'Transubstantiated into the musical…' : a critical exegesis on metaphor and actuality in James MacMillan's *Veni Veni Emmanuel*

Veni Veni Emmanuel was composed in 1991/92 and written to a commission from Christian Salvesen PLC for the percussionist Evelyn Glennie and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. It was first premiered in [1992] and has remained one of the composers' most performed works. Although it is usually described as a percussion concerto, it is perhaps more properly to be thought of as a work for percussionist and orchestra, rather than as a concerto in the strictest sense. This 're-orientation' will be explored further at the end of this article after consideration of the various structural thematic and harmonic components that make up the work and the compositional processes that created them.

The work's appeal stems from the immediacy of the rhythmic components combined with a largely accessible extended tonal language, both of which, superficially at any rate, are denigrated by critics as somewhat superficial. There is, however, a depth to the work which has remained unexplored until now, and it is exactly because there are many levels in operation that the article explores each of these in turn, before bringing them together at the end.

The Stimulus

Whenever he speaks about his compositional processes MacMillan usually resorts to religious metaphor as a means of articulating the interface between the creative act and the resulting artefact. MacMillan's thought processes are deeply rooted in the symbolism of his Catholic faith. Like Messiaen before him, he is concerned with capturing the intrinsic nature of music's relationship with the divine force that impels its creation. Thus the stimulus, whether musical or non-musical, which becomes the starting point of a new work is translated by MacMillan in religious terms as a point of Communion, or more precisely, Eucharist: so as in the Mass the waver and the wine are transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, in analogous manner he speaks of an extra-musical stimulus, coming from 'without' the work, being transubstantiated into the new composition.

Most metaphors and analogies have their limitations but if MacMillan's statement that the plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* was the starting point for the work of that name is true, then it should be possible to deconstruct the 'corporality' of the generating plainchant of that name within the work as a means of analysing the composition processes and methods which underpin the composer's style and technique. The present analysis therefore addresses the essential duality of MacMillan's work, that is, religious intent against musical content.

However the composition *Veni Veni Emmanuel* represents rather more than simply a translation of a religious metaphor into a musical reality. MacMillan speaks of the work as making a 'liturgical journey'[1] from Advent to Easter. It is therefore axiomatic that there is a religious super text which can be read into and onto the work such as will give 'meaning' to the compositional processes involved.

Translating the metaphors does not, of itself, provide a critical framework for interrogating the work, and despite the now hundreds of performances and strong audience support, *Veni Veni Emmanuel* has not always satisfied the critics. There is no doubt that, at this period in his compositional output, MacMillan fell back on certain stylistic clichés. The long held single note *crescendo* – which appears not just in *Veni Veni Emmanuel* but also in, for example, 'Isobel Gowdie' as well 'Visions of a November Spring' – has been rather ungraciously termed 'plagiarised Berg' by the critic Stephen Johnson.[2] Another cliché is the 'keening' high pitched sliding violin sound (often marked 'screaming') supposedly related to Gaelic Psalm singing, as the recent South Bank portrait attempted to demonstrate**.**[3]

It is essential to go beyond these obvious clichés to try to discover what lies at the root of MacMillan's compositional aesthetic. Father Gilbert Márkus OP, an academic priest well known to MacMillan has offered a perspective on the role of art which has almost certainly influenced the way the composer views his compositional processes. Márkus wrote: '[It's] about how art transforms, taking the substance of daily life and offering a symbol which transforms and transubstantiates the patterns of human toil and loss'**.**[4]

So, in *Veni Veni Emmanuel* there is a symbol of sorts which is utilised so as to transform the material that surrounds it but is, in its turn, the very essence of that material – this is MacMillan's idea of the source, the compositional stimulus, becoming so much a *part* of the new work that it *becomes* the work. MacMillan, following Márkus, uses the Catholic idea of transubstantiation as a way of describing this process, not it should be said, without criticism for his misappropriation of the word. To explain the metaphor in a sentence is impossible and the rest of this essay is concerned with showing exactly how MacMillan translates the metaphor into music.

The 'Veni, Veni' plainchant

The source for the work is the well-known Advent plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* which, in the words of the Eucharist, is 'broken for you', and finally rebuilt towards the final apotheosis at the end of the work. Although the technical processes are far less rigorous in MacMillan's music, this process shows the influence of Maxwell Davies, not just in the use of plainchant, but in the fragmentation and rebuilding processes which the younger composer utilises, albeit in a less systematised manner.

The *Veni Veni Emmanuel* plainchant symbolises Advent in the liturgical progression from Advent to Easter – humanity seeking the Second Coming. A transcript of the plainchant is given in Appendix 1.

The occurrences of parts of the plainchant throughout the work are summarised in Table 1 (see Appendix 2). The source text of the plainchant which MacMillan used was almost certainly the Latin Advent antiphon supposed to date from the time of Charlemagne (771-814), but for the sake of simplicity Appendix 2 utilises the usual English translation.

The Table shows that MacMillan uses only fragments of the antiphon – the chant is only heard in full at the climax of the work where its tonality is G (minor) for reasons which will become more obvious later. The opening fragments are based on the normal E (minor) tonality, as found in

numerous hymnbooks – this is taken as the referential tonic (from which the other transpositions are derived) and is first heard at bar 36. The pitch class E is associated with some key structural and thematic elements in the work (as for example in its use as upper pedal in flute in bars 89-99 and as the starting note of the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant anticipation in trombone, both of which will be discussed in due course).

Structure of *Veni Veni Emmanuel*

Before exploring the detail in any depth it is important to understand the structural outline of the work. Stephen Johnson refers to this as the 'traditional concerto model' of fast-slow-fast. However that superficial perception of the formal archetype masks a five part structure with in addition two Transition Sequences in and out of the 'central' slow section based on 'Gaude Gaude' ('Rejoice Rejoice' in the vernacular):

EXAMPLE 1 (form structure Table)

The form of the work then is an arch shape – with the recapitulation foreshortened as would be expected. In returning to its starting point the work suggests the cycle of the religious calendar but broken at the very end by the Easter. The arch shape is therefore, Bartok-like, lopsided, with the build up taking rather longer, and the reverse a retrograde of the former sections in compressed form. The emotional climax of the work with the risen Christ literally written into the music, 'in the midst of them' as it were, of which more later, occurs at the end of the work. However, on the other hand, the *structural* heart of the work is in the *Gaude Gaude* section and this is where the point of the Golden Section occurs. Although the whole work is not structured according to the mathematical principles underlying this concept it does have significance as we shall see. MacMillan did subsequently explore the Golden Section more deliberately in the two cello sonatas and other works.

In an interview published in the booklet for the 1997 South Bank Festival of his music 'Raising Sparks' (also the name of a song cycle written at that time), MacMillan said: 'There is a need … for bringing about the development of materials, a chaotic clash of materials, and then to bring about resolution'.[5]

In this work the resolution is liturgical – there is a steady progression through to the 'resolution' contained within the Easter message which is overlaid with a vision of the Second Coming encapsulated in the Easter bells.

MacMillan's use of the *Veni Veni* plainchant

The plainchant is deployed in two principal ways utilising its pitch content on the one hand, and its rhythmic potential on the other. Sometimes these properties are treated separately and sometimes in combination. MacMillan has spoken of improvising the Refrain rhythm of 'Rejoice, rejoice' into a 'heartbeat' rhythm so that it became one of the initial starting points and indeed the central thematic idea of the work.

EXAMPLE 2 – Rejoice Rejoice (heartbeat motif

Although there is an anticipation of the Heartbeat rhythm in the first section it is perhaps not surprising that initially it is the pitch based versions of the chant which predominate. At bar 14 of the first section (Introit-Advent) the plainchant is heard in 12 simultaneous statements utilising To through T11 in semiquaver movement as in the following example of the trumpet part

Example 3 Trumpet part bar 14

but the average listener is unlikely to be able to perceive this as the actual plainchant, hearing rather the 'chaos' that the composer intends. The first clear statement of the plainchant is at bars 27-35 in trumpet, with brass accompaniment, at T5 (i.e. A, C,E), giving therefore a basic A [minor] tonality – dominant of the D (major) tonality of the final pages of the work. However, it is not until bar 36 that the expected E (minor) tonality appears in horn, though chromatically altered (i.e. E,G,B,A#). This partial statement of the opening phrase of the plainchant heralds the appearance of interspersed E (minor) extended versions of the chant material used in Section 2 (Heartbeats), principally in the viola at 58 and refrain-based material at 62 in wind and in trumpet at 100 (D,B).

EXAMPLE 4 viola at 58, wind 62, trumpet 100

MacMillan's harmonic reasoning for the use of T0 transpositions at bar 36ff seems to hinge on the fact that the plainchant refrain in T0 begins on D which with the following B (i.e. 'Rejoice, rejoice') might suggest D as sub-dominant of A, or more likely G (major) as relative to E (minor)[6]. However in the later party of MacMillan introduces an important harmonic device which is going to have an essential function in the later sections: the juxtaposition of tritone-related statements of the *Veni veni* chant: at bar 88 the T0 statements of the *Refrain* are juxtaposed with T6 statements (Ab,F) on strings and with brass ('*Emmanuel*') at bar 110.

It might appear at first as though MacMillan's choice of pitches was random since they are usually only two or three note cells. It is exactly the perception this sort of thematic fragmentation that is the key to understanding the work. As mentioned earlier MacMillan has been influenced by Maxwell Davies and others in the manipulation of small thematic fragments. In this work the earlier fragmentation makes the strongest possible contrast with extended thematic statements such as dominate aspects of the texture in the build up to the climax in the 'recapitulation'.

Similar juxtaposition of thematic fragments at a tritone's distance are found in Transition Sequence I between the fragmentary trumpet thematic cells at T4 in bars 309-14 (C#,B,C#,E,D#,C#) which are linked to the trumpet's T4 *Veni, Veni* statement at 318 (i.e. G#,B, D#) set against *cor anglais* (trumpet triplet quavers at 324ff at T10 (D,F,A).

EXAMPLE 5   bars 309-14, 318, 324-(6)

Similarly, in the central *Gaude, Gaude* section MacMillan overlays three temporally distinct *ostinati* based on the chord sequence for 'Rejoice, rejoice' at T7 (i.e. A, F#) with T1 *Veni* fragments on percussion (F,Ab,C). A final structurally very significant tritone pairing occurs in the Dance Chorale section and will considered further later.

There is therefore a harmonic consistency throughout the work based tritone-related motifs and the idea of pairing is mirrored in other aspects of the work not least of which are rhythm/pitch and percussion/orchestra .

It is clear then that MacMillan's continual use of the opening pitches of the plainchant has two principal functions: firstly, from a musical perspective, the tonal implications of the opening trichord are clear and audible, and essentially 'root'the music in triad harmony and secondly, from a religious perspective, the spiritual longing implied in the words 'Veni Veni Emmanuel' is as a result also always audible. MacMillan's use of religious texts has suggested a strong affinity with Liberation Theology, and it is clear in this work that for him the Second Coming represents the 'ultimate' liberation to which everything points. The fragmentation of the 'body' as expressed in the fragmentation of the pitch material is how it is for mankind now. We hear, to mix the metaphor, as Paul says, we see – through a glass darkly – it is only through the final exposition of the plainchant in its (fully harmonised) totality that we perceive the 'whole body'.

MacMillan would later explore the same ground in his so-called *Triduum* works related to the three days of Easter – 'The World's Ransoming', the Cello Concerto and the Symphony all of which use the same plainchant as the present work. But, it is not the *Veni Veni* plainchant which ultimately gives these works their shared meaning. Rather, there is another plainchant, less obvious in its usage, but just as meaningful – in fact as I shall suggest much **more** meaningful. This is the Maundy Thursday plainchant 'Ubi Caritas' (Where Charity and love are, there God is'). As we will see this too makes a symbolic gesture, and not just at the Easter climax.[7]. Before we consider the effect of this 'new' plainchant on the work it is necessary to examine MacMillan's use of the generating Heartbeat rhythm.

Heartbeats

The heartbeat rhythm, derived from 'Rejoice, rejoice' is a central motivic feature of the work. Table 1 (Appendix 1 shows just how pervasive this is. Naturally the rhythm changes throughout the work but it is almost always associated with the descending minor third (except at the very beginning of the heartbeat section itself) and thus the antithetical opposite of the rising minor that opens the *Veni Veni* chant. MacMillan's idea here is to symbolise humanity and therefore a form of the motif has to appear in all the sections. At it s simplest it is ee (ee] as at bar 62ff in upper wind, but typically for MacMillan this is combined with a more metrically diverse but related rhythmic motif in lower wind and lower strings which uses half and full bar triplets. As a rhythm it is intended to symbolise humanity but no single instrument takes on the 'role' until the build up to the final climactic 'Second Coming' where the percussion part personifies the expectant humanity.

[More about this rhythm]]central section]

So far we have only examined the role the basic thematic elements play in the course of the work, but it is now necessary to return to the opening of the work to consider other levels of pitch manipulation present and in particular those which contribute to the tonal framework of the work and which help to underpin the harmonic processes which permeate the work and ultimately contribute to the effectiveness of the climactic end section of the work with the sense both of

return and of climax.

Analysis of the first section (detail)

The first section, Introit-Advent, of *Veni Veni Emmanuel* begins in apparent chaos.

Example 6 – score first page

Interpreting MacMillan's 'wider theological reasoning' this is humanity in chaos, perhaps the chaos before the creation of the world, but more likely following MacMillan's assertion that a starting point was Luke 21, the chaos signalling the end times. There is, however, already order in this chaos.

The opening chord, and also the scalic passages of the opening bars, are based on a devised scale characterised by a chromatic trichord from the starting pitch (F) in normal order (F,F#,G/ A,Bb,C,D)**.** It is tempting to try to equate the initial three note cluster as symbolic of the three-in-one Godhead but that is probably going a little too far. What is certainly important for subsequent events in the course of the work is the fact that six of the notes make up two contiguous triads; in bar one these are F major (F,A,C) and G minor (G,Bb,D) with F# as seventh note.

A new texture emerges at bar 14 as mentioned earlier in discussion of the *Veni Veni* plainchant:

Example 7 Score bar 14

consisting of twelve discreet lines of semiquavers articulating the initial phrases of the plainchant. The vertical organisation of this dodecaphonic texture uses the same septatonic triadic patterning in the wind parts as the opening chord but at T7 (C Major/D minor + C#). The significance of this pairing only becomes apparent at the end of the work in the Easter Bells climax where the six pitches spell out the triads of D major and E minor (D,F#,A/E,G,B), a combination of the key (only finally achieved) of Christ triumphant allied to the original key of the *Veni Veni* plainchant, – in religious imagery, mankind united with God.

Example 8 triadic constructions – bars 1, 14 and bells

But the hexatonic bells at the end lack one note and in the transposition of the paired dyads this would be Eb a pitch which we have already heard prominently in the work. MacMillan must surely have been aware of this when he deployed the 'Berg-plagiarised'[8] Eb as the unison *crescendo poco a poco* in the second Transition – the long held pitch which cuts through the middle of the texture from bar 426 to bar 489. We hear the note seeking a resolution or, metaphorically, seeking out the Divine Presence to complete itself. So, while this long pitch might at first seem just a MacMillan cliché, it actually has a very clear structural function in the work in that, and this is important, it is just a half a step – the Neapolitan – to the 'desired' D major of the final key of the Divine Presence as embodied in the statement of the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant.

The importance of the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant

The semiquavers which dominate bars 14-24 (see Ex 7) continue to articulate the first statement of the *Veni, Veni* plainchant all the way through to the end of the first phrase of the Refrain, but at bar 17, in the midst of the mass of sound in which the plainchant is encased there is a small, almost unnoticeable gesture on the trombone – a rising semitone *glissando* E to F.

It is heard again at the recapitulation of section 1 in the build up to the Easter Coda where it is more complete, although still based on E and on trombone, and still containing *glissandi*, as well as added grace notes *glissandi*, all of which serve to suggest, in the religious context of the work, an uncontrolled, slightly comic human element.   However at this point in the work the astute listener the thematic shape should be recognisable, despite these distortions, because the 'pure' version was heard twice in the central 'Gaude' section, where it 'translates' as the Maundy Thursday plainchant *Ubi Caritas.*

As indicated earlier, this is the second plainchant to be found in the work, and it is used symbolically to signify the Christ figure. In the *Gaude Gaude* section it is heard in A major, that is, the dominant of the key which forms the Easter climax where it represents the figure of Christ triumphant.

Example 9:   *Ubi Caritas* versions

By presenting the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant in distorted form (Ex. 9a) MacMillan makes his theological point clear – humanity can only sing the song imperfectly, it is distorted and uncontrolled, but recognisable. Therefore solo violin (Ex. 9b), in 'purity' of tone, high up in its register, represents Jesus, and the trombone, with its comic overtones, humanity.

Since the final section of the work functions both as a recapitulation and climax MacMillan brings back the heartbeat rhythm representing humanity, as he says, 'pounded out by the soloist and the timpanist'. This is the emotional climax of the work where the thumping heart of humanity is answered by the 'pure' 'Ubi Caritas' containing within it the assurance that 'Where Love and charity are, there God is', (Ex. 9c)rising over the lower brass of humanity chanting 'Rejoice, Rejoice This juxtaposition triggers the Easter bells which conclude the work, recalling the symbolic gesture at the Gloria in the Easter Vigil Mass.

While the placing of the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant at the climax 'makes sense' structurally, it is not just 'dropped in' as a musical *Deus ex Machina*. It is, above all, the resolution of what has gone before. It is also symbolically a 'second coming' for the *Ubi Caritas* plainchant appearing for the first time in the *Gaude gaude* section, aand for the second time at the climax 'translated' into D major the key the music has been seeking throughout.

D is the culminating tonality of the work, it represents the goal to which the work has been striving and MacMillan makes the progression to this 'key' sound right by manipulating the voice leading within longer term planning in the following way:

A sense of climax

After the *Gaude* central core section, nothing is ever quite the same again. So when the Dance is

recapitulated in the Dance Chorale (bar 490) there is a new 'inner core' (from bar 498) which contains the fully formed and harmonised version of the *Veni Veni* plainchant which has permeated the whole work up to this point in various distorted, fragmented and repetitive forms. The *Veni* plainchant is initially heard on G, minor/modal – but 4 bars before the Refrain (bar 542) the high trumpet enters and forces a shift of tonal centre for the Refrain driving it a tritone away to C#, where, as it turns out, it now 'fits' with the Dance tonality underneath. This is achieved by the trumpet holding a high B which then becomes a middle pedal not for the repeat of the Refrain (bar 546).

Example 10 bars 542-6 score?

 The Refrain thereafter proceeds as expected until the penultimate note – B, at the top of the violin register – gets stuck, and fails to resolve to the final pitch which would be C#. The lack of resolution reflects MacMillan's 'liturgical journey' – mankind seeks but cannot find resolution through its own striving, and chaos in the form of the repeat of the Introit returns (bar 565). As soon as the distorted *Ubi Caritas* is heard (bb. 570-2), the first violins, try to break away from the B pedal with semitone *glissandi* up to and away from the C, latterly with typical MacMillan instruction 'screaming'. Nevertheless, although this is the chaos of the opening section recapitulated it is different from the first simply because underneath it all we hear the voice of mankind, as personified in the tombone, trying to 'sing' the *Ubi Caritas*.

At last the *Coda*, which MacMillan labels *Coda - Easter*, arrives (bar 581), and the second violins finally reach the C# which they have been struggling to reach. Once there they then obsessively mark it, *molto espressivo*, in quavers with grace notes, as though knocking at the door (bar 582). MacMillan's marking for the string parts, once again, is 'screaming', perhaps to suggest mankind's increasing desperation for the Second Coming.

Example 10 Score page 147 (Coda – Easter)

Eventually resolution is effected unequivocally at bar 587 onto the D, which has been the goal since the B pedal was introduced 44 bars earlier, and this is the cue for the concluding statement of *Ubi Caritas* in D major four bars later in violins 2 *tutti*. Mankind is united in the presence of God.

Why has MacMillan chosen D as the ultimate goal? No doubt in part simply for its traditional semiotic reading of 'liveliness and rejoicing' and 'gay, brilliant, alert' as Rameau and Lavignac respectively asserted.[9] As a key it was strongly hinted at in the *Gaude* section because of the essentially ambiguous tonality of the *Veni Veni* chant which is variously B minor and D major.

Even here all is not resolved. The ubiquitous B which started this tonal progress is still present in the climax until at last as the final note – E – of the *Ubi Caritas* sounds, it gives way. This makes sense, retrospectively, of the E which appeared in flute in the Heartbeat section and of the E as starting note of the distorted *Ubi Caritas*. This too is a resolution of sorts. E is the opening pitch of the *Veni Veni* plainchant in its original form and it is also the opening note of the distorted *Ubi Caritas* plainchant. In addition it had an important upper pedal role in the Heartbeat section. In effect its comes to rest in Christ. MacMillan's theological reasoning is clear – humanity has been

striving to achieve resolution but this resolution is only present when God is there. Hence the bells.

Earlier in this article I noted that six of the bells from two contiguous triads, but in addition, the first four notes (D, A, B, F#) are the bass notes of the harmonised 'Rejoice, Rejoice' – the Easter bells represent mankind in harmony with God – the blessed assurance. In this context can it then really be an accident that the second time the *Ubi Caritas* this is heard in the *Gaude* section it is just a bar after the Golden Section (bb.375-6) – surely a metaphor for the presence of God within the heart of created order. MacMillan flags this 'second coming' with the sound of a 'mark tree' – effectively wind chimes, but in the context sounding not unlike the Sanctus bell. *Ubi Caritas* is therefore plainly a musical metaphor of the Christ.

Discussion of two problematic areas in the work
Pedals and Tonality

In his 1992 review of the first performance at the Proms, David Wright lists a series of complaints about the work which he details as: the 'low voltage impact', 'passages … sanitised by their very conventionality', 'the nature of some of the ostinati' and 'the tendency to anchor elements of the structure on extended pedal notes'.[10] It seems that MacMillan's use of pedal notes is being misunderstood somewhat.

The suggestion implicit in Wright's comments is that the pedal notes are used to anchor a harmonic texture so as to keep the listener 'secure' while more complex detail happens above (or below). But while this might be true in some cases it does not explain all, and neither should the different harmonic functions be all lumped together simply because they sound similar.

The importance of the middle pedal B for the progression to the climax was discussed in the previous section but there are other structurally important pedal notes throughout the work.

For example, at the very opening of the *Introit* there is already a pedal note in the bass – C – and despite the fact that the overall texture is aggressively cacophonous, it is not there to anchor the listener, or even to 'anchor' the musical edifice – it has a much more important harmonic function. It successfully creates expectation not because it is the dominant of the F based scale which dominates this first part (Ex. 8) – unless the listener is very harmonically aware it is unlikely to be perceived as such – its purpose is to lead to the first statement of the *Veni Veni* plainchant in its highly compressed form which bursts forth in the cacophonous twelve note cluster form at bar 14.

Criticisms of MacMillan's use of pedal notes centres on the view that they are almost unnecessarily structurally supportive. It is true that the unison Eb lasting from bar 426 to 490, then the B inverted pedal from 542 to 599 (including two small 'distortions' that take place *en route* as the music seeks the climax), account for nearly 20% of the work, but I have already explained their purpose. Whether or not they are effective is up to the listener to decide.

The role of pedal notes and their relationship to the prevailing tonalities in the work is summarised in Example 11.

EXAMPLE 11 handout

This Table shows that there are other pedal notes, much shorter than the B and E already discussed, which are nevertheless important within the long-term planning. As mentioned, the work opens with a C pedal for 13 bars (which returns in the recapitulation where it is reduced to 5 bars). This is succeeded some 26 bars later by the high C#. With the benefit of hindsight we know this to be the leading note of the D major of *Ubi Caritas* but which does not resolve here, simply leading to the Heartbeat sub-section. This is followed some 25 bars at bar 88later by 11 bars of flute on high E – hocketting heartbeats – which, as I hinted earlier, we finally understand at bar 595 (9 bars before the end) when the E comes to rest as a long held note when we hear, for the first time in the whole work, the last two pitches of the opening line of *Ubi Caritas* – DDDEE –with the words 'ibi Deus est' - 'there God is'.

But there is more. That hocketting E at bar 88 is underpinned by a tonal shift to Db which, though brief, is a key harmonic shift. We hear it again as a harmonic shift in the bass leading to the first statement of *Ubi Caritas* in the *Gaude* section – where enharmonic C# it is the third of the chord of A for the plainchant above.

Perhaps the most interesting example of juxtaposed tonalities tied into the pedal notes occurs in the Dance sections. In the first Dance section MacMillan used two basic tonalities juxtaposed against each other – G# minor/modal for the hocketting main idea, derived from *Veni Veni* (bar 127), and D minor/modal for a smoother contrasting idea (bar 142), whose connection with the chant is not at all clear. When the Dance returns with the Plainchant Chorale (bar 498), the Chorale itself is based on G minor/modal – a minor third higher than hinted at in the opening Introit. The contrasting tonalities are confined, in the Dance Chorale, to the solo percission. The vibraphone solo expresses the tonal conflict here because it opposes a much faster elaborated version of the G minor/modal *Veni* chant with a version of the same based on C#, as can be seen from this example.

EXAMPLE 12 (Vibraphone bars 499-505)

thereby re-establishing C# as an important tonal focus as it was for a time in part of the Heartbeat and *Gaude* sections. And the Plainchant Chorale is eventually drawn into this tonality, switching from G to C#, further preparation of the leading note function which was discussed above.

The Role of the Percussionist

It will have been noticed that comparatively little has been made of the role of the solo percussionist in the work. This anomaly was noted by early reviewers of the work since it was obvious that the main thrust of the musical and theological argument is carried by the orchestra. The 'problem' then is that the role of the percussionist in the work is ambiguous, if this is indeed a *concerto*. This is not quite how David Wright puts it, but it is, in essence, the main 'issue' to be faced when discussing the work.

The mistake which is made is exactly in viewing the composition as a *concerto* - it is a work

which features a solo percussionist who is, as MacMillan puts it in the preface to the score 'an equal partner' with the orchestra – the two partners converse, sometimes they agree and sometimes they do not. Conflict is not envisioned here in the way that it arises in the *concerto* as a genre, and there is certainly no attempt on MacMillan's part to equate the percussionist as the 'voice of humanity' to underpin the 'liturgical journey'. That is why the percussion part is largely a decoration, a counterpointing, a re-inforcer, and at times an opposer – but none of these roles to the exclusion of the others for any length of time.

For example, the percussionist has a specific role to play in the Heartbeat section which is primarily conditioned by the need for the music to contain the Heartbeat rhythm in a strongly characterised form. Likewise the percussionist also has a vital structural role to play at the climax but once again it is to express the religious subtext, that is the expression of the beating heart of humanity, rather than to demonstrate the virtuosity of the player.

Although the Heartbeat motifs do give some prominence to the percussionist, at other times the role is essentially to increase the texture either by adding to it, or through doubling of other instruments. Thus in the first section Introit the percussionist adds to the chaos by having independent arabesque-like passages sometimes harmonically ambiguous through MacMillan's use of the pentatonic scale, one of it's rare occurrences in the work. On the other hand for the rest of the first section the percussion part largely doubles the other instruments, usually wind and brass. In the dance sections although rhythmically more elaborate at times the prime function of the percussion is to give weight to the dance rhythms and to articulate the accents again rather than specifically to show off virtuosity.

Apart from the lead up to the final climax at bar 546, it is really only in the central *Gaude* section that the percussion part develops an independent life, detached from the tripartite 'Rejoice' *ostinato*, and so independent in fact that at first it is possible not to recognise that the part is based round repetitions of the motivic cells that have already been heard earlier in the work. Furthermore the tonal centres of the Rejoice *ostinati* are at T7 and the juxtaposed percussion at T1, directly expressing the harmonic relationship which has underpinned the structure throughout.

It may be problematic to define the percussion role exactly but it is certainly the case that the thematic and harmonic content is always clearly related and relatable to the surrounding textures.

Such are the separate strands which make up *Veni Veni Emmanuel*. It is now time to bring these back together and examine the effect of the work as a whole.

Musical sense and metaphorical significance

I began this study by re-articulating the metaphors that MacMillan employs to describe his use ('transubstantiation') of the pre-compositional stimulus on the one hand, and the spiritual ('liturgical') journey which *Veni Veni Emmanuel* takes from Advent to Easter.

MacMillan has not tried to personify the instruments, and specifically, the percussionist, as the 'voice' of humanity, not has he attempted, for the most part, to use the percussion part to embody conflict and resolution in the manner which might be expected in a traditional concerto model. In

fact, in a sense, the identity of the percussionist has been sacrificed to the metaphor. Although it is possible to suggest that the solo percussionist 'represents' humanity in the metaphorical world of *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, if this were truly the case then the orchestra would always represent the metaphorical other, that is, the Divine. Clearly this is not the case in this composition and could not be, for it would make the music simply two dimensional.

In the 'spiritual' scenario which MacMillan has created there will always be contradictions since the metaphor simply cannot be directed translated literally or absolutely into the musical substance. Despite the superficial similarities between MacMillan and Messiaen (viz. spiritual, Catholic, metaphorical), MacMillan's spiritual metaphors are not literal – no flying angels here – and his pitch generation processes are not continuously ordered – no modes of limited transposition or their like here. Rather what MacMillan means by 'transubstantiated' as it applies to the plainchant in *Veni Veni Emmanuel* is just this: the plainchant has become the new work, and as Example 1 (Appendix 1) showed, the fragments of the plainchant are not transformed into, nor do they build up to, the final fully harmonised apotheosis. There is no sense in which the plainchant grows into its full form. It is primarily through the structure and the pitch/tonal structuring that the 'liturgical journey' is effected.

In the simple ABA^1 macrostructure the final A^1 is both a variation and a culmination, and the non symmetrical shape, the lopsided arch, means that however the work is broken down into 5, 7 or even 9 subsections, the tonal stratum will always be felt underpinning the musical journey as it does in 'traditional' tonal music. Despite the criticisms the tonal progression that MacMillan achieves is one of the reasons contributing to audience comprehensibility – the other one being his use of highly recognisable and appealing rhythmic gestures.

If the fragments of the *Veni Veni Emmanuel* plainchant which are used throughout cannot of themselves suggest the 'journey', neither can the plainchant *Ubi Caritas* because it is only used symbolically, as the personification of Jesus. If we take this 'liturgical journey' too literally we will certainly be conscious of missing big liturgical events like the Nativity and the Passion, to mention but two.

It seems then from a critical standpoint that neither the 'transubstantiation' not the 'liturgical journey' metaphors really works absolutely, but in this composition they work sufficiently for a meaning to be inferred. In the end it is how the music communicates and how the processes operate that really matters. What I have therefore tried to do in this analysis is to demonstrate the depth of thinking which underpins MacMillan's writing and how he translates his musical ideas into practice locally and longer term. What emerges is a complex series of levels of musical meaning, some of which can be translated back into the 'programme' of the work, though always by inference since MacMillan himself has said virtually nothing about the actual detail of the musical argument, and some of which cannot.

However the real 'message' of this work does not lie in expectation ('O Come O Come Emmanuel') but in fulfilment ('Where Charity and Love are there God is'). It is therefore not really the plainchant *Veni Veni Emmanuel* which is transubstantiated in this work – the embodiment of the work lies literally and metaphorically with plainchant *Ubi Caritas*.

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[1] Liturgical Journey

[2] Stephen Johnson

[3] South Bank video

[4] Márkus

[5] Raising Sparks interview

[6] **[use of brackets as tonality is not 'absolute']**

[7] [NOTE: its presence was signalled by the composer in an interview for the 1997 'Raising Sparks' Festival of his music on the South Bank]

[8] Johnson

[9] Nattiez page…

[10] David Wright