

McGregor, Richard (2007) Looking for inspiration. In: Inaugural lecture, 2 May 2007, University of Cumbria, UK. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/137/>

*Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.*

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION SLIDE 1

Before I start I must up front say that the search for inspiration is ultimately a search for the roots of one's own creativity: in other words what one finds in others helps one to understand oneself.

PLAY Beethoven 'Moonlight' (discussion of arpeggios only!) SLIDE 2(a) MUS EX1  
Webern variation Op27 SLIDE 2(b).MUS EX2

Are **both** inspired? Not the second? The Beethoven is only broken chords with a very basic tune whereas Webern uses a pattern of 3 notes played in a huge variety of different ways.

Both in their own way inspired, both show composer struggling to break out of conventional.'

Let's not confuse 'taste' with 'inspiration' Taste is what you develop by choice or by indoctrination of 30 years Radio 1 listening.

\*

Up to the 1960s much musical analysis was concerned with 'what'. **What** happens at a particular point in a musical work and **how** it fits into the whole. In that kind of model exceptions to the 'rules' are noteworthy but they stay as exceptions.

That's the kind of musical training that I experienced – where rules exist and musical content largely works within those rules, and music stopped at the Second World War.

The rules were derived by theorists who had spent many years studying the 'masterpieces' and certain incontrovertible truths were established, and one learnt the 'norm'.

On the other hand, since the 1960s increasing attention has been given to understanding the effect of the musical idea, the 'intention' of the composer, the 'social context' against which the work was written, and the significance of the 'compositional gesture'.

Let me give you an example which I hope illustrates the difference between traditional approaches to analysis and those employed more recently. This is the development section of Mozart's 40<sup>th</sup> Symphony last movement. I'm **already** exercising an editing function on this work by not allowing you to hear the whole, but we don't have time for that:

Mozart 40<sup>th</sup> (m4 – development) SLIDE 2 (c)\ MUS EX 3

Traditional analysis simply notes that Mozart has largely based this whole section on versions of one chord – a really useful one – the diminished 7<sup>th</sup>.

This chord has interesting qualities: of all possible chords that exist – there are only effectively 3 versions of the chord available, ever. Those of you who have studied music will know that there are 24 possible scales (C major, C minor, C# major, C# minor and so on). If there are only 3 diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords that means they service a whole lot of different keys, so it follows that when a dim 7<sup>th</sup> comes, a composer has a lot of choice as to where to go next. The upshot for the listener

is temporary disorientation. So we find that composers use this to deliberately disorientate the listeners, to play aural tricks on them, remove the sense of certainty, destabilise ...

So here is Mozart using bar after bar of this chord, moving around and never settling down, keeping the listener in suspense. **Why** does he do this – of all the possible musical ideas that could have made this development section Mozart chose to concentrate on just one very small but highly significant idea. Is he just being clever – showing off what he can do with a small amount of material, **or** is their greater significance to the choice. Is it significant that the piece is in G minor which some commentators refer to as Mozart's 'tragic' key. Most of Mozart's symphonies were written to commission, but **not** this one it seems. Is it possible that this represents a musical expression of the depression which is known to be afflicting him in 1788 and which he refers to in a letter to a fellow freemason Michael Puchberg:

Vienna June 27, 1788                      SLIDE 3

'Do come for a visit; I am always at home;- I have done more work in the 10 days that I've been living here than in 2 months at my previous place; and if I weren't beset so frequently by black thoughts (which I have to chase away forcibly), things would be still better...'

We see the same possible psychological underpinning in some of the greatest songs in the Lieder tradition.

Schumann uses this psychological underpinning to good effect in his songs. In the song cycle *Frauenliebe und leben*, the fourth song is 'Das Ring am meinem Finger' (the Ring on my finger). It was written in 1840, the year in which Schumann finally won a legal battle against the father of Clara Wieck his piano pupil with whom he had fallen in love, so that they were able to marry in September 1840. Schumann was always plagued by doubts that he would never actually succeed in marrying Clara or that something would happen to destroy their happiness. He captures this doubt and uncertainty in the song – it becomes autobiographical for him. Here the woman sings of 'the Ring on her finger and how happy she is' but there's always a doubt that something will come around to upset the happy state – and so Schumann uses exactly the same chord as in the Mozart to twist the musical line and give a darker non verbal meaning to the text: happiness tinged with doubt;

Musical example – Schumann MUS EX 4 SLIDE 4

The point of spending some time on these two examples has been to demonstrate that the intention, motivation, or meaning, of the composer goes far beyond, or may be interpreted as lying far beyond, what the notes actually say to us as listeners. There is no doubt that both these works are inspired creations under the commonly understood definition of such things. So there are perhaps three principal strands to the study of inspiration – the first is about 'why' a composer has chosen to do something

Why? The reasons for a composer's choice      SLIDE 5(a)

at a particular point – inspiration that we'd understand in the phrase 'I was inspired to do this because ...', and the second strand is to do with the nature of the finished creation – we identify

that a particular idea is ‘inspired’ – Mozart’s use of the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> in this place is ‘inspired’, partly because it is original (in the context of the time), inventive (for the period), arresting (in its effect).

Originality, Inventiveness and Effect SLIDE 5(b)

The third strand is the least easy to define. It involves consideration of the ‘source’ of the inspiration and this is an area I will come back to in more depth later.

The Source(s) of Inspiration SLIDE 5 (c)

But we get some kind of idea about intent – the reasons behind a composer’s choices – from what composers say about their works. Here’s Mozart again talking about a symphony he wrote for Paris in 1778:

(Paris, July 3, 1778, to his father.) SLIDE 6

"I prayed to God for His mercy that all might go well, to His greater glory, and the symphony began and right in the middle of the First Allegro came a Passage that I knew would please, and the entire audience was sent into raptures – there was a big applaudissement – and as I knew, when I wrote the passage, what good effect it would make, I brought it once more at the end of the movement – and sure enough there they were: the shouts of Da capo. ... I had heard that here the final Allegros begin like the first Allegros, namely with all instruments playing and mostly unisono; therefore, I began the movement with just 2 violins playing softly for 8 bars – then suddenly comes a forte – but the audience had, because of the quiet beginning, shushed each other, \as I expected they would, and then came the forte-well, hearing it and clapping was one and the same. Immediately after the symphony full of joy I went into the Palais Royal, ate an iced cream, prayed the rosary as I had promised to do, and went home.

Here Mozart reveals understanding of what makes for effective music in a particular context – and out of that context it doesn’t have the same effect. Much the same applies to Haydn’s famous 2 bar silence in the Surprise Symphony. We all respectfully listen in silence to this music now so the real joke behind the sudden silence is lost to us: but it wouldn’t have been to those who heard the local loudmouth talking about his win at cards – who would have looked silly then?

Much of my earliest work, including my PhD thesis on some works by the composer Thea Musgrave was given over to the understanding of the musical processes at work: how the music worked, why musical ideas were in a particular place, what generative processes were used to ‘grow’ more music. This is largely the area of traditional analysis, and to a degree will always have to be there simply because to understand music more fully one has to know how to interpret musical style, form, and expression. It is through knowledge of the detail of the music that performers make sense of the music for the listeners. Here’s an example of what I mean – this is from a performance of Bach’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Brandenburg Concerto 1<sup>st</sup> movement

Here the performers give a clear signal that we have come back to the opening idea of the work for the last time by holding back the tempo ever so slightly and giving some added emphasis as the music enters the repeat, regaining the steady tempo once again. This is **for** the listener **from** the performers – there is no indication in the musical score that this should happen. However the performers would not do it unless they had a sense of the composer’s intentions:

Bach SLIDE 7 MUS EX 5

Traditional analysis provides the knowledge to underpin this decision, but contemporary musicology would ask the question ‘would Bach have done it like this in performance, and does it matter if he wouldn’t’. It is only comparatively recently that musicologists have begun to unpick a real concern with numerology – the use of significant numbers – throughout Bach’s work – does that make a difference – if we know that Bach was inspired partly by number symbolism? Would the nature of the work you just heard be different if it could be proved that the proportions are carefully calculated to conform to mathematical patterns such as occur naturally in nature: a little more on this later.

Composers derive their inspiration from many sources and I will come back to this particularly when talking about James MacMillan but just before we move on here is a wonderful final quote from Mozart, this time as a 15 year old on tour in Milan. Speaking about his lodgings he says:

Mozart quote SLIDE 8

‘Above us is a violinist, below us another, next door a singing teacher who gives lessons, and in the last room opposite ours, a hautboyist. Merry conditions for composing! You get so many ideas!’

But I want to stop for a moment now and just take a brief autobiographical journey which will attempt to explain why the search for ‘inspiration’ is such an important one for me.

In terms of a musical work what I have just given you was effectively a long ‘slow introduction’ to the main section of this lecture. For those of you who like to know what’s coming next think of the musical form – Sonata Form – there two main thematic groups are laid out consecutively and they are the building blocks for the rest of the work:

Sonata Form slide

SLIDE 9

Often in Sonata Form these two themes can be shown to have some relationship to each other, and sometimes, as in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony mentioned earlier they are both derived from the same musical idea. In the same way my two themes are inextricably inter-twined. The first, composition, the second analysis, which inevitably feed each other.

As some of you know I am passionately committed to the idea that everyone who studies music should engage in original composition at some level if for no other reason than that it is important to be able to understand what it means to express yourself creatively in music, and it’s actually quite hard to teach it (composition) at any level, including by the way, at primary school level, if you yourself have never engaged in the act of composition. It’s actually still hard to teach it if you have but that’s not a discussion for now though I’d be happy to pick it up again in questions at the end.

I don’t want to labour the point because I’m not concerned here with talking about my own efforts in composition, but rather about how the process which inspires composition can, or may, take place. Nevertheless because it WAS my own starting point I do need to say something about the process of compositional creation especially in relation to early stages of informal learning. What I mean by informal learning here is **that** part of the compositional learning process that a composer does for him or herself rather than necessarily being taught to do it – though perceptive composition teachers know how to cultivate both informal and formal learning. We see that in the

teaching of Frank Bridge in relation to Britten, and Petrassi in relation to Maxwell Davies.

In the early stages of compositional development this informal learning

Informal learning in composition SLIDE 10

about composition involves the young composer in 1) **absorbing ideas and methods from the work of** older established composers. This is usually not done by studying the music analytically but by soaking up its characteristic features 2) **through the listening and performing processes**. Music would not exist if it were not performed and performers need listeners. Listening (and performing) should always precede analysis. For example it is clear from the early music of Lutoslawski and Ligeti that the influence that was 'absorbed' was that of Bartok whereas for Poulenc we can say that it was certainly Stravinsky.

At first the elements which receive most attention in learning the compositional process are imitation of 3) **note manipulations (e.g. to sound like Mozart), and 4) rhythmic features and 5) matters of texture** or sound. In my own case in relation to what I wrote in my teens, if you knew the music with which I was familiar you would see/hear elements of Shostakovich and Prokofiev in the melodic features, Bartók in the rhythms, Vaughan Williams and later Richard Strauss or Berg in the harmony, and, much later Maxwell Davies in the compositional processes:

McGregor Prelude SLIDE 11 MUS EX 6

If the compositional learning process doesn't go beyond this point then what is produced as composition simply ends up being reproductive rather than productive, re-creative rather than creative. There are, however, a few composers who have made a lot of money by sticking to this level, but for fear of offending I shall not mention them!

Imitational work derived from listening/performing and then imitating is not the whole story. At a certain point or points a new level of understanding enters – a kind of intuitional feel for what is 'right' and 'how it works'. In my own case there was certainly a moment like this.

Audio Bartók SLIDE 12 MUS EX 7

For someone brought up on Beethoven, Mozart and Johann Strauss the revelation of the 'rightness' of this work was nothing short of an epiphany.

What I mean is that this is the key point when the way the musical materials – the melodic ideas, the rhythmic detail make 'sense' – in short you understand why the work is written like it is. This is crucial in relation to the development of a personal style in composition – the 'rightness' becomes personal – an understanding of what makes your own music work, but at the same time, while it indicates the acquisition of a personal style, very few composers can actually put into words why he or she believes this is how they should express themselves. Any more I guess than Picasso or Jackson Pollock or Andy Warhol for example knew how to articulate the 'rightness' of their artistic creations.

Such understandings are not one-offs – it can be a long time before one really understands the essence of a composer’s creative personality, and sometimes personal taste gets in the way. It’s perhaps heresy to say that it’s only in the last few years that I have developed a greater understanding of the essence of Brahms. But there are almost always key works which have a telling effect in the end. For me there were Strauss’s *Metamorphosen* (a beautiful work), Maxwell Davies’s ‘Stone Litany’ and much later, for different reasons, the last movement of Bach’s Sixth Brandenburg concerto.

I’ll leave composition for now because it’s time for the second theme: Analysis

Analysis /// National Curriculum for Music, BLANK FIRST, SLIDE 13 (a), (b)

It was University which, if I’m honest, opened up MY mind to the possibility that analytical understanding could, and indeed should feed the creative process. Analytical understanding is now embodied to a degree in the National Curriculum for Music through Listening and Appraising but THEN it was a process which, to a greater or lesser extent, one encountered only in depth AT University and often only through the work of younger lecturers.

I was fortunate to have Stephen Arnold as a lecturer. Stephen, at that time, was just out of University, had an analytical approach to composition and was also one of the early movers in electronic music. Stephen was very interested in the total serialism of the American Milton Babbitt – total serialism is where

Definition of total serialism SLIDE 14

everything – pitches, rhythms, dynamics and so on, is controlled by a pre-determined numerical sequence. – I may tell you the idea of imposing order on musical chaos has some attractions! This kind of music has been rather ungraciously termed ‘plink plonk’ music.

Perhaps more importantly as it turned out, Stephen had been a pupil at Cirencester Grammar School in 1959 when the young Peter Maxwell Davies arrived as music teacher. Max was one of the very first to identify that children could and should actually be creative, and should actively engage in composition for its own sake, and not just do pastiche work imitating the music of others (Bach, Mozart and so on). Those of you with long memories might be interested to learn that Rick Wakeman was also a pupil there at Cirencester at the time. Younger members of this audience have just said ‘who?’

Although I specialised in composition at University I had begun to get interested in the music of Maxwell Davies after hearing the first performance of a work entitled ‘Stone Litany’ – now this may not be one of the very best of Davies’s works but what I think was important was that here was a work in which musical content was highly ordered following pre-determined criteria (such as what note should follow which) and yet it managed nonetheless to have an expressive quality beyond this pre-determined content:

Audio example Stone Litany

SLIDE 15 MUS EX 8

I should say that this expressiveness been an abiding quality of Davies's music and for me it is the question of expressiveness which is at the heart of the question of inspiration – that's to say the imposition of the intellect in creating systems and structural organisation does not necessarily inhibit inspiration and in fact on the contrary can even be that element which underpins the very quality or nature of inspiration itself. In other words organisation of musical materials can nurture the seeds of inspiration.

This brings me to discuss the process by which composers create the musical work. Some composers write straight into the finished manuscript but many have a process of creation which involves building up ideas, musical materials. We're now in the Development section of this lecture!

A composer's sketches are the building blocks from which the work is created. Generally sketches are generated BEFORE the actual composition starts though they can be created as the piece moves forward. Analysts usually have no way of knowing at what point a sketch was created (unless they are conveniently) dated - nevertheless we often refer to any what you might call rough workings as precompositional sketches since they must precede the writing down of the finished score, even if this is accomplished in the same sitting. These sketches work rather in the same way as a painter might undertake preliminary sketching of sections of the whole. In art such sketches may be only be of a small fragment – a detail- from the finished whole – such as a face, or an object. For example this:

[image of Peter] SLIDE 16

is supposed to be a sketch study by Leonardo da Vinci prior to the painting of the last supper:

[Last Supper] SLIDE 17

A composer's sketches are to a degree like this – particularly when looking at a detail from one section of a work – I'll say more about this when I talk about Wolfgang Rihm. Often a composer's sketches are little more than a striking idea which he or she has had but does not know where in the composition this material will lie. However the initial sketches can be, as in Maxwell Davies's case, charts and grids which contain the basic musical syntax for the work. Here for example are the initial workings for the **Sixth** Symphony

– many pages of them – and for Maxwell Davies these are a crucial part of the process of creation – the generating of something out of nothing. Most composers need some kind of initial stimulus - this can take many forms – even spiritual as I will speak about in relation to James MacMillan.

Much of my work has involved interpreting the function and significance of such sketch material, and my interest in them began because Stephen Arnold had photocopies of some sketch material for Davies's 2<sup>nd</sup> Taverner Fantasia, which, so the story goes, had been rescued from a fire in a house in Dorset where Davies had been working on his first opera, which actually includes within it the music which was extracted to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fantasia. Davies says that he had to recreate the music from these sketches as the original version was destroyed by the fire.



If all that we have is the final musical score it is very difficult to begin to try to predict from where a composer has derived his or her inspiration. It can be difficult even impossible to reconstruct the sequence of composition just from the final score alone. In any case inspiration is often found in the way a composer takes a different road from that which is expected. Yet every composer carries within his or her unconscious mind the remembrance of how they learned, what they learned, and the journey they have already made to where they are now.

Maxwell Davies speaks of his apprenticeship years which lasted until he was 30. This was where he learned his craft, and it was a craft based on rigorous preparation before a note was written down into the musical score. In creating charts and note sequences such as you see here:

Chart example SLIDE 18

he was, he says, learning his material, getting to know the resources to be used in the work. In talking about this stage he would use metaphors like ‘taking the music for a walk round the island’ – in other words he literally walked round the Orkney island on which he lived ‘mapping out’ musical landmarks – that is, thinking through how the ideas might combine to create a structure for the whole. This stage is, if you like, like a painter doing several sketches of various features of the painting – several eyes, many noses, various hands, or, doing a rough sketch of the whole, or, experimenting with the colours to find the right shade.

Of course there has to be a starting point, and for Davies it is usually some pre-existing work or musical idea – in many cases it is one or more Gregorian plainchants. He is not a ‘religious’ composer as we might think of James MacMillan, but he uses the plainchants as sources – sometimes the same one over and over again – *Veni Creator Spiritus* (come creator spirit) – is one which appears in many works almost as if he were using it as an invocation to his muse. He will write out the plainchant then alter some of the notes slightly and finally ‘shake out’ – we call it ‘sieving’ the repeated notes, and he’s left with a basic musical idea.

Here’s an example of a plainchant written out in his sketches before he shakes out the unwanted notes:

PLAINCHANT

SLIDE 19

And to show you what I mean I have taken an advent hymn which many of you will know from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and done a Maxwell Davies on it:

VENI EXAMPLE SLIDE 20

I started with Davies today partly because I have spent most time with his music but also because it is easy to see HOW his musical language is created for each work – indeed anyone with a knowledge of the process could create exactly what Davies creates as his basic material. This is not the point at which inspiration enters (for the most part, though clearly the decisions taken are important in their own way in respect of the developing composition). Rather, inspiration is evidenced by **how** the musical language is deployed and a good composer is one who can balance tension with relaxation, intensity with space, harmony with dissonance and so on. Let me show

you a place where I believe Davies demonstrates this illusive quality of inspiration:

Symphony 2 3rd movement SLIDE 21 MUS EX 9

In this example there is a tension between the melodic idea (mostly on the harp), and its accompaniment, but Davies's use of the harp, as well as what is effectively a chamber music –like texture, brings this music right into the central European symphonic tradition, drawing on, but never imitating, Mahler in the texture and Sibelius in the way the melodic lines come and go. Needless to say both these composers' works form part of Davies's unconscious thought processes – unconscious most of the time but sometimes deliberately brought to the surface.

Perhaps too there is an essential emotional response which often feeds the compositional process: something which inspires the composer to respond in a particular way. It is very rare to be able to pin down this reaction point in a composer's work, although from time to time one gets lucky. In Davies's case there are some indications of personal emotional reaction in his scores but not written in a way that can be easily read. As a 14 year old Davies devised a personal alphabet – representing letters and short words by symbols:

Here is an example SLIDE 22

It's not relevant to say at this point how I managed to 'crack the code' – you might like to ask afterwards during questions – but as a result of being able to read them, comments indicating key emotional factors emerge which show that external considerations can give inspiration a 'kick start'. Here for example is a comment written during the early composition of the ballet *Salome* in 1978. Davies wrote, in his personal script:

*Salome* quote SLIDE 23

Now this work *Salome* came only three years after Davies's acknowledged masterpiece 'Ave Maris Stella'. Up until that work, written in 1975, Davies had spent many hours constructing charts and note sequences before composition actually began. However just before writing *Ave Maris Stella* he discovered that magic squares could be used in a musical way to generate material. He noticed as we all do when looking at Magic squares that the numbers have 'magical properties' in that you can add corners, diagonals, columns and so on and they make the same number. Here's an several examples of magic squares including a 4x4 magic square (second on the top line) – taken from Dürer's woodcut *Melencolia 1*. All the columns, diagonals and corners etc add up to 34:

Magic Square and Dürer SLIDE 24

This property allowed Davies to feel confident that his musical ideas would have an essential unity if 'mapped onto' the magic square. In other words he had found a musical language which was containable, unified and full of potential. There is no doubt that this very fact alone inspired him to create a work which is still considered one of the landmark works of the second half of the twentieth century European tradition. For a long time only some of the sketches for this work were known in the collection owned now by the British Library, however a couple of years ago I

was able to find an 80 year old lady living in Letchworth who had the rest of the sketches for the work which she had been gifted by the composer. Putting the two ‘bits’ together gives a complete picture of the genesis and execution of this important work. Just in case anything should happen to them I took photographs of all the sketches in her possession and here is a very small selection of the 90 or so pages in her possession, out of the total for the whole of over 200. The amount of work that goes into the creation of a work like this by THIS composer is substantial:

Examples from *Ave Maris* – sequence SLIDES 25-30 (6 slides)

But you remember the quote from *Salome* – Davies hit a compositional blackspot (and it happens to many composers) in 1979. I have suggested that this was simply because his actual desire for order was thrown into chaos and confusion by the lack of time to write the ballet and he could not do much of the advance planning which was his normal method of working.

This idea of order and chaos are controlling elements in of many composer’s works and one of the attractions of looking at the music of Wolfgang Rihm is that his philosophy hinges on organising the chaos:

Picture of Wolfgang Rihm SLIDE 31 (a),

He himself once said:

SLIDE 31 (b)

‘[I] create something from chaos ... which against chaos and with chaos again ends up being chaos’

However, unlike Davies, there is NO pre-planning and no construction of elaborate pre-compositional structures and note charts. Rihm talks of his writing as ‘spontaneous composition’. In an interview I had with him in 2000 he told me:

SLIDE 32

See relevant slide: ‘I’m a decisionist if you like ... an idea and sometimes it’s at the end’

If I show you the sketches for a piece called *Chiffre II* you will see I think quite easily that this approach is the complete opposite of Maxwell Davies’s – so very different that makes the comparison of the two approaches so interesting. This is quite literally ‘I’ve had an idea so I’ll write it down’. The rest comes directly from the brain at the point of composing – thus ‘spontaneous composition’, and it demands a very different approach in analysis:

*Chiffre II* two pages of sketches SLIDE 33

That is it for the whole work.

The IDEA of spontaneous composition is not new – in fact it was probably the norm up until the Romantic period . There is a famous story of Beethoven and the 4<sup>th</sup> piano concerto. In the first performance there were only a very few scribbled notes in the solo part on each page – nothing like what Beethoven actually played and the poor page turner had to try to work out where he was

in the music from them. Mozart we know often constructed a piece in his head then wrote it down from memory. However post Freudian composers, artists and other creative people, have not necessarily felt that it is enough to trust the brain to organise. Schoenberg wrote his six little piano pieces op 19 straight into the score as pure expression (this was one of the earliest Expressionistic works in music). However in later years he felt he had to go back to the music and find out how they hung together – to try to find out how, and if, the brain had made order in the chaos, without him knowing. In other words, in what way were they ‘inspired’? Clearly a post Freudian concern!

Here is an example of one of the six pieces: Op19 no 3 SLIDE 34 MUS EX 10

In Rihm’s case it doesn’t mean that very time he sits down to write it just ‘happens’. There are many examples of discarded fragments of pieces anything from 4 to 20 bars, sometimes more, discarded because they just didn’t feel ‘right’.

And it also doesn’t mean that there isn’t a struggle also to get the best means of expression for an idea. Listen to this opening from Rihm’s 4<sup>th</sup> Quartet – it’s bold and striking – you would think that it just came right away into his brain:

Opening of Rihm SQ4 SLIDE 35 MUS EX 11

But this wasn’t the case and there were a large number of discarded versions of this idea before the right one came – here’s a sequence of slides which shows that:

String Quartet 4, sequence of slides SLIDES 36-42

The idea that music just ‘comes’ is a feature of those composers who seek a strong spiritual dimension to their music. In fact John Tavener (he of the choral work which concluded Princess Diana’s funeral service) has said:

See relevant slide - SLIDE 43(a)

When I wrote about this spiritual aspect of music I compared Tavener’s statement to the opening of John’s gospel – ‘In the beginning was the Word’ – Tavener didn’t quite say ‘and the Word was Music’ but almost. Composers like Tavener, Part Messiaen, Gubaidulina, and MacMillan believe that there IS a spiritual dimension to their music and often deliberately ‘write it in’. They would certainly subscribe to the view Stravinsky expressed regarding the composition of the ‘Rite of Spring’: (to RED ONLY):

SLIDE 43(b)

‘...very little tradition lies behind *Le Sacre du printemps*. I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. **I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed**’ Stravinsky and Craft ‘Expositions and developments’ p147-8 (Faber Music Ltd) 1959

One of the attractions of working on the music of James MacMillan now that I am a little older and a little wiser is that I can understand better what the spiritual impetus is behind his music. This is the point where I want to return to something which I promised earlier – that’s the

importance of the musical or extra musical stimulus in relation to composition. By the way we are now in the Recapitulation section of the lecture and nearly at the end.

James MacMillan

SLIDE 44(a)

MacMillan, as a catholic, uses imagery which emphasises spiritual concepts and ideas (not necessarily in all his works but in a good number). He too, like Maxwell Davies, whom he admires, uses Gregorian plainchant in some of his works, but they are absolutely symbolic for MacMillan. In a work called *Veni Veni Emmanuel* – a work based on the Advent hymn I played around with earlier a la Maxwell Davies, this plainchant symbolises humanity's striving for, seeking, God, while another plainchant 'Ubi Caritas et Amor est' (where charity and love are, there God is) represents Jesus. The final climax of the work brings this latter plainchant to the fore representing the resurrected Jesus, with 'Rejoice Rejoice' underneath in brass and percussion, and then followed by the bells of Easter.

Audio example Veni Veni SLIDE 44(b) MUS EX 12

This work then is a journey from Advent to Easter and an expression of the Second Coming.

Clearly the inspiration behind such a work as this is spiritual and in that case much of the music can be understood as expressing religious aspiration. MacMillan even speaks of his musical or extra musical stimulus (such as a poem) as being 'transubstantiated' (note in Catholic theology the wafer and wine become the body and blood of Christ) into the new work: the stimulus *becomes* the new work. This makes interpretation of MacMillan's music both rewarding and, to a degree, straightforward. However in the end, although it might be a plausible interpretation one offers on a particular work as to how MacMillan has been inspired and how the ideas generated have been translated into music, it is only one interpretation of many possible. It's very likely that a composer does many things unconsciously once he or she has established their particular compositional voice and philosophy of composition. This is what makes the analysis of inspiration so interesting (and frustrating).

It is said that Milton Babbitt (you remember him from much earlier perhaps, in relation to Stephen Arnold) was analysing Schoenberg's 4<sup>th</sup> quartet in front of a class. A small man, he began to get agitated and excited by what the analysis was revealing and began jumping up and down saying 'why this is more exciting (interesting) than composing'.

SLIDE 45 (6 points)

So, if we can pull all this together what can we say: only this that each composer over time develops a **1) personal style**, develops **2) ideas which run through works** often over years, sometimes on the surface, sometimes hidden, and **3) uses his or her individual experience** to manipulate the musical material he or she creates. The most successful composers develop an **4) individual approach** to their music based on their **personalities**: this creates a degree of **5) uniqueness** within their works where the unexpected, or **6) rather a level of understanding beyond the expected** enters the composition process.

And it's this level of understanding beyond the expected which we as teachers need to look out

for. Thanks to those of you who have waited patiently for what I have to say about the nurturing of compositional processes in children for that is where I have reached.

This is my 'coda' or tail piece. Thinking of how important the Coda CAN be in a piece of music – such as in Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony first movement which is in quite the wrong key at the end of the Recapitulation and needs a long coda to bring the music back to the right key, so I want to emphasise the importance of what is done with the areas of creative music in the Primary school in particular.

Composition is an individual expression and not a collective one and many of the creative exercises that we use, and I have myself too, emphasise group activity rather than individual. Often a group activity will default to the lowest common denominator in a group – in other words what can be managed by the majority rather than the minority. In a way group activity is good – particularly for social development through music, but, our systematised (often scheme of work based) and sometimes formulaic approach to 'teaching' about creative expression may mean that the individual with an as yet underdeveloped or latent creative talent may not have the opportunity to have that talent recognised, and may not be presented with opportunities to develop in the best way for them. After all someone like Wolfgang Rihm, James MacMillan, Peter Maxwell Davies were all children once and presumably if we could revisit their past in a time machine we might well identify some of the things which led to the later expression of a creative personality. But if it's hard to see this in retrospect, it's even harder to anticipate.

Here is an example of a work Maxwell Davies wrote when he was still 15 – in 1949 this was just not the type of music that a 15 year wrote:

'Parade' SLIDE 46 POSS MUS EX 13

Consider the difference between this piece written when Davies was 15 with 7 year's composing behind him to mine written 20 years later at age 16 with 2 years behind me and it doesn't take much to see who was more inventive for longer! (And remember even if you don't like it, taste has nothing to do with this).

Recently I have been challenged – not in the musical sphere but by reading David Hay and Rebecca Nye's book 'The Spirit of the Child'. In that book Nye cites conversations on spiritual matters with children who express themselves in very profound terms, as profound in their way as any adult's, perhaps moreso because the comments are not tempered by the intellectualising out of ideas or the filtering of reaction through other experiences. Here's one 6 year old talking about her view of heaven:

Quote from 'Ruth': see relevant slide

SLIDE 47

I am sure that given the means of expressing themselves within musical contexts we would find more of this 'level of understanding that goes beyond the expected'. More research needs to be done in this area of musical creativity – and creativity is the buzz word at the moment. And while I'm on this – we need to encourage parents to sing to their pre-school children and encourage the children to sing with them – this interaction between parent and child is rapidly being lost. If

children sing from an early age they find their voices BEFORE they go to school. Pre-school children need to be encouraged to be experimental – making sound on the piano is not noise, it's experiment. Pound and Harrison in their book 'Supporting musical development in the early years' quote Coral Davies, who says:

See relevant slide:

SLIDE 48

The same could be applied to children losing this experimental desire in making sounds at the age of 5 or 6 – just of course when they go to school! It shouldn't be like that.

We need to learn more about the nurturing of individual musicality in Key Stage 1 children, encouraging individual experimentation, promoting the value of imitating ideas no matter how inexactly (that's how bedroom musicians start!) – and it's the first informal stage of composing. We need to allow individual children space to explore ideas BEFORE they find out that things/ideas have actually been done before, and we need to understand better how to encourage the individual to learn from experience in creative music. We need to encourage the individual child to experiment with the elements of music **before** we plant the baggage of knowledge in their brains – so it's not just how to fit into a group dynamic but to express themselves in their own way and on their own. I'll stop there but I'm happy to discuss specific examples of the kind of individualised development within the school situation during questions if you wish.

And above all we need to give particular credit where there is something of the unexpected – we should ALWAYS encourage anyway but we need to RECOGNISE the unexpected, and, the 'level of understanding beyond the expected' which is evidenced – that is recognise what is beyond the average response. Sometimes we do this, but we forget. Encouragement of the individual is the greatest blessing. Not very long ago I was sitting in the car in the Crook o' Lune car park having a coffee, and a mother and child approached the next door car. The child, who was certainly only about 2 years old was singing what seemed to me to be a 'made up' song – improvising it you might say. Some mothers would tell the child to 'stop making that noise' or say 'what on earth is that tune' but not this mother – as she put the child into the car she said 'that's a lovely song'. I nearly rolled down the window further to congratulate her for offering such positive encouragement.

I'll end with a quote from Shakespeare:

'Tell me where is Fancy bred, in the heart or in the head?' SLIDE 49

Does inspiration come from the intellect or from the emotions, or both? I want to conclude by playing you the Eb fugue from Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues Book II – here is intellectual music: structured entries of the main theme according to something of a pre-existing norm or pattern, and YET, beyond this structure is something emotive, something else, which is truly inspired and inspiring!

SLIDE 50 Bach Eb Fugue MUS EX 14