4 + 2/4 + 3/8$ for ease of reading and performance accuracy, they are intended to be heard as one combined $13/8$ phrase ($6 + 4 + 3$). While uncommon in western European music, such meters and beat groupings are found in much Balkan music played on instruments (such as the mandola-like tambura) with which I am familiar as a performer. In a sense, I have combined these two plectrum-instrument traditions (rock guitar and Balkan) to create the material which propels the movement. It works in practice due to the visceral sound created on the thick, steel-wound lowest-pitched (G) strings.

This motif is transformed in various ways. From bar 87 there is a substantial passage where the technique is used in an almost purely rhythmic, accompanying mandola ostinato under the cello solo line, while short intrusions based on the first two bars of Example 4.13 are heard from the other instruments, as in bars 91-92:

Example 4.14 *Quincerto* Movement II bars 90-93

Mdla

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Cello

90

mp

col legno

col legno

col legno

mp

The figure at the heart of Movement IV is similarly one which arises from the tuning and timbral nature of the mandola's lower strings. Commencing with a double-stopped figure on open strings a 5th apart, it maintains that interval in the succeeding notes. Combined with the rhythmic incisiveness of plectrum attack and hammering which defines the character of the instrument, it creates a folk dance-like figure, again recalling the primarily vernacular background of plectrum instruments.

Example 4.15 *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 194-197

Mdla

Vln I

Vln II

194

f

gl

gl

p

arco

arco

p

p

$\bullet = 112$ *Energetico*

These examples illustrate the way the root or core motivic material comes out of the physical nature and vernacular heritage of the instrument, and plectrum techniques in particular. The material is not only used in a purely melodic sense, but also drives the rhythmic and visceral propulsion of the piece.

4.4 Microtonal Inflection

Example 4.15 also highlights, along with several others quoted above, the frequent use in this folio of works of microtonal inflection through slide (to indeterminate final note), glissando and bending. On the fourth beats of bars 194 and 196 in Example 4.15, the combined timbral and pitch effect of double-stopped glissandi plays the role of continuing the bare, open 5ths being played while also adding an element of varied articulation. Instead of a constant plectrum attack on fixed pitches on each note, an element of fluidity is injected, complementing the hammering-on of beats one and two in the same bars. Exploring subtle pitch variations through bends and slides as expressive devices is a feature of the piece, from the opening bar of *Quincerto* (see Example 4.1 above) and in the musical language of the folio as a whole.

4.5 Form

Unlike most of the movements which comprise the *Suite for Solo Mandolin* and the *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar*, the structure of the movements in *Quincerto* is primarily episodic. Dialogue between the soloist and the quartet is the major structural feature, whether in ongoing developing exchanges based on cells, or in question and answer form, particularly evident in Movement Three:

Example 4.16 *Quincerto* Movement III bars 158-169

158 *pont*
Mdl *mf* 3 *open string keeps ringing after tremolo* *nat.* *f*

164 ♩ = 112
Mdl
Vln I *pizz* *f* *arco* *mp*
Vln II *pizz* *f* *arco* *mp*
Vla *pizz* *f* *arco* *mp*
Cello *pizz* *f* *arco* *mp*

The second half of Movement One is dominated by the mandola's opening material (see examples 4.1 and 4.2). The use of episodic, dialogue-driven writing creates a very free-flowing structure which highlights the timbral and expressive differences between the mandola and the instruments of the string quartet, often in ways which may be the opposite of the general conception of the nature of the instruments. This is highlighted in the above example, in which a soaring, lyrical mandola line is answered by the sparse, stuttering, pizzicato string responses. In other instances, exchanges between mandola and the strings highlight idiomatic writing for both plectrum and bowed instruments and build from such exchanges into effective climax points, as in bars 217-229:

Example 4.17 *Quincerto* Movement IV bars 217-229

The musical score consists of three systems of staves, each with five parts: MdlA, Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Cello. The time signature is 3/4.

System 1 (Bars 217-222):

- MdlA:** Starts at bar 217 with a rest, then plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 218. Dynamics include *f*.
- Vln I:** Remains silent throughout this system.
- Vln II:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 218. Dynamics include *f* and *Marcato*.
- Vla:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 218. Dynamics include *f* and *Marcato*.
- Cello:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 218. Dynamics include *f* and *Marcato*.

System 2 (Bars 223-228):

- MdlA:** Starts at bar 223 with a rest, then plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 224.
- Vln I:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 224. Dynamics include *ff*.
- Vln II:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 224. Dynamics include *mf*.
- Vla:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 224. Dynamics include *mf*.
- Cello:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 224. Dynamics include *mf*.

System 3 (Bars 229-234):

- MdlA:** Starts at bar 229 with a rest, then plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 230.
- Vln I:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 230. Dynamics include *ff*.
- Vln II:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 230. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*.
- Vla:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 230. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*.
- Cello:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes starting at bar 230. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*.

The music is both elemental (the insistent string figures from 217 and the oud-like mandola responses) and sophisticated in the way the music pushes and pulls the cell material around to work up to a false climax (bars 226-228) as the mandola and string quartet switch roles. There is an aggressive energy created through these exchanges, which are heightened by the unison string writing from bar 229 (at the end of Example 4.17). Writing in such an idiomatically focused manner seems to have magnified the nature of the exchanges, making the lyrical sections (such as those described in Example 4.5 and the mournful, yearning mandola melody which opens Movement III) particularly relaxed and soulful, while these closing exchanges have an extraordinary intensity.

Each movement has a specific and contrasting character, which is created by combining all the aspects of idiomatic mandola writing, tonality, structure, timbres and use of cells described in the episodic writing described above. As a result, the work as a whole moves from the questioning, somewhat hesitant nature of the opening movement to the confident and energetic second movement (driven primarily by the energy created through specific plectrum articulation), to a restrained and probing dialogue in Movement III. The fourth movement combines a rough-hewn, dance-like naivety with recollections from previous movements which keep interrupting the flow. This use of material from throughout the earlier movements could be described as approaching a cyclic approach to form. It has the effect of making the piece organic in nature but, more importantly, the snippets of material are like vague recollections of a dream one can almost touch, but which remains elusive, buried in the subconscious.

4.6 Conclusion: *Quincerto*

Most of the features addressed in this chapter deal directly with my creation of a piece with a specific musical language and character, drawn primarily from the idiomatic use of the mandola. While the Suites for mandolin and plectrum guitar explored the techniques, forms, historical and cultural antecedents and language of those instruments in a more direct and overt way, *Quincerto* has explored idiomatic mandola techniques in a manner which has informed the writing in terms of timbres created, tonality, the nature of the cells used and, particularly, articulation. By writing for mandola and string quartet the fundamental differences in sound production between bowed and plectrum string instruments and the way these differences can complement each type of instrument have been explored to create a unique addition to the chamber music repertoire. Taken as a whole, *Quincerto* is a work which alternates introspection with muscularity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Troika for Cymbalom, Plectrum Guitar and Cello

Troika is a work for cymbalom (Russian hammered dulcimer), plectrum guitar and cello. This is the first time to my knowledge that works have been composed specifically for such an ensemble. *Troika* consists of three movements:

1. 'Troika'
2. 'Kavkaz'
3. 'Flying'

The term '*troika*' is the equivalent of 'trio' or 'triumvirate' in Russian. It has a more specific connection in Russian minds, with things like traditional sleighs drawn by three horses and the ruling group of three in a political sense. It was chosen as the title of the first movement because, among other reasons, it is (like all three movements) essentially a work in three parts, and was written for a three-instrument ensemble of Russian-trained musicians (The Volatinsky Trio). It was also used as the title for the three-movement set as a whole for the same reasoning.

I have approached the composition of this set with the same technical aims as for the other works in the folio. That is, to create works for which a primary consideration is to make idiomatic use of the instrumental forces.

5.1 Cymbalom

Having been familiar with cymbalom in particular from the time I studied in the *narodnik* (folk or national) instrument department in the Tchaikovsky Conservatorium, Kiev, as well as professional work with cymbalom performers since, I have been aware of the high levels of technical skill and unique sound brought to

this instrument by players from the Russian schools of instrumental training. The music can be played by any type of cimbalom (whether Russian, Hungarian or Balkan), but was written for and recorded on the Belarus concert version of the instrument, with 78 steel strings ranging from G₃ to C₄ with three strings per pitch note (apart from the lowest half octave which has two strings per note). The exact range of notes and number of strings can vary slightly between instruments, but all are stretched across a flat surfaced wooden table-like structure behind which the player sits, striking the instrument with rounded wooden hammers.

5.2 Influences

Similarly, I have worked with performers of bowed strings, often classically trained, but in a ‘world music’ setting in which aspects of improvisation, decoration, and above all a flexibility in the exploration of timbre and articulation, have been paramount in delivering an interpretation of a movement. This approach imbues my writing in the ‘Troika’ set.

A further impetus in writing this set has been to incorporate aspects of an improvised character to the movements, even when notated. Through my work with the ensemble which recorded these movements (The Volatinsky Trio), I have been able to mould and adjust the music in rehearsal and performance, continually refining before creating the final score.

5.3 Articulation and Improvisation

While the movements are fully notated, they exhibit many of the characteristics of a plectrum-instrument player’s sense of articulation and expression, particularly in the utterance of a solo line. This is something I have explored in all the pieces of the

folio, but in this set I bring this way of writing not just to the plectrum-instrument (the steel-string guitar) but to the cimbalom and particularly the cello as well. The guitar's opening passage in the first movement, 'Troika', is a good example of this type of writing. It is also a further example of my structural preference for opening pieces or movements with a settling, *maqam*-like exploration of the mode or tonality of the piece.

Example 5.1 'Troika' bars 1-10

From the outset, the repetition of notes with implied accents (created by the use of one stroke hammer-ons and glissandi for pairs or groups of notes in a style recalling oud techniques) as well as the use of short, additive phrases are central features of the movement. Similar writing is also found in the opening of 'Kavkaz', in this instance involving the cello opening, echoed in the guitar response:

Example 5.2 'Kavkaz' bars 1-5

Freely

This example, with the cello playing two strings simultaneously to create a drone effect under a cascading, decorative, upper line, illustrates a feature of much of the writing for cello in ‘Kavkaz’ as a whole, as well as in the extended cello solo lines in all three movements in the set. It speaks of a soundscape more often associated with instruments such as the hurdy-gurdy or bagpipes, in which a drone or repeated notes serve to underpin renditions of song or improvisation. It plays the same role as the repeated interjections of open lower strings found in the guitar writing in other pieces (such as ‘Lament’ from the *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar*). Also illustrated here are the largely static harmonies used in the movement for extended periods, a feature dealt with further below.

Such a style of writing is also seen in the cello solo in the middle of ‘Kavkaz’. As the name of this movement implies, it has been influenced in a general sense by the music of the Caucasus (Kavkaz), where I spent some time as a student (in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1988), and heard numerous performances by traditional ensembles of the Caucasus, featuring instruments and music related closely to that of nearby Iran and central Asia. These featured a range of regional plucked and bowed instruments and, being just before the collapse of the USSR and before the advent of the internet, the performance practices were arguably little changed from the preceding centuries. The Turkic musical tradition of the area prioritizes harmonic development less than ornamentation, variation and improvisation. In the music of this region, particularly neighbouring Persia (that is, modern-day Iran):

*Improvisatory techniques stress development of short motifs through variation, extension, contraction and melodic sequence.*⁷³

⁷³ Randel (Ed.) *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 531

These are features which permeate my writing in this set, and in the folio as a whole. It is in this spirit that I have notated passages which, because they bring such techniques and sensibility to the writing, sound like they are improvised. In a very real sense they spring from an improvised developmental approach, in which the final version is the result of practical experimentation and refinement.

The three movements in *Troika*, individually and as a set, have not been composed with the aim of making them sound overtly influenced by non-Western music; it is more that they have emerged from a combination of my musical (particularly performance) background, approaching the writing as a whole with a plectrum-playing sensibility. Extensive use of repeated notes with varied accentuation, lines tumbling and going over themselves to create additive development of motifs, tremolo and the simultaneous varying of bow contact to and from the bridge are all evident in the cello writing. Supporting the cello line, in sections where the improvisatory nature of the writing contrasts with the preceding material, the cymbalom sometimes acts as quasi-darabukka percussionist (tapping the wooden frame of the instrument with upturned hammers), reinforced by the guitar playing a primarily rhythmic pattern sustaining the G tonality, somewhat like a continuo role.

Example 5.3 'Kavkaz' bars 70-75

Example 5.3 'Kavkaz' bars 70-75. The score shows three systems of music for Cymbal (Cimb.), Guitar (Gtr.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The first system covers bars 70-72, and the second system covers bars 73-75. The Cymbal part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Guitar part plays a series of chords, mostly triads, with accents. The Cello part has a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs and slurs. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *sul pont.* (sul ponticello).

Similar writing for the cello is found in the corresponding section of 'Flying':

Example 5.4 'Flying' bars 117-112

Example 5.4 'Flying' bars 117-112. The score shows three systems of music for Cymbal (Cim), Guitar (Gtr.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The Cymbal and Guitar parts play sustained chords with slurs. The Cello part has a melodic line with slurs and glissandi. Dynamics include *norm.* (normal), *f* (forte), and *dr* (diminuendo).

In this example, harmonic glissandi are more prominent, but the same thinking is evident in the cello parts in both excerpts. The other instruments play a more static role, sustaining the G minor-Eb major harmonic framework of the middle section of the movement as a backdrop to the cello's lines. In all these examples (5.2, 5.3 and

5.4), the attention is focused on the character of the delivery of the musical line, on nuances of timbre, attack, articulation and phrasing, as a tangential commentary on the main material of the movements, which precede and follow these examples.

As noted when discussing previous works in this folio, the plectrum instrument influence and improvisatory nature of the thinking behind much of this movement is reflected in instrumental lines which eschew long, arching phrases for shorter ideas which go over themselves and build incrementally, with the emphasis on articulation and overall shape generated through several short phrases. In the middle waltz section of ‘Troika’ the urgent, frantic nature of the overlapping 3/2 cells preceding it gives way to a section built around the cello’s, and then the guitar’s reflective, almost whimsical solo passages. In these passages, short phrases and glissandi as well as gently hammered repeated and decorated notes combine to create an arching 12 bar solo departure from the guitar’s main ‘riff’ or cell-playing function during the rest of the movement:

Example 5.5 ‘Troika’ bars 89-101

While the guitar acts in a largely continuo-like role, providing the rhythmic and harmonic platform for the third movement, ‘Flying’ features sections of dialogue between cello and cimbalom which create an effect somewhat like an improvised-

sounding version of phasing, through additive writing. As the cello answers the cimbalom in bars 98-104 (see Example 5.6 below), the cimbalom appears to be in unison but adds a variation at the phrase end. When this is in turn echoed by the cello, the process is repeated but varied again with the cimbalom veering off in a different line while the cello continues the original pattern, with further additions. It is as if the players are spontaneously exploring the material and ‘bouncing ideas’ off each other.

Example 5.6 ‘Flying’ bars 98-104

There are also instances of guided improvisation, in which the musician (in the case of Example 5.7 the cellist) is given a broad outline of the shape of the musical line desired, with scope to decide on the exact rhythmic and pitch parameters.

Example 5.7 ‘Flying’ bars 123-126

Thus the movements in ‘Troika’ are many-faceted in the way they are realised, and in which they are heard by an audience: at different times clearly composed and ordered, at times sounding improvised through the developmental and notational methods described, and finally in short passages giving great freedom to the interpreter, albeit with specific guidance.

5.4 Structure

The structures employed in the set *Troika* are quite different to those of the other ensemble piece, *Quincerto*, the movements of which are essentially cell-driven dialogue pieces, loose in form or rather in which the form is subservient to the manipulation of the central ideas. In a very broad sense, the structures in the *Troika* set are broadly Ternary in form, and can be illustrated as follows:

Example 5.8 *Troika* Movement structures

Section	Movement	Bar numbers
Exploratory introduction	Troika	1 - 10
	Kavkaz	1 - 7
	Flying	1 - 16
Clearly-drawn ‘A’ section	Troika	11 – 47
	Kavkaz	8 - 67
	Flying	17 - 80
Freer, reflective and/or muscular ‘B’ section suggesting varying degrees of ‘improvisation’	Troika	48 – 112
	Kavkaz	68 - 87
	Flying	81 - 136 (followed by bridging section in bars 137 – 168)
Revisited ‘A’ material or ‘A2’	Troika	11 - 27 (D.S.)
	Kavkaz	88 - 105
	Flying	169 - 204
Coda	Troika	113 - 125

As noted when discussing similar structures in the solo instrument Suites, I have employed Ternary form in these pieces primarily because my concern is with the

exploration of timbre, articulation, decoration and improvisatory elements. Essentially it is taking the minutiae of sound production as the starting point (that is, writing metaphorically ‘from the ground up’), as opposed to starting from the macro level of harmonic-based structures and fitting the music into it. For this approach, presenting an idea, working it over and returning to it is the ideal, loose framework.

I am drawn to Ternary form for a number of other reasons, including its prominence in the folk-song traditions from which the cimbalom and guitar are closely associated historically. Another is the simplicity and almost naivety of the form, and the fact that it has had a presence both in folk music and in the art music of the Europe from Baroque forms through to the Serialists and beyond.

Even in the most straightforward employment of the structure there is much more happening in the ‘B’ sections of these movements (which are more akin to Development sections) than in a simple Ternary-form structure. More than just a new melodic line or chord pattern is introduced in the B sections. Instead, a marked change in tempo and meter, and a freer-sounding, fluid, semi-improvisatory way of writing (featuring dialogue between instruments) and solo lines mark the middle sections of all the movements in the set *Troika*. This is in marked contrast to the ‘A’ sections in the movements, as in the case of the layering technique employed in the A section of the first movement.

On a more ‘micro’ level of structure, each movement in the set is driven by the use of cells or motifs, and none more so than in movement I ‘Troika’. Its material is almost entirely drawn from the following three cells:

Example 5.9 'Troika' cell 1 (bar 11) and inversion (bar 27)

Example 5.9 shows two guitar parts. The first part, labeled '11', is in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 85$ and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second part, labeled '27', is marked '(pizz) hand damped' and has a dynamic marking of *mp*. Both parts are written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat.

Example 5.10 'Troika' cell 2: fragment from inversion of cell 1 (bars 15-16)

Example 5.10 shows a cymbal part labeled 'Cimb.' starting at bar 15. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The dynamic marking starts at *p* and changes to *mf* at bar 16.

Example 5.11 'Troika' cell 3 (bar 15)

Example 5.11 shows a violin part labeled 'Vc.' in bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a slur over the first two notes of each bar. The dynamic marking starts at *mf* and changes to *f* at bar 16.

These cells are employed in a clean, layered manner in the 'A' section. This involves one cell being superimposed on another as the first continues playing, and other cells and related material being further superimposed as the movement builds.

Example 5.12 'Troika' bars 11-21: Layering Technique

The musical score is divided into two systems, each containing three staves for Cimb., Gtr., and Vc. in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat.

System 1 (Bars 11-15):

- Cimb.:** Bars 11-14 are rests. Bar 15 contains a melodic cell labeled 'CELL 2' starting on a half note, with a dynamic marking of *p*.
- Gtr.:** Bar 11 starts with a tempo marking of ♩ = 85 and a dynamic marking of *mf*. It contains a melodic cell labeled 'CELL 1'. Bars 12-15 contain rhythmic slashes (/:) indicating a consistent rhythmic pattern.
- Vc.:** Bars 11-15 are rests.

System 2 (Bars 16-21):

- Cimb.:** Bar 16 contains a melodic cell labeled 'CELL 1' with a dynamic marking of *mf*. Bars 17-21 contain rhythmic slashes (/:) with a dynamic marking of *mf*.
- Gtr.:** Bars 16-21 contain rhythmic slashes (/:).
- Vc.:** Bars 16-17 are rests. Bar 18 contains a melodic cell labeled 'CELL 3' starting on a half note. Bars 19-21 contain a melodic line with a dynamic marking that transitions from *mf* to *f*.

A significant feature of this method of composing is the contrasting syncopations and dynamic effects which it creates, a constantly shifting aural effect somewhat like the phasing found in minimalist music. Of course, over time one line or another shifts to another cell or inversion of a cell with different articulation or playing techniques (as discussed below) and the process metamorphoses into a new section in the piece.

The root material from the cells is also used to create counter melodies in the freer 'B' section, as played by the cimbalom in the following examples:

Example 5.13 ‘Troika’ bars 56-61. The cimbalom line is derived from the guitar line of bars 45-47, which is itself derived from cell 2.

Example 5.14 ‘Troika’ bars 80-85 (cimbalom counter-melody and cello response derived from inversion of cell 1)

There are numerous other examples of this use of root or cell material, in ‘Troika’ as well as the other two movements. They serve to give a unity to the aural material presented, as well as providing source material which is manipulated to form a number of roles in terms of structure, colour and articulation. These are manifested in various renderings by the range of timbres and attacks provided by the hammered, plucked and bowed string instruments.

5.5 Techniques

In these movements, which are built on the manipulation of very elemental cells or root material, a great deal of the effectiveness, variety and cohesiveness of the pieces comes from the use of specific techniques. In structural terms, I have already discussed how the use of additive techniques applied to short motives derived from a number of improvisation traditions (particularly from plectrum instruments) has informed the nature of these and other pieces in the folio. Complementing this is the use of specific instrumental techniques designed to add colour and character to the music. Examples of this follow:

Example 5.15 ‘Flying’ bars 169-172. Cello left-hand string slap, associated in

Western ears with the ‘rockabilly’ double bass practice of creating effective off-beat percussiveness, but also widely used among gypsy players of double bass in eastern Europe to propel dance music.

169

Cym *sf*

Gtr *f*
*pizz with string slap (LH)
on beat 2*

Vc. *f*

Example 5.16 ‘Kavkaz’ bars 103-105: guitarist turns the plectrum onto its edge during tremolo to create timbral transformation:

Meno Mosso

103

Cimb. *f* *pp*

Gtr. *f* *mf* *gl.* *p*

Vc. *f* *mp* *gl.* *p*

*Turn plectrum during tremolo to play on edge

Similarly, an effect found throughout the movement and the set as a whole is created by moving the point of the cello bow's contact with the strings during periods of tremolo:

Example 5.17 ‘Kavkaz’ bars 73-75: moving towards and away from bridge (sul pont.) during extended passages of cello tremolo

73

Cimb. *f* *pp*

Gtr. *mf* *p*

Vc. *f* *mp* *p* *tr* *sul pont.*

The above example also illustrates the use of upturned cymbalom hammers on the instrument frame as a percussion instrument. The cymbalom also employs nail-pizzicato, a common technique in the cymbalom music of eastern Europe. Used in this

fashion, it is a unique colour, contrasting in the following example with the sustained cello line and folk-like guitar chord pattern:

Example 5.18 ‘Troika’ bars 72-77

The musical score for Example 5.18 'Troika' bars 72-77 consists of three staves: Cymbal (Cimb.), Guitar (Gtr.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The Cymbal part begins at bar 72 with a 'pizz. (nail)' instruction and a dynamic of *p*. The Guitar part features a series of chords with a folk-like pattern. The Violoncello part has a sustained line with a dynamic of *mf* at the start and *f* at the end. The score is in a key with one flat (B-flat).

5.6 Conclusion: *Troika*

The three movements which make up *Troika* illustrate a unity of approach in terms of formal structure, the use of root or cell material in innovative ways and the exploitation of technical means to create a cohesive set. This is despite the fact that the three movements are very different in nature: ‘Troika’, with its riff-like use of cells in a variety of meters; ‘Kavkaz’, featuring Caucasus-like approaches to passages recalling dance rhythms and improvisation over largely static harmonies; and ‘Flying’, a study in slowly-evolving additive techniques and cell transformation, delivered in almost minimalist fashion around simple and contained harmonic language.

Over and above these features, the achievement of the set *Troika* is to create a set of notated concert movements which, while they share some similarities, approach ensemble writing from a fundamentally different starting point to the majority of

Western chamber music. The whole set is underpinned by a conception grounded in exploiting a unique combination of instruments: bowed, hammered and plectrum string instruments. By considering and incorporating the performance (and particularly a number of improvisation) practices associated with these instruments, including non-Western and popular notions of development and sense of line, a set of movements has emerged in which notated music and improvisation overlap and merge; a set in which short cells or root material of elemental nature are the basis for essays in colour, ornamentation, articulation and style, where elemental features of musical traditions lead to new musical paths and re-invention.

CONCLUSION

The driving force behind writing this folio of works has been my long-held view that plectrum-played string instruments had been not so much neglected or ignored over centuries, but simply misunderstood; that the very large body of music written for the mandolin in particular was largely inappropriate for the instrument. At best, it was mostly pedestrian, limited in appreciation of the instrument and thus largely unidiomatic. At worst, it unintentionally relegated the instrument to second-rate musical status, as composers produced pieces for it which amounted to pale imitations of music for other instruments (particularly violin showpieces from the late nineteenth century) or for much of the latter twentieth century tried to fit the instrument into streams of compositional thinking which I feel have not best suited the instrument. In more recent times a number of composers have shown more consideration for the instrument's possibilities, particularly those composers from a classical guitar background. However, even these composers have not approached the instrument as I have. One could speculate that this is due largely to lack of familiarity with the mandolin, and particularly with the plectrum as a sound instigator.

There is very little solo repertoire for the mandola, the instrument being mainly confined to the alto role in mandolin orchestras, despite its expressive potential, particularly in terms of colour and the visceral nature of the instrument's impact when played with the techniques and approaches employed in this folio. Similarly, there appears to be almost no solo concert repertoire for the plectrum-played guitar. This is somewhat understandable in light of the overshadowing presence of the Classical guitar, but is nonetheless surprising given the plectrum-played instrument's ubiquity in popular forms of music.

As I pondered these questions concerning the concert repertoire of plectrum instruments, I had been accumulating almost a lifetime of playing in and writing for ensembles in which such instruments had a major, often central role: from eastern-European and Mediterranean to Celtic and American traditions, as well as jazz-derived traditions, particularly Gypsy or Manouche Swing. I had also lived in or spent time in countries with significant plectrum-instrument traditions, and had grown up playing music in eastern-European ensembles of such instruments. As I developed my own improvisational skills, as well as methods of manipulating timbre, enhancing projection and ways of developing musical ideas through decoration and additive techniques drawn from several plectrum-instrument traditions, a desire emerged to try to introduce some of these techniques and approaches into writing idiomatic concert music for such instruments.

I have consciously avoided some of the approaches I would suggest have marred other composers' attempts to write for these instruments. One is the proselytizing nature of many composers (for mandolin in particular) who were trying to prove that the mandolin was just as worthy as the violin or flute in the scheme of things in European music. My view, as suggested by the title of these analytical notes, was that the mandolin (as well as the mandola and plectrum guitar) should be approached as coming from outside the European chamber and orchestral music mainstream; that a quite different vocabulary of writing should be used for these instruments, based on the regional origins of the instruments and their traditions and true musical natures: their *Ethnicities of Sound*.

Another approach avoided was the production of technically proficient yet musically unsatisfying pieces that can result from composers clearly unfamiliar with an instrument employing some gestures in a piece in an attempt to sound idiomatic (as

I have heard in guitar concertos sprinkled with faux power chords and tapping sequences). Instead, my plectrum guitar writing comes from immersion in the playing and improvisational styles of its traditions and major innovators, and from relating it back to other instruments with which it has distant but tangible associations, such as the oud.

However, this folio of works is not an exercise in writing dry, utilitarian studies for these instruments to prove a musicological point. At the same time as bringing the above considerations to the composition of the pieces in this folio, I have written music for formal concert presentation, both solo and in an ensemble setting. This has necessitated investing a lot of thinking and research into how best to exploit the inherent qualities of (and traditions associated with) the instruments, and convert these into musical statements of substance. Most significantly, it has focused my attention on exploring the minutiae of articulation, additive development of ideas drawn from improvisational and plectrum-playing traditions, and the sheer physical delight one feels from the aural impact generated by acoustic stringed instruments when played creatively, thoughtfully and idiomatically with a plectrum.

I have drawn from the full range of my musical influences: regional techniques and decorative traditions, fragments of folk melodies, structures ranging from Baroque fantasias to blues forms and gypsy-swing dance music templates, American players' notions of 'feel', articulation and sound production, and ensemble writing incorporating improvised elements. Most significantly, all the influences brought to bear on the creation of these pieces are inseparable from the instruments involved, with which I have had a long and close involvement.

The *Suite for Solo Mandolin* is both technically innovative and demanding. Its six movements explore techniques and colours in a way I have not encountered in any

other solo writing for the instrument, at the same time paying tribute to a range of playing traditions and looking ahead to the development of new uses of these languages.

Similarly, the *Suite for Solo Plectrum Guitar*, apart from being significant by its very existence, looks into the historical musical soul of the instrument for inspiration. The writing evident in its six movements accords with the concept of a suite both in the relationship between the pieces and the way they contrast with each other. Through the approaches to compositional thinking behind them, it is arguable that what has been created is, if not a new language, then very much a new dialect in writing for the guitar.

The ensemble pieces *Quincerto* and *Troika* again break new ground. The mandola writing in the former highlights, by its very idiomatic nature, the differences in character between the plectrum instrument and the string quartet. Rather than set them against each other as forces, *Quincerto* celebrates such differences, particularly in terms of timbre and articulation, and by having the instruments engage in a great deal of dialogue, interplay and exchange of ideas. The writing in *Troika* also displays these features but in different settings in terms of formal structure and use of root material, which itself has been influenced by the very different instrumental timbres, articulations and improvisational influences brought to the piece. *Troika* explores new ground through the very creation of a concert work for a unique combination of instruments. Instead of trying to incorporate these instruments into the compositional mindset of a more traditional chamber music trio template, my starting point has been to make the pieces emerge from the strengths and traditions of the instruments' own languages.

Central to my writing and musical aesthetic in general is an increasing preoccupation with the beauty and elegance of the single line of musical thought. Whether with some form of underlying harmonic, structural support or not, I find myself drawn to single-line utterances, decorations and additive development. The musings of an oud or solo plectrum guitar or mandola line have a powerful effect on me, and can often contain far more interest and beauty in fine details of execution than a complex work for a large group of musicians. This is evident in my work even when writing for a chamber setting, as a great deal of the musical expression takes the form of interactions between instruments along the lines described.

The most salient point to emerge from the creation of these pieces is a further development of my compositional focus and language towards what I described earlier as writing not *for* instruments, but rather writing *to* or *from* the instruments. This philosophy shifts the whole focus of the composer from one of manipulation to an end, and replaces it with one of building from the ground up. The focus is on the essence of the instruments, both technically and in terms of cultural origins and associations (as well as considering tactile elements involved in the creation of sound from the instruments), and on writing in a way which takes these qualities as the starting point for the compositional process (rather than an over-arching formal or dogmatic approach). The pieces which make up *Ethnicities of Sound* have a tangible credibility and inherent strength which raises them above the status of curiosity pieces for instruments on the fringe of the concert tradition.

This philosophical approach, born of recognition of the value of tradition and appreciating the ‘otherness’ of the instruments for which I have composed as being the very basis for the pieces written, allied with an attraction to crystalline detail of

sound and the more intimate scale of musical expression, is what emerges from these pieces, and which lies at the heart of my compositional identity.

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