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CHAPTER TWO

The Piano Music

Ian Pace

Michael Finnissy's piano music represents, at around 70 works, the most substantial section of his output. It has also generated the most attention, in part as a result of Finnissy's own activities as a performer. As a composer who writes continuously, not merely in response to commissions, Finnissy seems to have treated the piano as the most immediate receptacle for his ongoing concerns, at least since the mid-1970s.

Finnissy views the piano, an instrument which he knows as intimately as any, as a 'neutral' vehicle for fundamentally 'musical' concerns, timbral considerations receding from the foreground as a result of familiarity. Such a conception is in marked contrast to that which portrays him as the last in a long line of virtuoso pianist-composers, such as Liszt, Busoni, Rachmaninoff, Godowsky, Grainger and Sorabji. Yet several of these figures admitted to performing primarily by virtue of necessity, in a desire to enable both their own work and that of others they admired to be more frequently heard and understood. They ideally would have liked to concentrate their energies on composing, which is to some extent true of Finnissy as well. Beyond the restless harmonic experimentalism and proto-atonality of Liszt, the tonal objectification of Busoni, as well as his expression of inner tension through the differing pulls of the Germanic and Italianate traditions, or Grainger's ideas of 'free music'; these factors all have parallels in Finnissy's work that are in my opinion of much greater significance than those of mere virtuosity.

That said, it is hard to deny that Finnissy's piano music bears the hallmarks of a very distinctive approach to the instrument. Although Finnissy writes away from the piano, often taking a work to the instrument only in order to check the possibility of what has been written, he nonetheless would seem to have his own particular characteristics as a performer in mind. This may be unconscious on his part, but it is apparent to others who take up his work. However, virtuosity is, except in a few works, essentially a means to an end, which Finnissy uses to communicate his conceptions of the diversity, asymmetry and polyvalency of human beings and the world.

The works, as well as being huge in number, are enormously diverse, and encompass each different area of focus throughout Finnissy's compositional career. I have chosen to divide the works into categories partially determined by chronology, partially by preoccupations. There are clearly many other possible categorisations and I wish every bit as much to discuss the works as individual, autonomous entities, as by the extent to which they exemplify aspects of Finnissy's aesthetic and technical development.

Early Works - From the Juvenilia to *Wild Flowers*

The very first music that Finnissy wrote is a (currently lost) one line piano piece called *The Chinese Bridge* (1950). After this followed numerous, mostly short, piano pieces written during childhood. In recent years Finnissy has been prepared to let some of these be performed and published (some are collected in the Appendix to *Wee Saw Footprints*, others in the *Collected Shorter Piano Pieces Volumes 1 & 2*). If obviously limited in conception and realisation, these pieces do foreshadow ideas which were to be enacted in a more concrete form in Finnissy's mature work. The *Polskie Tance Op. 32* (1955/62)¹ show a certain indebtedness to the music of both Szymanowski and Bartók, but also an interest in close intervals and a blurring of tonality through continually changing chordal structures and bass lines.

Vivo [♩ = 200]

Example 2.1 *Polskie Tance Op. 32, 1. Kujawiak-Kozak*
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The second of the *Two Pasodobles* (1959) consists of overlapping strings of long held pitches with broad, expansive contours that seem like a premonition of the luminosity of *My Bonny Boy*, from *English Country-Tunes*, and passages from *Fast Dances*, *Slow Dances* and other pieces, as well as anticipating the style of many later vocal works. The *Romance (with Intermezzo)* (1960) hovers around different keys, although nominally it is in E flat/C minor. By contrast, the *Intermezzo* is more or less twelve-tone, taking Brahms' *Intermezzo Op. 118 No. 2* as a rhythmic model, and a 'note-row' based on an inversion of the opening bars of the *Romance*. The second part of the *Romance* then leads to a climax close to A flat, which is thus made all the more striking, though the piece immediately dissolves once more, ending in a tonally ambiguous manner.

The first piano pieces Finnissy acknowledges as part of his mature output are the *Songs 5-9* (1966-68). A more electrifying entry into the arena of piano literature could hardly be imagined. Finnissy burst onto the scene with huge rapid gestures encompassing the whole keyboard, wild streams of grace notes, but also very long sustained chords and silences. Extremes are

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Example 2.2 *Songs 5-9*
Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

Finnissy was a 'poetic' forms painting, the ci primarily from films by the An their titles; Wa man's cognitiv oppositions'. E lighting, etc. unconventional perceived as on

everywhere, of dynamics, range, angularity, continuity/discontinuity, notation, transcendental virtuosity (Example 2.2). Despite the stylistic pluralism of the 1960s, an original voice like no other had emerged, writing music that did not fit into any of the established categories. Where had it come from?

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The top system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests, with a bracket above it labeled '5:4(?)'. The lower staff has a more regular rhythmic pattern. The bottom system also consists of two staves. The upper staff has a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests, with a bracket above it labeled '5:4(?)'. The lower staff has a more regular rhythmic pattern. There are various dynamic markings such as 'ppp' and 'pppp', and an 'accel.' marking with a dashed line. The notation is highly detailed and complex, reflecting the 'transcendental virtuosity' mentioned in the text.

Example 2.2 *Song 5*
 Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

Finnissy was dissatisfied with what he perceived as the predominance of 'poetic' forms in music, and sought alternative structural models from painting, the cinema and anthropology. The ideas underlying the *Songs* stem primarily from several of Finnissy's interests: a series of short experimental films by the American film-maker Stan Brakhage, from which the pieces take their titles; Warhol's early cinematic work; and Levi-Strauss's belief that man's cognitive abilities are structurally reducible to a series of 'binary oppositions'. Brakhage's films consist of extremes of camera position, focus, lighting, etc. in such a way as to present familiar phenomena in unconventional ways, stressing the essential strangeness of what is often perceived as ordinary. As Robert Kelly said of Brakhage:

The image displays a musical score for 'Example 2.3 Song 7', consisting of seven systems of piano notation. Each system is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The score is characterized by complex, dense textures with many notes, often beamed together. It includes various musical markings such as dynamics (e.g., *mf*, *ff*, *rit.*), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions like 'senza ped.' (without pedal). The notation is highly detailed, with many notes and rests, and includes some unusual markings like 'C 111' and '12 11'. The overall style is intricate and technically demanding.

Example 2.3 *Song 7*. (Note that Bar 9 contains a transposed passage from *Song 5*, see Example 2.2, second line.)

There are 16 fragments, separated by bar lines, which are made clear to an uninitiated listener through a diminuendo from *fff* to *niente* in each bar. In the first bars, each of which seem to be in bi-partite form, one might notice the following properties:

- Bar 1: (a) bass, single notes/chords, (b) treble, albeit tempered by the last few pitches, single notes/clusters.
- Bar 2: (a) irregular rhythms, (b) regular. Each interrupted by grace notes. In a registral sense, (b) is inverse of bar 1.
- Bar 3: (a) regular pulses with grace notes, (b) arch of chord/cluster/notes of indeterminate duration.
- Bar 4: If one conceives (b) as starting after the single C natural, then (a) and (b) differ in density and, more obliquely, the direction of arpeggiation in (a) alternates, whereas in (b) it is regular (down). In both (a) and (b) the non-grace note figures have a statistical *ritardando*.

These types of oppositions continue, but become less obvious in bar 9, and from there onwards. Other oppositions can also be discerned between bars and groups of bars. The held pitches/rapid activity dichotomy is transformed into that between sound and silence in bars 12 and 13, to an extent that both are 'made strange' and, perhaps as a result of the polarisation, the two extremes might be seen each to contain the other (a consideration explored further in the ensemble work *Afar*). *Song 7* can be listened to on several different levels; indeed the bars might well have been written in a different order. It is for the listener to derive their own conclusions from this work which, at the time of writing, demonstrated the trans-cendentalist's aim to venture beyond the conceivable. It is an essentially abstract, perhaps even 'formalist' work, stressing structural properties most prominently.

With *Song 9*, other considerations are introduced. In 16 sections, demarcated by numbers in the score, the piece makes substantial use of long silences (indeed there is a greater quantity of silence than actual playing in the piece). These were intended as an attempt to realise in music the experience of certain phenomena in musical terms - a car passing behind a building, or the sun behind a cloud - where something is observed in one particular state, then later re-identified in a state advanced from that previously, the mind being left to fill in the experiential gap. It is interesting to consider how, when this form of experience is re-enacted in music, one is able to recognise the two forms of subjective perception as relating to the same object; what are the most essential characteristics that give this object its identity? The score opens with the instruction, 'The song must start as though the pianist had already been playing for some considerable time before the first chord becomes audible - as though another person suddenly opened a door to the room where he is playing.'

Song 9 is an exceptionally dense piece, with a myriad of different lines progressing simultaneously. In order to provide some sort of 'ruler' for these to be measured against, in the first section Finnissy introduces a series of notes and chords to be accentuated and optionally paused upon, 'focal points' which serve the function of a *cantus firmus*.

il più pianissimo
(♩ = 40)

Piano Solo

15

16

cluster (played with left forearm and/or elbow)

These four chords are quite at any dynamic. Play as

Example 2.4 *Song 7*

15

16

cluster (played with left forearm and/or elbow)

These four chords are quite at any dynamic. Play as

Example 2.5 *Song 9*

Dedicated to Ronald Lisander

Song 9.

Michael Finnissy

11 *il più pianissimo possibile (ppppp)*
(♩ = 140)

accel. e cresc. →

Piano Solo

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In other sections, Finnissy makes use of lightning-like flashes of activity, which disappear as immediately as they are made apparent, sometimes near, sometimes distant, a quasi-pointillist series of multiple lines where each note has a different dynamic (which is equally soon homogenised, perhaps an expression of Finnissy's reaction to a particular 'tradition'), and a series of strident periodic chords at the end, a counterpart to the opening, but foreshadowed in a previous set of chords, which are 'quite fast, aperiodic and played at any dynamic', thus sharing only the most essential characteristics with what is about to follow, or perhaps even demonstrating the arbitrary nature of such categorisation (Example 2.5).³

One might say that for music to be born again, it has first to die. The *Songs* clear the air for a new type of music to emerge. They are self-evidently the work of a young man, making the most dramatic of entries and defining in stark terms the boundaries of much of his later work, at least for the next decade. Finnissy has spoken of his work as inhabiting a 'post-Big Bang' world, in which he attempts to form some shape out of the millions of particles which are flying around the air, the residue of the musical explosion that was brought about by Cage. In this sense his approach relates to that of Ferneyhough, but whereas the latter assembles units of debris to form some sort of entity, Finnissy presents the debris en masse, then like a sculptor creates areas of coherence within the whole phenomenon.

The 'archetypal' (in Levi-Strauss's sense of the word, not Finnissy's as he would explore it later) nature of the oppositions in the *Songs*, the theses and antitheses, the blacks and whites, with no shades of grey, were to be revisited in a very different manner in some of the folk-music based works of the early 1980s. However, for a self-critical and continually developing composer, as Finnissy was and is, it was inevitable that some degree of synthesis of the polarisations of the early *Songs*, different structural models and extensions of the methods for articulating longer continuities begun in *Song 9*, would ensue. These came about with the piano pieces *Autumnall* (1968-71) and *Snowdrift* (1972).

Autumnall takes its title from John Donne's poem 'The Autumnall':

No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace,
 As I have seen in one autumnall face.
 Young beauties force your love, and that's a rape,
 This doth but counsel, yet you cannot scrape
 If 'twere a shame to love, here 'twere no shame,
 Affection here takes reverence's name
 Were her first years the Golden Age; that's true,
 But now she's gold oft tried, and ever new.
 That was her torrid and inflaming time,
 This is her tolerable tropic clime.
 Fair eyes, who asks more heat than comes from hence,
 He in a fever wishes pestilence...

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Section (A)

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2. More sp
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Example 2.6A

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The following

Section (B): C

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Section (C): A

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Section (D): A

Fragment
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Section (E): *come prima*

Further progress of (A1) and (A3), the latter usurping the former with longer durations. Quick *crescendo* of (B) material.

Section (F): Crotchet = 104

Spacious line of type (A2) now spread over whole keyboard, *crescendo* from *p* to *fff*, but tangents provided by continual interruptions of *pppp* and *sfz* notes, structurally equivalent to the progress in section (D), but here with three lines instead of two. Sudden cut to a few low, indistinct chords. Silence.

Section (G): *not too violent*

Very rapid multiple lines of types from (A), (B), (C) (Example 2.7). Sudden *appassionato* outburst, equally suddenly wiped out by quick, fading away, *pppp* gesture.

Example 2.7 *Autumnall*

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It is unlikely that this way of managing sections (A) to which the change, contemporary like Donnellan's positive in... While (1972) section takes its inspired lines:

Here Move White When

Two features in this work fervently pertransposition

precipitato, velocissimo
(P.I.) molto ped.
© 1975 edition

Example 2.8
Reproduced

It is unlikely that a listener would hear clear boundaries between sections in this way; this description is intended rather to break the score down into manageable units. The most important point to note, I believe, is the extent to which the differing material types are allowed to extend, then suddenly cut away. This can be seen in terms of the relationships between, for example, sections (D) and (F) as well as in the frenzied opening of (G), which is an amalgam of much that has gone before. The inherent *violence* of seasonal change, coupled with a sense of loss (always a consideration for a contemporary composer) seem to be factors which inform this work. Yet, like Donne, Finnissey is also able to find hope in the passing of the familiar, positive inspiration in the concept of transience.

While *Autumnall* is both radiant and violent, the following work, *Snowdrift* (1972) seems a (relatively speaking!) more still and translucent affair. It too takes its title from a poem, here William Sharp's 'The White Peacock', which inspired Charles Griffes's work of the same name and includes the following lines:

Here as the breath, as the soul of this beauty
 Moveth in silence, and dreamlike, and slowly,
 White as a snowdrift in mountain valleys
 When softly upon it the gold light lingers

Two features, which might be seen as opposite ends of a spectrum, stand out in this work: a series of major thirds or minor sixths (the two intervals most fervently proscribed by the 1950s serialists), or their equivalents with octave transpositions, and long series of grace notes.

Two musical score excerpts from 'Snowdrift'. The top excerpt shows a piano introduction with markings like 'sotto ppp' and 'hold down pedal change'. The bottom excerpt shows a more complex passage with 'precipitato, velociss. e piano' and 'molto ped.' markings, along with performance instructions like 'just before the bar?' and 'just after the cluster'.

Example 2.8 *Snowdrift*
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Through the piece, the intervals are reiterated at various points in different voicings, in particular within an ongoing progression of chords. They are more discreetly smuggled into other types of gestural material, while the grace notes follow an overall progression towards an extended series near the end (though in the sketches this comes after the first chord). Other elements are juxtaposed and intercut in a manner similar to *Autumnall*, but with a much more extended melodic line, which while at various points is briefly interrupted and subject to 'commentaries' in the bass register, nonetheless is given a considerable amount of space to progress. This uninhibited use of long line was to become an important feature of both Finnissy's instrumental and vocal writing, reflecting his humanity and consequent love for the human voice, so different to the desiccated, fragmented vocal gestures which had become such a feature of much post-Second Viennese School vocal and instrumental writing.

Finnissy makes use of a wide repertoire of cinematic technique, including the use of 'jump cuts' (Example 2.9a), 'dissolves' (Example 2.9b) or expressions of 'distance' (Example 2.9c).

Example 2.9a *Snowdrift*

Example 2.9b *Snowdrift*

Example 2.9
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Example 2.9c *Snowdrift* (a) p. 2, (b) pp. 3-4, (c) p. 7
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The sudden interruptions create a sense of dynamism and also serve the montage-like function of 'distancing' the material, showing its particularity by virtue of there being something else with which to compare it to.

There are obvious connotations of a 'snowscape' in the blizzards of grace notes but otherwise *Snowdrift* resists a clear programmatic explanation. Finnis was more interested in the creation of new modes of expression than in mere narrative, or copying a pre-existing formal model which would have been incompatible with his requirements (though he would soon find ways of rejuvenating older forms). This is also true of the two-piano work, *Wild Flowers* (1974), a further literary-inspired work. The title here is taken from William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.

Such a coming together of extreme opposites extends the structuralist concerns of the *Songs* to the post-structuralist notion that binary oppositions inevitably contain the roots of their own inversion (perhaps this conclusion cannot be escaped in the earlier works either). The piece makes much of the distinction between hyper-stasis and hectic activity as if to demonstrate the reality of this conception, especially in its use of sustained chords and clusters near the beginning. Moments like that shown in Example 2.10, the shattering of a state of relative tranquillity by a glancing blow to the keyboard by the first pianist, have the power to disturb intensely even an initiated listener, as has been demonstrated in successive performances.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for two pianos, labeled I and II. The first system features complex rhythmic patterns and clusters. Annotations include 'both hands' at the top of the first staff, 'cluster with left wrist' in the first piano part, and 'simultaneously with first note of LH arpeggio' in the second piano part. The second system is divided into two sections: 'Subito Rapido' and 'Andante'. The 'Subito Rapido' section has a 'C' time signature and includes instructions like 'Immediately after Piano II', 'both hands and palms', and 'subito sfffz'. The 'Andante' section has an 'Ad' time signature and includes 'sub. ppp' and 'sub. sfz' markings. The score is densely written with various musical symbols, including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 2.10 *Wild Flowers*, p. 2
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The piece is made up of a series of quite long sections, within each of which material or ideas are allowed to run their natural course. An extremely beautiful extended melodic line starting on the second page, echoes the similar passage in *Snowdrift* and also includes many intervals with clear consonant properties. Elsewhere a continuous stream of accelerating notes work their way up the bottom half of one keyboard, are transferred with an overlap onto the other half and progress further towards the top register.

Finnissy makes ample use of the antiphonal possibilities of the two-piano medium, as when the second piano echoes key notes within the melodic line of the first.

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Example 2.11 *Wild Flowers*, p. 3
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Yet the work was initially conceived for solo piano, a 'super-piano' exceeding in scope anything that had previously been thought possible (this would have to wait for the 3rd and 4th *Piano Concertos*). The use of multiple lines in different metres is made the more clear, however, when divided between players, who consequently need 'divide' their minds only half as much!

Wild Flowers contains much less of the intercutting that was such a striking feature of *Autumnall* and *Snowdrift* and consequently the large-scale design of the piece is easier to grasp. The shift from an assemblage of clearly defined components, as in the previous works, to a series of longer sections whose boundaries are clearly audible, thus allowing a greater emphasis upon material itself and its development (again receiving its prototype in *Song 9*), was to become a major feature of the next period of Finnissey's work. It parallels the development in cinematic history from the almost exclusive use of montage to a greater concentration on *mise-en-scène*.

From Improvisation to Abstraction

For much of the 1970s, Finnissey worked as a pianist and répétiteur for opera and dance companies. His work as an improviser for Matt Mattox's dance classes was to be reflected in a number of piano pieces, while others were written for choreography by Siobhan Davies and Kris Donovan, among others.

Freighttrain Bruise (1972/80) is the first piano work clearly indebted to Finnissey's improvisational work. The piece opens with rhythms, gestural contours and, more obliquely, harmonies derived from the blues, with a mostly regular beat, but within an essentially atonal context.

Lightly and quietly, but with a raunchy swing [$\text{♩} = 108$ approx.]

Example 2.12 *Freight Train Bruise*
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The aura of the music, the sensation of distance and alienation from the generic source comes about as a result of other factors as well as the atonality; Finnis also uses a filtering technique, in the manner of *Song 9* but on a more small-scale level, to produce silences, gaps in the texture, and occasionally compresses or otherwise modifies the beat. He describes the distortions as “bruises” on its surface, places where the ripe fruit of jazz hit the cold floor of late twentieth-century ‘angst’!. It would be easy for these types of transformation to become predictable, but in the end the piece is irreducible to any processual schema. The subsequent works in this vein were, however, to use much more monolithic structural models.

Kemp’s Morris (1978) takes its title from the actor Will Kemp, who Morris-danced for nine days from London to Norwich. Finnis has the pianist wear Morris bells around the knuckles, which produce sympathetic jangling, to correspond to the bells that a dancer like Kemp would have worn around their calves. The piece is in nine sections (one for each day of Kemp’s dance) the first five of which both allude to and are derived from the twenty-sixth melody in Playford’s *English Dancing Master* (1651), by a process of sub-division and subsequent re-construction and modification. This type of technique, and the meaning of different levels of allusion and

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Example 2.13
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derivation, will be explained in more detail when considering *G.F.H.* and other transcriptions later. The culmination is a wild dance around the keyboard with the right hand, accompanied by a more regular bass line:

Example 2.13 *Kemp's Morris*, p. 5
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From the sixth to ninth sections, the textures become more fragmentary, and the bells are shaken independently of any notes being played on the keyboard, their long tremoli eventually usurping the piano lines. However, the material within the sections often moves in various directions, or relates to other material, in ways which are tangential to the overall direction of the work, as when an echo of the melody from the beginning is briefly glimpsed in the eighth section.

The pounding bass line with a leaping right hand in the fifth section of *Kemp's Morris* is given a very different colouration in the final version of *Boogie-Woogie* (1980/81/85/96) (the last revision is a minor re-writing after the final page was lost), the first piece of a 'dance' trilogy with *Jazz* (1976) and *Fast Dances, Slow Dances* (1978-79). Here the left hand has a 'boogying' line which pulverises the bottom register for most of the piece, against which the right hand alternates a frenetic mixture of accented staccato notes and chords, and short two and three note/chord phrases, with more continuous monodic, but intervallically angular, lines, which later develop into two such lines simultaneously. A coda at the end consists of a quick *pppp*, *staccatissimo brillante* flurry of notes. While most of *Boogie-Woogie's* structural and textural elements have clear predecessors in earlier works, it is the particular 'flavour' of this piece that gives it its distinct identity, deriving from the jazz-inspired characteristics of the smallest scale elements.

In the initial draft of *Jazz*, Finnis was more explicit about this, stating that 'Pianist should remove tie and play throughout as closely to the style of

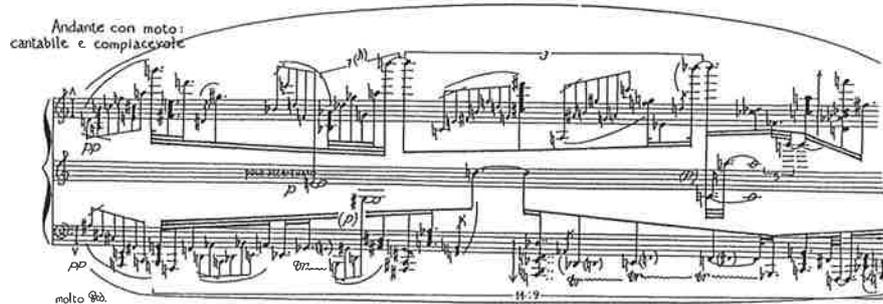
Jelly-Roll Morton as possible: Blues and Stomp in alternation'. To provide a container for his creative imagination in this piece which, like *Freighttrain Bruise*, was inspired by his improvisational work for Matt Mattox, Finnissy turned to a pre-existing structural model, the series of tempos in Beethoven's *Sechs Bagatellen Op. 126*:

1. *Andante con moto / L'istesso tempo / (non troppo presto)*
2. *Allegro*
3. *Andante: cantabile e grazioso*
4. *Presto*
5. *Quasi allegretto*
6. *Presto-Andante amabile e con moto-Tempo 1 (Presto)*

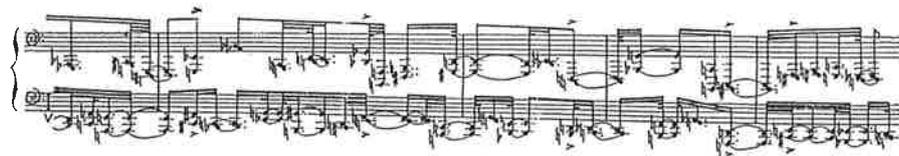
He then delineated three categories of material (my descriptions):

- (A) Melancholy, bluesy. Generally in top two and bottom two octaves of keyboard, sometimes with accentuated line in middle, providing *cantus firmus*, a little like the opening section of *Song 9*. Progressively getting slower.
- (B) Fantastic, macabre plundering of bottom of keyboard, first as a stomp, then as series of trills and tremolos, with clusters.
- (C) Stomp around whole keyboard, at first with ratios of 10:9 between the hands. Progressively getting faster.

The first of each of these material types is shown in Example 2.14.



Example 2.14a *Jazz material type (A1)*



Example 2.14b *Jazz material type (B1)*



Example 2.1

The develop-
work is the

- (A1) *An*
- Transfor
- Transfor
- (B1) *Alle*
- (A2) *An*
- (C1) *Pre*
- (B2) *Qu*
- (C2) *Pre*
- (A3) *An*
- (C3) *Pre*

One of the registers of pianistic idiom, but, for many stalagmites and free in portrayal. I taken a step this register of objectivity. The movement (1977). Tar roses' (which correspond both hands note/black harmonic interspersio more mund of execution

Example 2.14c Jazz material type (C1)

The development of materials (A) and (C) is thus in opposite directions. The work is then shaped as follows:

- (A1) *Andante con moto: cantabile e compiacevole*
- Transformation A1-B1 (a) *l'istesso tempo*
- Transformation A1-B1 (b) (*non troppo presto*)
- (B1) *Allegro*
- (A2) *Andante: cantabile e grazioso*
- (C1) *Presto*
- (B2) *Quasi allegretto*
- (C2) *Presto*
- (A3) *Andante amabile e con moto*
- (C3) *Presto*

One of the most noticeable characteristics of this work is its use of extreme registers of the piano for extended passages. Finnissy has said that this pianistic idiom derives from his sitting position at the piano (see Interview), but, for me, the sensation it produces is akin to being confronted by stalagmites and stalactites, or mountain peaks and deep pits; the melancholy and free improvisatory qualities of the work are given a larger-than-life portrayal. Finnissy's use of the very bottom of the piano in section (B1) was taken a stage further in *We'll get there someday* (1978) which is entirely in this register, except for the final staccato chord which acts as an ironic form of objectivisation.

The move to a high degree of abstraction was shown in *all.fall.down* (1977). Taking its title from the well-known nursery rhyme 'Ring-a-ring of roses' (which also appears in the stage work *Vaudeville*), the work is in three corresponding sections. The first, *all*, uses all the notes of the piano with both hands in rhythmic unison. Development is effected by the use of white note/black note filters which produce differing chromatic/diatonic/pentatonic harmonic fields, as well as occasional registral filters and tempo changes, interspersed with contrary motion scales, arpeggiation and grace notes. On a more mundane level, this section is also notable for its frightening difficulty of execution:

Example 2.15 *all.fall.down*, p. 2

Towards the end of this section, the left hand works its way up the keyboard for *fall*. Here two lines of chords gradually move down the keyboard, though with other forms of modification along the way, towards *down*, which is exclusively in the bottom register. This is notated in terms of metrical ratios for time signatures between the two hands, so that the left hand is proportionally slower than the right by a ratio of, for example, 13 to 19. Simultaneous developments here include overlays of silences, the reduction of continuous lines to single *sffffz* chords and back to lines again with progressively less dense chords, and 'stepwise' *diminuendo* (jumps from subito *ff* to subito *f*, subito *mf*, etc., without any other quietening in between).

Fast Dances, Slow Dances similarly took Beethoven's *Elf Bagatellen* Op. 119 as its structural model, but the resultant piece is quite different from *Jazz*:

- (1) *Allegretto*. Two lines at top of keyboard, the upper line monodic, ornamented with grace notes, the lower beginning in chords, then thinning down to single notes. Interruption of overall *staccato*, *fff* with pedalled *ppp* segments. Interspersions of grace note chords at bottom of keyboard. Rhythms moving around an implied dotted crotchet pulse.
- (2) *Andante con moto*. Continuation of two high monodic lines *ppp* from (1). Alternation of pedal and *staccato*.

- (3) *à l'A*
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- (4) *Anda*
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- (7) *Alleg*
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- (3) *à l'Allemande*. Wide arpeggiated *ff* chords, or angular lines, in differing metrical units.
- (4) *Andante cantabile*. Three lines, top line like (3) but here *piano*, with two chordal lines in different registers of the bass. Middle line begins rapid series of notes, leading to:
- (5) *Risoluto*. Again three lines. Top line continues middle line of (4), introducing rapid-fire chords. Brutal slurred pairs of chords in extreme bass in other two lines, in differing metres. Registral 'wrenching up' of top line leads to:
- (6) *Andante-Allegretto-l'istesso tempo* (Example 2.16). Two lines in each half of the keyboard. Both uneven, with novel experiment in notation, *accelerandos* and *ritardandos* written out as irrational rhythms. Continual shifts between all notes, white notes and black notes at different points in each part, as in *all.fall.down*, resulting in new harmonic fields as a result of different combinations of chromatic, diatonic and pentatonic filters. Overall *stringendo* leads to brief *Allegretto* interruption, hypertrophised version of (1). Increasing disjunction towards end between faster and slower melodic fragments.

Example 2.16 *Fast Dances, Slow Dances*, p. 8, lines 2-3

- (7) *Allegro ma non troppo*. Continuous series of very quick grace notes in both hands, with series separated by long pauses. Lengths of groups within series now seem to follow irregular patterns e.g. in first series have lengths 25-9-14-5-5-9-26-7-3-5-24-2-14-18-14 in right hand, with 20-8-10-5-4-8-24-6-4-5-22-2-13-16-13 in left hand. All in top half of keyboard, dynamics *ppp-mp*.
- (8) *Moderato cantabile, molto legato*. Three slow lines in different metrical units. Top line mainly in top three octaves of piano, eventually moving down, middle line ranging widely around middle register, bottom line always in the bass. Bottom line soon introduces chords, as eventually does middle line. Long *crescendo* to:

- (9) *Vivace moderato* (Example 2.17). Much longer exposition of idea briefly glimpsed in (5). Here two lower lines have single chords rather than pairs, though still in different metrical units. Rests between chords contain incrementally increasing or decreasing numbers of semiquavers, in the manner of Nancarrow. Further white note/black note filters. Top line utilises a variety of techniques, including rhythmic progression of 7 quavers, 8:7, 9:7, 10:7, etc; palindromic rhythms with increasing/decreasing irrational overlays; reduction from chromatic cluster-like chords to fourths, or whole-tone clusters. All in bass register, with one very high chord during *accelerando* into next section:

Example 2.17 *Fast Dances, Slow Dances*, p. 16

- (10) *Allegramente*. Continuation of (9), but faster and with more high chords. Bass chords become gradually denser, while top line is at times filtered to consist of only major/minor seconds, then *diminuendo* and thinning down towards monodic line, moving almost immediately to treble register. Irregular assemblage of fragments with varying metrical units.
- (11) *Andante ma non troppo, innocentemente e cantabile*. Long, slow, wide-ranging melody in treble, with occasional low chords in bass.

Both *all.fall.down* and *Fast Dances, Slow Dances*, together with works for other mediums such as *Alongside*, represent the culmination of a phase of Finnissy's compositional development, towards a degree of abstraction not seen since the *Songs*. There is a danger of arid formalism when the external referent does not influence the actual musical material, but if the structure of *Fast Dances, Slow Dances* served some meaningful purpose in the Beethoven work, why should it not be valid in a quite different context?

These works could be said to provide an 'archetypal' example of Finnissy's compositional techniques up to this point, laying bare the technical skeleton of much of his work. Operations upon material are made as clear as possible, though the categorisation of form and content is made problematic by the multi-layering of different developmental progressions. However

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systematic or random the works might seem in places, Finnissy's decision to write them the way he did is a *human* choice, so their very nature reflects a subjective personality: human characteristics with which a listener may find resonances. One might equally well say that Cage, a composer who Finnissy acknowledges as a major influence, could never completely escape intentionality in his own music, because his intention is manifest in the decision to use the particular procedures that he did, however random they might be. Those who respond to '4'33" by saying 'I could have done that!' betray a very puritanical streak: that composition is to be judged on the basis of the quantity of labour involved in its production, rather than its inspiration and distinctiveness. I do not wish to propound a completely open-ended pluralist aesthetic, just to point out that the ultimate enigma of the human mind makes it highly unlikely that any other individual would have produced works like these.

The scores define themselves almost as much by what is excluded as included, by their rejection of a too-obvious linearity of development, and the resistance to total systemisation in at least one parameter at any moment. Finnissy is not a dogmatist; all his compositional procedures involve a high degree of intervention in response to his instinctive and personal demands, and the use of random procedures to 'shake up' that which is becoming too predictable. The situation becomes more difficult to grasp philosophically, however, when one considers the similarities between chance and extreme complexity of system, or between chance and human intention, when one considers a human being as itself a complex system. These sorts of questions, to which the works provide one possible answer, would need a whole book in order to be treated in a manner which is even remotely satisfactory. I can merely point out the individuality of these works, even within the highly varied context of Finnissy's output. Some might even consider them to be 'typical Finnissy pieces' but this leads to a contradiction since they are the only works to fit such a category.

However, finding that a structuralist model of the world was not all-inclusive - there were many things which could not be reduced to an agglomeration of binary oppositions - Finnissy soon afterwards made a determined shift in direction, an attempt to engage in a more obvious dialogue with the 'world outside', through the introduction of materials derived from folk music and the work of other composers. He had reached the end of a line in both compositional and personal senses, having become so disillusioned with his native land that he sought work elsewhere. Before considering the subsequent periods of work, however, it is first necessary to look at the other paths which he had begun to pursue simultaneously, and another major work which was completed before the move.

English Country-Tunes

The thorny subject of England and Englishness is one that Finnissy has returned to at various points during his career. Unlike Fernyough or some

of the younger composers who have benefited from Finnissy's influence and encouragement, he has chosen for the most part to remain in England, yet always remained conscious of his status as an outsider, as a radical artist and homosexual. Although deeply interested at first in East European folk music, Finnissy realised that it would make more sense to investigate the music of his native land. This research explicitly informed works such as *Kemp's Morris, Folk Song Set* and *Tom Fool's Wooing*, but was nonetheless an important factor in the composition of Finnissy's first large scale piano work, the 50 minute virtuoso epic *English Country-Tunes* (1977/82-85), 'written in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II'.

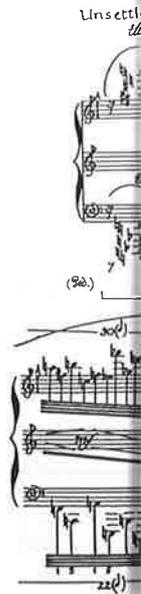
To consider the title: Does *English Country* refer to the 'country of England' or specifically the rural part therein? *Tunes* rather than *Melodies* - there is surely some irony in an age when composers are reprimanded for their failure to write 'nice tunes' (notwithstanding the fundamental importance of melody to Finnissy). *Country Tunes* - is this a word-play on 'contra-tunes', as in his later work *Contretänze*, or a play on the first syllable of *Country*, suggesting connotations of sex or sexuality? In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 2, II. 120ff:

Hamlet.	Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia.	No, my lord.
H.	I mean, my head upon your lap?
O.	Ay, my lord.
H.	Do you think I meant country matters?
O.	I think nothing, my lord.
H.	That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
O.	What is, my lord?
H.	Nothing.

Finnissy has certainly replied in the affirmative to the last of these questions, explaining that he intended the work to be 'about' attitudes in England to sexuality, a culture which attempts to deny or outlaw many aspects of human sexual behaviour, until they return to haunt it with a vengeance. Such considerations go a long way to explaining the instability and underlying psychotic nature of much of the first three movements of the work.

1. *Green Meadows*. Tempestuous yet distant surges of activity all around the keyboard erupting into sudden split-second violence (Example 2.18a). Low rumblings, building to a peak, then calm again. Emergent shimmerings, extremely quiet, using all registers. Sudden cut off. Violent, but exhilarating traversals up and down keyboard, joined by harsh melody in chords at the very top of keyboard, continually under threat of envelopment by the ascending swathes of notes (Example 2.18b). A gap in the texture, appearance of more diatonic melody in middle register. Top line dissolves, bottom line suddenly returns to rumblings. Alternation of more measured and spacious violence, with now monodic diatonic melody, accompanied first by rumblings, then by top register melody (now *ppp*). Long, timeless, exposition of serene but infinitely distant melody (Example 2.18c).

Rumblings
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2. *Midsumm*
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Example 2.18a



Example 2.18b

Rumblings again. 'Almost motionless' continuation of melody leading to second movement.

2. *Midsummer Morn.* Very slow, intensely nostalgic but also passionate, folk-inspired melody exclusively using white notes (Example 2.19a). Climax, a few black notes. Murkier textures (Example 2.19b), then sudden violent outburst across whole of keyboard (Example 2.19c). Return to initial type of music, but here tempered by grace notes, simultaneity of melodies, low accompaniment. Outburst again, introduction of clusters. Barest outline of melodic writing, usurped by grace notes. Third outburst (more organically derived from what has gone before), then sudden *diminuendo*. Uneasy calm, with four melodic lines simultaneously.

Example 2.18a *English Country-Tunes*

Example 2.18b *English Country-Tunes*

Example 2.18c *English Country-Tunes*
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Slow and wistful

Example 2.19a *English Country-Tunes*

gradually more and more animated

Example 2.19b *English Country-Tunes*

Example 2.19c *English Country-Tunes*
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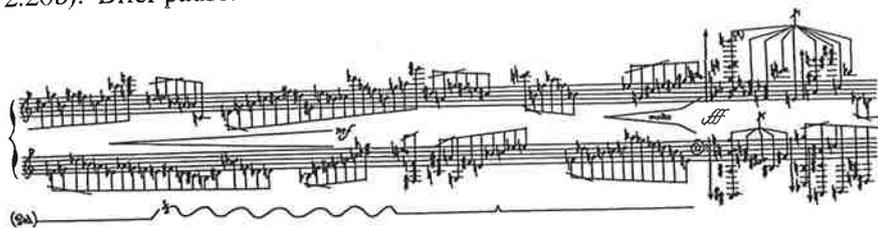
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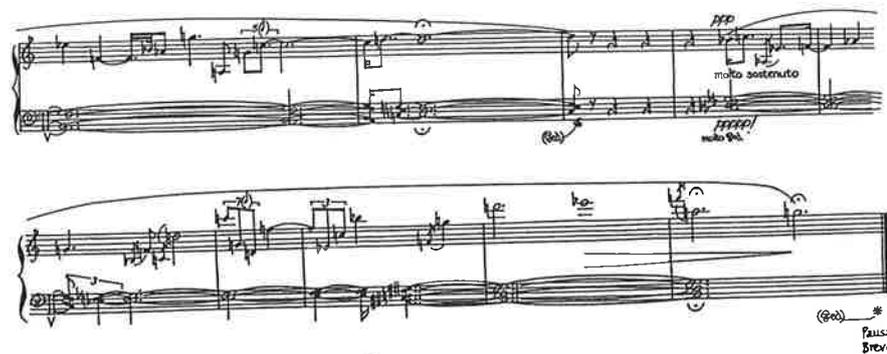
Exampl
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3. *I'll give my love a garland*. Continuation of end of *Midsummer Morn*. Increasing stability and tranquillity. Silence. Further continuation. Silence. Single melodic line in centre of keyboard, surrounded by macabre *ppp* sounds, buzzings, wailings, distant mutilated echoes. Silence. Melody alone, now in diatonic intervals. Surroundings again, now more hectic. Bass line suddenly breaks out. Rapid burst of notes, louder and softer with increasing rate of change. Swarm of grace notes in upper register, eventually quietening to *mormorato*, but still at top speed, with occasional clusters producing sensation of immanency (Example 2.20a). Crazy outburst all over keyboard, similar to that in *Midsummer Morn*. Sudden return to *piano* grace notes, moving straight back up to top of keyboard and *forte*. *Crescendo*, quick snatch of breath, then two more violent outbursts. Quick calmings, re-appearance of diatonic melody similar to end of *Green Meadows*, but accompanied by rumblings. Silence. Final melody, *molto sostenuto*, is most paradisiacal moment in whole work, yet uncertain conclusion (Example 2.20b). Brief pause.



Example 2.20a *English Country-Tunes*

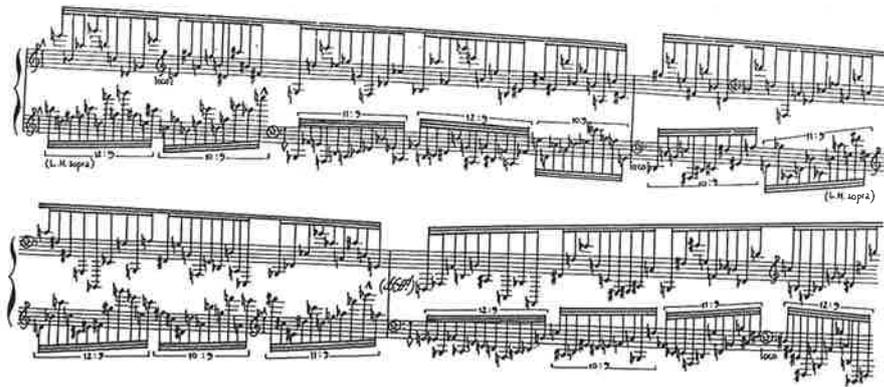


Example 2.20b *English Country-Tunes*

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Rather than continue with this degree of detail for the whole piece, it should suffice to describe how over the course of the following five movements the music attains both a greater stability and a greater polarisation between extremes. The fourth movement, *May and December*, forms a pivot between the two 'halves' of the work, retaining some of the instability that was a feature of the preceding three, yet with a long murmuring passage in the central register. The fifth, *Lies and Marvels*, is in two parts, the first a type of

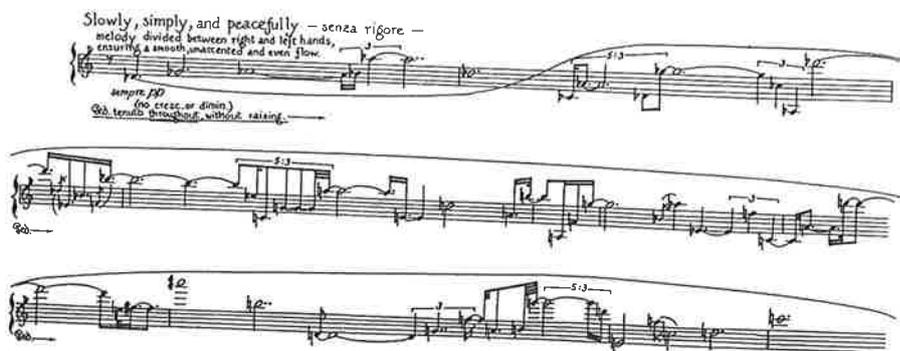
macho posturing at the bottom of the keyboard, which dissolves to a series of ghostly whispers, the second a brilliant series of ascending arpeggio-like figures in the left hand, with an equally rapid line in the right which is nevertheless more fixed in register:



Example 2.21 *English Country-Tunes*, p. 42
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The apotheosis of the violence inherent in the work is reached in the sixth movement, *The Seeds of Love*. For the most part a series of psychotic, fragmented gestures, which become more continuous before reaching a manic progression of out-of-phase *staccato* chords in both hands, finally dissolving into an indistinct shimmering in the top register.

After the second brief pause between movements in the piece, the seventh movement, *My Bonny Boy*, is very slow and entirely monodic, though with the sustaining pedal depressed throughout. Based on a traditional English melody, the initial sense of stasis is undermined by continual modulation:



Example 2.22 *English Country-Tunes*, p. 53
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The Pia

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The last movement, *Come beat the drums and sound the fifes*, might be a reflection on the para-military nature of the English marching band and could hardly stand in greater contrast to *My Bonny Boy*. Exclusively in the outer extremes of the piano, it is a long *Totentanz* (as one might describe the whole work), involving pounding chords in the bass, with a much more rhythmically irregular concatenation of fragments in the treble:

Example 2.23 *English Country-Tunes*, p. 58

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After the first *fortissimo*, further developments include the introduction of trills first in the treble line, then in the bass, and a more rapid rate of change of dynamic, bringing the work to its mind-blowing conclusion.

English Country-Tunes is a work which moves from an uneasy dialogue between extremes to complete polarisation. It presents both immense rage and nostalgia for a lost world, the latter of which is evoked by the particular utilisation of modal and diatonic material, producing what was for Finnissey a new colour, though the vision is made unattainable because of its haziness, seen through a gauze of tears. The piece is a culmination point like the 'abstract' works described above, the ultimate expression of extremes of passion and anger, almost like a form of catharsis. Certainly any listener is likely to leave the work feeling emotionally drained.

There is much which is dark and satanic, and a form of post-holocaust bleakness, a frightening landscape barely hospitable to man yet strangely beautiful, in the 'England' that Finnissey presents; the country from which he felt deeply alienated, and which he left for a period soon afterwards. The new colours that had been shown to be possible in *English Country-Tunes*, as well as different modes of synthesis, were to be the basis of the following decade-and-a-half's work.

The Piano Concertos

Finnissey's seven piano concertos date from a relatively short period, from 1975 to 1981. They share many of the harmonic/rhythmic/gestural characteristics of the 'abstract' works mentioned above, but also represent a commentary on the nature of the piano concerto as a medium (perhaps not

entirely different from the various ways in which composers as different as Globokar and Carter have explored the interrelationships between groups of players), and as such it would be disingenuous to deny considerations of virtuosity.

The relationship between soloist and ensemble is at its most conventional in the *Piano Concerto No. 1* (1975/83-84), which has continual dialogue between the piano and the other instrumentalists and a cadenza in the middle. In the *Piano Concerto No. 2* (1975-76), on the other hand, the piano has a long and extremely varied cadenza at the opening, then is gradually integrated into the ensemble, before ending with another, smoother cadenza, as if the piano has been 'cleansed' by its interaction with others. The *Piano Concerto No. 3* (1978) once more places the piano centre stage, with one of the most brilliant pieces of writing Finnissy has ever created, inspired by the playing of Cecil Taylor:

Example 2.24 *Piano Concerto No. 3*
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The ensemble, an unusual combination of oboe, clarinet, two tenor trombones, cello and double bass, is overshadowed by the piano for much of the piece, but the players have correspondingly 'free-jazz'-like parts, with especially imaginative *pizzicato* writing in the two strings. The integration of the piano (whose part includes two extended cadenzas) occurs only towards the very end.

But the *Piano Concerto No. 4* (1978/96) goes a stage further in its demands on the performer, veering towards the impossible. Inspired by Alkan's *Concerto for Solo Piano*, Finnissy has the performer adopt both solo and *tutti* roles, with corresponding changes of texture. There is absolutely no

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Example 2.22

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let-up for the pianist, who has to plough heroically through a seemingly endless series of whirling semiquavers, manage a five-part canon (with five different time signatures) in the closing section, and somehow negotiate the most hysterical of fugues:

Example 2.25 *Piano Concerto No. 4*, p. 30

It is hard to imagine greater difficulties than are provided by this work; indeed, Brian Ferneyhough described the resultant instrument in the *tutti* passages as a 'meta-piano'. Some of the passages in the revised version are taken from the withdrawn *Piano Studies*, and the now withdrawn ensemble piece *Long Distance* provides the canon at the end.

Both the *Piano Concerto No. 5* (1980) and the *Piano Concerto No. 7* (1981) dispense with a full score, supplying instead a set of parts whose vertical co-ordination is approximate. They both continue explorations of degrees of interaction and integration between soloist and ensemble. In the fifth concerto Finnissey takes the novel step of introducing a wordless voice part; this work operates a process of 'transference', whereby the ensemble is eventually 'infected' by some of the characteristics of the opening of the piano part, while the piano part itself becomes integrated into the ensemble, a form of 'counter-transference'!

The *Piano Concerto No. 6* (1980-81) is like the fourth, for solo piano, and also inspired by the Alkan work. It is an exceptionally strange and eerie work, containing unexpectedly long *spettrale* passages in the outer registers. The writing only becomes more animated and voluminous at a few places other than the beginning, as if the 'orchestra' is only occasionally able to

interrupt the 'inner world' of the 'soloist'. The coda congeals what has gone before into a long series of changing trills in both hands. Its rejection of conventions of taste and proportions enables types of material that have been evidenced earlier in Finnissy's output to be seen in a radically new light.

Transcription

In 1910, Ferruccio Busoni wrote the following in defence of Liszt's transcriptions:

Notation is itself the transcription of an abstract idea. The moment that the pen takes possession of it the thought loses its original form. The intention of writing down an idea necessitates already a choice of time and key. The composer is obliged to decide on the form and the key and they determine more and more clearly the course to be taken and the limitations. Even if much of the idea is original and indestructible and continues to exist this will be pressed down from the moment of decision, into the type belonging to a class. The idea becomes a sonata or a concerto; this is already an arrangement of the original. From this first transcription to the second is a comparatively short and unimportant step. Yet, in general, people make a fuss only about the second. In doing so they overlook the fact that a transcription does not destroy the original; so there can be no question of loss arising from it. The performance of a work is also a transcription, and this too - however free the performance may be - can never do away with the original. For the musical work of art exists whole and intact before it has sounded and after the sound is finished. It is, at the same time, in and outside of Time.⁴

Such a conception of *all* composition as a form of 'transcription' came as a revelation to Finnissy when he first read Busoni's essay. One might well wonder about the nature of this elusive 'abstract idea' that can be conceived independently of a particular realisation, but this form of conceptualisation of the compositional process has informed many of Finnissy's transcriptions and composer tributes. He attempts in these works to make clear his own particular aesthetic and technical priorities by applying them to something pre-existent, with the intention to remove one degree of unfamiliarity from the listening process.

Of course there is nothing particularly new about this approach (except in the degree to which the composer is conscious of it); think of Bach's transcriptions, Mozart and Beethoven's innumerable sets of variations, Debussy's ironic cribs of Wagner, Stravinsky's utterly original re-working of Pergolesi; more recently Berio's collage of Mahler, Debussy, Boulez and other's in the *Sinfonia*, Kagel's fixation on small elements within received genres, Cage's use of a citation as just another type of sound with no special importance, and, most ominously, the claustrophobia created by the 'closing in' of many voices from different times and places in B.A. Zimmermann's *Requiem für einen Jungen Dichter*.

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Example 2.26
Reproduced by

Finnissy's transcriptions do not clearly fit into any of the above categories, although they are clearly informed by this history. His approach is above all 'critical' - he is uninhibited about modifying or mutating his source material to suit his own ends. Starting from a belief that all composers are dealing with a vocabulary that has both natural and cultural/historic connotations, and thus that an 'original idea' is well nigh impossible, Finnissy has in this strand of his work (which in different manifestations has become his primary concern) dealt with the fundamentally *diachronic* nature of music; to achieve the 'not-yet-heard', one must find new ways of treating that which already exists, emphasising processes rather than material. I would suggest that without a thorough knowledge of what has come before, a composer is in great danger of 're-inventing the wheel'; those who ignore history are in danger of repeating it, and so on.

The first work that might be described as a 'transcription' is a curious affair called *Romeo and Juliet are Drowning* (1967/73). In this piece, Finnissy takes music from the love scene of Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette*, then gradually submerges it within a series of descending notes and chords derived from the drowning scene in Berg's *Wozzeck*:

Example 2.26 *Romeo and Juliet are Drowning* (two extracts)
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Yet none of these pieces merely pastiche the respective composer's style. The explosive opening of *Ives* (Example 2.27) may have something in common with the opening of 'Hawthorne' from the *Concord Sonata* (a piece which has never ceased to fascinate Finnissy, since the age of eleven), and the unusual use of ragtime rhythms might also relate to similar passages in the *First Sonata*, yet the piece could not have been written by anyone other than Finnissy himself.

The inspiration for *Grainger* came as much from his ideas as his music. In a letter Grainger described his experience lying on a boat on Lake Melbourne. The sheer variegation and unpredictability of the sounds of the water and nature that he heard heightened his awareness of how strait-jacketed and un-free much 'classical' music actually was. This was to lead to his composition of 'free music', with the use of irrational rhythms, continual metre changes, overlapping *glissandi* and much more in some of his less popular works. *Grainger* is exclusively at the outer ends of the keyboard, consisting of two outer melodic lines, and two inner lines of trills, an attempt to evoke the sound of Grainger's proposed 'kangaroo machine':

With great simplicity and warmth, lingeringly. [*♩*-between 84 and 104]

trilled notes should be played very softly and accompanyingly

So sing the cords

Example 2.28 *Grainger*

Nancarrow bears a superficial resemblance to some of the *Studies for Player Piano*, with a canon between the two hands, in different tempos and metres (Example 2.29), with one hand playing flourishes of notes of equal durations, while the other has palindromic rhythms, followed by an anticipatory series of irregularly spaced single *staccato* notes, before the situation of the two hands is reversed. The ways in which such material is developed bears some relation to those in *Fast Dances*, *Slow Dances*.

Example 2.29 *Nancarrow*

It is now worth considering a work derived from a specific source, to understand precisely how this source is transformed into the finished piece. While there is no 'super-formula' into which any source can be fed to produce an instant transcription - Finnis's compositional processes are continually altered in accordance with the needs of each particular work - nonetheless *G.F.H.* (1985) (Example 2.30) provides a relatively typical example of how he creates a work of transcription.

Written to celebrate the tercentenary of Handel's birth (whose transparency and seemingly endless facility for creating line is much admired by Finnis), the work takes the opening of the *Trio Sonata Op. 1 No. 1* as its point of departure (Example 2.31a). This appears in the third voice at the beginning. Finnis splits the melody into seven pitch cells, each of three notes, then inverts them to produce a further seven cells (Example 2.31b). The pitches for other voices are then derived by transposing combinations of these cells. The top voice is a random permutation of retrogrades of the cells, while the second voice consists of the inversions in order. After finishing the initial exposition of the melody, the third part also uses a random permutation of the pitch cells (Example 2.31c,d,e). Each line was composed separately; when Finnis came to put them together, some pitches were modified to prevent contrapuntal overlap and unwanted harmonic combinations.

Finnis also created a vocabulary of rhythmic cells, probably derived from just a few, some of whose possible relationships are shown in Example 2.31f. The method by which the actual rhythms are determined is a little more complex than that for pitch. Finnis takes *two* randomly derived series of rhythmic cells, then intuitively finds ways of containing cells in the first series in the time of subsections of the second (Example 2.31g).

The melo
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of transform
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way down th
between all f
chord sudden

Larghetto

The melody is passed around the four voices in successively modified forms (the process described above is particularly evident in the rhythm), in voice order three, two, one, four, while the other parts continue the processes of transformation and re-transformation (such that their modification is a 'step ahead' of the main line), while the transpositions gradually work their way down the keyboard (Example 2.31h). Once the line has been passed between all four parts, and before this process becomes too obvious, the *fffz* chord suddenly interrupts and drags all the voices down an octave.

Larghetto e piano [$\text{♩} = 92$ approx.]

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12-xii-1985

Example 2.30 *G.F.H.*

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By this stage they are modified to such a degree that the original melody has ceased to be recognisable, yet something of the 'flavour' remains. It is Finnissy's belief (which I share) that after even the most radical of transformations, a kernel of a source's intrinsic characteristics, however small, will continue to be present in a work which has been created from that source. That his transcriptions do indeed sound so very different, bears this out.

(a) melody

(b) pitch ce

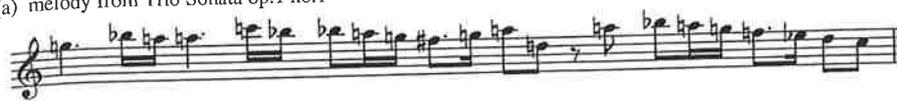
8-14 a

(c) pitches o

(d) pitches o

GFH

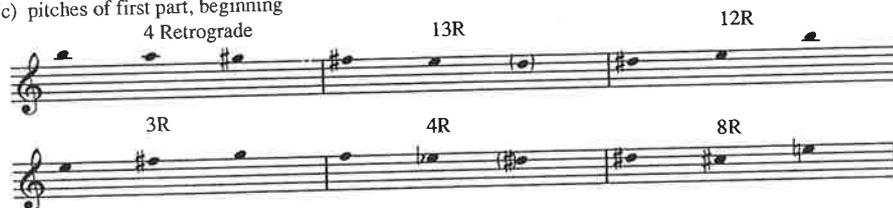
(a) melody from Trio Sonata op.1 no.1



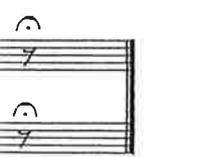
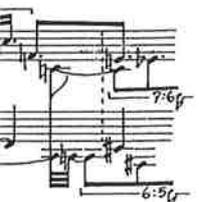
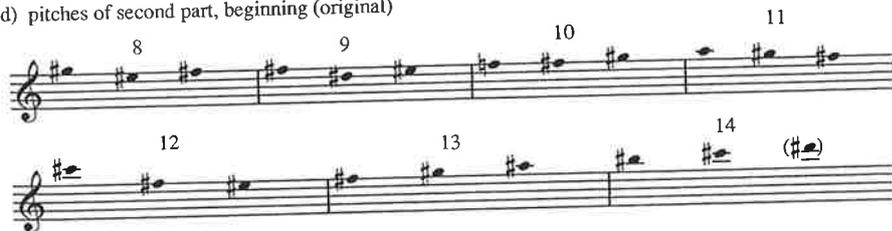
(b) pitch cells derived from (a)



(c) pitches of first part, beginning



(d) pitches of second part, beginning (original)



12-xii-1985

original melody has
remains. It is
most radical of
characteristics, however
created from that
different, bears this

(e) pitches of third part, after initial melody. From random series 2,5,7,11,14,13

Retrograde inversion of 2

(f) Rhythmic cells

5 = retrograde of 2, 16 = topological distortion of 6, 7 = condensed 3, 11 = extraction from 6
 20 = 10 + 1 joined with a unit:

(g) Rhythmic derivation of top part, beginning

(h) Successive
2nd part

1st part

4th part

Example 2.3

(h) Successive transformations of melody
2nd part

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Brackets above the staff indicate intervals of 3:2 and 6:5.

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Brackets above the staff indicate intervals of 7:5, 6:5, and 3:2.

1st part

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. A bracket above the staff indicates an interval of 3:2.

4th part

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Brackets above the staff indicate intervals of 3:2 and 5:3.

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Brackets above the staff indicate intervals of 7:5, 3:2, 6:5, and 6:5.

Example 2.31 *G.F.H.* procedures a-h

In a later work, *William Billings* (1990), written while Finnissy was staying in Buffalo, he took a selection of Billings's hymn tunes, performed a 'cut-up' procedure, then re-assembled them interspersed with silences, before expanding upon particular melodic fragments which took his interest:

William Billings - source material

KITTERY



BETHLEHEM



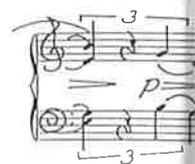
BOSTON

GLAD THEN, AMERICA



Example 2.32a Billings sources

[J = 72]

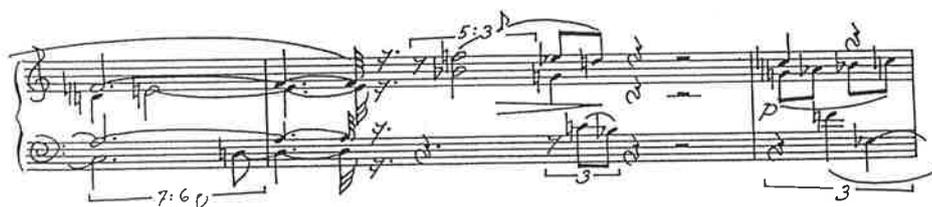
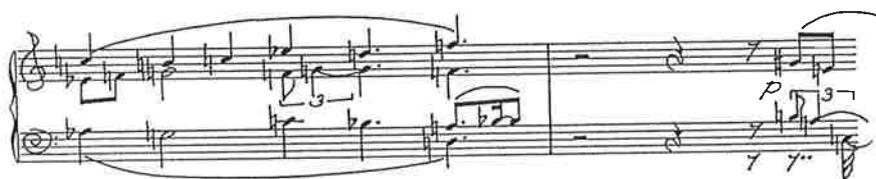
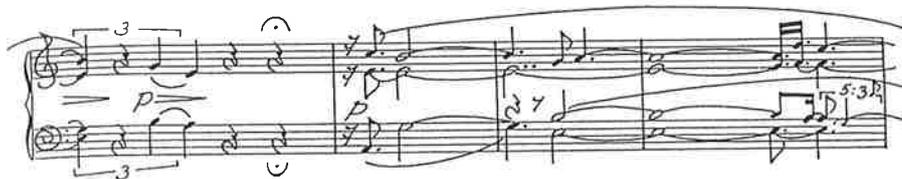
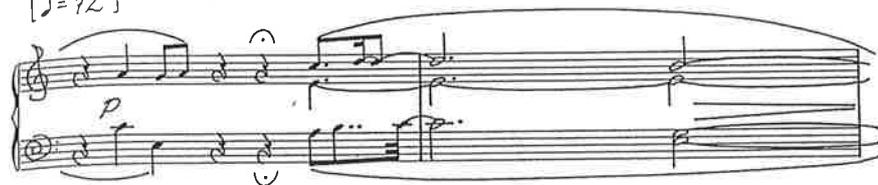


Example 2.32b
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The piece bears
which is itself
element of its
impossibility of
photographs of

William Billings

[♩ = 72]



Example 2.32b *William Billings*, p. 1
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The piece bears a certain resemblance to John Cage's *Apartment House 1776*, which is itself in part based on Billings, though Finnissy's work has a greater element of intention and critique. It presents an evocation of the impossibility of returning to the certainties of the pasts, like a series of distant photographs of lost worlds, tinged with ambivalent nostalgia.

Finnissy's major work of transcription, however, is the series of pieces composed over a long period of time and collected as the *Verdi Transcriptions* (1972-88/95). Inspired by his deep love of 'the energy, passion and wide-rangingly generous humanity of Verdi's operas', and a wish to advocate Verdi against Wagner, who self-styled 'modernists' habitually regarded as a more 'serious' composer (like Mozart or Brahms, to name but two objects of Finnissy's disaffection), he at first intended to write one piece derived from each of Verdi's operas, to be collected in four books. After completing one book of nine pieces, construed as a continuous work, and a collection of six other transcriptions as a second book, Finnissy decided to present these two books, with the inclusion of three fragments in the second collection, as a complete work in eighteen movements.

- I Aria: 'Sciagurata! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!' *Oberto* (Act 2)
- II Trio: 'Bella speranza in vero' *Un Giorno di Regno* (Act 1)
- III Chorus: 'Il maledetto non ha fratelli' *Nabucco* (Part 2)
- IV Chorus: 'Fra tante sciagure...' *I Lombardi* (Act 3)
- V Septet with Chorus: 'Vedi come il buon vegliardo...' *Ernani* (Part 1)
- VI Choral Barcarolle: 'Tace il vento, è queta l'onda' *I Due Foscari* (Act 3)
- VII Aria: 'So che per via di triboli' *Giovanna d'Arco* (Act 1)
- VIII Duet: 'Il pianto...l'angoscia...di lena mi priva' *Alzira* (Act 2)
- IX Aria: 'Mentre gonfiarsi l'Anima' *Attila* (Act 1)
- X Romanza: 'Me pellegrina ed orfano' *La Forza del Destino* (Act 1)
- XI Chorus: 'S'allontanarono! N'accozzeremo' *Macbeth* (Act 1)
- XII Duet: 'Vanitosi! Che abbierti e dormenti' *Attila* (Prologue)
- Fragment (a): 'Cielo pietoso, rendila a questo core' *Simon Boccanegra* (Act 2)
- Fragment (b): *La Traviata*
- Fragment (c): 'Vi fu in Palestina' *Aroldo* (Finale Act 1)
- XIII Romanza: 'O cieli azzuri...' *Aida* (Act 3)
- XIV Duet: 'Qual mare, qual terra...' *I Masnadieri* (Part 3)
- XV Aria: 'Tu che la vantià conoscesti' *Don Carlo* (Act 5)

The total work is much more than a mere ordering of disjunct movements, however; there are several 'running themes' throughout the cycle. During his investigation of Verdi's large output, Finnissy was able to discern a number of recurrent 'archetypal' features, such as a particular type of descending melodic fragment. Indeed, descent per se is the most obvious determinant of the final piece on the cycle, the *Don Carlo* transcription, which ranges from an almost static series of long descending notes derived from the Verdi melody, to a coruscating series of overlapping scales (Example 2.33).

The first piece, the *Oberto* transcription, is literally dredged up from the murkiness of the bottom of the keyboard, after an explosive opening which 'clears the air'. As has been pointed out by Richard Toop,⁵ the particular series of tri-chords used here derive from all the possible combinations of intervals in the Verdi melody (Example 2.34).



Largo

pp *dolcissimo ed espressivo*

5:4

3

pp

5:3

7:6

10:7

sempre loco

sempre (tutta forza) loco

6:5

5:4

10:9

13:9

ffff

ffff

Example 2.33 Verdi Transcriptions No. 18 (beginning and end)
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Largo gravemente

Example 2.34 *Verdi Transcriptions No. 1*, p. 5
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There is an overall upward progression (not completely smooth) in register from this point to the *I Due Foscari* transcription, which stormily devours the whole keyboard, followed by a series of staccato clusters of a violence unprecedented even for Finnissy, shattering all that has come before (Example 2.35).

New types of music, with a new emphasis on free melody, can then grow from these ruins in the next three movements. The first *Attila* transcription, which was the last piece in the original Book 1, contains recollections, modified with hindsight, of the previous pieces, a little in the manner of the final movement of Liszt and others' *Hexameron* variations. There are also links within the second book to the previous pieces. The transcription from *La Forza del Destino* extends a slurred gesture that was heard briefly in the piece from *Un Giorno di Regno*, while the *Macbeth* transcription, set exclusively at the top of the piano, provides a counterpart to the first piece.

Yet, as might be expected from Finnissy, these methods of sustaining overall momentum are by no means the main *raison d'être* of the work, as he works on a series of other levels. There are a number of homages to the keyboard styles of Romantic and late-Romantic pianist-composers. The Barcarolle from *Ernani* makes use of a left hand part reminiscent of Godowsky's studies for the left hand alone (Example 2.36).

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Example
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Musical notation on the left page, showing piano accompaniment with markings like "dolce sempre" and "7:6".

Musical score for Example 2.35, featuring piano and vocal lines with various dynamics and markings. The score includes markings such as *pp subito*, *staccatissimo*, and *Allegro con fuoco*. It also contains numerical markings like "7:6", "5:3", and "7:5".

Example 2.35 *Verdi Transcriptions No. 6*, p. 31
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Musical score for Example 2.36, showing piano and vocal lines with numerical markings like "9:8", "9:6", "5:3", and "10:9".

Example 2.36 *Verdi Transcriptions No. 5*, p. 23
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The Duet from *Alzira* (about the rivalry between a Peruvian Indian chieftain and the Spanish governor), on the other hand, uses as its basic matrix the first piece from Busoni's *Indianisches Tagebuch*:

ALZ. (prorompendo in lagrime si getta disperata ai piedi di Gusmano) *soffocato*

Il pianto... l'angoscia... di lena mi pri.va... di..... le.na mi

pp *piu'geriss.*

pri.va... lo vedi...son l...o...più spenta che vi - va... più spenta che

Example 2.37a Verdi melody 'Il pianto... l'angoscia... di lena mi priva'

Allegretto affettuoso, un poco agitato

dolce

p

Example 2.37b Busoni *Indianisches Tagebuch* No. 1

Allegretto

Example 2.37c
Reproduced by

Distant echoes
time to time.
ornamental f
Finnissy's tra
the original d

M

G

E

Allegretto affettuoso, un poco agitato

The musical score consists of three systems of staves. The first system has a tempo marking of *Allegretto affettuoso, un poco agitato* and includes dynamics *p*, *pp*, and *pp*. It features a 6:5♭ time signature. The second system includes a 7:5♭ time signature, a *mp* dynamic, and a *soffocato* marking with a triplet of notes. The third system includes a *pp* dynamic, a *a tempo* marking, and a 6:5♭ time signature.

Example 2.37c Verdi Transcriptions No. 8

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Distant echoes of Liszt, Schumann, Alkan and others can also be heard from time to time. The method by which Liszt expands a seemingly unimportant ornamental figure in the *Reminiscences de Don Juan*, has a parallel in Finissy's transcription of *Un Giorno di Regno*, where a dotted rhythm from the original duet keeps threatening to tear the piece apart:

The score shows a duet between a male voice (M) and a female voice (G/E) with piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Italian. The piano part features a prominent dotted rhythm in the right hand.

M: non pos-so dir, non posso dir che bramo:
 G: sia - mo: an - ch'es - - - sa a noi man -
 E: sia - mo: an - ch'es - - - sa a noi man -

M
so che tut. t'o - ra tut. t'o - ra io l'a - - mo, e ch'egli m'ingan.
G
- cò.
E
- cò.

Example 2.38a Verdi 'Bella speranza in vero'

velociss.
rit.
energico
veloce
veloce
mf
scherzando
veloce quasi gliss.

Example 2.38b Liszt *Reminiscences de Don Juan* (extracts)

ch'egli m'ingan-

8:
energico

oce

oce quasi gliss.

7:6
7:4
6:5
accel.

10:9

5:3
pp

pp mp
7:6

Example 2.38c Verdi Transcriptions No. 2 (extracts)
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On another, perhaps the most important, level, the whole work stands as Finnissy's first 'Art of Transcription' (a further one was to follow in the *Obrecht Motetten*) and a 'Homage to Busoni', from whose essay the original concept for the work stemmed. The extent of modification of the sources changes in degree between different pieces. In the Romanza from *Aida* and the Duet from *Attila*, the original melodies are clearly recognisable, even though they are presented in a new context:

Example 2.39 *Verdi Transcriptions No. 13*, p. 84
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In the *I Due Foscari* and *Macbeth* pieces, Finnissy is more concerned to re-create his own reactions to the atmosphere and impact of the respective moments in the operas, the materials having been transformed beyond recognition. Other movements inhabit various positions between these two extremes, sometimes submerging the originals within a quite different sort of texture, as in the *Ernani* transcription. In others, such as the *I Lombardi* or *Don Carlo* pieces, Finnissy uses the original as the starting point for his own creative imagination. Finnissy's transcription from *La Traviata* acknowledges the melodic unity of the work, and relates to the whole opera, rather than to any one particular moment, re-working the fundamental melody into an exuberant dance owing perhaps a little to Eastern European folk music (Example 2.40).

Where the *Verdi Transcriptions* are extrovert and highly projected, Finnissy's other large transcription cycle, the *Gershwin Arrangements* (1975-88) and *More Gershwin* (1989-90) present a much more intimate and melancholy sound-world, some of the most personal music Finnissy has ever written. Finnissy had heard Gershwin's songs on his parents' radio as he grew up, so they were for him fused with many memories of childhood. The pieces are also informed by an awareness of the appalling poverty and deprivation in the 1930s, the period from which most of the songs in the first book originate. The songs may have served to divert people's attention from their terrible circumstances, but they also spoke a little of these conditions in

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the lyrics (although not so explicitly that Gershwin could be branded a dangerous subversive). When writing his arrangement of *Shall we dance?*, Finnis had in mind the degrading dance contests that many entered in the vain hope of winning a sum that would help them out of their hardship, later immortalised in Sidney Pollack's film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* The piece was intended to suggest couples dancing directly on top of a crevice in the earth, which threatens to open up and swallow them (Example 2.41).

Allegro vivo

Example 2.40 *Verdi Transcriptions Fragment (b)*, p. 80
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Example 2.41 'Shall we dance' from *Gershwin Arrangements No. 6*
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At the same time as Gershwin was writing his immensely successful music, the Second Viennese School were pioneering atonality and dodecaphony on the other side of the Atlantic. The arrangements attempt to synthesise these musical worlds, which Berg's student Theodor Adorno, amongst others, saw as fundamentally opposed. Gershwin's home-spun brand of chromaticism is pushed to its limits, a narrow melodic tessitura being echoed intervallically in *They can't take that away from me* to produce a form of quasi-expressionism (Example 2.42), providing a transformational parallel to Schoenberg's advancement of Wagner's harmonic experimentalism.

Example 2.42 'They can't take that away' from *Gershwin Arrangements No. 5*
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The intricacy and tightness of the first book, particularly the ways in which at times every note is given a directional force through voice-leading, produce an at times claustrophobic intensity, harsher than the 'poeticised' intensity of the *Verdi Transcriptions*, although some respite is offered by the emergent tonality in the arrangement of *Love is Here to Stay*. The sense of alienation is heightened by the ambiguous and enigmatic nature of many of the endings, resisting rhetorical 'closure'.

The second book relates to earlier and rather more upbeat songs from the early 1920s, with the tautness of the earlier pieces replaced by a freer, more improvisatory feel. *Limehouse Nights* parodies a certain stereotypical

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Example 2.43
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portrayal of Chinese music (Limehouse was, at the time the song was written, home to the major Chinese community in London), *I'd rather Charleston* is transformed into a wild stomp, and *Swanee* is given a magical coda:

Andante, desolato ($\text{♩} = 52$)

Example 2.43 'Swanee' from *More Gershwin No. 6*, last page
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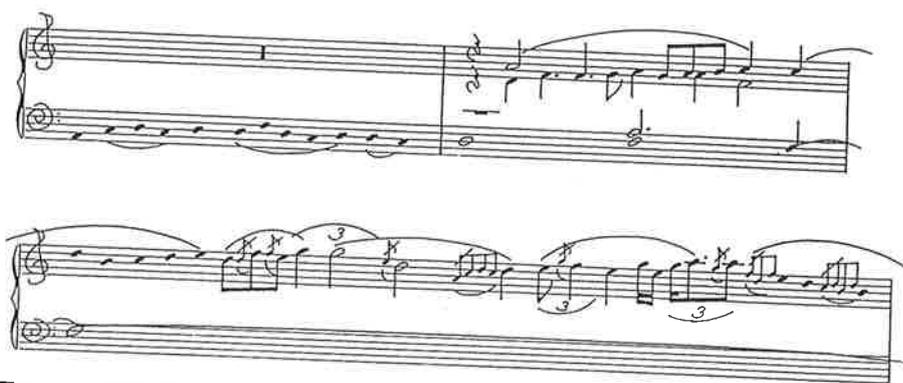
However, after the bleakness of *Isn't it Wonderful* (note the rhetorical nature of the question), Finnis ends the cycle with one of his most crushingly angry and defiant statements, *Nashville Nightingale*, written when the dedicatee, Andrew-Worton Steward, was dying from AIDS. The woozy blues of the opening leads to the expropriation of a single line, often an omen of trouble ahead in Finnis's music (when one dares to assert their individuality, they will soon be crushed by the wrathful masses?), leading to a brazen hammering out of the melody in a ravaging, dissonant environment (Example 2.44).

A similarly 'in your face' approach is also present in Finnis's subsequent arrangement of Jerome Kern's *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man* (1990), an ironic comment on the title. Several other more recent pieces attempt either a form of 'meta-transcription' or a synthesis of highly different styles. *Cibavit eos* (1991), written as one of several pieces for the

bicentenary of the death of Mozart (a composer who Finnissy does *not* admire) is based on an early choral piece in which Mozart derives his own contrapuntal writing from lines of plainchant which appear alongside. Finnissy takes this process a step further by deriving his own monodic line from the counterpoint (Example 2.45).



Example 2.44 'Nashville Nightingale' from *More Gershwin* No. 8, last page
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Example 2.45 *Cibavit Eos*, p. 1
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There are several other examples of transcriptions which do not necessarily reflect any particular fondness for the source. Finnissy chose to compose the highly ornate *Strauss-Waltzer* (1967/89) more as a result of his interest in Tausig and Godowsky's own Strauss arrangements than because of any love for Strauss's music.

The use of material from other composers allowed Finnissy to create music that was both accessible yet fresh. In the hands of a lesser composer, such ventures could all too easily result in soggy pastiche or mere eclecticism. However, Finnissy also made use of music from far beyond the boundaries of Western 'art music'.

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[♩] = 168



Example 2

Folk Music

Finnissy was interested in the folk musics of Eastern Europe from childhood, in part through knowing Polish and Hungarian friends of the family. Later on he was asked to transcribe some records for a Yugoslavian ballet teacher and was immediately struck by the electrifying nature of what he heard. A short piano piece *Svatovac* (1973-74), based on a Macedonian folk melody and a little influenced by Bartók, dates from this period.

When he began to investigate the music of his native land, Finnissy realised that the consciousness of his position as an 'outsider' made that which he discovered no less 'foreign' than the music of Azerbaijan, or Aboriginal Australia. As well as English folk song, he was drawn to Scottish bagpiping, *piobaireachd*, and in particular its types of ornamental figuration. The ways in which grace notes are used on monophonic instruments, or those lacking dynamic possibilities, provided an ideal tool for retaining a sense of vertical harmony in either monodic or dense polyphonic writing. Always wary of too-obvious linear development, Finnissy replaced the incremental nature of *piobaireachd* with a more circular, or multidirectional, approach. The group of six pieces entitled *Reels* (1980-81) exemplify this:

[♩ = 168]

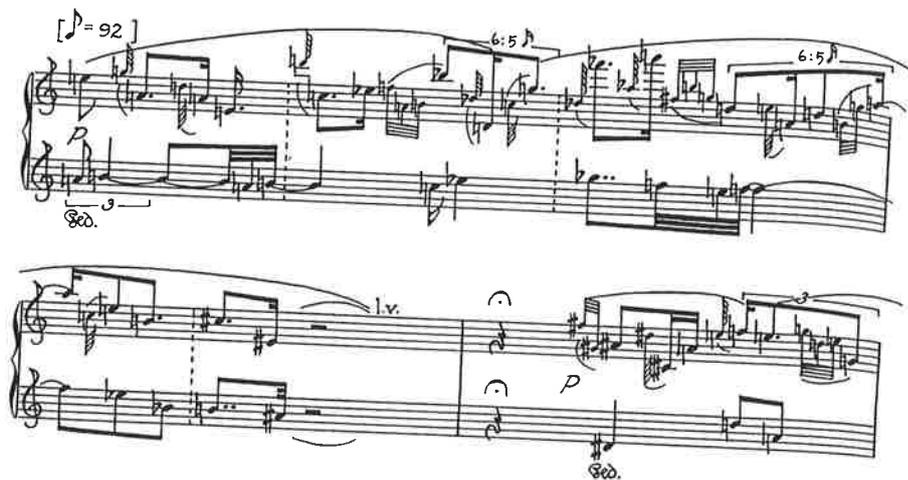
staccato

3 7:6 5:3

6:5 8:5 8:7

6:5 3 8:5

Example 2.46a *Reels No. 1*

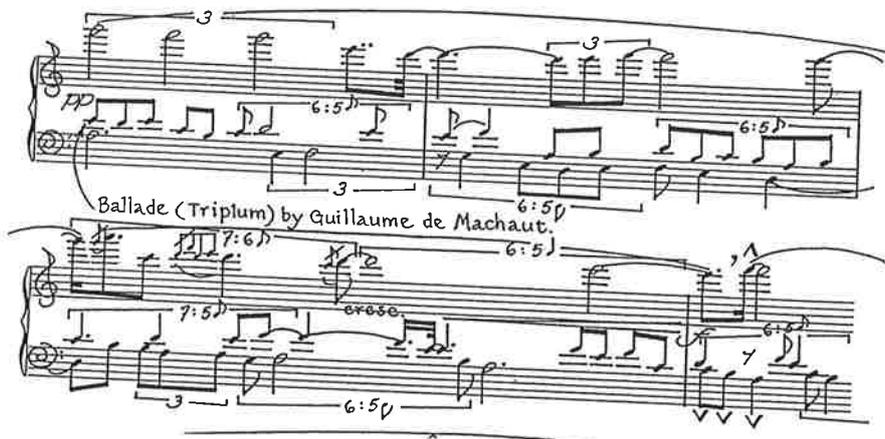


Example 2.46b *Reels No 4*

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It should be clear that, were the grace notes removed, the shifting sense of key would be considerably less audible, and could easily blur into a rather grey unfocusedness.

Piobaireachd remained of great importance to Finnissy; he used its figurations in a quite different context in his setting of Machaut's *De toutes flours* (1990), another instance of his fondness for syntheses of seemingly unrelated musical types:



Example 2.47 *De toutes flours*, lines 1 and 2

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From the beginning of the 1980s, starting with *Duru-Duru* for voice and instruments, Finnissy wrote a long series of pieces based on folk musics from Sardinia, Rumania, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Aboriginal Australia and elsewhere. There are obvious pitfalls for a composer from the 'civilised' West when dealing with the music of more 'primitive' cultures. Fetishisation and idealisation serve only to patronise in the manner of the nineteenth-century Orientalists, whereas cheap eclecticism, given a false justification by appropriation of the term 'post-modernism', shows nothing more than an artist's dearth of original ideas. A tendency in politically correct Britain has been to take non-Western musical materials, divest them of all their individual features, then re-construe them within a form of mock-romanticism, presenting the finished products as a shining example of 'Ethno-music'. A white composer who does this will be praised for their 'multiculturalism', or a non-white one for the 'accessibility' of their music; in reality they are committing a form of Uncle-Tommery.

Finnissy was acutely aware of all these dangers, and strove hard to avoid them. His approach was not of pastiche, quotation, or even representation (another thorny area for such a semantically ambiguous medium as music, which semiotics-inspired composers such as Sciarrino have tried hard to address). Rather, Finnissy's folk-inspired works are in essence an attempt to capture in sound his emotional and intellectual reactions upon encountering different cultures, as well as considerations of associated historical and political factors and his attempts to imagine the situation were he himself living under very different circumstances. The later folkloristic works continue the quest to synthesise seemingly irreconcilable cultural differences.

The ways in which the musical materials are treated are not significantly different from those used for the transcriptions, though, as I mentioned earlier, it should not be assumed that Finnissy has some super-algorithm which, when fed any source, will instantly produce a composition. On the contrary, qualities and reflections concerning the sources affect the resultant pieces at all levels, each work a quite particular response to that which is encountered.

It would be disingenuous to deny the existence of similarities as well as differences between the pieces, however. Beyond the obvious fact that each comes from the same composer, all the folk musics are the products of human beings who by definition share some common attributes. The speaker and ensemble work, *Various Nations*, was specifically configured to demonstrate this fact, but it also becomes apparent when different works are compared.

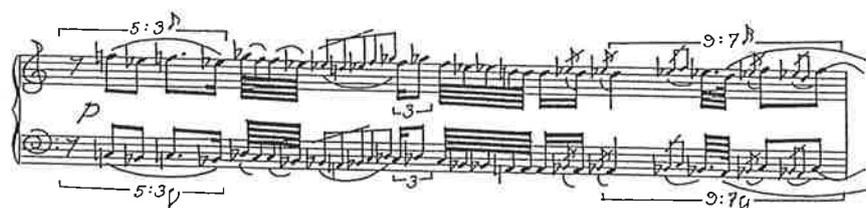
One of the pieces from the first period of Finnissy's folk-inspired work is *Terekkeme* (1981), for piano or harpsichord, whose inspiration comes from the music and culture of Azerbaijan (Example 2.48).

Throughout the piece single lines are alternated with exact doublings at different intervals. Azerbaijanian music is more alluded to than actually quoted, but a number of characteristics can be discerned. The ornamentation is extensive and the melodic lines contrast fluidity with repetition. They attempt to imitate the sounds of the 'zurna' (a type of shawm or oboe), the

'saz' and 'tar' (types of lute), and also demonstrate a greater tonal orientation than in other works such as the strident *Hikkai* (1983). The situation of the Azerbaijanis, living in an area where the tension between Christianity and Islam is at a peak, is another possible conceptual determinant. The extent and means by which any of the musical decisions relate either directly to the sources or the particular degree of compositional mediation will be discussed in more detail when considering *Folklore*, but what should be emphasised is the way in which each of Finnissy's sources generates a rich and distinct palette of colours, possibly more so than when he works in an 'abstract' vein.



Example 2.48a *Terekkeme*



Example 2.48b *Terekkeme*

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Terekkeme was not in fact derived from any particular instance of Azerbaijani folk music, though some of the other works are. *Taja* (1986) is the last in a cycle of pieces based on a Sardinian melody, together with *Duru-Duru* for voice and small ensemble, *Anninnia* for voice and piano and *Andimironnai* for cello. All of these pieces sound significantly different, yet there are some common underlying factors. The motivation for writing several pieces after

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this source was analogous to that of a painter who wishes to capture a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Apprehension of the four pieces' differences can provoke a search for their similarities, and vice versa. What remains an interesting question is the degree to which similarities are a result of either the source materials, the types of treatment they undergo, or simply the fact that they have all been mediated through the mind of the same composer.

Later works, such as *Lylyly li* (1988-89), go a step further in combining folkloristic considerations with other conceptions. The work was inspired by the permanent exhibition of work by Joseph Beuys in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, which Finnissy described as 'a series of mementos of lost worlds'. He derived much of the material from Rumanian folk-song, but in a highly distorted, out-of-focus, or fragmented manner. This could well be a reflection on another dilemma for an urban composer: is one celebrating qualities of life which advanced capitalist society has lost, or is one perpetuating a form of agrarian myth, a nostalgic view of pre-industrial civilisation, which serves only to keep those in the under-developed world 'in their place'?

The work, entirely *pianissimo*, consists of a journey, through several modes of expression and their combinations:

- (A) Melodic line, highly ornamented, with contrasts between sustained pitches and relatively quick activity
- (B) Continuous series of trills
- (C) Quasi-microtonal lines of dense chords

One might consider the work as being in nine sections, separated by silences in which a fifth in the bass is silently depressed, then the pedal changed, so that the resonance is filtered.

1. Long exposition of (A) (Example 2.49), leading to brief occurrence of (B) then (C), both in two parts.
2. Like 1, but much shorter (A), and slightly longer (C).
3. Again similar, but longer (B) and (C), with top part changing from (B) to (C) considerably before lower part does likewise.
4. Opens with (C), then return to (A). Short (B) in two parts, then much longer exposition of (C), quite blurred. Short return to (A) again.
5. From (A) straight to (C), but here in three parts. Each line less dense and clearer than previously, including monodic fragments.
6. Now (C) in four parts, more blurred. Extraction from this texture of ascending, slowing melody. Music comes almost to a complete halt. (No change of resonance.)
7. Return to four part (C). Almost immediate reduction to three parts; thinning out of individual lines. Brief return to (A).
8. (C) in three parts. Extraction of short fragment of (A), then phrase of two-part (C).
9. Three short fragments of highly blurred, close, two-part (C), separated by changes of resonance.

Example 2.49 *Lylyly Li*, p. 42
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Example 2.50 *Lylyly Li*, p. 46
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The most obvious line of development is thus a gradual reduction in clarity of line, although, as should be clear from above, this path is not straightforwardly linear. The buzzing of the trills suggests imminent activity and direction, but actually leads to the more blurred combinations of chords.

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Lylyly li is a sophisticated and ambiguous work which makes original use of both harmony and density.

Recent Work

The 1990s have been a productive time for Finnissey and the piano, with a more sustained flow of piano pieces than at any time hitherto. Many of the earlier directions, in particular transcriptions, have become integrated into the underlying approach. Pieces have appeared based on the work of composers as different as Machaut, Mozart, Rossini, Mahler and Sibelius. In a response to the hackneyed grouping of Finnissey and others under the label 'New Complexity', and to an issue of *Perspectives of New Music* dedicated to this topic, Finnissey wrote a piece called *New Perspectives on Old Complexity* (1990/92), which moves historically through transcriptions of Dunstable, Bach and Debussy, exemplifying a particular subtext of musical history, which is, as ever, seen through the composer's very personal vision.

Several works have been written as Valentine cards to Finnissey's partner, based on suggested material such as *My love is like a red red rose* (1990) after the Robert Burns poem, or *What the meadow flowers tell me* (1993), a 'cut-up' of fragments from the corresponding movement of Mahler's Third Symphony. These pieces tend to move from one point to another, rather than having a definite beginning and end; an opening up of a camera lens on a continuous flow of activity, rather than on a reified object, and relating once again to the concerns of *Song 9*.

Though most earlier pieces carry a dedication, the need to make 'tribute' pieces which will relate precisely to the interests and enthusiasms of the dedicatees as well as to perceptions of their characters, has also become a central concern. The sad events of composers' and friends' deaths have resulted in numerous pieces in tribute, reflections both on memories and the manner in which these peoples' voices live on beyond their physical passing. *A solis ortus cardine* (1992), written 'to celebrate the life and work of Olivier Messiaen' takes a work of plainsong and transforms it a little in the manner of some of Messiaen's *Quatres Études de Rythme*, especially the assignation of specific dynamics and durations to individual pitches in *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (see Example 2.51a and 2.51b).

Following the tragically early death of the pianist Yvar Mikhashoff, with whom Finnissey performed in the premiere of Cage's *Europera 3*, he wrote a series of five *Yvaroperas*, which mediate between different modes of operatic referentiality, including Cage's own, and also attempt to capture aspects of Mikhashoff's particular style of playing. The second and fourth of these are based respectively on 'The Sun, whose rays...' (Example 2.52a) from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, and 'Je crois entendre encore' from Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (Example 2.52b). The original melodies continue from beginning to end of the pieces, but are at various points joined by more chromatic material, which varies in the extent to which it blends with the main line.

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Example 2.51a Olivier Messiaen *Mode de valeurs et intensités*
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Example 2.51b *A solis ortus cardine*
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Example 2.52

Example 2.52
Reproduced by

Andante comodo, sostenuto

pppp The sun, whose rays... ("The Mikado" - Sullivan)
ppp

Example 2.52a (a) Yvaropera 2

Andantino, sempre pianissimo

pp
Je crois entendre encore ("Les Pêcheurs de Perles" - Bizet)

Example 2.52b Yvaropera 4

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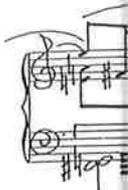
The two pieces present different perspectives on a communion with voices from the past. In the second piece, the more chromatic material (which essentially takes the form of a melody with accompaniment) is *ppp* whereas the main line is *pppp*. As both are in the same treble register, the main line seems to appear in gaps within the texture. In the fourth piece, on the other hand, the main line has a more prominent position as it is in the bass, so there is much less overlap in register with the other material. It therefore assumes a more 'solid', foregrounded position. Another memory is that of Finnissy's own earlier operatic transcriptions, in particular the sextet from *Ernani* in the *Verdi Transcriptions*.

The first and third *Yvaroperas* are less clearly directional, making use of a myriad of disfigured fragments from the nineteenth-century operatic repertoire and of their transcriptions by pianist-composers (in the first piece, for example, pairs of ascending scales on alternate beats, with arpeggiated melody, recall Liszt's transcription of Wagner's *Tannhauser Overture*). The Cageian nature of these works is tempered by a quite clear degree of emotional intentionality, broadly melancholy in the first piece, angry in the third. By the fifth piece (written over a year later than the other four), memories have become hazy, one is left with a struggle to recall something ever more distant, impossible to discern behind the fog of time.

As Finnissy gained a greater reputation, he felt a corresponding need to speak out on issues about which he felt deeply, using both words and music. The choice of folk-song to set in his tribute to Cornelius Cardew, *There never were such hard times before* (1991) belies some sympathy with Cardew's analysis of the injustices of modern capitalist society, whereas *Stanley Stokes, East Street 1836* (1989/91) relates to an event in Brighton when a homosexual took his own life in fear of an angry mob who were pursuing him.

However, the most bleak and nihilistic statement that Finnissy has ever delivered in a piano work is contained in the twenty-minute long *Nine Romantics* (1992). The inspiration was an account of the life of the Victorian artist Simeon Solomon, who enjoyed critical and commercial success until he was found in the act of 'cottaging'. Public outrage was fuelled by the homophobia and anti-Semitism endemic in the period, but also by the undermining of the urban bourgeoisie's hopelessly naïve idea of the 'artist' as a type of ultra-refined being to whom natural human desires do not apply. Once the image was shattered, Solomon lived the rest of his life in destitution, reduced to being a pavement artist. Such a glaring example of the wrongs of putting an artist on a pedestal held a particular resonance for Finnissy.

He delineates three types of material: (A) flamboyant, operatic and tempestuous, with voices struggling to break out of a dense texture, (B), a monophonic melody in a middle register, relatively animated, based on Hebrew liturgical chant, as a tribute to Solomon, (C) very slow, quiet but intense chromatic polyphony derived from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, moving slowly upwards in register:



Example 2.



Example 2.

Example 2.
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Example 2.53a consists of two systems of piano music. The first system features a treble clef with a 'subito' marking and a bass clef with a '5' marking. It includes annotations such as '7:5', '6:5', and a triplet '3'. The second system continues the piece with similar annotations, including '7:6', '6:5', and '7:5'.

Example 2.53a *Nine Romantics*, material type (A)

Example 2.53b is a single system of piano music featuring a treble clef and a bass clef. It contains several triplet annotations marked with a '3' and a slur.

Example 2.53b *Nine Romantics*, material type (B)

Example 2.53c consists of two systems of piano music. The first system includes dynamic markings 'p' and 'pp' and a triplet annotation. The second system continues with similar dynamics and includes a '7:6' annotation.

Example 2.53c *Nine Romantics*, material type (C)

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The first three of the nine sections of the work present each of these material types, after which each is given in the 'guise' of the others (B as A, C as B, B as C, etc.), by combining pitch material from one with another's tempo, density, or other characteristics:

The musical score is written for piano. The first system begins with a tempo marking of *molto Sed.* and a *subito* marking. Above the staff, there is a tempo indication $[\text{♩} = 50]$. The second system contains two sections with time signatures of 7:5 and 6:5, and a dynamic marking of *(f)*.

Example 2.54 *Nine Romantics*, p. 17

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It is as if each 'character' is stripped of its essential identity and made to parade in a false manner. The work could also be seen as an act of self-criticism, undermining particularly character (A), a convenient stereotype for Finnissy's critics. Whatever, the work is disturbing and disorienting, containing slow sections which seem to extend far beyond their natural course, others in which the material is unduly hurried, a point in the eighth section where the music almost 'dies', and a grotesque combination of voices in the last section that seems fundamentally unbalanced.

One might well ask if such a conclusion could be reached without prior knowledge of the composer's intentions. In the case of the particular *modus operandi* of the work, the answer is perhaps not, but the music certainly plays havoc with the listener's natural feelings of balance and proportions, of which Finnissy is acutely aware. This goes beyond cultural convention: were there not some intrinsic means by which music is able to produce an objectifiable kernel of responses in listeners, music could surely never attain more than an extremely localised audience.

It is also worth considering the musical and general culture that led Finnissy to write a work like this. Many British composers demonstrate little understanding of either important musical developments of the post-war period, or indeed those qualities by which music from the past retains immediacy today. What is lacking above all is the understanding of music as a *temporal* medium, and musical works which fetishise style, rather than processes, are unlikely to rise beyond the level of wallpaper. Style is everywhere; people, art or political beliefs are reduced to the status of disposable commodities, to be appropriated or discarded according to the dictates of fashion, reflecting the influence of the worst aspects of

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Americanism. Amongst the corresponding inanities of some 'soundbite'-based British musical criticism, one encounters pairings of Finnissy with Ferneyhough, as both of their music happens to contain a greater number of notes than some others, or Lachenmann with Sciarrino, appreciation of either's music rarely progressing beyond the realisation that both use instruments in unconventional manners.

Objectification of musical material or even of musical processes (via such means as dialectic, aura or hyperbole), which is so vital to such different composers as Nicolaus A. Huber, Ivo Malec, Chris Newman, Mathias Spahlinger or Christian Wolff, or for that matter to Beethoven as well, threatens such a shallow point of view, and thus is treated with callous contempt. As I hope to have made clear at various points in this essay, operations upon material and techniques for presenting material in unusual perspectives is of much greater importance to Finnissy than material per se, and so he reacts angrily when patronised by labels such as 'New Complexity', an all too easy categorisation according to superficialities. By the radical objectification procedures he uses in *Nine Romantics*, Finnissy pulls the carpet out from underneath the feet of his critics and offers a form of social critique more devastating than would be possible through a written polemic. *Nine Romantics* may not say what a lot of people would like to hear, but it is a potent statement about our times.

Folklore

The most important of Finnissy's recent piano works is his epic four-part cycle *Folklore* (1993-4), possibly his most ambitious piano work to date and the summation of all his previous work using folk materials. The score is prefaced by the following note:

Folklore. Gramsci's imperative to compile an inventory of the 'infinity of traces' that historical processes leave on 'the self'. Folklore - a distant memory, an assemblage, a critical elaboration, an opposition of conjunctions, an open-ended investigation, a palimpsest, a self-portrait.

Folklore. Inherent attitudes. Pretension - the piano (a 'respectable' Victorian mantleshelf, spineless and domesticated) - Grieg (from childhood), another vision of Arcadia (cowherds, and peasants dancing); Grieg's influence on Percy Grainger (dismissed by some as a wayward amateur dishing up folk-tunes for the parlour); Grieg's harmonic innovations (impact on Debussy); John Cage (...Grieg was more interesting than the others...). What else do I remember?

Folklore. England: insular and conservative, institutionalized, de-spiritualized, tawdry and corrupt. Transforming 'angry young men' into embittered, cynical 'couch-potatoes'. Rendering artists impotent through mockery and stereotyping (what is there to be afraid of?). Politics: Capitalism. A *free* country in which censorship is universally rife. Hypocrisy. Bigotry. The cheap laugh. Cardew, Orton, Jarman. 'Deep (Tippett) River'. Heads fall and are swept under the carpet. Nothing behind the eyes. Imperialism is served.

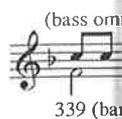
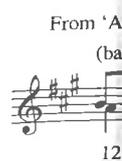
Folklore. Travel broadens the mind. (Food broadens the stomach). White men belittle Aborigines (a member of the music-faculty at Melbourne Uni. asked why I was interested in 'primitive trash'. Do I declare an interest in 'symbols of oppression'?) Power. The Archaeology of Knowledge. Lévi-Strauss, Foucault. Diversity - or the world-culture (e.g. modernism)? *Folklore*. Untidy - insufficiently selective. Art/Editing/Experience (skill, in itself, potentially obscures icon/essence). A simulacrum. Evocation becomes Provocation.

The title of *Folklore* thus refers to particular instances of folk-culture, to the intrinsic nature of folklore and our perception of it, and to the composer's own personal 'folklore', the many determinants within his musical personality.

The range of reference of *Folklore* is immense, yet it amounts to much more than a mere encyclopaedia. The description which follows shows how the various musical passages relate to their sources, and how the *montage* of different materials takes place. To call up two figures in justification, I would quote Freud's conviction that the essence of a dream lies neither in the plethora of unconscious thoughts that inform the dream, nor in the dream itself, but rather in the 'dream-work', the processes by which the brain converts its subconscious dream-material (modifying, censoring) into the actual dream; and Orson Welles's belief that the truth of a film lies in the editing.

Folklore 1, 'Lovingly and reverently dedicated to the memory of Edvard Grieg', was written for the North Sea Music Festival of Salford, Glasgow and Bergen, and has a distinctly Nordic flavour, making extensive use both of Norwegian folk melodies, as collected by L.M. Lindeman in *Aeldre og Nyere Norske Fjeldmelodier*, and Grieg's folk-arrangements in *Slätter Op. 72*. The ways in which some of the material in *Folklore 1* is derived from these sources is demonstrated in Example 2.55.

Much of the piece is concerned with modulation between different stages of referentiality, a spectrum between exact Lindeman and free Finnissy. The other Nordic determinant is an increasing use of *piobaireachd* ornamentation, which will become a central feature of *Folklore 2* and 3.



From 'Aeldre og nyere norske fjeldmelodier' by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (4th edition)

(bass omitted) (bass omitted)

124 (bar 5) 408 (bar 3) 312 (bar 7) 312 (bar 3)

(bass omitted) (etc.)

339 (bar 4) 152 (bar 4) 318 (bar 6) 354 (bar 8) 354 (bar 3)

(b) *Folklore 1*, bars 94-95

mf

(c) Grieg, *Slatter* op. 72

No. 6

Folklore 1, bar 96

retrograde

No. 3

Folklore 1, bar 82

free adaptation

etc.

Example 2.55 Lindeman, Grieg

7. Bars 168-72. *Meno Allegro*. Transition to:
8. Bars 173-268. *Largo moderato, molto tranquillo, luminoso*. Derived from an abandoned tribute to Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, highly ornamented Grieg/Lindeman, in the style of *piobaireachd* (Norwegian/Pibroch), and four inserts, as follows:

Bar 173	Sorabji 1.
Bars 174-5.	'Run-up' to Norwegian/Pibroch.
Bars 176-82	Norwegian/Pibroch 1, G flat (Example 2.57).
Bars 183-4	Insert 1, A flat (Example 2.57).
Bars 185-98	Norwegian/Pibroch 2, G flat (Example 2.57).
Bar 198	(Middle) Sorabji 2.
Bars 198-205	Norwegian/Pibroch 3, G flat.
Bars 206-11	Insert 2, towards A flat.
Bars 212-21	Norwegian/Pibroch 4, G flat.
Bar 221	(End) Insert 3. C with G flat and G minor.
Bars 222-31	Norwegian/Pibroch 5, G flat.
Bar 232	(Beginning) Sorabji 3.
Bars 233-52	Norwegian/Pibroch 6, G flat.
Bars 252-4	Insert 4, around A.
Bars 255-65	Norwegian/Pibroch 7, G flat.
Bar 266	(Beginning) Bridge back to Sorabji.
Bars 266-8	Sorabji 4. Hints of F.

Example 2.57 *Folklore 1*, bars 192-202, p. 14
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None of the Sorabji fragments presents a clear tonal centre, and within the generally static tonality of the Norwegian/Pibroch, there are several moments where one of the voices briefly changes key, or loses its sense of tonality. The effect of this section could be seen in two different ways, either as a form of phantasmagoria, the illusion being shattered when the music dissolves back into the Sorabji from whence it came, or as a means of giving the tonal music a greater presence, making it more 'real', by objectification. I am inclined towards the latter interpretation of this glorious moment in the work.

Folklore 2 & 3 make use of a wider range of sources. The most obvious of these is a further emphasis on *piobaireachd*. From an earlier and withdrawn piece, *Haen*, which now appears at the end of *Folklore 2* (bars 203-68, Example 2.58a), Finnissy derived four long monodic passages: *Haen* itself, 'Hinbare', 'Hodrodin', and 'Hintodre', each named after particular ornamental figurations (Example 2.58b).

Example 2.58a *Folklore 2* bars 203-11
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Piobaireachd exer

Example 2.58b

Hinbare, Hodrocin into 97 fragmen particular ornam on F, as is Hodro in the Dorian r produces both a nature of bagpip of direction.

A number of These come fro are transposed with other altera 'Rumanian Regi

Example 2.59a *Folklore 2*
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The overlaid ran in tribute to Cor of *Study for Two Chinese folk-so arrangements (E*

Piobaireachd exercises (Scottish traditional bagpiping)

(a) (b)

* Haen (Dithis - single) Hinbare (Leumlath movement) Hodrodin (exercise on the Urlar) Hintodre (on Crunluath Fosgailte)

Example 2.58b

Hinbare, Hodrodin and Hintodre were derived quite simply by dividing Haen into 97 fragments, then randomly permutating and transposing them, with the particular ornament placed at the beginning. Hinbare is in the Aeolian mode on F, as is Hodrodin, and Hintodre (which does not appear until *Folklore 3*) in the Dorian mode on G. Such a scheme might seem arbitrary, but it produces both a type of circularity entirely in keeping with the repetitive nature of bagpipe playing, and a series of floating melodies that have no need of direction.

A number of Rumanian folksongs feature in the first half of *Folklore 2*. These come from an anthology 'Cîntecul de Leagăn' (Example 2.59b) and are transposed to various keys, sometimes changing from major to minor, with other alterations. All Rumanian material is referred to in the sketches as 'Rumanian Region':

Example 2.59a *Folklore 2*

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The overlaid random grace notes which appear throughout the movement are in tribute to Cornelius Cardew, after his use of a similar technique in *A Book of Study for Two Pianists*. These reach their apotheosis in a setting of a Chinese folk-song 'The Little Shepherd', in the style of Cardew's own arrangements (Example 2.60).

Some of the folksongs from Cîntecul de Leagă (note values halved)

(a) 177

(b) 78

(c) 409

Example 2.59b

(a) Ancient
Oriental

(b) Exam
Helms
Brisk

(c) Cardew/

Example 2.60
Reproduced by

(a) Ancient Chinese melody "The Little Shepherd", quoted in Oxford History of Ancient and Oriental Music p.116

Musical score for 'The Little Shepherd' in 2/4 time, featuring three staves of treble clef notation. The melody is characterized by eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets and grace notes.

(b) Example of Cardew's setting of Chinese folk song "Sailing the Seas depends upon the Helmsman" (etc.)
Brisk

Musical score for 'Sailing the Seas depends upon the Helmsman' in 2/4 time, featuring two staves. The tempo is marked 'Brisk' and the dynamics are 'light'. The score includes a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with accompaniment.

(c) Cardew/Chinese "The Little Shepherd" (etc.)

Musical score for Cardew's setting of 'The Little Shepherd' in 2/4 time, featuring two staves. The score includes a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with accompaniment, including triplet markings.

Musical score for 'Molto staccato e secco, leggeriss.' in 2/4 time, featuring two staves. The score includes a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with accompaniment, including triplet markings and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'pppp'.

Example 2.60d *Folklore 2*, p. 38
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Possibly more significant is the dedication of the movement to Sir Michael Tippett, signified musically by the Negro spiritual 'Deep River', as used in Tippett's *A Child of our Time*. There are several meditations and improvisations around this melody, several of which appear before the melody is heard in a relatively simple form towards the end. The other sources are a setting of a Sussex folk-song 'Let Him Answer Yes or No', originally a violin and cello piece written for the 'Brighton Cabaret', two short bursts of activity as a homage to Christian Wolff, which bear a certain resemblance to his piano piece *Hay una Mujer Desparecida*, and a series of extracts from the original version of *Folklore 3*, which I will call Historical/Chronological. *Folklore 2* is organised as follows:

1. *Freely wavering tempo*. Bars 1-10. Hinbare 1, Aeolian on F.
2. Bars 11-42. Rumanian Region (RR) 1.
Faster, capriciously accel. molto, etc. RR1.1, with pibroch, Aeolian on A. Homage to Christian Wolff 1.
a tempo RR1.2, with Lindeman accompaniment, and Cardew grace note overlays. Homage to Christian Wolff 2.
poco meno a tempo RR 1.3.
a tempo Meditation on Deep River 1.
lento subito a tempo RR 1.4.
lento subito a tempo Meditation on Deep River 2.
a tempo RR 1.5.

The musical score for Example 2.61, *Folklore 2*, is presented in three systems. The first system begins with a 'Geo.' marking and includes dynamics such as *pppp* and *subito*. The tempo is marked *Adagio molto espressivo*. The second system features a 'Deep River' (Negro Spiritual or Hymn of Meditation) melody in the right hand. The third system includes dynamics like *p*, *pppp*, and *p*, and a tempo marking of *8:5 p*.

Example 2.61 *Folklore 2*. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

3. *Animal*
Bars 4

Bars 4
Bars 5
Bars 6
Bars 6
Bars 6
Bars 7

4. Bars 8
Bars 8

Bar 9
Bars 9
Bar 9
Bars 9
Bar 9
Bars 9
Bars 10

Example 2.6
Reproduced

5. Bars 103-166. From 2nd part of Historical/Chronological and Hodrodin
Allegro con brio. Hist/Chron 2.1.
Un poco più ritenuto Hodrodin 5.
Grave ed appassionato Hist/Chron 2.2.
Commodo, con delicatezza- più animato Hist/Chron 2.3. Oblique stylistic references to Roslavets/Scriabin, Brahms, Bussotti
 Bars 139-66 Hodrodin 6. Much more extended.
6. Bars 167-268. English Region
 Bars 167-70 'Let Him Answer Yes or No', with drones and ornamented accompaniment.
Molto staccato Cardew/Chinese 'The Little Shepherd'.
Adagio molto espressivo 'Deep River' with Ivesian echoes, followed by blues-like variation, reducing from four voices down to one (from Deep River at end of *Folklore 4*).
Freely wavering tempo Long exposition of Haen. Initially Dorian on D, progressing through other modes.

So the relatively static music of the bagpipes serve to frame a journey through Rumania and England, the latter of which (through the Cardew motif) impinges upon the consciousness of the former. Conflicting forces appear on the sides of this 'path': shafts of light, culminating in the setting of 'Deep River', then fading away, and finally ominous premonitions of the violence which is to come to the fore in *Folklore 3*. The original version of this part (Historical/Chronological) from which much of the first half of the final version comes, was originally written for a lecture-recital in Taiwan, called 'Brave New Serial World', and also included pieces by Schoenberg, Busoni, Feldman and others. This is the most direct reference to Finnissy's personal 'folklore', describing phases of his development as a composer and a human being (Example 2.63).

The tempestuousness of the opening and beyond are a reflection of Finnissy's memories of student revolt when in Italy in the 1960s:

This piece probably started when I heard someone glibly dismiss the 1960s as 'part of political folklore'. The 1960s were years of political activism and idealism. In May 1968 I was a student in Rome (sometimes under house arrest, trying to avoid the police in the frequent street riots - they'd spray blue-dye and pick you up later if they couldn't get you at the time - as a student one was always at risk). We talked endlessly and rather naively about 'radical social reforms'. 'Liberation' was the byword - friends of mine fought at the barricades in Paris, literally risking their lives for 'values' to believe in. Identifying with 'the oppressed', siding with the proletariat against capitalist exploitation, I began to investigate folk-music: the music of the people and the music of the oppressed. One dubious benefit of the Industrial Revolution was the growth of towns and cities. In the resultant urban sprawl people can lose their identity and contact with fundamental human values. Not surprising then that, during the Nineteenth Century, as this became first apparent, people began to define themselves with 'Nationalism'.



Example 2.63
 Reproduced

From the composer's effect on Finnissy's the 'infinite' about 'progress' later violence. Within referring to

Molto Animato

ff!

molto Sed.

V

I.v.

ff!

ff!

p

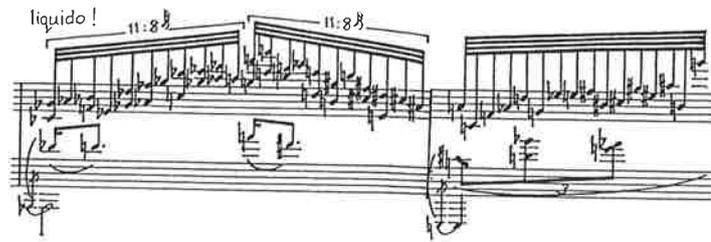
f

Example 2.63 *Folklore 3*

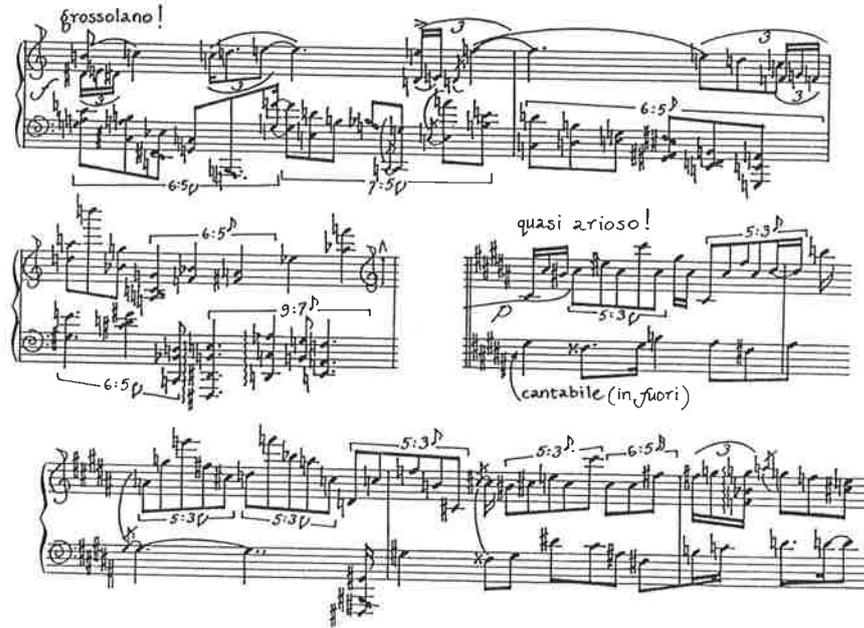
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From the eruptive opening gestures, Finnissy works in references to composers who, either as a result of integration or rejection, had a substantial effect on him. This material as a whole provides a chronological account of Finnissy's developing musical mind and, as he says in the note to the piece, the 'infinity of traces that historical processes leave on the self'. Allusions abound to compositional styles, in particular those of Brahms (the 'progressive' as described by Schoenberg, a view that was once shared (but later violently rejected) by Finnissy), Scriabin, Ives and Bussotti.

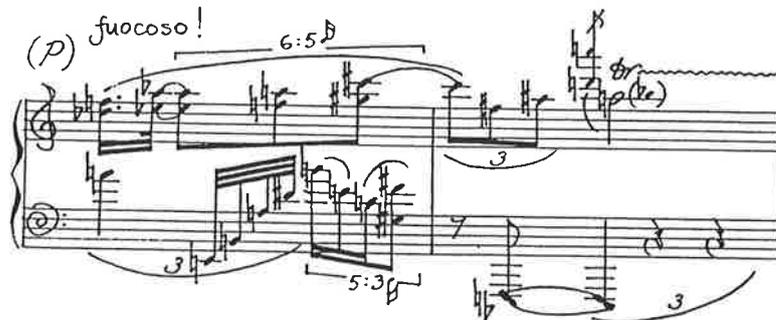
Within the opening section, Finnissy also inserts four brief fragments referring to the 'elements':



Example 2.64 a 'Water', after Debussy's *Reflets dans l'Eau*.



Example 2.64b 'Earth', after Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*; 'Air', an 'air' from Verdi's *Don Carlo*.



Example 2.64c 'Fire', from Scriabin's *Prometheus*. All from *Folklore* Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

Other sections
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Example 2
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1. Bars 1
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Other sections use a setting of a French folk-song 'Hier J'ai Recontré' from Picardie, which was originally a piece for solo violin or violin and piano, in which the piano plays embellishment above drones at the end of each of the violin's verses. This is overlaid by gradually reduced groups of random grace notes, a residue from the Cardew tribute of *Folklore 2*. A section of 'Hintodre' is played twice, identically, at two different points in the movement, a homage to Luis Buñuel's film *The Exterminating Angel*, at one point within which the characters re-enact an earlier scene.

Later sections of the movement refer to traditional Swedish fiddle playing, and are taken from 'Svenska låtar - Jämtland Härjedalen', configured so as to suggest comparison with the earlier mock-Norwegian music, providing another thread through the whole work:

Example 2.65 *Folklore 3*, bars 173-80, p. 66
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The final reference is to Serbian melodies, as collected in Stevan Mokranjac's 'Song Garlands'. *Folklore 3* runs thus:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Bars 1-99. Mostly from Historical/Chronological. | |
| <i>Molto Animato</i> | Hist/Chron 1.1. Three violent gestures, then consolidation. |
| <i>Marcato e Risoluto</i> | Hist/Chron 1.2. Unstable, continual change of register. |
| <i>Subito: poco meno mosso</i> | Hist/Chron 1.3. Attempts for voice to come through. Stabilisation, increasing confidence. Submerged tonal elements. |

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| <i>liquido!</i>
Bars 33-46 | 'Water' insert.
Hist/Chron 1.4. |
| <i>grossolano!</i>
Bars 50-51 | 'Earth' insert.
Hist/Chron 1.5. |
| Bar 52 | Insert, anticipating marches in <i>Folklore 4</i> . |
| Bars 53-4 | Hist/Chron 1.6. |
| Bar 54 (<i>subito</i>) | Homage to Christian Wolff 3. |
| Bars 55-8 | Hist/Chron 1.7. |
| <i>quasi arioso!</i>
Bars 68-80 | 'Air' insert, F#.
Hist/Chron 1.8. |
| <i>fuocoso!</i>
Bars 83-7 | 'Fire' insert.
Bridge passage. |
| <i>Un poco più largamente</i> | Hist/Chron 2.4. Brahms. |
| <i>Largo sostenuto</i> | Hist/Chron 2.5. Ives. |
2. 'European Region'. Bars 100-166. Mostly based on 'Hintodre' and 'Hier J'ai Recontré' (HJR), Inserts are like continuation of elements of Historical/Chronological.
- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>Freely wavering tempo</i>
<i>quasi Violino</i> | Hintodre 1. Dorian on G.
HJR 1. Alternating 'violin' and 'piano', with grace note overlays (though not cut at obvious points).
Hintodre 2.
HJR 2.
Insert 1, Scriabin/Roslavetz. Brief reference to Rumanian melodies in left hand, bars 113-14.
HJR 3 (Example 2.66).
Insert 2. Bussotti - Finnissy.
HJR 4.
Hintodre 2 (again).
Insert 3. Debussy, Renaldo Hahn - <i>The Orient</i> .
Hintodre 3.
Insert 4. Brahms, after Second Piano Concerto.
Hintodre 4.
Hist/Chron 2.6. Brahms.
Insert 4. 'Bird-music'.
Hist/Chron 2.7. Brahms - Scriabin.
Hintodre 5.
Hist/Chron 2.8 Scriabin - Ives.
Bridge to next section. |
| <i>Freely wavering tempo</i>
<i>quasi Violino</i>
Bars 107-14 | |
| Bars 114-15 | |
| Bars 116-18 | |
| Bar 119 | |
| Bars 120-23 | |
| Bars 124-5 | |
| Bars 126-31 | |
| Bars 132-3 | |
| Bars 133-6 | |
| <i>Moderato, Andante</i> | |
| Bars 149-51 | |
| Bars 152-6 | |
| Bars 157-9 | |
| Bars 160-64 | |
| Bars 165-6 | |
3. Bars 167-244. As pibroch fades away, other Nordic element returns.
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Andante sostenuto</i> | Swedish 1. Includes 'violin' solos. |
| <i>Moderato con anima</i> | Swedish 2. |

Bars 19
Bars 19
Bars 19
Bars 22
Bars 23
Lento,
Bar 2



Example 2.66

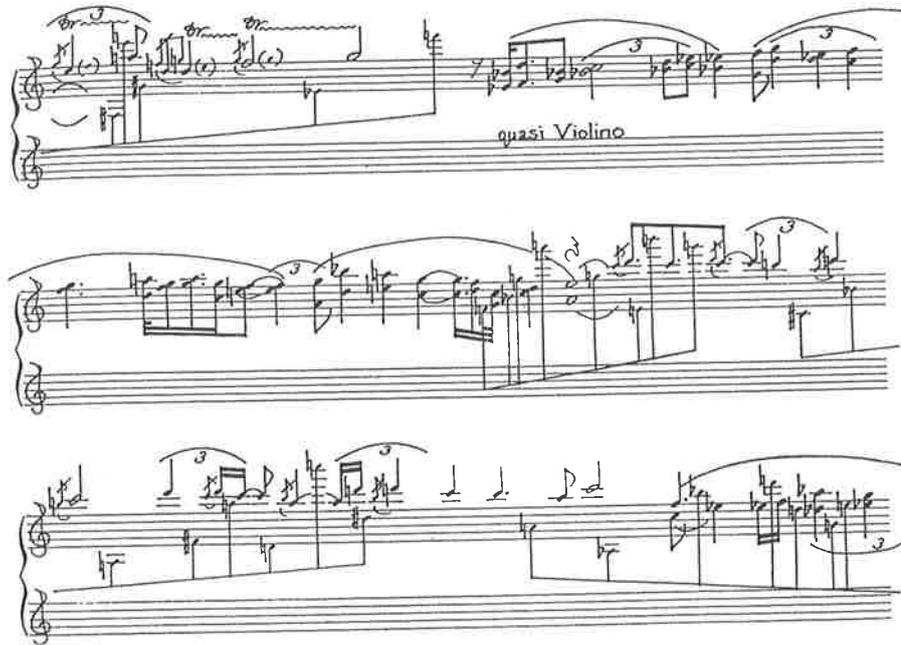
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Bars 190-96
 Bars 196-7
 Bars 197-227
 Bars 227-31

Bars 232-3
Lento, in modo 'notturmo'
 Bar 239

Swedish 3 (more ornamented).
 Rumanian melody.
 Serbian 1.
 Swedish 4. Solo (like Rumanian melody)
 then 'chorus'.
 Hist/Chron 2.9.
 Swedish 5.
 Hist/Chron 2.10 (from third crotchet).
 Highly enigmatic yet visionary ending.



Example 2.66 *Folklore 3*. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

It should be clear that changes of tempo are by no means necessarily 'in phase' with changes of material types. Rather a sophisticated relationship occurs between large scale form and individual materials, even to the point where there may be a change of material within a phrase.

Folklore 3 is both more aggressive than the previous two parts and more equivocal, progressing from rage to bewilderment via many side-routes, some humorous, others ironic. Most of the running threads have at this stage been brought to a conclusion. It is left for *Folklore 4* to attempt some sort of summation.

There is a greater preponderance of music here from the Far East and America, and most of the European elements have died away, though a few traces of *piobaireachd* remain. The sources include music from India: Finnissy selects random bars from 'Folksongs of South Gujarat' by Madhubai Patel, then modifies them to produce a melody in the bass:

(a) From "Folksongs of South Gujarat" by Madhubai Patel (Indian Musicological Society)

15 (Mendi toe vavi malavi)

Musical notation for 'Mendi toe vavi malavi' in treble clef. The melody consists of nine measures. Above the notes are numbers 1 through 9. Measure 3 is marked with a 3* and has a triplet bracket over the notes. Measure 7 is marked with a 7*. Measure 9 is marked with (etc.) and has a triplet bracket over the notes.

21 (Jiva tun shiva ney sambharjey)

Musical notation for 'Jiva tun shiva ney sambharjey' in treble clef. The melody consists of five measures. Above the notes are numbers 1 through 5. Measure 4 is marked with a 4*.

Musical notation for 'Jiva tun shiva ney sambharjey' in treble clef. The melody continues with measures 6 through 10. Above the notes are numbers 6 through 10. Measure 9 is marked with a 9*. Measure 10 is marked with (etc.).

7 (Sadakey vo lemado beni)

Musical notation for 'Sadakey vo lemado beni' in treble clef. The melody consists of seven measures. Above the notes are numbers 1 through 7. Measure 2 is marked with a 2*.

Musical notation for 'Sadakey vo lemado beni' in treble clef. The melody continues with measure 8, marked with 8* (etc.).

(b) Opening of *Folklore 4*

Random permutation of 24 Folksongs (India): 2 bars from each

Musical notation for 'Opening of Folklore 4' in treble clef. The melody consists of three measures. Above the notes are numbers 15 (3/7), 21 (9/4), and 7 (8/2). The notes are grouped by vertical lines.

becomes:

Musical notation for 'Opening of Folklore 4' in bass clef. The melody consists of three measures. Above the notes are numbers 3, 3, and 3. The notes are grouped by horizontal lines.

Example 2.67 (Patel derivation)

Counterpart
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and a denser

Musical notation snippet in treble clef.

Musical notation snippet in treble clef.

Example 2.68
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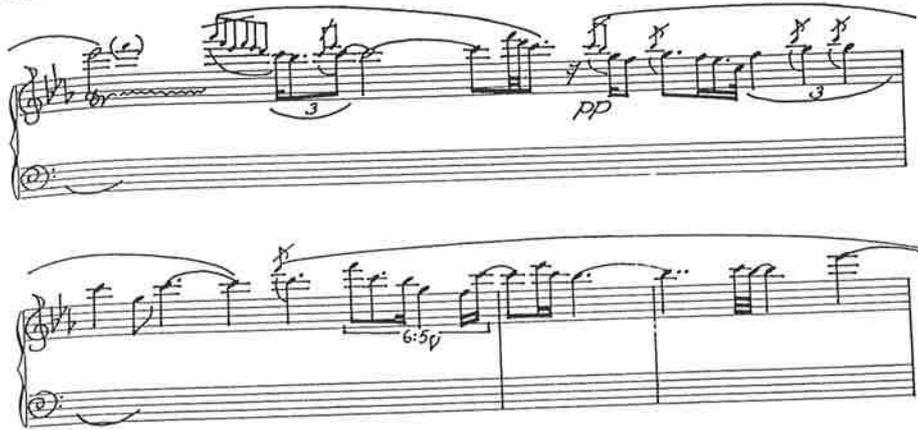
The structure

1. *Quite Fast*
Bars 1-4
Bars 5-11
Bar 18
Bars 19-21
Bars 22-23
Bars 34-35
Bars 37-38
Bar 43
Bar 44
Bars 45-46
Bars 46-47

For the se
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longer melo
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2. *Slowish*
Bars 48-49
Bar 50
Bars 51-52
Bar 53

Counterparts are provided by a flute-like melody, derived from the 'Anthology of Korean Traditional Music' (Korean Music Research Institute) and a denser chromatic material ('Chromatic'):



Example 2.68 *Folklore 4*, bars 14-19, p. 73
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The structure is as follows:

1. *Quite Fast, strong and affirmative.* Bars 1-47.

Bars 1-4	Indian 1. Dorian on C.
Bars 5-17	Korean 1. Aeolian on C.
Bar 18	Chromatic 1.
Bars 19-21	Indian 2.
Bars 22-33	Korean 2.
Bars 34-6	Indian 3.
Bars 37-42	Korean 3.
Bar 43	Chromatic 2.
Bar 44	Korean 4. Aeolian on A.
Bars 45-6	Chromatic 3.
Bars 46-7	Korean 5. Aeolian on C again.

For the second section, Finnis uses two brief references to a choral work, *The Stones*, by the movement's dedicatee, Rodney Lister, and two much longer melodic lines, in different modes, from a traditional Chinese melody, the second of which includes pibroch-like inserts.

2. *Slowish and Gentle.* Bars 48-53.

Bars 48-9	Lister 1.
Bar 50	Chinese 1, Dorian on F#. Extended (Example 2.69).
Bars 51-2	Lister 2 (Example 2.69).
Bar 53	Chinese 2. Dorian on F. Extended. With pibroch insert (Example 2.69).

Example 2.69 *Folklore 4*, from bar 50, p. 79
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The next section is a long random 'cut-up', in the manner of William Burroughs, of 70 different fragments. The first 20 of these (though they do not of course appear in this order in the piece) are taken from a volume of Sousa's *Marches*, whose inclusion in this particular context recalls Ives, while others refer to material from earlier in the piece and elsewhere in the composer's output, and include several silences (their position is thus the result of random rather than strategic processes). Finnissy accommodates these within a series of pre-selected tempos, whose changes again are not configured so as to relate to any particular predominance of material.

3. Bars 54-112. Random cut-up of fragments. Bars 63, 65, 66, 70, 78, and several more from Sousa. Tempo structure: *Allegro moderato*; crotchet = 116; *Andante*; *Adagio*; *Allegro - alla marcia*; *Più mosso*; *Allegro - alla marcia*; *Più mosso*. Pause:

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Example 2.70 *Folklore 4*, bars 96-100, p. 85
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The final two sections are as follows:

4. *tempo libero*. Bar 113. Chinese 3. Highly extended (longest uninterrupted line since 'Haen'), first in Mixolydian on G, then Dorian on B.
5. *Lento, molto sostenuto, quasi sognando*. Bars 114-37. Smudged blues improvisation around 'Deep River'. As at end of *Folklore 2*, but with melody in third voice, quicker accompanying voices and no thinning out of voices. Coda, bars 131-7 (Example 2.71).

We have moved from the Nordic flavour of *Folklore 1*, through the many-faceted European-ness of the following parts, to an upper 'Pacific Rim' of America and the Far East in the last part. What remains is the voice of the oppressed, as exemplified by the Negro spiritual, and a polarisation between long interrupted melody and frenetic montage, recalling the similar polarisation in *English Country-Tunes*.

Example 2.71 *Folklore 4*, bars 130-37. Conclusion
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Folklore is open to many different interpretations, not least because of the diversity of the reference material and conceptual overdetermination⁶ of the work. Though the materials were not chosen in order to demonstrate their similarities, as is the case in the earlier work for speaker and ensemble, *Various Nations*, similarities certainly can be discerned, as is inevitable when dealing with 'found' objects which have a history of their own. A sense of unity is perhaps provided by the fact that they are all experienced through the eyes (and ears!) of a singular individual. The work might on another level be

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seen as a celebration of global intercommunication, revealing both similarity on one level and diversity on another. In another sense, the consistent modifications and distortions reflect the futility of nostalgia or primitivism, as one often encounters it in the more crude manifestations of 'green' politics. Orton's defacing of library books, the impossibility of Jarman's imaginary landscapes, Cage's panoramas (*Roaratorio*, the *Europerras*), Lévi-Strauss's searches for the elemental structures of man, all these spirits hover over this immense and ultimately beguiling work, variously passionate, angry, glorious, mysterious, bleak and disorientating, from a composer who searches far and wide in a quest for the truth and provides at the very least a new level of feeling and understanding. What stays in the mind longest, however, is the love of melody, of the human voice, which sings and goes on singing as the world burns around it, the oral tradition of so much folk music, from a composer who is not afraid of the self, with all its vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

The journey from the *Songs*, through *Fast Dances*, *Slow Dances*, *English Country -Tunes* and the *Verdi Transcriptions*, to *Nine Romantics*, *Folklore* and other recent works is long and wide-ranging. Many elements have been explored to their logical conclusion, discarded, re-integrated in a different manner, then synthesised with other new elements. Yet I believe the recent work, in particular *Folklore*, Finnissey's crowning compositional achievement for the piano, to show the necessity of much of what has come before. His utterly un-sentimentalised re-introduction of functional tonality or modality as part of a spectrum which contains at its other extreme the most savage chromatic dissonances or even para-microtonality, allows for the widest possible range of colours and emotions, bringing to mind Charles Ives' bewilderment at the idea that either tonality or atonality should become doctrinaire. Only a few other composers, such as B.A. Zimmermann, Heinz Holliger, Helmut Lachenmann or Christian Wolff have in their different ways been able to achieve such a form of synthetic transcendence. At the time of going to press, Finnissey is engaged on a project that will dwarf even *Folklore*, a projected four-and-a-half hour piano piece *History of Photography in Sound*. There are only a small number of composers who could successfully realise a work of this scale, but Finnissey may well turn out to be one of them.

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Notes

1. An opus number does not signify any particular chronology in Finnissy's early work, it is merely part of the title.
2. Robert Kelly - on Stan Brakhage's 'Art of Vision'
3. 'The Piano Music of Michael Finnissy', Brian Ferneyhough.
4. Ferruccio Busoni - *The Essence of Music and other Papers*, translated by Rosamond Ley, Dover 1965/1987.
5. Richard Toop, 'Four Facets of the New Complexity' in *Contact* 32 (1988).
6. 'Overdetermination' is a term first used by Freud, to indicate when a phenomenon is the product of multiple determinants. A counterpart is 'underdetermination', used to denote a determinant which feeds multiple phenomena.

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