

University of Adelaide

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Elder Conservatorium of Music

Portfolio of Compositions and Exegesis:

Composing for a Choral Spectrum

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Music (MMus)

by

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August 2008

Part B

Exegesis

Composing for a Choral Spectrum

B1 Exegesis: Composing for a choral spectrum.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this thesis were primarily addressed through practical experiments in choral music composition, which resulted in a portfolio of choral works covering a categorized choral spectrum ranging from very simple choral works for young children, to complex works for adult choirs of a professional standard.

1: What are the limitations for a composer in choice of text, text setting, choral groupings, and instrumental accompaniments when composing for a choral spectrum?

2: What are the limitations for a composer in regard to musicianship skills, aural skills, intonation skills, vocal range and ability when composing for a choral spectrum?

Each of the works included in the portfolio addresses a particular aspect, or particular aspects, of the above research questions. To make the compositions especially suited to Australian choirs, the lyrics selected for all of the music have been written by Australian poets. To make the music accessible to a wide range of singers, all of the music for the portfolio is non-religious.

Some of the compositions included in the portfolio were rehearsed, performed or recorded, which greatly assisted in the revision stage of the compositional process. However, arranging for all of the works in the portfolio to be performed and recorded was beyond the scope of this thesis. In order to maintain consistency, therefore, no recordings are included in the portfolio. One moving-image DVD with an audio component has been included in the portfolio. This is because one particular work in the portfolio (*Tram*) was composed specifically to accompany this footage. The audio track on the DVD may be useful in the conceptualisation, rehearsal and performance of this work.

As well as the experiments in choral music composition included in the portfolio, the research was informed by a review of some key Australian choral composers and conductors and their work, and by an analysis of Benjamin Britten's *a cappella* choral work *Hymn to St Cecilia* (1942). It was also informed by ongoing professional practice as a community choir conductor with Chandos Chorale (2005-2007), by six months working full-time as a coordinator, children's choir conductor, and music theory teacher for Sydney Children's Choir (2007-2008), and by various commissions and projects as a composer (2005–2008).

Other performances and projects undertaken as part of the research for this thesis (portfolio of compositions and exegesis) have included; travelling to Natimuk in Victoria to interview Australian mountaineer Brigitte Muir whose book *The Wind in My Hair* inspired *The Seven Summits* (2005); travelling to Melbourne for the premiere of *Admiral's Arch*, a commission for Carey Grammar School's *Aqua Fest* in Federation Square (2005); commission of *Gifts from the Sea* for Carey Grammar School's Christmas concert (2005); collaboration with Tis Milner Nichols and Ink Pot Arts for a performance of *Tram* at the Festival of the Moving Image in Adelaide (2005); a run-through workshop, informal performance, and recording of

Prelude: Denali by the Elder Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra (2005); attendance at the Australian Choral Conductor's Education and Training Summer School in Melbourne (2007); a performance and informal recording of *Love's Coming* by Eve vocal trio at the Adelaide Festival Centre (2007); a composition workshop for the Sydney Children's Choir's Saturday School Camp (2007) called Recipe for a Song; rehearsals of *Song of Rain* by Christie Anderson and the Young Adelaide Voices Alumni Choir for their anniversary concert (2008); an informal recording of *Song of Rain* by Eve and accompanist (2008).

The research was also informed by prior singing experience with choirs such as VoiceBox Youth Opera (1995-1997), Gondwana Voices (1997-1998), the National Youth Choir of Australia (2000, 2002, 2004, 2005), the National Music Camp Choir (2000), the Adelaide Voices (2002–2004), the Adelaide Chamber Singers (2005), the Adelaide Symphony Chorus (2006), and the Sydney Philharmonia Choir (2007).

Further relevant experience informing this research has been workshop project experience including the VoiceLab Workshop Project (2003) funded by the Australia Council and Helpmann Academy, the National Music Camp Opera Composition Program (2004), and the Helpmann Academy's cross-institutional multimedia projects *Splice* and *My Unbelievable House* (2005).

1.2 OVERVIEW OF CONTENT OF SUBMISSION

The portfolio was divided into the following categories in order to clarify the choral spectrum investigated: 1) choral music for children's voices in one part; 2) choral music for children's voices in two parts; 3) choral music for children's voices in three parts; 4) choral music for boys with changing voices; 5) choral music for young adult treble voices; 6) choral music for male voices; 7) choral music for adult female voices; 8) choral music for mixed adult voices; 9) large choral work for mixed voices and orchestra. See 'Contents' for a summary of the content of the portfolio (see contents: p. 2).

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

A search for Australian literature regarding Australian choral music composition uncovers very few resources. Perhaps the most comprehensive ‘literature’ regarding Australian choral music composition, at this stage, is the Australian choral music itself.

It has been observed that the Australian choral music repertoire has been rapidly growing over the last thirty years (Stephens 2004). However, the academic writing on the subject is yet to catch up, and there is still a scarcity of academic literature about Australian choral music composition (as opposed to choral music education). A handful of relevant and up to date research papers on the subject have been completed through postgraduate programs at universities around Australia and can be found on the Australia and New Zealand Postgraduate Music Research Website (2007).

However, while undertaking research regarding issues of choral music funding for the honours dissertation *Australia’s Choral Music “Catch 22”* (Wood 2004), it was observed that the majority of Australian choral music research focuses on education rather than on composition. For example Anne Stephens’ Masters dissertation *Education for an Australian Choral Tradition: Evaluating the Philosophies of Stephen Leek* (2004) which carefully probes the effectiveness of *Voiceworks* (Leek 1989), Stephen Leek’s model for teaching composition in early high-school.

Unfortunately, the body of research relating to choral music education is not directly relevant to a composer investigating the limitations of composing for a choral spectrum. However, a study of Leek’s actual choral music provides equal insight into his innovative compositional techniques, while his choices of texts and text setting provide practical demonstrations of how he applies his poetic sensibility and educational philosophy to his compositional practice.

Future Research

It appears that an aspect of the literature that would benefit from scholarly research is the area of Australian choral music composition. Given the dearth of a body of academic literature about Australian choral music composition, this research is predominantly informed by the Australian choral music repertoire itself.

Following is a brief review of the works of Australian choral music composers whose approaches to choral music composition have most influenced this research.

Judith Clingan, AM

Canberra composer Judith Clingan has composed the largest volume of Australian choral music

for young people (by any single composer) that this researcher has a working knowledge of. Clingan has composed a range of operas, music theatre works, oratorios, song cycles and choral works for young people and adults alike, including *Marco Polo* (1990), *Kakadu* (1990), *Modal Magic* (1986), *Birth Pangs* (1996), *Mythical Beasts* (1992), *Peter Pandemonium* (1989), *Stony Tunes* (1994), and *Songs of Middle Earth* (1971)). She has also published collections of songs composed or arranged by her, such as *Things Mediaeval* (N.d.), and the publication for schools *Songs of the Tree of Life Volume 1: the early years* (1995) and *Songs of the Tree of Life Volume 2: the middle years* (1996). A familiarity with Clingan's compositions has led to a better understanding by this researcher of the musical capabilities of young people, particularly upper primary and early high-school aged children. Clingan's style is strongly influenced by her fascination with, and expertise in, Mediaeval and Renaissance music and folk music. This can be seen in her frequent use of the ancient church modes in her compositions, for example *Modal Magic* (1986), and in her collections and arrangements of folk music such as *Folk and Fancy: sundry songs* (1981) and *Things Mediaeval* (N.d.).

As well as being a composer, Clingan is a choral conductor and music educator, with her dedication to composing choral music for young people spanning forty years. Clingan's work has influenced a generation of choral composers, including the highly respected Australian choral music composer and educator, Stephen Leek.

Choral works by Leek, such as *Goolay-yali* (1997), *Myoon-myoon* (1997), and *The Voices of Gondwana* (1998), as well as choral works by other Australian composers, including *Songs for Imberombera* (1997) by Michael Atherton, *Fife Tune* (1978) by Colin Brumby and *Love Me Sweet* (N.d.) by Carl Vine, were first introduced to this researcher by Lyn Williams and Mark O'Leary through Gondwana Voices, a national Australian children's choir.

Lyn Williams, OAM

Williams is a respected children's choir conductor and regularly commissions work by Australian choral composers for the choirs that comprise Gondwana Voices and Sydney Children's Choir. Sydney Children's Choir is designed to provide a comprehensive choral education for Sydney children aged from 6 years to 16 years and Gondwana Voices provides an annual national auditioned choral education program for children aged from 10 years to young adults, based on the Australian Youth Orchestra's model for National Music Camp.

Along with the composers previously mentioned, Williams has commissioned choral works by

Paul Stanhope, Paul Jarman, and Elena Kats-Chernin among others. Williams also runs a choral composition competition for young composers through Gondwana Voices, and funds a residency position for young choral conductors through Sydney Children's Choir, most recently held by emerging choral composer Daniel Walker.

Williams has written some outstanding works for children's choirs including *Ferry Me Across the Water* (1998), *Islands* (1998), and *Festive Alleluia* (N.d.), and has written several articles for Australian music journals, most notably *The Children's Choir: a full-blown virtuoso instrument* (1999). Williams' recent works *A Flock of Stars* and *The Dominion of Dreams: Under a Dark Star* were premiered by Gondwana Voices for their Voices of Angels concert in Sydney, 2007, and show a lyrical and poetic approach to choral music composition clearly informed and inspired by her long association with children's choirs.

Carl Crossin

Australian choral music for adults is of particular interest to Carl Crossin, conductor of the Adelaide Chamber Singers. Crossin has conducted Australian works such as *Elegy for Ambon* by Chester Schultz (2001), *Exultate Domino* (1961) and *Morning Fanfare* (1976) by Nigel Butterly, *Et Misericordia* (1997) and *Christ the King* (1997) by Clare Maclean, and *Requiem* by Peter Sculthorpe (2004), and commissioned well-known composer Graeme Koehne to write *Mass for the Middle-Aged* (2005). Crossin is himself a composer and has written sacred choral works such as *Caritas* and *Apache Blessing*. *Caritas* is an extended and challenging choral work for adults based on the Gregorian chant *Ubi Caritas*, also used by Maurice Durufle in *Quatre Motets: Sur Des Themes Gregoriens* (N.d.). *Caritas* also incorporates aleatory elements and perhaps Crossin has been influenced by the work of Stephen Leek in this regard.

Stephen Leek

Crossin introduced this researcher to Leek's aleatory work 'Kondalilla' from the choral song cycle *Great Southern Spirits* (1995) in 1999. Very positive audience reactions to 'Kondallila' have been observed in many performances and in several countries (Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Germany, and England) and have cemented Leek's reputation as one of Australia's leading choral music composers. Although Leek's nationalistic philosophy (Stephens 2004) of creating a unique 'Australian' choral music sound may be debatable, his own prolific attempts to follow this objective have produced many interesting choral works. Leek's use of the voice for aleatoric imitation of various Australian 'bush' sounds is a clever atmospheric device which he sometimes uses to evoke place. Many of these sounds are particularly recognisable for Australian

audiences and are intended to infuse his music with ‘Australianness.’ Leek also primarily sets Australian poetry in his choral music.

As conductor of the elite youth choir Australian Voices, Leek has keenly promoted new Australian choral music in Australia and throughout the world. Leek has also attempted to make choral composition itself more accessible to Australian schoolchildren with his composition curriculum *Voiceworks* and with his *Millennium of Choral Composition: an exploration kit for high school students, teachers, choristers and conductors in the compositional techniques of choral music* (1998) developed with the *Australian Voices* (Australian Music Centre 2006).

Leek’s educational work *Voiceworks* (1989) has been an inspiration to composition teachers around Australia, and is based on using extended vocal technique, aleatory elements and graphic notation as a springboard for teaching composition in schools (Stephens 2004). Leek’s use of the voice as the foundation for his *Voiceworks* method of teaching composition in schools is interesting for choral composers and teachers alike, and is based on the practical assumption that the one compositional tool available to (almost) all students is their voice (Stephens 2004).

Some part of Leek’s success in Australia as a choral composer could be attributed to his determination to have his music published, most recently through his own publishing company Stephen Leek Music, thus making it available to a wider range of singers and choral conductors. Graeme and Ralph Morton (Morton Music) and Mark O’Leary (Young Voices of Melbourne) are some other publishers determined to promote Australian choral music. These publishers are also choral conductors and composers, with Ralph Morton directing the choirs at St Stephens Cathedral in Brisbane, Graeme Morton conducting the Brisbane Chamber Choir and Mark O’Leary conducting Young Voices of Melbourne.

Some other conductors and composers who have influenced this research and who are interested in new Australian choral music are Christie Anderson, artistic director of Young Adelaide Voices; Anna Pope, choral composer and conductor of Lumina; Noel Ancell, choral composer and conductor of the Australian Boys Choir and The Vocal Consort; Faye Dumont, conductor of the Melbourne Women’s Choir and the Melbourne Chamber Choir and convenor of the Australian Choral Conductors Education and Training Conference.

The above review has aimed to briefly summarize the Australian choral music conductors, composers and compositions that have primarily influenced this research. The four main composer/conductors to influence this work, Judith Clingan, Lyn Williams, Carl Crossin and Stephen Leek, have unique choral conducting experience, and their compositional voices are

worthy of note in relation to this research because they each relate to a specialised facet of the choral spectrum and will be referred to throughout this exegesis.

1.4 COMMENTARY

The individual experiments in composition that make up the portfolio will be examined below in relation to relevant aspects of the research questions and the reviewed literature.

Choral Music for Children

Choral music composition for children often does not seem to be taken seriously. However, composing an outstanding choral work suitable for children can be as complex as composing a larger work for a professional ensemble, as there are many limitations for a serious composer to consider when composing choral music for children. For example, due to durational constraints, many of the pieces included in this section of the portfolio are quite short.

Choral music for children's voices in one part

The compositions constituting the category of 'choral music for children's voices in one part' were experiments in composing choral music for unison treble choir. Issues of time signature, style, duration, complexity, accompaniment, and choral groupings, have been investigated through the following experiments in composition. The pieces included in the portfolio in this category are *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake*, *The Shortcut*, *Misty Morning*, and *Jumping Warm-up Tune*.

12 Bars of Chocolate Cake

Genesis

12 Bars of Chocolate Cake was composed as a demonstration piece for a composition workshop for eight to ten year-old children. This piece was composed by following simple guidelines for composing a song developed by the researcher. These guidelines were based on this researcher's most common method of composition, and will therefore be looked at in detail.

Processes

The challenge was to create a workshop that could give all the children involved an overview of the process of composing a song, and give them a hands-on experience of composition in which all of them could succeed no matter what their level of musicianship happened to be.

To formulate a successful structure for this workshop it was important to ask some questions

about composing a song. For example: looking at it simply, what are the major elements used when composing a song? How could these elements be condensed into a guiding method that the workshop children could follow to compose a song? What would be a successful way to workshop such a method?

There are common elements or ingredients used in composing a song – primarily words, rhythm, melody, and harmony (Bennet 1987). A simple dictionary search confirmed this hypothesis with the definition of a song as “a usually relatively short musical composition consisting of words set to music and the music itself” (*Encarta World English Dictionary* 1999). By isolating the ingredients for a song, it was possible to write a method, or ‘recipe’ for making up a song for the workshop. The basic structure of this particular composition process will be referred to throughout the research as *Recipe for a Song*.

Recipe for a Song

Words (take the lyrics you have written or found)

Rhythm (find the rhythm of the words by reading the words out loud)

Harmony (make up a simple chord progression on an instrument that fits the rhythm of the words, or fit the words to the rhythm of the chord progression)

Melody (listen to the chords and improvise a melody, singing the lyrics in rhythm and in tune with the chords)

In order to workshop *Recipe for a Song* with children it was necessary to compose an example piece based on this method that would be enjoyable and easy to learn for a large and diverse group of children. It was also necessary to compose a generic chord progression to provide a harmonic and rhythmic framework that could easily be adjusted to suit a variety of poems and therefore quickly adapted to lyrics written by the workshop participants. A similar workshop technique had been previously observed in a composition workshop with Judith Clingan in Canberra in which she used a simple melody called ‘Miniatures’ (2004) as the foundation for a workshop on choral improvisation.

The *Recipe for a Song* concept gave rise to the associated concept of asking the workshop children to make up cake recipes to form the basis of their song lyrics. Using this idea the researcher wrote some entertaining lyrics (see portfolio: p. 11). The lyrics for *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* were intended to be rhythmic and (generally) rhyming so that the mnemonics would make it easier for the children participating in the workshop to learn in a short space of time. The words were also intended to be funny to give the workshop an enjoyable atmosphere.

Following the *Recipe for a Song* procedure, the lyrics were set to a melody improvised around a simple twelve-bar blues chord progression. *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* was initially written down as guitar chord symbols and a melody, and at this stage was committed to memory for use in the workshop.

Limitations and Solutions

Subsequently the researcher decided to notate or ‘compose’ *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake*. This proved to be more challenging than anticipated due to the swing rhythm and the syncopated melody (see score: p. 12). The main issue in the composition of this piece was deciding which time signature would be most appropriate. The rhythm was more accurate in 4/4 time, but the notation required lots of triplets which made the music look complicated (see score: bars 10-12). The music looked less complicated in 12/8 compound time (see Appendix B), but the rhythm was less accurate. Often children are quite old before they learn compound time, so it seemed that there would be issues with the appearance of the music in either time signature. Eventually accuracy won over simplicity, and *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* was included in the portfolio in 4/4 time. It is also more traditional for twelve bar blues to be set in 4/4 time. However a 12/8 version of *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* has been included in Appendix B in case teachers feel more confident with this option.

The only other compositional issue to arise with this piece was related to the vocal register. ‘B’ below the treble staff appears quite regularly in *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* and this is on the lowest edge of the range for young children (Ostrander, Arthur E. and Dana Wilson 1986: 3). However the children in the workshop had not struggled with singing the piece in that register, so it was not transposed. Nevertheless, the range of the piece is limited so, if it were too low for a particular group of children, it would be easy to transpose the piece up.

Future Research

The workshop children had no trouble learning *12 Bars of Chocolate Cake* by ear during the workshop, but when confronted with music notation that looked ‘difficult’ it seemed possible that there might have been a psychological barrier to their success. It was also possible that less confident teachers would look at the piece and find it difficult to read and therefore think that it would be too hard for young children to learn (disproved by the children’s success in learning the piece during the workshop). It was not possible to test this hypothesis with another group of children in this research, but it would be interesting to test this question further in future research.

The Shortcut

Genesis

Young children seem to love being able to associate a story with their own life experience, and it doesn't take much to excite their imagination. A story about something seemingly insignificant can hold great pleasure for a child. *The Shortcut* was originally composed for a five year-old boy and a three year-old girl based on an anecdote from a routine event in their lives – a walk with their grandparents.

The challenge with this piece was to make such a personal story appealing to anyone, not just to the two children involved. This was achieved through the text (see portfolio: p. 16) and through the simple folk-style of the song. This simple folk-style was partly influenced by the traditional Australian folk music repertoire, partly by contemporary Australian folk songs such as *Roll on Wild Rivers* by Dave Clark (1982), and partly by association with Judith Clingan.

Processes

Rhyming couplets and a simple rhythm were two techniques intentionally used to make the song easier for young children to remember (see portfolio: p. 16). This was important because the poem was quite long.

The Shortcut was composed as a simple folk style ballad using the *Recipe for a Song* method (see exegesis: p. 233).

Limitations and Solutions

Composing a ballad-style song for young children provided a challenge, which was to keep the melody simple but not so repetitive as to be boring. This was partly achieved by closely basing the melodic variations on the main chord progressions, which provide easy aural cues for the singers. Other techniques used to keep the melody fairly simple were restriction of the text to one syllable per note (not too many slurred syllables), restriction of the range of notes used in the piece (just under an octave), and the use of a comfortable vocal register for young children.

The folk style of this piece called for a simple accompaniment. The aim was to make it possible for the accompaniment to be played by an older sibling, or student, or by a teacher who had not necessarily specialised in music but who could play a few chords on the guitar. Initially chord symbols alone were used to describe the progressions, however on further thought the guitar part was notated. This was done to make it faster and easier to arrange the guitar part for another instrument (such as a piano) if required. However, in order to cover all bases, chord names were also included in the score above the notated guitar line.

Misty Morning

Genesis

The words and melody of *Misty Morning* were first ‘made up’ and memorized in 1992 when the researcher was a child. The song was inspired by a beautiful morning, and by the rhythm embodied while stroking a dog (Misty).

Processes

This early creative process was a simple one; words were made up and memorized (see portfolio: p. 21) and a melody was made up, to fit the rhythm of the words, and memorized. Nothing was written down.

An attempt was made to write down the melody in 1995 under the guidance of Judith Clingan, but the researcher’s lack of composition skills at the time meant that this attempt was inaccurate and therefore unsatisfactory.

A request for a song from Ink Pot Arts in 2005 prompted a final attempt to notate this piece. It seemed like an interesting and appropriate experiment in composition: an adult composer writing a song for children originally made up by a child (the composer).

Future Research

It also raised an interesting philosophical question: when is a piece of music composed? Is it composed when it is ‘made up,’ or when it is remembered, or when it is written down? It would be interesting to explore this issue in future research.

The first version of *Misty Morning* was composed for a *cappella* choir in three parts. The harmonies were based on remembered harmonies ‘made up’ to accompany this piece.

Limitations and Solutions

The remembered harmonies proved too difficult to learn for the children at Ink Pot Arts. This was also the case for one of the Sydney Children’s Choir groups called the Jarman Choir. The solution was to replace the harmony lines with an instrumental accompaniment to support the melody line of *Misty Morning*.

Piano was chosen as the accompanying instrument because the Jarman Choir had a piano and an accompanist available to them at the time, and the sustained quality of the piano suited the piece. When writing a piano accompaniment for choral music for young children the danger can be that it might drown out the children’s voices. If they’re not able to hear themselves sing, the choir’s intonation can be affected. This can be an impediment in the choir’s intonation training, and can also cause the children to try to sing too loudly.

It was therefore important to write a very gentle piano accompaniment. The accompaniment was intended to be fairly simple so that it would be suitable for a teacher or an older piano student to play. The result was a composition similar in style to *Ferry Me Across the Water* (Williams 1998), a simple and lyrical folk-style melody with gentle piano accompaniment.

Several versions of this piece have been arranged for use with different groups of children. The three part version can be found in the Appendices (see Appendix C).

Jumping Warm-up Tune

Genesis

Jumping Warm-up Tune was composed as a warm-up piece for practicing intonation and singing thirds.

Processes

The melody was composed first, in this instance, and was simply based on thirds. The idea for the words came from seeing some children jumping on a trampoline. The words were written to fit the melody and were intended to be simple and fun, suitable for young children (see portfolio: p. 26).

Jumping Warm-up Tune was also conceived with rhythmic movement in mind, to help warm up the children's bodies for singing and to encourage the children to embody the rhythm.

Choral music for children's voices in two parts

The compositions incorporated in the category of 'choral music for children's voices in two parts' were experiments in composing choral music for treble voices in two-part harmony. These compositions investigated issues such as text setting, text suitability, and compound time. The pieces included in the portfolio in this category are *The Gliders*, *Orange Kite*, *Gifts from the Sea*, and *Kangaroo Warm-up Round*.

The Gliders

Genesis

The Gliders was an experiment in composing a melody suitable for the vocal ranges and abilities of very young children. Based on the idea that "the development of children's singing voices occurs sequentially" (Gould 1990: 10), it seemed logical that music composed in a simple pentatonic mode could be one type of music suitable for introducing very young children to choral singing.

Processes

The process used to compose *The Gliders* was not the *Recipe for a Song* method. Instead, the melody was composed first and the words were fitted to the melody later. The simple pentatonic melody was originally improvised on a clay ocarina, and then memorised. The poem was written subsequently to fit the rhythm of the melody. The poetry was intended to rhyme so that it would be easy for young children to remember (see portfolio: p. 30).

The words for *The Gliders* were inspired by a trip to the Austrian Alps. In the Alps at certain times, para-gliders can be seen jumping off the tops of mountains and floating down on the thermals. From a distance they look like large birds.

Limitations and Solutions

The issues that arose in composing this piece were mainly to do with text setting. The melody was composed first, so the poem wasn't an exact fit despite being written specifically to fit the melody. This meant that slurs had to be used to extend vowels in order for the accented syllables to fall on the strong beats and the unaccented syllable to fall on the weak beats (see score: bars 23-26). As very young children sometimes have difficulty with slurring syllables, it seemed that this word setting might make the piece too difficult for young children to sing. To test whether this was going to be an issue, the piece was taught to a six-year old boy. He didn't have any trouble learning it, but it wasn't a conclusive test.

It seemed that perhaps *The Gliders* would be more suitable for slightly older children (eight year-olds) to sing. To facilitate this, an easy, gentle piano accompaniment and a simple harmony were added. Several versions of this piece were arranged for children with different skill-levels. One of these has been included in Appendix D.

Orange Kite

Genesis

Orange Kite was composed for children aged between nine and eleven years old. It was an experiment in using compound time, syncopation within compound time, close harmony, and time signature changes in music for children.

Processes

The piece was composed using the *Recipe for a Song* method (see exegesis: p. 233), with the lyrics composed before the melody. The poem was inspired by a cheerful childhood memory of flying an orange kite. It intentionally uses rhyme as a mnemonic device (see portfolio: p. 34).

The melody was composed in a melancholy or nostalgic mood, and maintains a slightly ambiguous feel as the harmony shifts between major and minor chords throughout the piece.

Limitations and Solutions

Orange Kite was composed for children who had mastered independent singing in two parts, and who would enjoy a musical challenge. In order to achieve this, the piece was written in compound time. The rhythm of the guitar accompaniment was designed to assist the singers with the ‘feel’ of compound time, however a few instances of syncopation were used in which the choral part is rhythmically unsupported by the guitar part, for example at bars two, four and nine. There is also one brief time signature change at bar twelve from 12/8 time to 9/8 time and back. Added challenges for the choristers are the close harmony that can be observed throughout the piece, and the dynamic hairpins in bars ten to thirteen. Some children’s choirs, such as Junior Gondwana (children aged ten years to twelve years) conducted by Lyn Williams, would have no trouble facing the challenges incorporated in *Orange Kite*. As Doreen Rao says (cit. Bourne 1990: 4) “the potential for a child’s artistic development is directly related to the artistic capabilities of the teacher.”

Gifts from the Sea

Genesis

Rebecca Hicks commissioned *Gifts from the Sea* for Carey Grammar School’s 2005 Christmas concert in Melbourne. She mentioned that the piece was for a large combined upper primary school choir which was able to sing in two parts quite competently, but which still had trouble singing in three parts. She also mentioned that she would like one of her piano students to play the accompaniment.

Processes

Writing a text that reflected an Australian experience of Christmas seemed important in this instance, so that the children’s choir and the audience could identify with it. An attempt was also made to approach the topic from a non-religious and non-materialistic perspective. The poem was inspired by many Christmases spent quietly at the beach, and by the treasures discovered on beach-walks. The poem used rhyme as a mnemonic device (see portfolio: p. 39).

Gifts from the Sea was composed using the *Recipe for a Song* method (see exegesis: p. 233). The melody was then divided between two parts and harmonised. The piano part was based on the original guitar chords.

Limitations and Solutions

Although *Gifts from the Sea* was for two-part treble choir, it needed to include some challenges for the singers. Therefore the vocal lines don't always use the same rhythm as each other (see portfolio: p. 40: bar 9) and the melody is quite syncopated in some places (see portfolio: p. 40: bar 3 & 7). The parts cross briefly at bar nineteen and bar twenty-one and there is some close harmony (see portfolio: p. 44: bar 43). There were some issues with text-setting too, such as in bar thirty-two where "the most" was originally set on two quavers at the end of the bar.

The piano part created some compositional challenges. The guitar part that it evolved from had been quite simple and sparse. However, a guitar could not be heard over such a large choir, and the commission had included a piano part suitable for a student accompanist.

The original piano part seemed too simple. It also didn't include enough pitch cues for the singers. Pitch cues were added at key points (see portfolio: p. 40: bar 2) in the next draft and the piano part was filled out. Coming back to this version after a few weeks break, it became apparent that it would be too difficult for a student, and that it was not well written, as the chords in the left hand were too spread out. The piano part was simplified again, and the chords in the left hand were adjusted.

Rebecca Hicks moved to Germany before the piece could be performed. This was disappointing, but it also meant that the piano part could be re-composed for a more experienced accompanist, which solved most of the compositional problems. The final version included in the portfolio is suitable for a more experienced accompanist.

Kangaroo Warm-Up Round

Genesis

Kangaroo Warm-Up Round was an experiment in composing a round for children that could be used as a choral warm-up to practise singing scales and to develop independent part-singing. The words were also intended to provide practice at singing certain open vowel sounds such as "a" as in cat, "ah" as in car, "oo" as in too, "oh" as in hot, "i" as in bit, and "ooh" as in book (see portfolio: p. 48). There is one compound vowel sound in "won't" and a conductor or teacher would have to decide how to teach this vowel. For instance it could consist of a long "oh" followed by a short "ooh" when sung. This clarification of vowel pronunciation, or vowel matching, within a choir is an important part of learning choral technique. For example, if this warm-up were to be sung with an Australian accent, several vowels would be sung as compound vowel sounds, to imitate the diphthongs idiomatic to the accent.

Processes

The round is simply based on a major scale, and the entries have been marked with asterisks in the score. *Kangaroo Warm-Up Round* was designed for use in conjunction with physical movement, to warm up the chorister's bodies and to practise embodying the rhythm.

River Flowing Warm-Up

Genesis

River Flowing Warm-up was an experiment in composing a warm-up piece to practise staying in tune on a repetitive line in harmony, to practice legato singing, and to practise independent part-singing.

Processes

This was achieved by using a legato ostinato pattern against a melody. The ostinato pattern is to be sung on a single vowel sound, "ooh", so that the singers can fully concentrate on their intonation, as staying in tune on a repetitive line that moves up and down, or on a single repeated note, is notoriously difficult for singers. Both intonation and independent part-singing are aided by having to listen to another part while singing.

Practising *legato* singing on a single vowel gives the teacher an opportunity to correct certain aspects of choral technique, such as width of mouth opening, mouth shape for the vowel used, tongue position within the mouth, and 'chewing' (where the jaw is moved up and down for every new note).

The words are simple and rhyming (see portfolio: p. 47), so that the focus can be on the technique.

Choral music for children's voices in three parts

The compositions incorporated in the category of 'choral music for children's voices in three parts' were experiments in composing choral music for treble voices in three-part harmony. These compositions investigated issues such as choice of text, text setting, accompaniment, and vowel matching. The compositions included in this category are *Admiral's Arch*, *Moonrise*, and *Spooky Warm-up*.

Admiral's Arch

Genesis

Rebecca Hicks commissioned *Admiral's Arch* for Carey Grammar School's Vivace children's choir in 2005. The Vivace choir was an auditioned choir of year three to year six students capable of singing in three-part harmony. The accompaniment was to be played by one of Rebecca's

piano students.

The poem for *Admiral's Arch* was written in 1999 during a camping trip to Kangaroo Island in South Australia. The poem describes a colony of New Zealand fur seals that lives and plays in a tiny portion of the Southern Ocean framed by a spectacular rock archway called Admiral's Arch (see portfolio: p. 54).

Processes

The poem was set to music using the *Recipe for a Song* method. The poem does not rhyme or have an obvious rhythm, which might make it harder for children to memorize.

In general the music aims to convey something of the rocking of the ocean and the flowing motions of the seals. The melody of *Admiral's Arch* was harmonized in three parts, and canon was used in the harmony as a metaphor for the seals twining around each other (see portfolio: pp. 55-64: bars 21, 35, 53, 55, & 71) in the waves.

Limitations and Solutions

Admiral's Arch was premiered at Aquafest in the Recital Hall at Federation Square. The choral music sounded good and the children enjoyed singing it. However, the piano part seemed a little weak. This meant that the piano chords had to be filled out more, and needed more registral differentiation. Bass clef was used in both hands from bars fifty-five to seventy-five to provide registral contrast with the treble voices and to allow the voices to stand out more.

Moonrise

Genesis

Moonrise was an experiment in composing a choral piece in three parts for a small, upper primary school children's choir with a high level of musicianship. It also investigated ways to extend children with good musicianship, good aural and intonation skills but with limited vocal ranges such as boys with changing voices.

Moonrise was inspired by a landscape painting of a summer evening, by concerns about the drought, and by concerns about the erosion and loss of topsoil seen in some of the big winds in Melbourne in early 2008.

The poem aimed to touch on these issues and feelings subtly, with some beautiful images to light the imagination of the children (see portfolio: p. 66).

Processes

Moonrise was composed using the *Recipe for a Song* method. The guitar accompaniment is

ambiguously major and minor, primarily moving between A minor and D major chords. This reflects a certain ambiguity in the poem. The guitar accompaniment works well for a small choir, and was therefore an appropriate instrument to use in this piece.

Limitations and Solutions

To provide a musical challenge for the choir the three vocal parts mostly move polyphonically and are not necessarily directly supported by the guitar. For example see the Treble 1 entry at bar four of the score (portfolio: p. 67). Suspensions, passing notes and clusters are used to create close harmony throughout the piece, and would also be a good challenge for the choir.

The maximum range for each part in *Moonrise* is around an octave with Treble 1 ranging from F sharp on the treble staff to D on the treble staff, Treble 2 ranging from C below the treble staff to D on the treble staff, and Treble 3 ranging from A below the treble staff to G on the treble staff. The limited ranges of some of these parts could be sung by boys whose voices are just starting to change and whose range is being “shortened at both ends” (McKenzie 1956: 7).

Spooky Warm-up

Genesis

Spooky warm-up was an experiment in composing a singing technique and vowel-matching warm-up in three parts, which would be suitable for a children’s choir.

The harmony is somewhat ambiguous which gives it a ‘spooky’ sound.

Processes

Opportunities to practise vowel matching are provided with *legato* lines sung on the same vowel sound as the other two parts. These lines move up and down by step or by small intervals. The uniform vowel sound also gives the teacher a chance to listen to the vowel matching within the ensemble, and to observe and correct any bad singing habits that the choristers may have developed.

This warm-up would also be useful for practising dynamic variation with a choir. It was also intended that the singers using this warm-up could swap parts to practise producing the vowels in different parts of their range.

Choral music for boys with changing voices

Tram

Genesis

Tram was an experiment in composing choral music using extended vocal techniques that didn't require accurate pitch. The sounds of the old Glenelg tram in Adelaide inspired *Tram*.

Tram arose out of a collaboration with sculptor Tis Milner-Nichols for the hybrid media workshop *Splice*, run by the Helpmann Academy. Part of the workshop involved creating a hybrid media piece for an informal performance. The result was an ephemeral sculpture created by Tis, a *Musique Concrete* style composition created by the researcher, and a collaboratively produced moving-image film.

Processes

The original electronic work *Tram* was created by mimicking the tram's sounds with the voice, recording the sounds and creating a piece out of them structured to fit the movements of a tram over a five-minute period. The only sound that couldn't be described with the voice was the bells at the tram crossings, so a small Japanese typhoon bell was used to describe these sounds.

Limitations and Solutions

The success of the informal performance resulted in a request from Anne-Marie Kohn for *Tram* to be presented at the Festival of the Moving Image in 2005. This meant that the work had to be revised to suit the new venue: the moving image footage was filmed from the front using a better camera, the extended technique vocal 'tram' sounds were taught to a group of young performers from Ink Pot Arts, and the performers' movements were choreographed with assistance from several Ink Pot Arts teachers. This version of *Tram* was performed at the Mercury Cinema as part of the SALA Festival of the Moving Image in August 2005.

The use of live voices in the 2005 performance sparked the concept of notating a choral version of *Tram*, which would be particularly suitable for boys with changing voices. The difficulty came in working out how to notate this work. The Protools tracks from the recording were printed out to create a visual guide to help in the composition of the notated score.

The score seemed to work best as a 'time' score using seconds and minutes instead of a time-signature and bar numbers, with the notation serving more as a guide than as an absolute (see portfolio: p. 78). However, the score could easily be extended or abbreviated as required. For example, *Tram* could be used effectively as a warm-up piece in an abbreviated form.

The marked durations in the *Tram* time-score are based on an actual tram ride, and as such are not very flexible. However, the rhythms in *Tram* could be taken at varying tempos, decided by each individual performer, while keeping the original rhythmic motif and the marked durations, intact.

This would produce interesting episodes of ‘phasing’ which are appropriate in this piece, while maintaining accurate durations. Incorporating chance elements into this piece is a technique reminiscent of works by John Cage and Stephen Leek.

The marked pitches in *Tram* are relative. Pitch clusters work well in this piece. *Tram* is ideal for boys with changing voices because there are plenty of unvoiced parts and no ‘right’ pitch. The ‘hairpins’ <> in the score are like electronic fades (fading in or out from nothing).

A key to the score was created to explain what the sounds are and how to produce them (see portfolio: p. 76). To get a clearer understanding of the concept of this piece it would be helpful to watch the DVD included in the portfolio (see Appendix A).

Future Research

It would be interesting to try notating this piece more pictorially, or by using ‘cells’ like Stephen Leek has in ‘Kondallila’ (1995).

Choral music for teenage treble voices

Adagio for Snow

Genesis

Adagio for Snow was an experiment in composing choral music for a high-school aged treble choir that couldn’t necessarily sing in three parts. Issues investigated through this composition were choice of text, text setting, and accompaniment.

Processes

The melody for *Adagio for Snow* was composed before the lyrics by improvising on a clay ocarina and recording it onto Protools. The melody was then notated and a piano accompaniment was composed to go with it. The music was quite melancholy, and it seemed appropriate to write a poem suitable for teenagers to go with the music.

The general theme of the poem came from a sense of sadness about some of the tragedies of global warming. This emotion was brought on by a documentary on the Arctic and Antarctic ice sheets, which showed how they have been melting sooner and sooner each year, and how this affects the fauna that relies on it, like the polar bears. According to the documentary polar bears are now severely endangered as a result of the retreating ice due to global warming. This seemed like a suitable subject for teenagers (see portfolio: p. 93).

Limitations and Solutions

One of the main challenges of this piece was to set the poem to the pre-composed music. This method of composing choral music created some text-setting problems, similar to those mentioned earlier in the discussion of *The Gliders*. This meant that it was easier to re-write the melody than to set the text to the existing melody. The original melody was moved to the piano accompaniment, and a new melody was written to fit the text and harmonise with the accompaniment.

This piece was emotive and therefore the expressiveness of the string family was a more suitable accompaniment than the piano. The piano part was therefore re-arranged for strings. The original bowing was too broad, so this was adjusted to be easier to play.

Choral Music for Adults

Choral music for male voices

The Orange Tree

Genesis

The Orange Tree was an experiment in composing for an *a cappella* choir of all male voices. Issues of choral grouping and changing voices were explored.

Rich in resonance and overtones, male voices are frequently arranged *a cappella*.

(Ostrander and Wilson 1986: 164)

This piece was inspired by John Shaw Nielsen's poem *The Orange Tree* which he wrote while he was weeding an orange orchard in Mildura, at the end of the First World War (McFarlane 2006).

Processes

The section of *The Orange Tree* from bar eleven to bar twenty-five was originally composed for cello and piano. However it fitted Shaw's poem quite well, so it was expanded and had some of the words set to it. A beginning and an ending were then composed to fit the words. This meant that the section from bar eleven to bar twenty-five had the words set to it after it was written and that the rest of the piece was set (*vice versa*) to the words (see portfolio: p. 107). This provided some interesting word-setting challenges, and required some time-signature alterations (see portfolio: p. 108: bars 13-19).

Limitations and Solutions

The Orange Tree is a mostly polyphonic work, with several tempo changes. These changes were partly used to contrast the man's poetic voice with the young girl's poetic voice. The piece was

originally written for the choral grouping TBaBaB, but the top line seemed a little high for most tenors in some places (see portfolio: p.109: bar 26). This seemed like a good opportunity to re-arrange the piece so that young men with changing voices could participate in singing together with the grown men. The piece was therefore re-arranged for the choral grouping ATTBaBaBB. The idea of including young men's voices was based on the alto-tenor idea of changing voices.

“Alto-tenor” is a term used to describe and classify the boy's voice after it has lowered to the stage when the changed voice begins to develop.

(McKenzie 1956: 19)

The alto-tenor part in *The Orange Tree* generally sings the words of the young girl in the poem, or the voice of innocence. The lower parts mostly take the role of the man in the poem, or the voice of experience. This poetic exploration of themes of innocence and experience is similar in some regards to the concept of duality developed in W.H. Auden's poem *Hymn to St Cecilia*, and investigated by Benjamin Britten in his choral composition of the same name (1942).

The poem is written from the man's point of view, so all the voices in the poem are really the voices of his imagination, which is why it seemed appropriate to set this piece for male voices. Some differing sections of the poem were set concurrently (see portfolio: p. 110: bars 26-33), to help describe the impressions that the man isn't really listening to the young girl until the end of the poem. However the poem was too long to be set in its entirety in this piece.

Future Research

It would be interesting to expand this piece further with a second 'movement' to include the missing verses.

Choral music for adult female voices

The compositions included in the category of 'choral music for adult female voices' were experiments in composing choral music for treble voices that would be particularly suitable for adults. These compositions investigated issues such as text setting and interpretation, accompaniment, and poly-rhythm. The compositions included in this category are *Love's Coming* and *Song of Rain*.

Future Research

After these two works had been completed the researcher discovered that other Australian composers had previously set these two poems as well as *The Orange Tree*. For example: Horace Keats *The Orange Tree* (N.d.), Margaret Sutherland *The Orange Tree* (1954), David Morris

Love's Coming (1994), Gerald Glyn *Love's Coming* (1986), Richard Mills *Love's Coming* (2005) and Anne Boyd *A Song of Rain* (1986).

It would be interesting to discover what qualities attracted all of these composers to these particular texts. Was it because they were by Australian poets? Was it because some of them were out of copyright? Was there some innately musical or aesthetic quality to the poetry that attracted these composers? Would these poems be equally attractive to non-Australian composers? Academic research could perhaps provide some answers to these questions.

Love's Coming

Genesis

Love's Coming was an experiment in composing a choral work for women's voices that could successfully reflect the delicacy and subtlety of an understated poem.

Love's Coming was originally composed for Eve vocal trio. One of the members of Eve has perfect pitch, and can play the harp while singing. All of the women are professional musicians. These factors were taken into account when composing *Love's Coming*.

John Shaw Nielsen's poem *Love's Coming* (n.d.) is very gentle and understated, and seems to require a very musically sensitive treatment. Reading this poem brought to mind a simple plainchant by Hildegard von Bingen, *Spiritus Sanctus* (ca.1100 AD), and Chinese calligraphy.

Processes

As a result of these thoughts a very free, simple melody, was 'made-up' and memorized. It was originally set plainly with just a drone as an accompaniment (see score: bars 11-23). However, it seemed that this might be too simple and sparse for Eve.

Therefore the melody was harmonised with another vocal line, and a simple harp part was added, along with a third vocal line. Sections of the piece remained completely unaccompanied, and the harp was used purely to maintain pitch in these unaccompanied sections. It was also used to mask the alto drone's entries, so that they could arrive quietly or seemingly out of nothing. The harp harmony was only filled out in a couple of sections. Changing time signatures were used to remain as faithful to the text as possible, thus giving a more natural speech rhythm similar to that used in plain-chant.

Eve performed *Love's Coming* in autumn 2007 at The Artspace of the Adelaide Festival Centre, and the concert was recorded live. A rehearsal prior to the concert had allowed for a few alterations to be made. For example a change was made in the spacing of the chord at bar 102

(see portfolio: p. 129) to fit the harpist's small hands. However, when it came to revision, the recording proved most valuable.

Limitations and Solutions

Love's Coming was a lot harder than it appeared at first and it was easy for the performers to underestimate its technical difficulty. It used open fifths and was quite sparsely accompanied, which made any errors in the performers' intonation very obvious. This would probably have been assisted by a more forgiving acoustic, but it seemed that some changes could help to improve the intonation. The recording also showed that the use of the harp part in some of the 'unaccompanied' sections was a little too repetitive.

In order for this piece to be performed successfully by musicians other than *Eve*, a few revisions had to be made. As most singers wouldn't have perfect pitch, a harp introduction could be added to the piece to help the performers find the first note. The existing harp part could also be added to, since the harp wouldn't have to be played by one of the singers. Therefore a harp introduction was added, and the harp part was expanded. The alto vocal line was also extended a little. This revised version was included in the portfolio (see portfolio: p. 118).

The use of plainsong as an inspiration for composing choral music can also be observed in Crossin's work *Caritas* (2002).

Song of Rain

Genesis

Song of Rain was an experiment in composing a choral work for adult female voices to investigate issues related to accompaniment, choral grouping, text setting, and duration.

Song of Rain was inspired by several years of drought resulting from a long *El Nino* weather cycle. The bone-dry summers and the brown dusty landscape seemed related to an internal creative drought. This piece was composed in celebration at the end of a creative drought. It was also composed as a kind of hopeful 'rain dance.'

Processes

The music is set to a poem by C.J. Dennis called *A Song of Rain*. This poem has two distinct voices in it: the philosophical intellectual adult voice, and the emotional child voice (similarly noted in the discussion on *The Orange Tree*). The music aims to reflect this.

The composition process for *Song of Rain* started in 2007. The piece was originally intended to be for a community choir, Chandos Chorale. The composition process began with a short 'riff'

improvised on the piano, which was then memorized and notated. This riff can be seen in the piano part at bar twenty-seven (see portfolio: p. 139). It provided the basis for a large proportion of the musical material.

A melody was improvised over this riff, memorized and written down. It was notated in Sibelius, and a chorus section (see portfolio: p. 139: bar 27-52) for mixed voices was composed. The piece was then left in this unfinished state until March 2008.

Limitations and Solutions

The realisation that *Song of Rain* didn't have to use C.J. Dennis' entire poem, that it didn't have to be composed for community choir, and that it could be composed for a highly trained female ensemble such as Eve instead, led to a renewed enthusiasm for the piece. This resulted in the composition of a harp introduction, and development of the chorus section in early 2008.

The section from bar fifty-seven to bar seventy-eight (see portfolio: p. 142) required frequent revision, particularly in relation to text setting, because the text was quite complicated. The composition process once again became stalled at about bar ninety-seven (see portfolio: p. 147) because the piece seemed to be getting too repetitive, and too long and it became hard to envision an appropriate ending. This issue of duration was resolved simply by cutting out a section of the work, and by contrasting the soprano line with the mezzo lines, dynamically and rhythmically in bars ninety-eight to 116. A modulation at bar 116 helped to lead the piece into a recapitulation of the introduction which formed the ending of the work. The harp part was also re-composed for piano, to provide a more sustained sound.

The piano accompaniment aims to convey the sense of the vast distances described in the poem by using long, sustained piano chords. A simple, cheeky rain motif can be found throughout the work: see bar two for an example (see portfolio: p. 118).

Christie Anderson rehearsed *Song of Rain* with the Young Adelaide Voices Alumni choir and accompanist Janice Purdie in 2008. Once again this piece had appeared deceptively easy, but the poly-rhythms from bar ninety-eight to 116 proved to be quite difficult (see portfolio: p. 148). As a result Eve and Janice Purdie made a rough recording of the work to assist the singers. However, no changes were made to the score as a result of hearing this recording. It seemed that sufficient rehearsal would solve most of the problems that arose.

Choral music for mixed adult voices

Mangoes

Genesis

Mangoes was an experiment in composing for a professional level, mixed voice, adult choir. The issues investigated included providing a rhythmically challenging piece for a professional choir, and using the music to enhance the humour of Richard Tipping's poem, *Mangoes*. The idea of incorporating tango rhythms into the piece to create a kind of mango tango was also quite appealing.

Processes

The rhythmic first section of *Mangoes*, from bar one to bar twenty (see portfolio: p. 160), was based on a simple chord progression improvised on the piano. This progression was memorized and notated, and then arranged for a large mixed choir.

Limitations and Solutions

The work became 'stuck' at this point from June 2007 until March 2008. An email from Richard Tipping giving his permission to use his poem inspired a fresh attempt to set *Mangoes*.

The use of a tango style melody (see portfolio: p. 168: bar 33) and tango rhythms helped to move the piece forward, and sudden interruptions in the flow of the piece (see portfolio: p. 171: bar 45) helped to create humorous interludes by using an element of surprise. The composition process became stalled once again at bar sixty, before the idea of setting the serious sounding 'parental' voices in the lower parts from bar sixty-two helped to move the piece forward to the end.

Future Research

It would be interesting to investigate how other Australian composers evoke humour in their actual choral music, other than simply through the text. The humour in James Valentine's three Christmas carols (arr. Sally Whitwell 2007) for example, seems to come purely from the words.

Large choral work for mixed voices and orchestra

Seven Summits

General Concept

The idea of composing a large seven-movement composition was inspired by Brigitte Muir's book *The Wind in My Hair* (1998). Brigitte Muir was the first Australian to climb the Seven Summits, the highest mountain on each continent, and the first Australian woman to climb Mount Everest. The idea was that one movement or section of music would be composed for each of the mountains that she had climbed.

Brigitte is a kind of modern heroine, and this led to the idea of writing an opera based on her adventures.

After contacting Brigitte via email and engaging in a correspondence, the researcher received permission to interview Brigitte and to use her story as the basis for this composition. The interview with Brigitte Muir on the twenty-sixth of March 2005 in Natimuk, Victoria, was a very productive, informative and essential experience. Speaking directly to Muir about her experiences of climbing the Seven Summits gave some important insights into Brigitte's character that her book didn't reveal.

On discovering that a ten-minute orchestral work was a core component of the Masters program, it seemed that composing an orchestral prelude for this opera would be a logical idea. After some consideration, the idea of composing an opera was modified to that of composing several movements of a seven-movement oratorio based on the same story. The movements included in the portfolio are *Prelude: Denali*, *Kilimanjaro Part 1: Freedom Song*, and *Kilimanjaro Part 2: Uhuru Peak*.

Prelude: Denali

Genesis

Prelude: Denali was composed as an orchestral prelude to the larger choral work, *The Seven Summits*. It was an experiment in composing an orchestral prelude to a large choral work.

This piece was inspired by Muir's description of climbing Denali. Denali is the highest mountain in North America. Denali, or Mt McKinley, is situated in Denali National Park in Alaska. Denali is the name given to the mountain by the indigenous people of that area and means 'the high one' (Muir 1998).

Processes

The main themes in *Prelude: Denali* were composed using the *Recipe for a Song* method. These themes were then developed and fitted together to form the skeleton of the piece. This was then orchestrated for a romantic style orchestra. This type of orchestra was used because the opportunity arose to have it played through by the Elder Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra in this format.

Denali was given two rehearsals (Monday the 1st and Monday the 8th of August) and was then performed on the eleventh of August as part of an 'in house' concert at Elder Hall by the Elder Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Keith Crellin.

Limitations and Solutions

Even though the piece had had very little rehearsal a few things were learnt from the experience of having it performed. For example, ‘*mp*’ and ‘*mf*’ should rarely be used because such relative dynamics easily confuse the players. Another thing was that the string section could easily overpower the wind instruments. It also became apparent how important it is to write courtesy accidentals and cues in the parts, and to provide sufficient rests for the woodwind so that their lips don’t get tired and shaky. Revisions were made to the score in response to these discoveries. Some of the percussion instruments included in the original version (such as bass drum and congas) also seemed a little unnecessary, and were cut from the score.

In the interview with Brigitte she had described climbing Denali as ‘exciting.’ Brigitte also said that she had felt very optimistic about climbing Denali, so the piece needed to express a sense of optimism. This was achieved by composing a very gentle and light-hearted figure for the opening, which moves into a dance-like melody (see portfolio: p. 190).

Creating a feeling of expectation and a swelling of excitement, a speeding of the pulse as breath is drawn in, was achieved by using the oboes (see portfolio: p. 194: bar 55) and trumpets in a phrase of high, fast, repeated notes that slow down as they descend in register. This also aimed to evoke the sounds of the wild geese flying overhead that Brigitte describes in her book. A similar technique is used in Chinese opera.

Excitement builds throughout the first half of the piece and culminates in a full orchestral crescendo designed to evoke the experience of ‘summitting,’ or reaching the top of, Denali (see portfolio: p. 198). After the crescendo the instruments are left hanging in space for a moment (see portfolio: p. 204: bar 142) before the delicate and icy sounds of the high mountains are played out by celesta, harp, wind instruments, and string pizzicato.

A restless three against four rhythm was used for the descent section (see portfolio: p. 207: bar 195) to evoke the feeling of a trembling, tired body, the feeling that time was running out, and regret at leaving the summit. A high soaring flute and piccolo melody was used to represent a kite flying. The relief and regret of reaching base camp is portrayed with a simple unison melody in the strings. The piece winds down with a recapitulation and finishes where it began, with a feeling of light-hearted excitement.

This piece was subsequently revised further. An attempt was made to write a piano reduction and an arrangement for small chamber orchestra, but this proved too time consuming and beyond the

scope of this thesis. The final arrangement cut some of the instruments such as the marimba and changed the ‘cymbals in hand’ to suspended cymbal.

Future Research

A future revision of this work might include some re-writing at around rehearsal mark ‘J’ to make it a little less sentimental, and an arrangement for chamber ensemble.

Kilimanjaro Part 1: Freedom Song

Genesis

Kilimanjaro Part 1: Freedom Song investigated the challenges of composing a polyphonic work for SATB choir accompanied by strings. Freedom song was inspired by a feeling of liberation and was composed as an affirmation.

It also indirectly referred to the historical slave-trade link between North America (where Muir had just climbed Denali) and Africa, and the historical liberation of the African American slaves.

It was also inspired by Brigitte Muir’s description of the vibrant and colourful African town that she stayed in before making her ascent of Mt Kilimanjaro.

Processes

The first half of this piece was originally composed for strings. The melody was invented on the guitar, inspired by the sounds of African thumb-piano music and percussion, and harmonised with a simple canon. The section of the work from figure “M” of the full score and up to figure “N” was completed for strings before the piece was abandoned.

On returning to this piece after a year, it seemed that it would work well as an SATBaB choral piece. Words were written to fit the rhythm of the melody, and the piece was developed linearly from figure “N” to the end, although the section from figure “P” to figure “Q” was added afterwards to expand on the minor section. Figure “Q” begins the recapitulation that forms the ending of the piece.

Limitations and Solutions

Once the piece had been composed for choir, the strings were added again. The strings basically follow the melody line, and were included to offer intonation and rhythmic support to the choir.

Kilimanjaro Part 2: Uhuru Peak

Genesis

Kilimanjaro Part 2: Uhuru Peak investigated the challenges that arise when composing for an

adult treble choir with orchestral accompaniment.

The text for this piece was inspired by Muir's description of the liberating experience of leaving her boyfriend, and bathing in a mountain stream on Mt Kilimanjaro. The locals call Mt Kilimanjaro *Uhuru*, which means freedom (Muir 1998). This ties into the previous section of the work, *Freedom Song*.

Processes

The first section of *Uhuru Peak* to be composed was the section from figure "T" to figure "U." This was composed using a simple ostinato pattern improvised on the guitar, which was then memorized and written down. A melody was improvised around this ostinato, using the lyrics "I bathe in a stream" (see portfolio: p. 220).

This piece was originally written with *Eve* in mind as the performers. The ostinato pattern was therefore filled out on the harp, and two vocal lines were used to harmonize the melody. This version was left for about a year.

Returning to this piece after a long break made it clear that it would need to be expanded, with a beginning and an end, and a more substantial instrumental accompaniment. The next part of the piece to be composed was the section from figure "S" to figure "T." The piece was then developed from figure "U" to figure "X" using several different melodies composed using the *Recipe for a Song* method. At this point a woodwind accompaniment was added to the harp accompaniment.

The ending of the work became a recapitulation of the section from figure "S" to figure "T," and an introductory section was added (figure "R" to figure "S") after a trip to the Victorian Alps. This section served as a bridge between *Kilimanjaro Part 1* and *Kilimanjaro Part 2*. Strings were added to expand on the accompaniment.

Limitations and Solutions

The issues that arose when composing this piece were mainly to do with balance between the orchestra and the women's choir. It was important not to drown out the voices, but at the same time they needed to be well supported harmonically. Care was taken not to swamp the singers, and several accompanying passages were made *pizzicato* in the strings partly to allow the singers to be heard more clearly.

Several versions of the accompaniment were tested: a version with piano and harp, a version with harp alone, a version with woodwind alone, a version with strings alone, a version with

woodwind and strings but not harp, a version with harp and woodwind, and a version with harp and strings. In the end, the best sound came from a combination of woodwind, strings, and harp.

Future Research

It would be interesting to have this piece performed to investigate whether the accompaniment has provided enough harmonic support for the singers, and to see whether the singers (who mostly sing in quite a low register) can be heard sufficiently well above the orchestra.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Throughout this creative investigation I have explored the limitations that arise when composing for a choral spectrum. This has given me the opportunity to contribute to the choral repertoire, and to develop and demonstrate my skills as a composer of choral music.

I took a holistic approach to this research, immersing myself in all aspects of choral music including studying the works of choral composers, conducting, teaching, leading and participating in workshops, singing, coordinating, and composing.

For example, I conducted an adult community choir, three children's choirs, ran national auditions for children, ran a composition workshop for children, taught music theory to children, coordinated a children's choir, and participated in an auditioned choral conductor's summer school. I undertook all of these activities for the first time as part of the research for this project. This was a steep learning curve for me. At the same time I continued to participate as a singer in adult choirs and as a composer in National Music Camp.

This journey has demonstrated to me, in a number of ways, the considerable limitations that apply when composing music for any category of the choral spectrum. In order to explore these limitations, and further my skills as a composer, I undertook a series of 'experiments' which required me to tackle areas of choral composition that I had never attempted before. For example, I composed choral music for children, boys with changing voices, teenage treble voices, and men's voices. I also created a hybrid media choral work, composed a choral work that exceeded four minutes in duration, and composed a large choral and orchestral work.

Composing pieces for women's voices and mixed adult voices allowed me to build on existing composition experience in these areas.

This research gave me a thorough and practical understanding of the limitations of the choral medium and this enabled me to compose successful works for a choral spectrum. The eighteen

compositions included in the portfolio are an expression and documentation of my creative journey as a composer on the road to mastering choral composition.

This journey is ongoing, and there are several avenues worth exploring in the future. For example, I would like to conduct rehearsals and performances of all the works composed for the portfolio, and produce good quality recordings of these works. This would be a valuable experience, as it would give me new perspective and insight into the strengths and weaknesses of these works, and further inform any future research that I might undertake in the area of choral composition.

I intend to complete the *Seven Summits* oratorio project, as there does not seem to be anything similar to this in the Australian choral repertoire. This will require several years of work to complete, including further research into composing for choir and orchestra.

Following the completion of the *Seven Summits* project, I would like to investigate how to apply techniques of choral music composition and orchestral accompaniment to composing operas for children. This will involve an extension of the research into composing appropriate and satisfying choral music for boys with changing voices, which could be a particularly valuable contribution to the literature. It seems possible that a body of suitable repertoire in this field might assist in the retention of male voices in choirs both during and beyond adolescence.

All of these future projects will be enriched and informed by the knowledge, skills and experience gained during my creative investigation into the limitations of composing for a choral spectrum.

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McFarlane, Ian. 2006. 'Ian McFarlane on John Shaw Nielson.' Transcript of presentation. *Voices in the Gallery*. N.p: Friends of the Libraries.

www.thebegavalley.org.au (16 August 2008)

Melbourne Chamber Choir – Faye Dumont Singers Inc

www.home.vicnet.net.au/~fdsinc/mcc.html (16 August 2008)

Music Australia

www.musicaustralia.org (16 August 2008)

Song Company

www.songcompany.com.au (16 August 2008)

Sydney Chamber Choir

www.sydneychamberchoir.org (16 August 2008)

Sydney Children's Choir

www.sydneychildrenschoir.com.au (16 August 2008)

Sydney Philharmonia Choir

www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au (16 August 2008)

Young Adelaide Voices

www.youngadelaidevoices.asn.au (16 August 2008)

Young Voices of Melbourne

www.yvm.com.au (16 August 2008)

Appendices

Appendix A: *Tram* DVD (Digital Versatile Disc).

The general concept for the multimedia project *Tram* was arrived at during an artistic collaboration with sculptor Tis Milner Nichols for the Helpmann Academy's Splice project in 2005. I came up with the concept for the music unassisted.

Tis Milner Nichols and I shot the moving-image film together, and I then put it together in Final Cut Pro and iMovie with assistance from artist Datsun Tran.

I created all of the music for this film, using sounds produced by my own voice. The only sound not produced by my voice in this film is the sound made by the typhoon bell, which was also played by me. I produced and recorded these sounds using Protools and matched it to the moving image film in Final Cut Pro, to create the final soundtrack.

Instructions for use:

The *Tram* DVD is located in a disc pocket directly in front of the back cover of this thesis.

Please insert the disc into your DVD player.

When the menu appears, press 'play.'

The moving image film and accompanying audio runs for 5 minutes.

When you have finished watching this DVD, please eject the disc from your DVD player and return it to the disc pocket at the back of this thesis.

**DVD is included with the print copy
held in the University of Adelaide Library.**

Appendix B: 12 Bars of Chocolate Cake Score

12 Bars of Chocolate Cake
 Words and Music by Callie Wood

♩=112

Treble Voices

Acoustic Guitar

mf

3 mf
 Tr. Choc' - late cake is ve - ry nice I wish I could
 A. Gtr.

6
 Tr. eat it twice but Ma - ma says it's ve - ry bad ___ for
 A. Gtr.

9
 Tr. me ___ cause it' - ll rot my ___ teeth and it' - ll
 A. Gtr.

12 (almost whisper) p
 Tr. give me a ca - vi - ty ___ But
 A. Gtr.

The musical score is written in 12/8 time with a tempo of 112 beats per minute. It consists of four systems, each with a vocal line (Tr.) and an acoustic guitar line (A. Gtr.). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: 'Choc' - late cake is ve - ry nice I wish I could eat it twice but Ma - ma says it's ve - ry bad ___ for me ___ cause it' - ll rot my ___ teeth and it' - ll give me a ca - vi - ty ___ But'. The guitar accompaniment features a consistent eighth-note pattern with a melodic line in the treble clef. Dynamics range from mezzo-forte (mf) to piano (p).

15

Tr.
me 'n my friends made cake at school and we ate it by the

A. Gtr.
p

18

Tr.
swim- ming_ pool_ and we were all

A. Gtr.
mf

20

Tr.
hap - py as_ could be_ till we

A. Gtr.
mf

23

Tr.
ate the whole thing_ and I got a sore

A. Gtr.
f

25

Tr.
tum- my_ Cause

A. Gtr.
p

27

Tr. choc' - late cake is ve - ry nice and

A. Gtr.

29 *mp*

Tr. I wish I could eat it twice, and e - ven

A. Gtr. *mf*

31 *mf*

Tr. though Ma - ma says it's ve - ry bad for

A. Gtr.

33

Tr. me

A. Gtr.

35 *f*

Tr. I don't care cause I'm a

A. Gtr.

36 **rall.**

Tr.
choc' - late cake fiend!

A. Gtr.
mp

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Tr. (Trumpet) and A. Gtr. (Acoustic Guitar). The Tr. part is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'choc' - late cake fiend!'. The A. Gtr. part is in treble clef and provides accompaniment. The score includes a measure number '36' at the beginning, a 'rall.' (rallentando) marking above the Tr. staff, and an 'mp' (mezzo-piano) dynamic marking below the A. Gtr. staff. The Tr. staff has a fermata over the word 'cake' and a slur over the word 'fiend!'. The A. Gtr. staff has a fermata over the word 'fiend!' and a slur over the final two notes.

Appendix C: *Misty Morning* Score for Treble Voices in Three Parts

MISTY MORNING WORDS AND MUSIC BY CALLIE WOOD

$\text{♩} = 80$
MP

TREBLE VOICES 1
AH _____ AH _____ AH _____

TREBLE VOICES 2
MF
MIS - TY MIS - TY MORN - ING SKY LIT BY THE

TREBLE VOICES 3
MP
AH _____ AH _____ AH _____

6

TR. 1
AH _____ AH _____ AH _____

TR. 2
EAR - LY SUM - MER'S LIGHT SUN NOW RI - SES A - BOVE THE _____

TR. 3
AH _____ AH _____ AH _____

12

TR. 1
MF MP
AH _____ WAY I FEEL AH _____

TR. 2
MF MP
HILL THE WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL AH _____

TR. 3
MF MF
WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL GOL - DEN _____

18

Tr. 1
 AH AH MISTS OF GLOOM

Tr. 2
 AH AH MISTS OF GLOOM

Tr. 3
 RAYS SPREAD - ING OUT MEL - TING THE MISTS OF GLOOM

p

24

Tr. 1
 AH AH AH

Tr. 2
 AH HEAV'N A - BOVE FLOW - ERS

Tr. 3
 THE CLOUDS NOW RISE TO THE HEAV'N A - BOVE FLOW - ERS

mp *mf*

30

Tr. 1
 OH MIS - TY MIS - TY MOR - NING

Tr. 2
 ARE IN BLOOM AH AH

Tr. 3
 ARE IN BLOOM AH AH

mf *mp*

36

Tr. 1
 SKY LIT BY THE EAR - LY SUM - MERS LIGHT SUN NOW

Tr. 2
 AH AH AH

Tr. 3
 AH AH AH

42

Tr. 1
RI - SES A - BOVE THE HILL

Tr. 2
AH THE

Tr. 3
AH

45

Tr. 1
THAT'S THE WAY I FEEL

Tr. 2
WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL

Tr. 3
WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL

The image shows a musical score for three voices, labeled Tr. 1, Tr. 2, and Tr. 3. The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 42 and ends at measure 44. Tr. 1 has the lyrics "RI - SES A - BOVE THE HILL". Tr. 2 has "AH" and "THE". Tr. 3 has "AH". The second system starts at measure 45 and ends at measure 48. Tr. 1 has the lyrics "THAT'S THE WAY I FEEL". Tr. 2 has "WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL". Tr. 3 has "WAY THAT IT LOOKS IS THE WAY I FEEL". The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Dynamics include MF (mezzo-forte) and a crescendo leading to a final fermata.

Appendix D: *The Gliders* Score for Unison Treble Voices

The Gliders

Words and Music by Callie Wood

Allegretto

mf

Treble Voices

I saw them float ing_ there like birds_ high a - bove the_ moun-tain

9
Tr. peak. One was blue with sil- ver_ stars_ and_ a gold en_ streak. They

18
Tr. float-ed there like_ but - ter - flies, slow - ly_ drift- ing_ by_

26
Tr. Surf-ing cur - rents in the_ sky, Pa - ra - gli - ders. fly!

Appendix E: *Orange Kite* Score for Unison Treble Voices and Guitar

Orange Kite
Words and Music by Callie Wood

Allegretto mf

Treble Voices

Acoustic Guitar

3

Tr. have a kite an

A. Gtr.

5

Tr. o - range kite its

A. Gtr.

7

Tr. tail is made of bows I

A. Gtr.

9

Tr. fly it on the hill - - top On

A. Gtr.

11

Tr.  days when a strong wind blows |

A. Gtr.  *mp*

13

Tr.  run down the hill my kite far a - bove and

A. Gtr.  *mf* *mp* *mf*

15

Tr.  laugh with sheer de - light

A. Gtr. 

17

Tr.  while the wind ruf-fles the tail

A. Gtr.  *mp*

19

Tr.  of my o - - - range

A. Gtr. 

21

Tr.

kite

A. Gtr.

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Tr. (Trumpet) and A. Gtr. (Acoustic Guitar). The score begins at measure 21. The Tr. part starts with a whole note chord in the first measure, followed by two measures of rests. The A. Gtr. part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the first two measures, followed by a chordal ending in the third measure. The word "kite" is written below the Tr. staff in the first measure.