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THE CONTRABASS AS A VEHICLE FOR AUSTRALIAN MUSIC;
HOW A SMALL REPERTOIRE CAN INFORM
THE CREATIVE OUTPUT
OF ONE COMPOSER.

Jim Coyle

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of requirements for the degree of
Master of Music (COMPOSITION)

Sydney Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
2014
Declaration

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

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

Australian music for the contrabass is treated as a microcosm of Australian art music over the past forty years. More than thirty works in this repertoire are surveyed and subjected to analysis of various degrees of depth. Threads of musical development are discerned and demonstrated to reflect the broader development of compositional techniques.

This analysis is shown to inform a portfolio of creative work which is heavily focused on the contrabass as a performing medium. These compositions, including solo, orchestral and theatrical works, reveal an emerging individual style which is, nevertheless, strongly connected to the surveyed body of repertoire.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction and compositional themes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A representative survey of Australian music for the contrabass</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exegesis of compositions with the contrabass as soloist</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exegesis of compositions for larger ensembles</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exegesis of dramatic works</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Chapter 1. Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine developments in a small repertoire, Australian music for the contrabass, to see how they reflect broader trends in contemporary music. It contains a specific examination of how these compositional trends reflect aesthetic and technical developments in recent Australian string music. The aesthetic trends reveal many of the composers of this repertoire following one of a small number of loosely defined sets of composition preoccupations. The technical developments examined reveal a move from isolated gestures using extended techniques, towards a more nuanced and gradual modification of string timbre. This body of research informed the portfolio of creative works. The exegetical elements of this paper analyse the influence of this repertoire. This exegesis also analyses and identifies points of departure from the compositional zeitgeist and reveals the emergence of a unique and personal creative voice.

### 1.1 Musical commonality and individuality.

Composers, like all human beings, have a set of core beliefs, values, ideas and interests. These are more or less evident in their creative output and contribute to their compositional voice. The idea of a composer's individual voice is a critical one in appraising his or her music (Schwartz, Child & Fox, 1998; Rochberg, 2004). It is distinct from style, although both are informed by the composer's artistic, aesthetic and social context, in the same way that dialect and idiolect are distinct in a person’s use of spoken language (Cone, 1974). The analysis of a representative sample of Australian contrabass music (about 30 works in all), reveals commonalities of technical and aesthetic approaches in some cases, and some distinct and recognisable individual voices. The exegesis draws on this commonality and plurality to reveal a distinct musical idiolect. The introduction to the exegetical part of this paper explores extra-musical and aesthetic preoccupations, then examines the technical idiosyncrasies of the portfolio of creative work.
1.1.1 Religious Affect and Angels.

In the portfolio of creative work, many of the pieces are concerned with human emotion. A subset of these pieces are specifically about human reaction to religious experience. They are not pieces about religion, but are far more concerned with how humans are affected when visited by the supernatural. In Judeo-Christian belief systems, these visitations and annunciations are often personified in angels, the messengers of the Divine. In the cases of *Billy Bray Abides in the Light* (2013) and *Angelus* (2014), the message is purely and overwhelmingly joyful. A positive, but less exuberant message is delivered in *And My Angel Whisper Peace to Me* (2014), a work that explores the idea of a happy death. In these works, and in a less personified way in *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* (2014), the angel is represented by a short motif, the *vox angelus*.

1.1.2 Directness of Gesture, Rhetoric, Tradition

One of the notable trends in the repertoire surveyed in Chapter 2 is a move away from the more extreme gestures and sonorities of the avant-garde since the 1990s. The portfolio of original compositions is a reflection of that trend. Indeed, it could be seen that in certain respects, particularly in the organisation of pitch and rhythm, that it is more conservative than most contemporary work. Pieces like *And My Angel Whisper Peace to Me* (2014) and *On the Heaviness of Sorrow* (2013) identify themselves strongly with the rhetorical traditions and mannerisms of mainstream European thought in the first instance and, at least harmonically speaking, with a post-nationalist, modal Britishness in the latter. The technical details of these features will be discussed more fully in their respective exegeses. It is notable that these works, which deal with serious themes, rely more heavily on a traditional musical rhetoric; the more extended techniques and gestures tend to be used in pieces with a more light-hearted intent such as *Gilded Passages* (2013) and *The Light Fantastic* (2013).
1.1.3 Joy, Vitality, Playfulness

Another trend that may discerned in the repertoire studied is a move towards more immediately human titles, themes and preoccupations. For example, pieces from the 1970s surveyed include Dialogue (Tahourdin, 1973) and Playback (Conyngham, 1973) which are concerned only with the world of sound. Whereas more recent compositions have a wide variety of extra-musical associations, including deeply human and emotional ones (Lake Ice by Mary Finsterer, 2013; Beowulf by Larry Sitsky, 2007).

This trend towards a more organic music is very much reflected in the portfolio of original work. Indeed, the only non-organic music is that which represents the azoic elements in Douglas Mawson Walking Alone (2014). On many other occasions, there is a deliberate attempt to make the music sound as human as possible. This is manifested in directness of gesture, the simplicity of some ideas, the rhythmic spark (particularly the frequent use of 3/4 and 6/8 time signatures which reflect the rhythm of the body), the cantabile lines for instruments. Part of that human experience is humour and light-heartedness which is most evident in Gilded Passages (2013) and The Light Fantastic (2013).

The works discussed in the exegesis are also often concerned with very human and very emotional themes. An often-evoked emotion is that of joy. Two works, Angelus (2014) and Billy Bray Abides in the Light (2013), are concerned exclusively with this emotional state; one that composers have tended to neglect (with the obvious exception of Beethoven). This directness of communication with the audience is a very important feature of the body of creative work, and there are a number of techniques employed to realise this goal.
1.2 Musical Techniques Developed and Explored

The portfolio of original works reveals a distinct and individual voice, whose aesthetic preoccupations are briefly described above. Given the highly technical nature of composing music; particularly when a composer is working in a traditional ‘dots on a page’ fashion, it becomes very important for every composer to develop a musical idiolect which he or she can employ intuitively. This ease with one’s own language allows a freer flow of ideas between composer and listener. The musical idiolect described in the exegesis has a number of idiosyncratic techniques and characteristics.

1.2.1 Three are Metre, as Rhythm, as Structure.

Contemporary composers tend to shy away from triple metre, with its association of the waltz and the jig. Popular music is almost never in triple metre, so there is a certain old-fashioned humanity about creating music that uses these time signatures. The rhythms they tend to engender, too, have human, intimate qualities; rocking, lilting, breathing, pulsing. Using the 2-1, long-short template for musical structure is at its most obvious in Angelus, but there are also aspects of it in On the Heaviness of Sorrow (2013) and Douglas Mawson Walking Alone (2014). It has a pleasingly asymmetrical symmetry and is suitable for music of great humanity.

1.2.2 Recursion and symmetry in structure.

The most mathematically-determined passages in the portfolio are the electronic elements in Douglas Mawson Walking Alone (2014). The structure of this music is based on the hexagonal symmetry of the ice crystal and those structural principles are applied strictly using techniques such as inversion, retrograde, mensuration and transposition. This is an atypical approach and chosen because of the absolute lack of humanity that this particular music represents. In other works, a mathematical model is introduced as a sort of structural mold, but can be interpreted quite loosely once the music itself is introduced.
A highly characteristic structural device is that of the recursive or fractal structure. Followed quite loosely, the principle behind this idea can be summed up as ‘as great, so small.’ For example in Angelus, the 2-1 rhythmic idea can be augmented from the tiniest rhythmic cell, up to the macro-structure of the entire work. Melodically, too, this recursiveness has proved a valuable idea. One structural technique that proved effective in both Angelus and Billy Bray Abides in the Light is that of simultaneous mensuration; playing a theme at more than one pace at the same time. Clearly the faster rendering needs to be played more than once. This leads to the introduction of cyclic elements to musical structure which is a radical departure form the expositions then development model that has been so dominant for much of the history of western Art Music.

1.2.3 Pitch Language and Extended Modality.

Pitch is a very twentieth century obsession. In analysing music, it is very easy to become obsessed with it to the exclusion of all other musical elements. Nevertheless, the harmonic and melodic language of the works examined in the exegesis is very significant to determining their place in a wider repertoire. The pitch language used is essentially an extended modality (based, fundamentally on the British traditional music modes with the addition of notes derived from jazz and blues inflections). It includes the major modes. Major sonorities are sometimes used for extended periods in a more colouristic and less functional way (e.g. the finale of Douglas Mawson Walking Alone (2014), the final third of Billy Bray Abides in the Light (2013)) in a technique that resembles post-minimalist pitch organisation. This technique, in addition to its evocative and timbral power, also has the advantage of liberating pitch structure from the confines of functional tonality and serialism.
1.2.4  **Nuanced Timbral Techniques.**

One way in which the body of creative work closely reflects recent compositional trends is in the nuancing of timbral techniques. String writing in the past ten years is increasingly likely to ask the players to move from the bridge slowly (*Billy Bray Abides in the Light* (2013) bars 8-9, *Lake Ice* (Finsterer, 2013), bars 173-175) nuanced *col legno* techniques (*Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* (2014) bars 181-190, *Scherzo alla Francescana* (Pompili, 1994)) or to add a unison double-stop imperceptibly at first (*On the Heaviness of Sorrow* (2013) bars 19-20, *Die Zelle* bars 5-7 (Bieniek, 2007)).

The original work has added to these techniques by exploiting the manipulation of vibrato more fully than any of the previous pieces. Gradual increase and decrease of vibrato, sometimes combined with crescendo and diminuendo, is such a feature of the original work that new notation has been devised for these techniques, viz,-

This gradation of certain timbral techniques is a key feature of the development of the idiosyncratic sound-world found in the body of original work.

1.2.5  **Leitmotif and Thematic Symbolism.**

In the two dramatic works included in this portfolio, there is a very strong tendency to use leitmotifs. In this way, the narrative determines the structure. This technique has been well-known to stage and film composers for over a century and is employed in a very direct way in *The Violin* (2013). In *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* (2014), these motifs are associated with emotions and psychological states, rather than persons and objects; and there interplay is nuanced in such a complex way that the music evokes psychological states which would be impossible to describe using words. In this way, the leitmotif narrative technique operates on multiple and often subtle levels, which differentiates it from more the more directly narrative situations in which it has been employed in the past.
1.2.6 Hymns and Chorales.
The use of chorale-like textures and gestures occurs in various guises in the repertoire studied, from the rather formal and dissonant use in *Nocturnes* (Butterley, 1978) to the atmospheric in *Beowulf* (Sitsky 2007) to the manically energetic in *Crime and Punishment* (Hindson 2010). They occur frequently in the original work and are often used to simplify textures, thereby bringing sharper emotional or narrative focus (for example in Scene 2 of *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* (2014), or from bar 73 of *Angelus* (2014)). Chorales also have specific connotations in the rhetoric of western Art Music, and these connotations are often evoked in the original work.

1.3 Summation
The work of any artists may be seen as the sum of their preoccupations. These are influenced by the social, political, aesthetic and cultural environment that artist inhabits. They are also influenced strongly by the social, political, aesthetic and cultural heritage of those artists and by the extent to which they chooses to engage with that heritage in their artistic practice. A detailed survey of the repertoire in which this body of work is to be placed will reveal how much of that heritage this composer shares with his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.
Chapter 2. A survey of Australian music for the contrabass

There are over thirty works for contrabass composed by Australians, the majority of which are held at The Australian Music Centre. These compositions range from short pieces for unaccompanied contrabass, to substantial concertante works. They represent most of the compositional styles and approaches adopted by Australian composers in the past forty years. This is a survey of those works, focussing on key pieces.

A survey of the Australian repertoire for one particular instrument is an unusual undertaking; the only similar works published are theses on Australian music for organ, clarinet, piccolo and percussion. Timothy McEwen’s 1998 masters thesis is on Australian organs; that is to say the instruments themselves with a smaller focus on the repertoire. However, McEwen does focus on a handful of compositions by Australians. He has chosen to look in detail at works by composers who are not themselves organists (for example, Moya Henderson, Anne Carr-Boyd and Graeme Koehne) and so represent a more generalist approach to writing for the instrument. Richard Mason’s 2013 doctoral thesis on clarinet repertoire is closer in scope to the present study. Mason aims to use clarinet repertoire to “examine aspects of the development of Australian New Music” (Mason, 2013, p2). Mason has some detailed analytical notes on a handful of frequently performed Australian works for the clarinet, namely Michael Smetanin’s The Ladder of Escape, Ross Edwards’ Ulpirra and Ariel’s Music, a concerto by Brett Dean. Mason includes an appendix listing over 1200 scores for the instrument held at the Australian Music Centre; clearly, an attempt at a comprehensive survey would be impractical.

Mason’s interviews with composers are revealing, particularly about what attracts composers to one particular instrument; and it is clear that the clarinet is particularly attractive partly because ‘the different registers of the clarinet have such striking colours’ (Andrew Ford quoted in Mason 2013 p.177). Similarly, composers often cite the great timbral range of the contrabass as its most attractive feature (Turetzky 1974, Dresser 2010).
Paul Tanner’s 1995 masters thesis examines new percussion compositions by West Australian composers. His perspective is entirely that of the performer. The same approach is a characteristic of Melinda McNicol’s 2009 thesis examining aspects of Australian writing for the piccolo.

There is a more substantial body of international work which discusses the advanced timbral possibilities of the contrabass. The size of this instrument means that advanced playing techniques achieve their intended effects more easily. The trail was blazed by Bertram Turetzky in his book *The Contemporary Contrabass* (1974). Much of what Turetzky describes is still very much relevant forty years later, although his discussion of electronic modification of sound involves long obsolete technology and his apparent conviction that vocalisation was going to become a standard part of instrumental technique has not come to pass. Turetzky also commissioned and performed many new works for bass, including some of the early examples by Australian composers.

The successor to *The Contemporary Contrabass* is the DVD and CD set *Guts* (2010) by Turetzky’s former pupil, the composer, bassist and academic Mark Dresser. *Guts* is, among other things, a practical guide for the composer, containing tables of multiphonics and artificial harmonics, and demonstrations of very practical value.

Much of the other literature on composing for the bass as a solo instrument is inclined to be too technical for the composer who is not a bassist (Daino, 2010, Clark, 2006) or is concerned with acoustical phenomena that rely on a deep understanding of the physics of sound (Dresser 2008, Thelin 2011).

The compositions surveyed are sorted into groups according to the broadest definition of their compositional approach. The purpose of this rough taxonomy is to show common characteristics more clearly and to place the portfolio of creative work in its musical context more clearly.
2.1 Mainstream Works

Mainstream contemporary compositions represent the modernist tradition of recent Australian, European and American composers. This category is broad and diverse, with a relatively large number of pieces from the entire time period under discussion.

Peter Tahourdin’s *Dialogue no.3* (1978) for flute and double bass was also written for Bertram Turetzky and his wife, Nancy, a flutist. It consists of a number of episodes in different moods that are linked thematically. Stylistically, it represents the European mainstream of this period, with textures and gestures typical of such composers as Luciano Berio (Berio, 1965). The work is tightly structured and is built on motifs based on the intervals of the perfect and diminished fifth, the minor ninth and their augmentations, diminutions, inversions and so on. The instruments are truly in dialogue most of the time with a great deal of antiphonal and contrapuntal interplay, using such techniques as imitation and atonal species counterpoint.

The episodes vary in mood from the expressive (example 1: after rehearsal mark 13, page 4) to the playful (example 2: after rehearsal mark 5, page 2)
to the severely Shostakovian. (example 3: after rehearsal mark 16, page 5),

yet the piece has a strong sense of unity owing to Tahourdin’s skills using motivic
development in the European tradition. Tahourdin makes a particular feature near
the end of moving the bow slowly from the bridge to the fingerboard in tremolando
bowing. This is an early example of graduated (or nuanced) extended techniques and
a highly effective one.

The first concerto written for contrabass by an Australian composer is Barry
Conyngham’s *Shadows of Noh* (1979). This is another piece written for Bertram
Turetzky.

*Shadows of Noh* contains a highly detailed, virtuosic and bravura part for the soloist.
It consists largely of a series of gestures, including some aleatoric elements, and
varyingly complex musical textures.

The use of the perfect intervals of the fourth, fifth and octave gives this work a very
distinctive resonance. These intervals allow Conyngham to make full use of the
sonorities of the bass’ open strings (and those of the other bowed instruments) which
adds to the distinctiveness of the sound world in *Shadows of Noh*. This bold and
imaginative idea, combined with the mainstream avant-garde gestures of the time,
make this a memorable work.

*Selen* (1983) by James Paull is a work for solo contrabass that has some imaginative
touches, clearly influenced by the composer’s work as a guitarist. These include,
hammer-on and –off techniques, sometimes combined with Bartok pizzicato and a
muffled open string, played by placing a left hand finger as close to the nut as possible
and stopping the string vibrating freely.
Bruce Cale's *Freedom* (1984) uses many extended techniques, and a good deal of this piece is played behind the bridge. Even in less adventurous passages, such as the one quoted for left hand pizzicato over an arco open string, there is a good deal of timbral imagination and careful study of the instrument shown (example 4).

A work which explores extended techniques for both the contrabass and its accompanying piano is *Suspended Preludes* (1993) by Andrew Schultz. This piece consists of seven miniature movements, most of which explore the sonorities of a single extended technique or group of techniques. This is an inspired idea, as it allows the full timbre and gestural potential of these techniques to be appreciated on their own terms, without the clutter of a heavy texture of many other timbres.

The seventh and final movement, *Trans*, explores the contrast between the intensity of high, expressive notes in arco and the cooler timbre of arco harmonics. This is a highly subtle and imaginative use of colour without extending the instruments technique very far.

Schultz does extend techniques significantly further in the third of these miniatures, *Piano Drum*. It is entirely unpitched and percussive. Both piano and bass strike the bodies of their instruments as the exclusive means of sound production. However, Schultz mandates three ‘pitches’ for the bass and five for the piano; clearly meaning pitches relative to one another, rather than pitch in its absolute sense. Schultz specifies which part of the bass should be struck, but does not say with which part of the hand. In so doing, he has explored one area of timbral variety but not another. Noticeable differences in tone colour can be obtained using the fingertips, knuckles, palms and even fingernails. These effects are ones explored more fully in *The Light Fantastic*. 
The darkness of the bass’ timbre is a common theme with many composers for the instrument, and this is the case with *Dark Side* (1995, revised 1998) by Andrew Ford. The work contains striking and immediate contrasts in dynamics, mood, tone colour and pitch in a series of almost theatrical gestures. Ford pushes the technical limitations of the instrument as far as he possibly can in this work and seems to have borrowed some techniques from guitar playing, including (and these are surmises based on how this passage could be played) harp harmonics for the left hand (with doubling stopping) and the apparent use of a grand barre to finger some quadruple-stop chords (apparently non-arpeggiated in arco). The two examples quoted below show these techniques and the abrupt contrast in this piece. (bar 47 page 1 and bar 95, page 2). They devices are not as formidable to play as they first appear because of the very slow tempo. (example 5)

![Musical example](image)

*Dark Side* is also a piece containing many very thoughtful subtleties. It is one of the few works of this period that nuances bow position in relation to the bridge, and makes much use of moving to and from the ponticello and tasto positions. Ford also makes subtle contrast in different flautando-type timbres by using arco without vibrato, tremolando and harmonics.

This nuanced approach became more general by 2010 when Barry Conyngham returned to the contrabass concerto *Kangaroo Island*. 
The first movement opens with a theme that is recapitulated at the end of the final movement, at which time it is placed in tonal context and revealed to be based on the following transposed Dorian mode. (Figure 1)

The first movement is sparse and rather desolate, but contains a rare example of virtuosic pizzicato writing for the solo bass and concludes with the introduction of a highly dissonant chorale texture in the strings (example 6: bar 69, page 9).

The second movement is often harsh in texture and uses rapidly repeated notes on the string instruments in a percussive, almost aggressive series of gestures. In these passages, Conyngham exploits subtleties in differences in string attack without seeing the need to employ any extended techniques. This is highly effective writing for the instruments, and reflects a tendency in Australian string writing in recent years that has been led and championed by Matthew Hindson (for example in *Crime and Punishment*, 2010).

It is Conyngham’s lack of extended techniques for the bass in *Kangaroo Island* that make it the exception in the repertoire rather than the rule. He does, in the third movement, move trills to the ponticello position and back again. This is a novel combination of effects and a very striking one. It is also an instance of a nuanced approach to techniques like sul ponticello, vibrato, sul tasto and even harmonics which is very much a feature of the most recent works surveyed. It may well be that the second decade of the twenty-first century is the one where few if any new instrumental techniques are developed, but a more gradual and nuanced approach to their composition and execution is the area to be developed – the dimmer switch is replacing to on/off button. In this important regard, compositions for the contrabass are reflective of a more general trend in music.
Of the five concertante works for contrabass written by Australians, Barry Conyngham has written two, in 1979 and 2010 near the extreme ends of the time-scale of this study. The early work, *Shadows of Noh*, is far more avant-garde in its treatment of the solo instrument and is far more radical in its compositional approach in general than the recent Kangaroo Island. To what extent this is a reflection of a personal evolution on the part of Conyngham as a composer as opposed to a new conservatism among Australian composers is open to debate, but it is a remarkable change.

In 2010, Matthew Hindson composed *Crime and Punishment*, a relatively short concertante work for contrabass and string orchestra. It is an archetype of Hindson’s writing, in that it contrasts episodes of grimly loud dissonance with quiet reflective moments and passages of great rhythmic verve and vitality (example 7).

The above example, from bars 41-43, is typical of Hindson’s music in this mood. The rhythm has a clear straight-ahead four to a bar feel, but has enough rhythmic sophistication to make it interesting as well as toe-tapping. Of all Australian composers, Matthew Hindson is the one who perceives and exploits the greatest amount of rhythmic edge out of the string instruments, a sound-world explored to the fullest extent in works such as *Homage to Metallica* (1993) and *In Memoriam* (2000). In some passages in *Crime and Punishment*, the colour and pitch of the notes is chosen to make it sound more like a drum kit solo than anything else (example 8: page 32, bar 166).
In *Crime and Punishment*, Hindson also uses the repetition of these ostinato figures with crescendo and thickening texture to build climax. These sorts of techniques clearly draw inspiration from popular dance styles of the twenty-first century. ‘Dance styles’ in this context means such things as rap, house, techno and so on. Hindson even manages to evoke the ‘epic’ sonority of the dance floor anthem in this work, thereby obtaining far more raw power from a string ensemble than seems possible (example 9: page 26, bar 185).

By drawing on these sorts of techniques (syncopated ostinato, four very clear beats to the bar, textural thickening by adding more layers of ostinati, rigid tempo) Hindson is making his a more international voice than those of his compatriots. No other notable Australian composer is so strongly influenced by these African-American derived styles but they are very much part of the compositional language of such composers as Thomas Ades (*Asyla*, 1997) and Steven Mackie (*Turn the Key*, 2006).
Furthermore, Rap and its associated styles is the principal means for music expression for some groups of Australians, such as young Aborigines. (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, 2004). In this sense, *Crime and Punishment* is an exceptional work. It is the only composition in this survey which encompasses an international compositional approach which has apparently been largely avoided, at least so far, by other Australian composers. There are a few exceptions, for example the reiterative demisemiquavers in the fourth movement of *Kangaroo Island* could be seen in this light, as is the use of ostinato in the most recent bass concerto by an Australian composer, *Lake Ice* (2013) by Mary Finsterer.

*Lake Ice* is a concerto of imagination and subtlety, and its style contrasts quite strongly with much of Finsterer’s previous output. The solo contrabass opens the work alone and immediately begins a delicate exploration of timbre which is a hallmark of *Lake Ice*. The opening figure (example 10)

![Example 10](image)

is a cell on which much of the opening and closing passages of the piece is based. The transformations to this and other themes are constant and subtle. *Lake Ice* is in a single, continuous movement but has the slower, more widely-spaced music at the beginning and the end.

This use of extended techniques for subtlety and colouristic nuance, rather than for gestural novelty, is also followed in the orchestra. Icy, ethereal chords on string harmonics are given extra sheen and perspective by the addition and subtraction of orchestral colours such as bowed vibraphone and woodwind flutter-tonguing. This is a highly effective and imaginative way of colouring a musical line, creating a constantly changing timbral patina (example 11: bars 17-19 notated at concert pitch).
Another admirable characteristic in Finsterer’s use of tone colour and instrumental technique is the way in which she nuances certain effects, gradually introducing them. These effects include gradually introducing tremolando, ‘late shaping’ of crescendos and moving the bow towards the bridge while increasing vibrato (example 12: bars 173-175, strings only shown).
One particularly striking feature of *Lake Ice* is the solo instruments ‘strange and beautiful’ sonorities, particularly in its ‘seldom heard’ upper register (Finsterer, 2013, introduction). Finsterer makes very effective play of the contrast between the warmth of high arco notes and the glassy, icy quality of harmonics in the same register. This contrast is particularly telling on a solo contrabass (e.g. bars 563-606). There are playful qualities, too, in all the subtleties of *Lake Ice*; in its frequent use of triple rhythms and in the lightness of its textures. This playfulness is of great importance in works of this sort of imaginative scope, particularly in works which were inspired by the imaginations of children. Slightly paradoxically, this playfulness with extended instrumental techniques can be seen as an indication of stylistic maturity. Finsterer has the confidence to be something other than grimly earnest in her use of instrumentation; and has an audience whose sensibilities are perfectly happy with her approach. This can be seen as an indication of broader trends in thinking about new music on the part of both composers and audiences.
2.2 Pieces with Electronics.

The difficulty with some of the older works in this group is that the technology they employ, innovative at the time, is now almost entirely obsolete. This makes performance of the works in question difficult today. It is very much to be hoped that some four-track reel-to-reel tape recorders are being preserved in working order; the time is surely coming soon when historically informed performance of works of this type, quite a substantial repertoire, are being staged.

These works include Barry Conyngham’s *Playback* (1973) written for Turetzy and a four-track reel-to-reel tape recorder and other audio equipment.

Douglas Knehan’s work *Elegies for Merilee* (1989) is scored for solo contrabass and tape (of two other contrabasses) or for three contrabasses. In that sense, its use of electronics is somewhat limited; indeed unnecessary if three bassists are available.

*No More Rock Groynes* (2009) by David Young is for unaccompanied contrabass to be played with a contact microphone instead of a bow, although what the bassist is to play is unclear from the unexplained graphic score.
2.3 Pieces with Complexity

New Complexity is a musical style and compositional approach that, in its most narrow definition, is associated with a few pioneering British composers such as Brian Ferneyhough and Ian Dillon. For the purposes of this argument, 'new complexity' works are those that have been influenced by this musical movement rather than works that could be said to be archetypal pieces in this style.

*Along the Edge of Darkness* (1999) by Dominic Karski is work (like *The Dark Fantastic* and *Dark Side* (Ford, 1999) influenced by the darkness suggested by the bass’ timbre. This work for unaccompanied contrabass relies almost entirely on extended techniques and novel timbres.

The work shows a richer palate of tone colour than any previous Australian composition for this instrument, including half harmonics and the gradual change from stopped notes through half harmonic to full harmonics; a technique which is particularly successful on the contrabass. Karski also nuances the levels of certain techniques including tasto and ponticello and, in a very bold stroke, col legno and left hand string slapping. (example 13: bar 44, page 3)

The example quoted above is for open strings only, there is a scordatura used throughout the piece. Technically and timbrally *Along the Edge of Darkness* is the most advanced contrabass piece by an Australian composer in the twentieth century.
Karski composed a longer chamber work featuring the contrabass four years later. *motion+form* (2003) is scored for percussion, harp and bass, and explores a variety of timbral possibilities for this trio, principally the bell-like timbres that are available on these three instruments. The bass part itself is highly percussive; indeed, other than some unstable and sliding harmonics, it is entirely percussive. *motion+form* also explores timbral variety in percussion writing for the bass. Karski is careful to differentiate fingers and thumbs striking the neck and the soundboard. He also distinguishes between left hand fingers striking the strings and releasing the strings with a strum. Many of these more percussive techniques are borrowed from the world of guitar music.

*Die Zelle* (1996) by Matthew Bieniek contains some of the most complex writing encountered in this study. It is a chamber work and is score for piccolo, violin, harp, bass clarinet and double bass. The bass part in this work has a variety of roles, including an opening solo which exploits double stop altered unisons to a very large degree, including by the use of microtones, glissandi and differentiated dynamics (example 14: page 1 bar 5).

There are several episodes in *Die Zelle* in strongly contrasting moods. To maximise contrast, Bieniek tends to favour the extreme registers of these instruments. It is also worth noting the extreme complexity of the rhythms, dynamics, timbre and pitch, a style explored by few Australian composers, although it is more typical of recent European composers. (example 15: page 6, bar 40).
Soon after this, the work moves to a pianissimo chorale without even vibrato to disturb the primal peace. The contrast with the carefully-ordered apparent chaos of the preceding duet is very striking.

*Scherzo Alla Francescana* (1990, revised 1994) by Claudio Pompili is almost a treatise on extended techniques for solo bass. Pompili is extremely ambitious in the demands he makes on his soloist in this unaccompanied work and its single page contains a number of pioneering techniques. These include differing types of col legno bowing (scraping, striking, bouncing; with full wood or half hair/half wood). It also includes ‘half harmonics’ which have become fairly standard gestures in low string writing in recent years, but this is an early example. The strings are played towards the bridge, on the bridge (quite a dramatic difference in sound), behind the bridge. There is even a quiet lyrical passage played behind the bridge. The tailpiece itself is even bowed in a recurrent gesture and Pompili makes extensive use of gettato or bouncing bowing.

*Pit* (1981) by Andrew Ford consists of a series of highly complex gestures with some measure of silence between them so both listeners and performers can reorientate themselves to their new musical environment. The contrabass part is extremely demanding with rapid passage-work, extremes of pitch and dynamics and very quick changes between arco, regular pizzicato and Bartok pizzicato.
2.4 Conservative and Pedagogical Works

There have always been a large number of composers whose work could be described as conservative and it shows little or no influence of the contemporary avant-garde. Their work is sometimes neglected by scholars and critics, but often shows a high level of technical ability and artistic integrity.

Examples in this repertoire that follow this approach include Robert Allworth’s *Aspects* (1978), Houston Dunleavy’s *Burning* (1997) and *A Little Suite* (1999) by Geoffrey Allen. More remarkable works are Nigel Butterley’s *Nocturnes* (1978) for four contrasses and two tour-de-force solo pieces by Larry Sitsky, *Variations on Waltzing Matilda* (2007) and the highly effective *Beowulf* (2007), which includes some of the most darkly brooding music in this repertoire. (example 16: page 2, bar 28 – 31).

Pedagogical pieces are often, but not always, a subset of works with a conservative approach. This is true with this repertoire and is represented by such works as *as if in a dream...* (1996) by Mark Clement Pollard and *Binary Code* (2010) by Richard Charlton.
2.5 Pieces Influenced by World Music Styles

Many Australian composers have integrated various world music styles into their works. In some cases, the musical language is that of the composer's own culture, which is true of the post-modal pitch organisation found in the portfolio of creative work, reflecting its composer's background in British folk music. In the other examples cited in this survey, that is not the case. Most often it appears to represent a wish to portray Australia as geographically and culturally part of Asia.

*Seeds of Passion* (1999) by Andrian Pertout. Uses the scale system of Indian classical music, which divides the octave into sixty-six shrutis or harmonic divisions. Pertout uses a very detailed system of pitch notation. This is necessary because he divides the semitone into approximately five microtones (Pertout’s comma having a value of between 19 and 22 cents, depending on the interval in question.) The two following examples show this complexity. (example 17: bar 6, page 1 and example 18: bar 41, page 3).

It is significant that this is the only work in this body of repertoire that uses microtonal inflections of pitch. This is one area of compositional technique which has received attention from Australian composers in recent years but has not appeared in recent contrabass literature. This is particularly surprising, given the bass’ superior capacity to inflect pitch in very small intervals indeed. The use of glissando gettato, discussed in Chapter 3, does not come into this category because the intermittent pitches are given as approximations.
From a Lake of Honey... (2007) by Betty Beath explores the lyrical side of the bass in the context of music that evokes the sounds of Java. The piano provides much of the more obviously Javanese sonorities, such as quiet, gong-like clusters and heterophonic treatment of a thin texture.

In Min-amé (1990) by Michael Whiticker there are clear African structural and thematic influences as well as rhythmic figures derived from gamelan orchestras. In this repertoire, this is a unique fusing of two world music traditions.

2.6 ‘Australian’ Works

Largely under the influence of Peter Sculthorpe, there have always been Australian composers whose work sounds Australian. These may loosely be characterised as a nationalist group.

Booroora (1990) is a trio for clarinet, percussion and bass by Ross Edwards. It is immediately recognisable as Edward’s work; the pedal notes, the disrupted ostinati, the use of open consonances are all here. Edwards in Booroora achieves his characteristic sense of space and an unmistakable Australian-ness of sound that he manages to achieve without resorting to cliché.

Colin Bright’s concerto Young Tree Green (1992) is a work with a self-consciously Australian sound world. The following excerpt (page 7, bar 32) features many of the most recognisably Australian musical gestures – regular beat, clapping sticks and other woody timbres, slowing descending melody with long notes in it. It owes a good deal to John Antill’s ballet score Corroboree (1946) (example 19).
One of the most popular and most often performed piece in this entire repertoire is *Yandarra* (1998) by Matthew Hindson. The work opens with some stormy, rough effects for bass alone.

The main body of *Yandarra* is based on a more lyrical theme based around a characteristically Hindson melodic motif (example 20).

There is a clear affinity between this melody and the themes of Hindson’s teacher Peter Sculthorpe and, for that matter, the melodic shapes of Aboriginal song.
2.7 Jazz and Post-Minimalist Works
There are surprisingly few jazz-influenced works in this repertoire and they include Bruce Cale's *Concertino* (1979) and Eve Duncan's *Europa* (2010). There is the clear influence of jazz in one piece in the portfolio of original works, *The Dark Fantastic* (2013).

*Refrains* (1989) by Robert Davidson offers the bass as a lyrical instrument playing a series of simple cantabile melodies over a perpetually moving and evolving piano line. This post-minimalist approach is particularly successful in this instance, because Davidson has allowed the process-derived piano part to form an accompaniment to a string of contrabass melody which gradually unfolds, giving an almost conversational sense to the musical discourse. There are similarities to this approach in the portfolio pieces *Billy Bray Abides in the Light* (2013) and, to a lesser extent, *Angelus* (2014).

2.8 Summation
A survey of this nature necessarily gathers data that is qualitative. In no small part, this is because the classification of each piece into a loose category of style has considerable elements of subjectivity about it. Nevertheless, the detail in the analytical data above does demonstrate that this repertoire indeed reflects broader trends in Australian music in the past forty years, both in terms of the aesthetic and cultural perspectives of the composers and in the advances in compositional techniques for string instruments.
Chapter 3 Exegesis of solo music for Contrabass and for Cello

This chapter discusses four pieces composed in 2013. *The Light Fantastic* and *The Dark Fantastic* are companion works for contrabass and piano and they explore a variety of timbres in a somewhat playful manner. *On the Heaviness of Sorrow* is a study in using Baroque rhetoric in a modern context to express grief. This body of work also includes *Gilded Passages*, a composition for solo cello which acted as a study for some of the bass music in this portfolio.

In the early stages of the composition process, a number of studies of various string techniques were written to explore the efficacy and efficiency of certain string techniques. These techniques would later become critical elements in the solo contrabass music. Opportunities were taken to examine these techniques with string players and discuss their success or failure.

Examples include studies for solo instrument involving playing across all four strings. These were created to deepen understanding of string fingering on various instruments (examples 21, 22, 23).

**Four string study 1**

![Four string study 1](image)
Studies on single notes were also written. Their purpose was to explore timbral difference between strings, between stopped notes and harmonics and between different instruments (example 24).
Entirely technical lists of harmonics and their availability and feasibility on various string on different instruments were also created (figure 3).

Harmonic 'A's available

The idea of growing and shrinking vibrato was to become an important expressive technique in the portfolio of compositions. It seemed important to write and hear studies that placed this in a very simple texture and musical context (example 25).
3.1 Gilded Passages

Included in this collection of contrabass music is the cello work *Gilded Passages*. This was written early in 2013 for a specific masterclass opportunity and has served as a more advanced study for many of the more advanced techniques that subsequently been employed on the contrabass.

Specifically, *Gilded Passages* allowed further exploration of the following techniques which are used in one or more of *The Light Fantastic*, *The Dark Fantastic* and *On The Heaviness of Sorrow*.

- Complex time signatures, but with a regular pulse.
- Rhythmically measured gettato glissando (e.g. b7), which is more successful with intervals bigger than the semitones used here.
- Use of different parts of the hand for percussive effect, and how best to notate that. Borrowing fingering terminology from guitar music is efficient.
- Extended pizzicato techniques, particularly strumming. The passage from bar 31 shows a number of interesting features which are worth further exploitation in later pieces. They include the use of the thumb in relatively low positions, so it can function as a sort of *grande barre* in parallel movement of this kind. The obvious ukulele borrowing is exploring a little-known side of the cello. Strumming orchestral string instruments is a highly effective technique, but needs careful management. The principal difficulty with the left hand
movement in the sort of passage quoted below is the fine, independent adjustment required of the fingers to maintain true intonation. In this respect, a borrowing from guitar music looses something in translation (example 26: bb 32-33).

Another slightly disappointing aspect of this sort of writing for cello (or for contrabass e. g. in The Light Fantastic bb. 56 ff.) is the lack of sheer power this strumming generates. Experiments with plectra of various kinds were not successful.

- A good deal of the writing in Gilded Passages, particularly the opening and closing sections, is arco writing resembling the solo cello music of Bach, at least superficially. There are interpolations of more modern techniques such as gettato glissando and an 11/8 time signature is clearly not Baroque. However, the piece evokes the restrained decoration and symmetrical logic of this important body of work for the instrument, as this example shows (example 27: bb 6-9).
3.2 The Light Fantastic

This short piece for contrabass and piano seeks to explore extended techniques for the bass in a playful context. Most repertoire that uses extended techniques does so in a series of very serious and disjunct gestures, for example *Along the Edge of Darkness* (Karski, 1999) *Pit* (Ford, 1981). This piece integrates some of those techniques into a more conventionally fluent musical sound world. It also hopes to capture some of the sense of playful experimentation that is the foundation of extended techniques. In other words, all of these unconventional ways of playing an instrument were invented when someone started playing around with that instrument. Play in this sense is both creative and jocose.

*The Light Fantastic* is structured on an obvious use of Fibonacci numbers as models. The episodes are, sequentially, 21, 13, 8, 5, 3, 2 and 1 bars long (figure 4).

| A extended with episode, bridge and recap. | B arco. New tonal centre. | C strummed | C – A bridge | A | B | A |
The piece is also in a clear ABACABA rondo form, with alternating episodes being the ‘A’ material that is characterised by the use of harp harmonics. The B music is a high arco passage and the C music features strumming.

Some extended playing techniques in *The Light Fantastic* are described in table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harp harmonics</strong></td>
<td>This is a technique borrowed from guitar playing. The thumb of the right hand touches the harmonic node, while a right hand finger plucks the string. The major advantage is that the left hand is free to play an independent line. Harp harmonics can never be played loudly, and the higher they are in the harmonic series, the less likely they are to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strum</strong></td>
<td>Again, a guitar-influenced technique and more successful in this context than a classical pizzicato, which has a much more subdued effect. This passage starts in thumb position in a relatively low position to facilitate the parallel microtonal movement of the notes. This is a technique also explored in <em>Gilded Passages</em>. In <em>The Light Fantastic</em>, this technique does not move beyond descending parallel chords (with their association with country and jug bands – hence the use of chord VII as a dominant in bar 48). However, there is a great deal of potential in strumming and much work to do in this area for both instrumentalists and composers. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote that pizzicato technique was underdeveloped in 1912 (<em>Principles of Orchestration</em>, p.22). The same could be said today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of fingertips to strike both bass and piano is a major feature of *The Light Fantastic*, *The Dark Fantastic* and *Gilded Passages*. Guitar fingering notation is used to aid the players in realising the rhythmic intentions. Variety in percussive colour is achieved by striking the instrument with different parts of the hand (knuckles, palm, thumb) and by striking different parts of the instrument (strings, scroll, ribs, belly). These are tabulated in below.

### Table 2: Percussive techniques on the contrabass involving striking with the hands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fingertip</th>
<th>Fingernail</th>
<th>Palm</th>
<th>Knuckle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belly</strong></td>
<td>Both hands effective. Resonant sound with focussed and sharp attack.</td>
<td>Both hands effective. Resonant sound with focussed and very sharp attack.</td>
<td>Extremely resonant and boomy.</td>
<td>Resonant with very sharp attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Back</strong></td>
<td>This is difficult to reach and play effectively and its sounds are very similar to those on the belly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tailpiece</strong></td>
<td>High pitched. Lots and lots of resonant overtones form the strings.</td>
<td>Rather like a percussive guitar.</td>
<td>Similar to fingertips, but inferior sound.</td>
<td>Similar to fingertips, but inferior sound.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The hand percussion on the instrument is made possible by the harp harmonics. These are played by the right hand only, thus freeing the left hand to be a percussion instrument. This situation led to the unusual notation in the A music of this score, with the contrabass having a sort of modified grand staff (example 28: bb 1-4).

The timbres of harp harmonics and hand percussion, led to the need for a very light, high, *una corda* part in the piano. The piece's complex time signatures exist in the world of a clearly discernable, if irregular beat. The piece is in D major, partly for practical reasons to do with the viability of harmonics, and partly for reasons of brightness. All of these elements combine to create the lightest possible work for one of the heaviest instruments.

### 3.3 The Dark Fantastic

The *Dark Fantastic* is a companion piece to *The Light Fantastic* and is concerned with the more appealing associations of darkness. It is neither sombre nor sinister. The piece is based on a rather sparse riff pattern. This is not repeated explicitly throughout the movement, but is ever-present as a modified or implied element of texture. All other material in this movement is derived from this riff (figure 4).
The piece is based on a scale that could be defined as dorian/blues (see the notes on performance in Bruce Cale’s *Concertino* (Cale, 1979, p3)) with A as the tonic (figure 5).

The scale can be transposed and new pitch material derived. For example, from bar 20, the tonality is rather unstably based on C, then F# (which is the flattened 5th of the blues scale on C – a derivative of a derivative) and by bar 24 has moved to B (derived from the scale built on F#). From bar 29 – bar 43, the harmony is built on E, thus implying a retransition based on the dominant of the home key. This passage coincides with the obvious climax of the work; a climax that is in retreat before the return to the tonic. Because of this removal of the link between harmony-based form and the structural placement of the climax, and the blues-derived pitch material, the formal elements that may be seen to be classical are treated in an original manner.

The piano writing in *The Dark Fantastic* is mainly in the jazz style. It references a number of different jazz and blues idioms, including cool jazz (bars 51-54), stride playing (bars 35-36) and the sort of sustained jazz chords over a walking bass that is characteristic of certain swing styles (bars 21-24). The pianist is also required to play the instrument as unpitched percussion for the first twelve bars, and to use the very lowest notes in the quietest dynamics at the end. These opening and closing passages, as well as being very quiet and low in pitch, are also extremely thinly scored. The final two iterations of the riff featured two entirely silent bars, an extra beat of silence added (in bar 57) and brief arco gestures in the contrabass, thus increasing the amount of silence. This leads to the end of the piece which is the quietest whisper that could be contrived for these performing media.

The contrabass part in *The Dark Fantastic* has its own technical and musical challenges. The mood and dynamics of this piece change quite rapidly and move to extremes of register and dynamics. From bar 9 to bar 12, the rapidly alternating pizzicato and arco passages give the impression of the bass having two distinct voices in dialogue. There is a great deal of bass music in this piece which is both rhythmic and lyrical, bar 17-18 is a good example. In contrast, the use of ornaments and
feathered beams in bars 30-31 give more of an improvisatory feel to the solo line. As with On the Heaviness of Sorrow and Gilded Passages, climax is marked by the apassionata repeating of a very high note. This gesture has become something of a fingerprint in the idiolect of this body of work.

Extended string techniques are not a central feature of The Dark Fantastic, although there is a passage of string slapping (bar 40-43) at the end of the retransition. There is also the recurrence the gesture that involves gettato and glissando simultaneously (e.g. bar 11, bar 52), another highly individual feature of the solo works in this portfolio. In these piece, all of these instances have feathered beams, reflecting the natural tendency of a bouncing bow to become quicker as it is drawn towards its point. In other pieces, particularly Douglas Mawson Walking Alone, gettato bowing of this kind is employed, but in measured rhythms. This requires considerably more bow control on the part of the players, particularly when tackled simultaneously by an ensemble, for example Douglas Mawson Walking Alone bars 142-143.

3.4 On the Heaviness of Sorrow

On the Heaviness of Sorrow is a piece about grief and loss which all humans experience and to which we must respond somehow. The work takes its rhetorical language from the mannerisms of Baroque composers, which, somewhat paradoxically, can appear to be more authentic expressions of sorrow than the more exaggerated gestures of Romanticism.

The piano follows the well-trodden path of chromatic descent to represent grief. Each of the four voices in the piano descends slowly and not at the same time as the other voices. This rhythmic augmentation of the duration of the dropping of pitch is more subtle than repeating a descending ground. The descending chromatic chords carry functional harmonic implications, particularly as they descend from C# minor (with added second) to G# major; which may be analysed as a sort of Schenkerian half-movement stretched out across the piece. However, these are blurred by the almost constant use of pedal and references to remote keys that may be read into the transitional chords (which is to say all of them, except the first and the last (figure 6)).
The contrabass, too, consists of descending lines. The idea is to draw the ears and heart downwards. This is a technique has also been used by the same composer in the orchestral piece *Pieta* (1995), which was, in turn, inspired by the eponymous Michelangelo sculpture and its drooping, sorrowful lines.

The very limited tessitura of the piano part is a careful choice to reflect the program of the piece and to contrast with the more demonstrative gestures of the contrabass.

- Many of the dynamics and expressive techniques required of the pianist are not notated until towards the end of the piece. There is a deliberate intention that the pianist should make his or her own expressive interpretation of what is, apparently, a rather bland piano part. Towards the end, the timing of the pedal coming off and on is very important because it finally removes the most nebulous tonal implications of the piano part, and is notated very carefully (example 29: bb 29-31).
The contrabass is played mainly in arco in an expressive style, although there are some subtle changes of colour indicated, the most important of which is the increase in vibrato notated with this symbol which was first used in *The Light Fantastic*.

There are also features such as left hand pizzicato and unison double stops.

The piece is unbarred, but there is a clear pulse in the piano part. *On the Heaviness of Sorrow* calls for two independent lines of rubato from both players, to create a deliberately disjunct texture. This presents a small challenge for the accompanist, as he or she must not keep in perfect time with the soloists, except for critical moments. This, for an accompanist, is counter-intuitive.
The obvious element of thematic unity is the descent by step; however, the bass part is also constructed quite carefully from a number of important sub-themes. These include the lower mordent figure presented at the very opening and the repeated note (often gathering intensity). Example 30 (bar 3) shows both of these cells used consecutively.

The series of extremely low ‘gong’ notes that toll in the piano from time to time also provides the pitch set from which the starting note of each major bass phrase is taken (figure 7).

- This is a very important structural element because it acts as a ligature between two instruments that are operating on different planes of texture. This theme also appears in a single statement in the bass part nearly at the end of the piece (example 31: b 30).
3.5 Summation
As with the repertoire surveyed in Chapter 2, these works show two distinct strands of development. One is the aesthetic; an artist is trying to express original and, in some cases, deeply personal ideas using the performing media. The use of solo contrabass as a vehicle for personal expression is a rare choice, but the instrument's range of eloquence in these pieces justifies it. The second strand is the continual development of new performance techniques which expand the timbral palate. The studies written prior to the compositions show the importance of a thorough and methodical approach to these technical matters.
Chapter 4 – Exegesis of music for large ensembles.

The three pieces discussed in this chapter are concerned with religious affect; that is to say the emotional reaction of human beings to profound religious experience. In these pieces, that experience is conveyed through the medium of an angel. In monotheistic tradition, an angel is a messenger of the Almighty and is far removed from the saccharine cherubs of some contemporary depictions.

4.1 Billy Bray Abides in the Light

Billy Bray (1794 – 1868) was a Cornish miner and preacher. After a dissolute youth, Billy was converted to Christianity after a near-death experience in November 1823.

Billy was not a conventional man, nor was he a conventional preacher. His Christianity was not one of dour censoriousness, of condemnatory eyebrows and the creaking, dusty tomb of the eternal Sabbath; Billy was here to rejoice and frequently danced and shouted out of pure happiness. His energy was astonishing; he worked a twelve-hour shift in a tin mine, raised vegetables to feed his large family, often walked twenty miles on a Sunday to preach and built three chapels with his own hands. He never stopped celebrating his God and his life.

Billy is a hero. Not only a beloved hero of the Cornish people, nor even a hero only to Christians; Billy is a great hero of human happiness.

This work explores the exuberant, energetic joy that is so characteristic of Billy Bray. Even in its contemplative moments, there is an irrepressible energy in this music that reflects Billy’s dynamism.
• *Billy Bray Abides in the Light* in many ways served as a study for the larger work *Angelus*. It explores themes and techniques that have subsequently been developed. It also develops some features which had already become stylistic hallmarks before this piece was composed. Examples of this include and extended modalism in pitch organisation, nuancing of string techniques (including growing and shrinking vibrato, moving gradually from mezzo ponticello to arco naturale (e.g. Bar 8) and the use of very low notes as ‘gong’ effects (example 32: bb 57-62).

There are a number of techniques new to this idiolect that are explored in this work. These include minimalist-inspired phasing of lively material in the first third of the work, using the lowest string of a solo violin for lyrical passages (e.g. bars 17-26 – a timbre taken up again in the viola solo at the start of *Angelus*), the inclusion of chorales as an element of texture (e.g. bars 17–64) and high-pitched, repeated pedal notes (in the final third of the piece from bar 77 onwards).

• *Billy Bray Abides in the Light* was also the opportunity to explore the durational and structural technique of simultaneous mensuration. In this context, this term, which has its origins in the notation of early polyphonic music, means that a single theme is played simultaneously at more than one speed, with
those playings being mathematically related to one another by a simple ratio. It is a technique exploited with remarkable success in Thomas Ades’ orchestral work *Polaris* (2010). In *Billy Bray Abides in the Light*, the main theme (first introduced by the contrabass in bar 9) is played by that instrument and the right hand of the piano from bar 77, whilst the left hand simultaneously plays the same theme with notes four times as long (the example also shows clear and simple use of modal harmony in the Mixolydian on D, without additive notes to bring brightness to the finale (example 33: bb 77-87).
This ratio is not precise, as contemporary composers who employ mathematical models (e.g. Ades, Adams) appear to consider mathematics must serve music and not the other way around.
4.2 Angelus

The orchestral work *Angelus* develops the idea of simultaneous mensuration further. For example, in bars 212-248 the only theme of the work is proclaimed by the horns, violas and high woodwinds, while instruments in the tenor register (trombones, bassoons, cellos) play it with note values three times as long. Simultaneously the lowest instruments play a somewhat altered and occluded version of the theme with notes nine times as long as the originals.

- The philosophical principle behind the idea is found in the hermetic text called *The Emerald Tablet* and is *quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius*, meaning roughly; as in great, so in small. This clearly applies to the idea of simultaneous mensuration, but also to the fractal ideas used in the structure of the piece. Further, true to the spirit of this maxim, there are examples in *Angelus* where simultaneous mensuration of rhythm occurs in short passages. A notable example of this is in bars 51-53, an outburst of exuberance in a contemplative passage which is simultaneously uses three crotchets, three quavers and three semiquavers as rhythmic units (example 34: bb 51-53).
The number three is of critical importance to the structure of Angelus. This is largely for programmatic reasons. One meaning of the title is a reference to the Catholic devotion of the Angelus. The Angelus prayer is structured in threes. The macrostructure has three unequal parts (Angelus, Ora pro nobis, Oremus), the microstructure of the first part is built on three Ave Marias. The Angelus is prayed three times daily. The Angelus bell tolls three notes three times.

This composition is entirely structured on the number three from its smallest rhythm to its ternary architecture overall; principally on the 2-1, long-short relationship (which mirrors with how our heart beats, how we dance and is the rhythm of celebration for me). It is an example of a fractal or recursive approach to form that seems to be successful and is related to the simultaneous mensuration technique.

Each third of Angelus has its own distinct character and may be further divided into thirds, and those thirds in turn tend to reflect the 2-1, long-short ternary idea. However, the sections are linked and the links often disguised somewhat, so the sense of a series of unrelated episodes is diminished. Further unity is obtained by the monothematic nature of the piece. The diagrammatic representation of the piece is based on one sketched early in the composition process. This structural idea was critical to Angelus from its very conception (figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Retransition</th>
<th>Loud coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The passage between bars 144 and 156 (The second 1/3 of the second 1/3 of the first 1/3) contains the following rhythms simultaneously (figure 9):

\[\begin{align*}
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid \\
\mid & \ \ \ \ \mid & \ \ \ \ \mid
\end{align*}\]

This 'zooming in' shows the fractal properties of this piece from its biggest to its smallest durational units.

The melodic subject on which all of Angelus is based begins with three notes of the Vox Angelus mentioned in the introduction. This melodic cell also appears in Billy Bray Abides in the Light, And My Angel Whisper Peace to Me and Douglas Mawson Walking Alone. The rising fifth is a stirring sound, because of its natural resonance. Composers have known this time out of mind, and examples may be found in Gregorian Chant, Japanese ancient music and elsewhere. It is followed by a minor third, which adds a more human and emotive element to the theme (figure 10).

\[\text{\textit{Angelus}}\text{ also further explores some of the ideas studied in } \textit{Billy Bray Abides in the Light}, \text{ including high repeated pedal notes, ‘gong’ style low bass notes, meditative chorales which move from foreground to background and, above all, the idea of exploring joy in music; an emotion that composers have not considered often.} \]
4.3 And My Angel Whisper Peace to Me

- The angel theme appears in a different mood in the final work discussed in this chapter, *And My Angel Whisper Peace to Me*. The title is taken from *A Prayer for a Happy Death* (1840) by John Henry Newman. The angel theme is clearly present, but in a far quieter situation (example 34: bb 1-5).

![Lento tranquillo](image)

The modal pitch organisation in this work is much more inclined towards consonance; and its approach to matters such as rhythm and texture are very straightforward. This also reflects the purity of the timbre of the tin whistle and a wish to express music about an emotional state in a very straightforward way.

4.4 Summation

In terms of mood, *And My Angel Whisper Piece to Me* is something of an anomaly in this chapter; it is rare that a composer be so preoccupied with the idea of joy. This is an illustration of how this body of work has unique features as well as belonging to the time and place of the repertoire surveyed in Chapter 2. That this divergence should be more apparent in large ensemble repertoire is unsurprising. This is partly because so little of the repertoire in Chapter 2 was composed for large ensemble. It may also be that composers save their declaration for larger ensembles. In these genres they often make public statements of their personal position. It is no accident that the sub-title of *Angelus* is ‘A Declaration for Orchestra’.
Chapter 5 Exegesis of Dramatic Works

This chapter discusses *The Violin*, a piece for narrator and three instruments after the short story by Spike Milligan, and *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone*. The latter is a chamber opera for one singer, two cellos, two contrabasses, piccolo trumpet and recorded sound. It is the major work in the portfolio. *The Violin* served as something of a study for *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone*, particularly in the use of leitmotif in a dramatic setting.

5.1 The Violin

*The Violin* is a setting of a short story by Spike Milligan (1961). It is narrated and the instrumental music helps to tell the simple story. As is typical of Milligan’s writing, there is humour and the unexpected as well as a deep human sympathy. Each of the characters is represented by a theme and so the work is reminiscent, at least in spirit, of pieces like *Peter and the Wolf* (Prokofiev) and *The Soldier’s Tale* (Stravinsky).

*The Violin* is in a fairly straightforward minor-major tonality based around G minor and its nearly related keys. Some passages develop into more remote tonal areas (e.g. Db major around bar 153).

The flattened super-tonic leads to an exotic, indeed Semitic, flavour to some of the themes. This reflects the fact that two of the principal characters are Ashkenazi Jews.

The structure of the piece follows the narrative. There are five themes each representing the three characters in the story, the Depression and the Violin itself.

The Depression, (wistful, nostalgic: figure 11)

\[\text{music notation} \]

---
Joe, (solid and determined, yet the flattened notes add an element of pessimism as well as hinting at Ashkenazi heritage: figure 12)

Uncle Alfred, (old-fashioned, proper and a little fussy: figure 13)

The Old Man, (resolute but not as vigorous as it could be: figure 14)

The Violin, (high, wild, romantic, other-wordly: figure 15)

The themes are woven together sometimes when the characters interact. This sometimes occurs as polyphony (e. g. from bar 127), on other occasions an accompaniment figure is based on one of the character themes (e. g. from bar 153). These leitmotifs are also developed as the mood and situation changes (e. g. urgency from bar 78; overwhelming relief from bar 127).

Instruments are associated more with the motif than the character, although the upper register of the violin is reserved exclusively for the character of The Violin. The contrabass carries a good deal of the melodic argument, consistent the portfolio's emphasis on exploring the expressive capabilities of that instrument.

There are some ensemble difficulties in coordinating the narration with the instruments. For this reason, fermatas and ‘vamp’ bars are used to provide points of rest, so the narration and instrumental music can realign themselves in time if necessary.
5.2 Douglas Mawson Walking Alone

Douglas Mawson (1882 – 1958) was an Australian explorer and geologist, best known for his Antarctic expeditions in the heroic age of exploration. He led the Australasia Antarctic Expedition (1911-1914) and the action of this chamber opera takes place in the most famous episode of it. Mawson and two companions, Belgrave Ninnis and Xavier Mertz formed the Far Eastern Sledging team and set off in November 1912 to explore the coastal King George V Land. After five weeks, Ninnis fell down a crevasse and was lost, along with six dogs and the vast majority of the supplies. Mertz and Mawson turned back immediately, eating the remaining dogs to survive. Mertz soon sickened, probably as a result of toxic levels of vitamin A found in dogs’ livers. After a period of Mawson nursing him, Mertz died and Mawson was obliged to sledge the final 100 miles alone. He barely made it alive to the safety of his winter quarters, only to discover that the ship for Australia had sailed a few hours earlier. Mawson spent another winter on the ice before returning home.

The action of Douglas Mawson Walking Alone concerns the period between the death of Mertz and Mawson’s arrival at his winter base at Commonwealth Bay. Mawson (sung by a bass-baritone) is the only character in the opera. The piece is in five scenes and lasts about 35 minutes. The scenes present vignettes of this solo sledge journey with three of the most memorable occurrences in the solo journey portrayed. In scene one, Mawson is burying Mertz and reflecting on his feelings at Mertz’ death and his own immediate future. In scene two, Mawson is immobilized in his tent by a raging blizzard and recounts the loss of Ninnis and the supplies. He becomes pessimistic about his own chances of survival. Scene three portrays the well-known story of Mawson falling into a crevasse and summoning the will to pull himself back up. This is the heart of the drama and shows Mawson choosing the much harder alternative; to struggle on and to try to live. In scene four, Mawson is stumbling along, dragging his sledge, increasingly alarmed at the extreme deterioration in his own physical state. The final scene sees Mawson arrive at Aladdin’s Cave, a snow cavern in which supplies had been left. The first items he sees are two oranges and a pineapple, vivid and stunning reminders of the world outside his own pain and solitude. He hears the wind drop and knows he can march the final few miles and reach safety. At the conclusion
of the piece a recorded voice (kindly provided by Peter Fitzsimons, author of an excellent biography of Mawson (2011)) recounts the events following Mawson's unlikely deliverance.

5.2.2 Libretto and Staging

The libretto was written by the composer after careful research into the events of the expedition and the character of Douglas Mawson, whose own sledging diary was the primary source for the libretto (Mawson, 1988). Each scene contains a quotation from literature that was taken south by Mawson's party (an unpublished inventory is held at Mawson’s Hut Replica Museum in Hobart). In scene one, it is lines from the Burial Service of the Book of Common Prayer. Scenes two and four contain quotations from Tennyson and Browning, whom Mawson admired. The verses quoted come from Tennyson’s In Memoriam (one of the favourite poems of Robert Falcon Scott who had died on the ice a year before – Mawson did not know of his demise at this time) and Browning’s Prospice. In scene three, Mawson obsessively repeats a couplet from Robert Service, his favourite poet, as a sort of motivational mantra. The line, “Just have one more try — it’s dead easy to die, / It’s the keeping-on-living that’s hard” is the tag of the poem The Quitter. In the final scene, the quotation is from a sentimental music-hall song, The Sweetest of Oranges, which is a pastiche of the style, rather than being an actual Edwardian song.

Apart from these quotations, the libretto is entirely in the first person. Mawson’s language is factual and direct, and principally concerns his immediate physical environment, including his own body. Mawson, by all reports and to judge from his journals, was a plain-speaking man, with a scientist’s tendency to communicate concisely, clearly and precisely. In the opera, there are occasional outbursts of emotion when he is under particularly extreme stress (e.g. bars 183-188, bar 413). Because some of the most dramatic events of the story have taken place before the opera starts, there are significant passages when Mawson reflects on the immediate past. This is entirely in character and situation and helps the audience to understand the narrative circumstances more fully.
Douglas Mawson Walking Alone was first performed on 20th September 2014 with Sepehr Irandoost as Mawson, Jody Rose directing and the composer conducting. This was a fully staged production and presented some theatrical challenges. The sense of a constant journey was created by having Mawson make all his entrances Stage Left and all his exits Stage Right. Costume was relatively easily to contrive from modern clothing, except the balaclava helmet which had to be knitted specially. Suitable properties were available to hire from Opera Australia. The set itself was largely white and referenced the shape of ice crystals. This, with appropriate theatrical lighting, makeup and a cool day, created a positively frigid atmosphere for those watching.

The hardest scene to stage was scene three, in which Mawson dangles from a crevasse by a rope. This could only realistically be done by having the performer’s feet on the ground and him leaning forward at an angle of about 45 degrees with a rope taking most of his weight. The audience seemed more than content to suspend disbelief in this situation. A similar solution to this exact problem was used in the 2013 Hobart production of The Call of the Aurora by Joe Bugden (Joe Bugden, personal communication).

5.2.3 Vocal Music

Mawson is portrayed by a bass-baritone with this tessitura,

The vocal writing is almost entirely syllabic. This reflects the straightforwardness of Mawson’s character. It also makes it easier for the audience to follow what is a fairly complex plot delivered in a short period of time. The main exception to this is the long melisma in bar 75 on the word ‘convulsing’.

In the three passages that set poetry (the openings of scenes two, three and four), the tonal language of the vocal writing becomes more solidly modal. These poems are a link to home and the melodies here invoke the modality of English folk-song as well as the melodic shapes of English art song (example 33, bb. 124-133).
The resonances created in corresponding passages in scenes one and five are somewhat different; the limited pitch movement in the Burial Service passages has obvious liturgical resonance, while *The Sweetest of Oranges* is a facsimile of the sentimental waltz songs that were popular in Edwardian times.

The remainder of the libretto; written by the composer but closely based on Mawson’s journals and letters (Mawson 1988, Mawson, 1964) is set to music with a somewhat more extended tonal vocabulary. A close and long-standing artistic relationship between composer and singer allowed vocal writing that emphasised the best of both artists’ qualities.

5.2.4 Instrumental Music

Leitmotif

The vocal part in this opera is direct, matter-of-fact, even plain. However, the complex emotional sub-plot is provided by the string group who represent the interior drama of Mawson’s psyche. This drama can be intense; for example the conflict between Mawson’s temptation for the ease of death and his desire to see his beloved Pacquita again; and the unconquerable feeling of relief at Mertz dying and no longer being a burden, mixed with his deep sorrow at the loss of a friend and his guilt at feeling any relief at Mertz’ death. These emotional complexities are surmised, but are based on a thorough examination of Mawson’s psyche as revealed in the journals he wrote at the time.
There are a large number of leitmotifs used in this work, principally in the strings, which represent different emotions. There are about twenty of these motifs, some of which portray emotions which are not easy to describe in a single word and many of which are more or less closely related to one another. A selection of the most important of these is given below.

Figure 16: Hunger (e. g. bar 1)

Figure 17: Grief, mourning (e. g. bars 2-3)

Figure 18: Life (e. g. bar 16 and occurs in many places throughout the opera, its context determining its narrative qualities)

Figure 19: Anxiety (e. g. bars 22-23). This is also somewhat complex, the interval of the sixth also represents compassion. The connection is that anxiety is sometimes a compassionate concern for oneself, whereas the theme representing more sorrowful compassion (closer to the german *mitleid*) is a descending scalic passage.
Figure 20: Determination (eg bars 107 ff)

Figure 21: Hope (eg bar 102). This appears quite frequently in a timid and hesitant way, as if hoping were unreasonable or even impious. The only entry of the piccolo trumpet at the very end of the piece declaims this theme (the vox angelus) boldly.

Figure 22: Frustration (related to anxiety) (e. g. bars 131-132)

Figure 23: A feeling of being trapped; claustrophobic, constricted. (e. g. bars 180-181)
Other motifs include a major seventh chord to indicate calm, glissandi descending from very high notes for physical revulsion, melodic movement around a semitone for religious sentiment and a semi-dissonant chorale for love.

For example, towards the end of scene three, when Mawson has emerged from his closest brush with death, the music combines the motifs portraying calm, life, self-compassion and determination (which is related to the hope motif) (example 34: bb. 334-338).

In scene four Mawson is considering the condition of his own body and the strings add the themes for revulsion, hunger and (a little fainter) for life. His own line hints at the ‘calm’ theme, showing an almost clinical detachment from his own physical plight (example 35: bb. 373-377).
These themes are combined to convey the psychological sub-plot of the opera. Indeed, they could be said to form the principal plotline, as Mawson's interior struggles are as much the subject of the piece than the physical action he undertakes.

The final scene is somewhat different, because the emotional landscape has changed. At this point, despite his pain and grief, Mawson becomes increasingly connected in his mind with the warm, human world which he left behind and hope grows strongly in him. In this scene, for the first time, the wind drops, so the electronic sounds representing wind and ice are silent for the only time in the opera. By this stage, these sounds are not in the foreground of the listeners’ perception, but their sudden absence is dramatically noticeable. The entry of the angelic (in the senses of heroic and heraldic) trumpet near the very end of the piece is also a calculated *coup de théâtre*, signaling the full arrival of hope, life and joy.

### 5.2.4.2 Instrumental Techniques.

The string writing in *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* uses a number of extended techniques, many of which were explored in the instrumental pieces discussed above. Notably, these include the *gettato* bowing (often with *glissando*) (e.g. bar 132) and nuancing of vibrato (e.g. bar 75, bars 109 ff.) (c.f. Finsterer, 2013). Other advanced techniques include nuanced *col legno* effects (e.g. bars 180-190, bars 450 ff.), finger percussion (bars 423 ff.), passages entirely in harmonics (e.g. bars 342 ff.) and grinding (a technique pioneered by Matthew Hindson in, for example, *Crime and Punishment* (Hindson, 2010).

### 5.2.5 Recorded Sound

The electronic sounds represent the impersonal and indifferent elements in Mawson’s world; ice, wind, rock and snow. They are manipulated using strict mathematical principles based on the number 6. This is because an ice crystal (the basis for the shape of snowflakes among other things) is hexagonal, symmetrical and fractal. The ice music is played by computer-generated versions of six glockenspiels and six sets of crotales.
Wind sounds are from [http://www.soundjay.com/wind-sound-effect.html](http://www.soundjay.com/wind-sound-effect.html) which is a free source public domain sound library. Because the dynamics of wind are far more complex than that of ice, no attempt has been made to apply mathematical formulae to the recording of wind.

The ice music in each of the scenes has a slightly different structure. Each scene is monothematic, with the themes using the number 6 for rhythm (quite obvious) and pitch (based on sixths and tritones (ie. six semitones)).

Towards the beginning and the end of each scene, the symmetry of the music can lose its integrity somewhat, which is the case with ice crystals in natural environments, due to abrasion, erosion by the wind and fluctuations in temperature.

Dynamics are determined by the musical and narrative necessities of the opera.

The macro structure for each scene is as follows (table 3),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1 – Burial Service</td>
<td>Palindromic from centre point (i.e. the second half is the retrograde of the first). The theme itself is also palindromic, and contains even more detailed elements of fractal symmetry. The theme is 36 beats long and based entirely on sixths and tritones.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2 – Tentbound</td>
<td>Palindromic from centre point, limited pitch set suggesting confinement, symmetrical theme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3 – Crevasse</td>
<td>Triple palindrome (AA’AA’AA’), greater repetition to suggest entrapment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scene 4 – On the March
Palindromic from centre point.

Scene 5 – Aladdin’s Cave
Palindromic from centre point and the theme itself is a palindrome (i.e. the second half is the retrograde of the first). The theme is 36 beats long and uses sixths to hint at the tonal area of D mixolydian.

The ice music in each scene is further manipulated employing the same patterns as its macrostructure on increasingly deep levels. This reflects not only an increasing exploration of recursion as a structural principle but also the fractal shape of ice crystals.

In scene 1, the group 1 glockenspiels (1st, 2nd and 3rd glockenspiels) play the theme at double the speed of the group 2 glockenspiels. The group 1 glockenspiels are phased by using rests of 1 ½, 3 ½ and 6 beats for the three instruments. They are pitched a major sixth apart, with octave shifts where necessary.

The group 2 glockenspiels are also pitched a major sixth apart and are phased with rests lasting 3, 4½ and 5 beats.

The crotales play the motif at quadruple speed. The 4th, 5th and 6th crotales play an inversion of the motif. The two groups of crotales are phased (within their own group) at a quaver apart. The gap between their appearances is 36 crotchet beats plus their phase addition.

In scene 2, the theme is subjected to a very limited number of transformations – phasing at six quavers, six crotchets, six dotted quavers, six dotted crotchets, six semibreves and six dotted semibreves apart for the glockenspiels. The larger distances are for the instruments playing a transposed pitch set. The crotales are
phased at the same distances, with the addition of a 36 beat rest before each iteration. The crotale
s do not play the central repeated-note element of the theme. Also the fifth and sixth glockenspiel and
the fifth and sixth crotale are transposed up and down a semitone respectively. This limited material
suggests a very limited horizon.

In scene 3, this attempt to create the impression of constriction goes further. As Mawson has fallen
down a crevasse and is suspended, upside-down, the ‘ice interval’ of the sixth is also inverted and
becomes a third. The thematic material in this scene is not developed nor transformed, simply
repeated in phase and mensurated at factors of 3 (crotale 1, 2 and 3) and 27 (i.e. 3³) (glockenspiel
and crotale 4, 5 and 6). The basic rhythmic unit in this scene is 2+1. The third glockenspiel is played
a minor third higher. The crotale are played a major third higher.

In scene 4, the material is more expansive, suggesting the immensity of the landscape. This is
achieved through larger intervals (sixths and their compound) and longer note values. Glockenspiels
1, 2 and 3 are a semitone apart so the entire chromatic scale is included. Glockenspiels 4, 5 and 6 are
inversions of Glockenspiels 1, 2 and 3, but only appear at the heart of the ice crystal – at the centre
of the scene. The crotale match the glockenspiels, but their rhythms are augmented and their
phasing is based on longer periods.

The structure of scene 5 is similar to that of scene 1, except that the crotale are rhythmically
diminished and on a phase that involves an 18 crotchet beat rest. The significant difference is that
the pitch organisation hints quite strongly in the direction of D major. This key symbolises hope and
is the prevailing tonality of the final scene. In this way, the indifferent environment at last appears
less hostile to Mawson. There are times in this scene when the wind and ice noises become silent, as
the calm which allows Mawson’s final dash to safety descends. This effect is manipulated live by
the sound projectionist.
5.3 **Summation**

*Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* contains the most emotionally and technically complex music in this portfolio. Despite involving only one character in a largely featureless environment, this is a deeply complex story on a psychological level. The various tranches of texture in this work reflect that complexity, as does the advanced use of the leitmotifs. These are also employed in more obvious ways and this helps to generate a cohesive structural sense to the piece, which is an important consideration in a work of this length.
Chapter 6 Conclusions

The analysis of the repertoire undertaken in chapter 2 reveals strands of compositional thought in Australian art music of the past forty years. Some of the techniques and gestures described in detail by Turetzky and used by composers in the aftermath of the publication of *The Contemporary Contrabass* (1973) have fallen into obsolescence. These include vocalisations from instrumentalists and the use of tape for electronic manipulation. Other techniques, for example percussive sounds and very high harmonics have remained part of composers' vocabulary in writing for the contrabass.

A significant recent innovation in string writing is the nuancing of string techniques such as gradually moving the bow towards the bridge and gradually introducing vibrato. These effects are most numerous and most striking in the very recent scores surveyed (Hindson, 2010, Finsterer, 2013). This idea of graduated extended techniques can be found in broader repertoire by Australian composers (Stanhope, 2013; Ford, 2011) and it is reasonable to conclude that this may be identified as a recent compositional trend.

During the course of this research, the focus has shifted away from a study of how a small repertoire can reflect broader trends in art music to an examination of how these recent trends can inform a body of creative work. The exegetical chapters of this thesis demonstrate how such trends in thinking about technique and timbre can be individualised by a single composer by his application of them to his own creative preoccupations and a developing musical idiolect. Furthermore, in the creative work, some of these techniques are developed in original ways and used in a variety of contexts. These techniques, such as nuanced vibrato and a combination of gettato and glissando, have become recognisable and idiosyncratic features of this body of work.
In the compositions for contrabass solo, the advanced timbral possibilities of the instrument are explored in the context of the most recent trends in extended instrumental techniques. In other words, the grand (and often isolated) gestures of the 1970s and 1980s are absent and replaced by nuanced, subtle and often playful timbral changes. These are not only reflective of general recent trends in Australian contrabass music, but they are also illustrative of their composer's aesthetic standpoint.

The music for large ensembles discussed in Chapter 4 reveals itself to be much more declarative, 'public' music. In this sense, it adopts a similar stance to some of the larger-scale works reviewed in Chapter 2 such as *Young Tree Green* (Bright, 1992) and *Crime and Punishment* (Hindson, 2010). Despite the similar stance and medium, the voices are unique and a work such as Angelus has little in common with the broader repertoire of its time and place.

Chapter 2 contains no dramatic works, so cultural comparisons with *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* are difficult. Nevertheless, there are strong technical links between the string writing in *Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* and some of the recent works analysed. Examples of these techniques include the use of non-determinate intermittent pitch, ‘grinding’, very high harmonics and, above all, gradually moving from one timbre to another. The use of these distinct colours as part of leitmotif allows a further dimension to the structure and texture of this dramatic work.

*Douglas Mawson Walking Alone* also has significance as a major work, and the last composition completed in this portfolio. It represents a significant milestone in the development of a composer’s emerging voice. In it, contemporary string techniques, recent thinking about structure (particularly the idea of recursion) and textural complexity and simplicity can clearly be discerned. These are melded with a melodic and rhythmic voice that comes from a remoter and more individual place.

The fusion of these elements creates a compositional language which is at once dialect, a product of its place an time and idiolect, the unique voice of an individual.
Further, the exploration of compositional technique has enabled the composer to realise creative and aesthetic conceptions in a way that is well-crafted, contemporary (in a narrow sense of the word) and highly individual. As such, it exemplifies the creative process as genuine research.

The connections between the body of original work and the most recent compositions analysed in chapter 2 remain strong. Extended timbres exist as part of an integrated musical fabric rather than as isolated gestures, they are often introduced gradually, the structure of pieces is informed by multiple repetitions and phasing and lyrical writing is not eschewed.

To conclude that a composer’s work is connected to his *zeitgeist* may be seen as a commonplace observation. However, in this instance, the strands of this connection are followed closely; and the points at which the original work diverges from these strands are identified, thus identifying the uniqueness of an emerging musical voice.
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