



# City Research Online

## City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Pace, I. (1997). The Panorama of Michael Finnissy (II). *Tempo* (London, 1939): a quarterly review of modern music(201), pp. 7-16.

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/6557/>

**Link to published version:**

**Copyright and reuse:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

---

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

[publications@city.ac.uk](mailto:publications@city.ac.uk)

---

## **The Panorama of Michael Finnissy (II)**

### **Ian Pace**

*Tempo*, New Series, No. 201 (July 1997), pp. 7-16.

A large body of Michael Finnissy's work refers to music, texts and other aspects of culture outside the mainstream European tradition. As a child he met Polish and Hungarian friends of the family, and was further attracted to aspects of Eastern European music when asked to transcribe Yugoslav music from a record, for a ballet teacher. Study of anthropological and other literature led him to a conviction that folk music lay at the roots of most other music, and related quite directly to the defining nature of man's interaction with his environment. Finnissy went on to explore the widest range of folk music and culture, from Sardinia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, the Kurdish people, Azerbaijan, the Vendan Africans, China, Japan, Java, Australia both Aboriginal and colonial, Native America and more recently Norway, Sweden, Denmark, India, Korea, Canada, Mexico and Chile.

In setting or utilizing folk materials, Finnissy's procedures bear some similarities to those that operate in his transcriptions- breaking up and re-ordering material, using random or 'intentional' processes. The sources often inform the final work in several different ways: through derived pitch and rhythmic cells, which sometimes operate on both micro- and macroscopic levels; fixation upon particular defining characteristics (in particular modes of ornamentation); as well as instrumental, registral and other configurative devices which can suggest further stylistic qualities of the originals.

To an artist who encounters 'foreign' cultures and wishes to come to terms with such experiences in their work, there are of course many options open. Some of these are fraught with danger. One who is unable to progress beyond a naive sense of awe can well end up fetishizing, presenting in their own work a hopelessly idealized and romanticized view whose lack of critique serves only to patronize, in the manner of the 19th-century Orientalists. Equally unworthy is crude eclecticism, liberal bandying-around of the mere trappings of a multiplicity of sources. (This practice receives a spurious justification by the label 'post-modernism', which in reality shows an artist's dearth of imagination, inability to see beyond the surface of that which they encounter.) Most nauseating of all is the tendency amongst some recent British composers to take non-Western musical materials, divest them of all that makes them individual, and re-construe them in a 'civilized' guise, (i.e. clothe them in a form of mock-romanticism) then present the finished products as a shining example of 'Ethno-music'.

Finnissy's work avoids these various pitfalls. His use of any non-'classical' musical sources represents most fundamentally an attempt to engage in a dialogue with the world, to express his emotional and intellectual reactions, and to imagine the situation were he himself living under very different circumstances (and in particular to express solidarity with oppressed peoples). As with the transcriptions, nostalgia is hardly a part of the equation: while he looks for a way beyond the high esotericism of some post-war music, techniques derived from serialism and Cage are of paramount importance to the production and aesthetics of Finnissy's works. In the mid-1970s, he took a particular interest in Japanese music, theatre, art and literature. This interest

was first manifested in *Tsuru-Kame* (1971-73), a stage work involving a text (a recital/concert type of dramatic ballad, *naga-uta*: long song) derived from the Nōh play 'gekkyuden' as well as dance. The text tells of two magic animals, a crane and a tortoise, who teach an emperor a dance to ensure his longevity. This beautiful and meditative work (see Example 1), one of the composer's favourites, is of key importance in his technical development, since it involves his first use of imitative counterpoint in a uniform register, derived from *gagaku* music (though there are some premonitions of this technique in *Song 2*). Such a technique was to be employed in many later works such as *Alongside* and *The Cambridge Codex*, which have no explicit Japanese connexion.

Ex. 1

The image displays a musical score for Example 1, consisting of two systems. The first system includes a Solo voice part (top), a Chorus part (middle), and a Percussion part (bottom). The Solo voice part has the lyrics "ki- ni". The Chorus part has the lyrics "mi- ko- shi o ha- ya- me" and "mi- ko- o ha- ya- me". The Percussion part includes performance instructions such as "Fingerings" and "DMP". The second system shows a Solo voice part with the lyrics "no- yo- wa i no chyo-" and a Percussion part with the instruction "Perc I Chime Bars". The text "THE CHORUS EXIT." is written below the first system. The score is marked with measure numbers 41, 23, 7, 8, and 23.

Other Japanese-inspired works have a theatrical or narrative connexion: *Gorō* (1978), for tenor solo and ensemble, tells of Gorō Tokimune, tempered on his quest for revenge against his father's murderer by his love for his mistress and the tug of nature around him. *Hinomi* (1979) for solo percussion captures through Finnissy's eyes some of the excitement of hearing the frenetic energy of Japanese drumming. The title is taken from a shadow puppet-play (*bunraku*) in which a bell at the top of a fire-warning tower (*Hinomi*) warns of attacks from outsiders. These three works all deal with 'preparatory' situations, setting the scene for future events, which relates to the concept of the 'open work' I mentioned in Part I, entering and departing the endless

continuum of time. Also related to *bunraku* is *Kagami-Jishi* (1979) ('mirror (of the lion spirit)' for flute and harp, whose flute part owes something in its articulation to *shakuhachi* writing. In the two later works, the Japanese element is less explicit: *Jisei* (1981) ('Aerial Spirit'), for solo cello and small ensemble, metamorphoses folk-derived material into more conventionally virtuosic double-stopped writing on the cello, while *White Rain* (1981) for piano takes its title from a woodcut showing the effect of a particular type of light on the rain, and so focusses varying 'lights' on its musical material.

Also 'preparatory' is the Javanese-derived work *Kelir* (1981) for six solo voices (see Example 2), whose text consists of ritual formulae which would be used as magical invocations, before the shadow puppet-play. Finnissy specifies:

In singing this text the phonetic components of the words simply colour the vocal sound - no attempt should be made to convey its 'meaning' or to emphasize the 'exotic' quality of the words themselves.

The work is powered with an almost over-whelmingly sense of electricity, magic and sexual energy, far exceeding that which would be possible through mere semantics. Equally charged, driven and ritualistic is *Ngano* (1973) for solo voices, choir, flute and percussion, a setting of children's songs of the Venda Africans of the Northern Transvaal. This piece, which relates to early Stravinsky as well as Vandan music (though Finnissy, unlike some British Stravinsky-imitators, builds on the edginess and sharpness of focus of Stravinsky's work, rather than smoothing down the corners), is both terrifying and exhilarating, and its climax involves log drums alternating complex rhythmic patterns with fierce beats, in tandem with chanting from the choir.

## Ex. 2

The image shows a musical score for six solo voices and piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as staccato and mp. The lyrics are: 1. dja han tu Jang ka dua Ra dja pe ri Ka; 2. tu djuh Per ta ma a Ra; 3. sa; 4. nek; 5. ; 6. be.

There are several cycles of works, which ought really to be performed complete, using materials and ideas from each of the folk cultures Finnissy has explored. The

appeal of Sardinia lay in its ancient roots, Arab influence and epitomization of the 'wild side' of Southern European culture. The four pieces share common source material, but the configuration and realization of each is substantially different. The heated *Duru-Duru* (1981) ('Around-around') for mezzo and three instruments was really the first piece intricately using folk-derived materials. The voice and flute are set in the same register and echo each other, while the piano and percussion provide an elaborate counterpoint to this. The nature of the sources is more apparent than is often the case, through the recurrence of passages using only three close pitches, and the regularity (eschewing irrational rhythms) of the bass drum part. Large scale structure is provided through textural and registral shifts, as if ever-further layers of the materials are being revealed. *Andimironnai* (1981) uses a Sardinian poetic form to provide a new sort of musical structure, within which clearly distinguished types of instrumental technique delineate complimentary phrases. *Anninnia* (1981- 82) ('Lullaby') for soprano and piano makes extensive use of modes of ornamentation, ever an interest of Finnissey's, which amplify consonant sounds in the stridently 'vowelistic' language. *Taja* (1986) for piano, whose title refers to the tenor part in Sardinian religious music, uses some of the same material as *Duru-Duru*, but in a chromatic rather than microtonal context, and in a much more calm and meditative style.

As mentioned earlier, Eastern European folk music has also been a major concern. While an early piano work, *Svatovac* (1973-74), uses a Macedonian melody, as does *Contretänze* (1985/ 6) for ensemble (whose title is interpretable both as 'country dances' and 'contra-dances' and which is described by the composer as 'Bach turning into Macedonian folk music'), and *Ének* (1990) relates to Hungarian material, the locus of Finnissey's Eastern European interests seems to have converged on Romania. The narrow tessitura and extensive ornamentation of Romanian folk music inform many works in addition to the 'ethnic' ones. Always interested in synthesizing seemingly disparate elements, Finnissey began to combine aspects of Romanian music with other phenomena. *Cătana* (1984) presents a 'contest' between two different sections of the ensemble, in an Ivesian evocation of competing village bands. *Cabaret Vert* (1985) (Example 3) for ensemble takes its title from the Rimbaud poem 'Green Inn Cabaret'; all the folk poems refer to the colour green, so the piece is almost an inner exploration of 'greenness'. *Lylyly Li* (1988-89) was inspired by a collection of exhibits of Joseph Beuys and 'consists, for the most part, of invented folk-music, smudged, distorted, left dangling in thin air. A series of fading snapshots of lost worlds'. Such is the modernity of Finnissey's approach, recognizing the futility of a hankering after 'lost lands'.

The situation of people as oppressed as the Kurds is apparent in Finnissey's settings of their music. In *Yalli* (1981) (a folk-dance) for cello, 'dance' material is overwhelmed by tissues of simultaneous lines, glissandos and tremolos, until it is eaten away at and retarded. We are left with an 'oppressed' (assimilated?) instrument playing a bottom string unnaturally tuned to a low F. Another folk-dance setting, *Nasiye* (1982) for solo guitar, involves fleeting arpeggios from the con-strained material, rather like flights of thwarted liberation. More positive is the celebratory dance *Dilok* (1982) for oboe and percussion, where the combination of the natural stridency of the instrument and the 'earthiness' of the percussion part produces a pagan, primal form of celebra-tion, far from the civilized 'sophisticated' aspects of Western culture. *Delal* (1984/87), also for oboe and percussion, from traditional court dances, is more restrained and solemn,

whereas the 'love songs' *Kulamen Dilan* (1990) for soprano saxophone and percussion contrast moments of extreme passion and intimacy.

Ex. 3

The image displays a musical score for four parts: Mezzo Soprano, Flute (Fl.), Clarinet in A (C.A.), and Percussion (Perc.). The score is in 3/4 time and is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics 'Pri-mă-va-ra,' and the instrumental accompaniment. The second system starts at measure 35 and continues the vocal and instrumental parts. Dynamics include pp, p subito, and mp.

The peoples of the Caucasus, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians, share some musical traditions. In his Azerbaijani-inspired works, exploring an area at the touching point of East/ West, Christianity/Islam, Finnissy returned to his interest in binary oppositions. The potential conflict, as demonstrated by subsequent events in Nagorno-Karabakh, might have informed the confrontational *Keroiylyu* (1981) for oboe, bassoon and piano. Fortissimos/pianissimos (only one short mezzo-forte section), angular, swooping lines against tightly constricted ranges, the wind instruments' utter disjunction from the piano at the end - this is a work of theses and antitheses, synthesis only glimpsed in the distance. Whether or not this was a conscious compositional decision is perhaps secondary; Azerbaijani music, the political, religious and nationalistic situation of the country, and Finnissy's own Azerbaijani-based work all stem from some common 'seeds', so it should not be surprising that one can find common characteristics in each. The other pieces in this cycle are *Terrekeme* (1981) for harpsichord and piano, which alternates a predominantly ascending single line, with two parallel lines in 2nds, 4ths or 5ths tending towards descent, imitating respectively the 'zurna' (a type of shawn or oboe) and the 'saz' and 'tar' (types of lute); *Uzundara* (1983) for clarinet, the 'gently flowing dance' of whose title is hard to reconcile with the starkly contrasting register shifts, with long passages at the very top; and *Sepevi* (1982-83) for double bass, which

comes from a folk dance in triple time and groups almost all the notes in threes (though there regularity ends).

The largest and most comprehensive cycle of folk-culture works is that from Aboriginal Australia: *Teangi* (1982) ('Flowering Earth') for ensemble, *Warara* (1982/91) ('Red Ochre') for 6 players, *Aijal* (1982) ('Sky') for flute, oboe and percussion, *Banumbirr* (1982/86) ('Morning Star') for small ensemble, *Marrngu* (1982) (a mythical possum) for E-flat clarinet, *Ulpirra* (1982-83) ('Token of Friendship') for bass flute, *Hikkai* (1982-83) ('Immediately') for piano and *Ouraa* (1982-83) ('Wood') for ensemble. In the early 1980s, Finnissy spent two periods teaching in Australia, unable to find work in the then (and now) hostile British musical climate. Feeling ostracized both in this respect and as a homo-sexual in an intolerant society, he was drawn to attempt to understand the culture of the Aboriginals, oppressed by brash white Australia. He encountered incredulity from a faculty colleague on why he would be interested in such 'black trash', but this merely stiffened his resolve. The range of commentary is immense: *Warara* evokes natural 'animalistic' sounds, 'Birds chat-tering, red clouds lit up by the sun, rain, fresh shoots of grass, and mice starting through the mist, leaving trails of paw-marks' (Example 4). The high registers, staring down from above, of *Aijal* contrast with the proliferation of growth in *Teangi*. *Banumbirr*, from a bark-painting, involved an attempt 'to find - emphatically - musical "gestures" within myself that corresponded to the hieratic (totemic/symbolic) patterns and deliberately restricted colours of that painting'. *Marrngu* is full of sinister ruminations, *Hikkai* is racuous then explosive, while *Ulpirra* is more restrained, even 'respectful'. The last of this cycle, *Ouraa*, is a savage and bleak landscape, whose use of the skeletal sound of castanets bears similarities to the ominous claves in Xenakis's *Metastasies*. Material overlaps throughout this ambitious cycle, as in the others - yet again Finnissy seems to be exploring an 'object' from as many angles as possible, with all the tools of his compositional and critical armoury.

Ex. 4

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, which is a vocal piece with instrumental accompaniment. The score is written for six parts: Clarinet (b), Violin, Soprano, Percussion, Flute, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The Soprano part has lyrics in a non-Latin script: 'runana bi li mare i ingi li djil ma ru djun mi li li li gi li'. The score includes various dynamic markings such as ppp, p, and (-). There are also performance instructions like '(Flag.)' and '7:5b'. The percussion part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

Upon his second arrival in Australia, he decided to examine a different identity, that of the colonial settler (with a nod in the direction of Percy Grainger). The three sets of *Australian Sea Shanties* (1983) for amateur choir, piano and recorder consort

respectively and *Botany Bay* (1983/89) for mezzo, flute, oboe or clarinet use traditional and colonial melodies, while *The Eureka Flag* (1983) for solo piccolo takes its title from a proposed flag of Australian independence during a failed rebellion in the mining community. As a postscript or a summation of the previous work, Finnissy wrote a final pair of Australian works: the orchestral evocation *Red Earth* (1987- 88) and *Quabara* (1988) ('ceremonial chant') for didjeridu and percussion. The former is a further reflexion on the other-worldly colourations, inhumanity and barrenness of the Australian landscape, while the latter combines the telluric sound of the didjeridu with 'trash' percussion, an obvious comment of commercial exploitation and 'Coca-colonization'.

A few works consider America from both native and settler's viewpoints. *Sikangnuga* (1979) for flute is named after the Hopi Indian (from NE Arizona) word for 'The First Breath of the World'. Here small constrained intervals transpire within wide leaping melodies and grace notes. Towards the end, an elaborate counterpoint is set up between voice and instrument, perhaps representing the first human voice emerging from the glorious and frightening chaos of nature (a motif which has prevailed over much of Chris Dench's compositional career). The polar opposite is *Pavasiya* (1979) ('The Red Light of Dawn') for oboe, in which angular lines, interspersed within a predominantly narrow melodic range, are gradually pushed out, the line distilled to long series of trills. The rowdy *Mississippi Hornpipes* (1982) for violin and piano (proof that there is life yet in the medium of solo instrument and piano, even after the crushing statement about it made in Xenakis's *Dikthas*) clearly relates to a wholly different 'ethnic' tradition.

But Finnissy's homeland was no less a 'foreign country', which he explored with equal fasci-nation. The works relating to British traditions portray aspects of the composer's native land in a no less original light. The title of *English Country-Tunes* (1977), originally written 'for the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II ' suggests pastoralism and 'nice tunes', yet it is actually a pun on the first syllable of the second word (one could write it *English Cunt, Re:Tunes*), and is part an expression of Finnissy's anger at the taboos and hypocrisy concerning sex and sexuality in England. The piece, which is probably Finnissy's most famous, presents arching extremes, stalactite-like contours at both ends of the piano that threaten to dwarf the individual (Example 5a), and a continual feeling of unease in a situation that could (and often does) explode at any moment (Example 5b). Yet another 'England' appears in cracks in the texture and comes to the foreground at a few points, most prominently in the penultimate movement, *My Bonny Boy*. This consists of a modal melody, derived from a folk-tune, presented in an almost timeless, Feldman-like, manner (Example 5c), which suggests a n unsurmountable sensation of distance, a yearning for that which is too far away to be completely grasped. (This is an important consideration in the later *Yvaroperas* (1994-5) and *Tracy and Snowy in Köln* (1996).) As some type of peace is on the verge of being attained, the final movement, *Come beat the drums and sound the fifes*, begins (Example 5d). Often described as a *Totentanz*, the traditional English march, with pipe and drums, is transformed into the stomp of jackboots; paramilitary elements underly a seemingly harmless English ritual. Yet the piece does much else prior to the final polarization: many passages are deeply sensual and erotic, marvelling in the wonders of sexual desire.

Ex. 5a.

5a (ral.)

(pp) (mp) (p)

rit. poco a poco

More spaciouly

1-3 7-11 15-16 23-28

Ex. 5b.

10-16 18-19

Very Fast

f (Both Hands)



cimbalom) and the 'absurdist' playwrights,<sup>2</sup> not to mention Cage (and the tradition whence he originates - Emerson, Thoreau, Ives, Cowell etc.). Joyce's searches for axes of similarity between classical, mythical and contemporary narratives and Busoni's opinions on the 'one-ness of music' (particularly as demonstrated in his opera *Turandot*, which adopts a plethora of different folk musics with the hope of showing their overlapping features) are towering precedents for Finnissy's recent 'meta-folkloristic' or more generally 'meta-musical' concentrations, works which use a large number of source materials to show more panoramic concerns.

*Various Nations* (1992) for narrator and ensemble was conceived when Finnissy encountered a mid-19th-century children's book detailing vast generalizations about peoples and places (e.g. 'Italy, the remains of ancient Rome, is deservedly styled the Garden of Europe. But beautiful as this large country is, yet the common people are wretched beyond expression'). Each movement combines a passage from the book with folk music from the country in question. The different folk materials are chosen to reflect similarities and affinities, a plea for world harmony. *Glad Day* (1994) for chamber orchestra, written for the Purcell tercentenary, takes a structure derived from a motet by Robert Carver and fills it with every possible type of music that Purcell himself might have heard: Scottish and Irish folk music, dance music, strings playing psalms and the work of other composers, to create a picture of all the types of music that would have been singing through Purcell's head at the time. The new orchestral work *Speak its Name!* (1996) contains many hidden allusions to the work of homosexual composers, including one short section where they all appear simultaneously, and elsewhere moves round the four quarters of the world, using folk music from Northern Greenland to Chile.

The boldest statement of all, and possibly Finnissy's finest work for piano, is the four-part *Folklore* (1993-94). *Folklore 1* presents a pan-Nordic picture, with varying degrees of allusion both to Norwegian folk-music and Grieg's settings of it, later ornamenting the Norwegian material in the style of *piobaireachd*. This ornamentation becomes one of many motives running throughout the work, as Finnissy presents long bagpipe-like monologues at various places in the second and third parts, as well embellishing Rumanian and Chinese melodies in this manner. *Folklore 2* has two 'regions', Rumanian and English, the first of which consists of strident, vital melodies which are in fact based on lullabies, combined with residues of the Norwegian music and spatterings of random grace-notes in the manner of Cornelius Cardew. The second region sets a Sussex folk-song, leading to the culmination of the Cardew motive: a setting of an ancient Chinese melody in the manner of Cardew's own settings, combined with a greater number of the random grace-notes, which continue in some of the third part. Both regions are intercut with other elements: two short homages to Christian Wolff, expressing solidarity with another rethinker of folk music, more *piobaireachd*, and the beginnings of a much more violent and tempestuous type of material, described by the composer as his own personal 'folklore', memories of his time in Italy, when his fellow students battled with the police. Following the Cardew/Chinese passages is a relatively unembellished setting of the Negro spiritual 'Deep River' as set in *A Child of our Time* by Tippett; several short variations or meditations of it have been heard earlier in this part. This most

---

<sup>2</sup> An elucidation of this type of 'canon' is given in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp.327-398.

direct of utterances is soon clouded and thins out, leading to another long setting of *piobaireachd*.

*Folklore 3* opens in a fiery manner, with a long section of the tempestuous material glimpsed briefly in the second part. Out of this grow a number of different stylistic allusions, to Brahms, Ives, Scriabin and Bussotti, figures who exerted a strong influence on Finnissy's compositional personality, and who he struggled to liberate himself from. In between this type of material is a setting of a French folk-song, and more *piobaireachd*. The music finally calms down towards a setting of Swedish fiddle music, configured in such a manner as to be reminiscent of the Norwegian settings of *Folklore 1*, and also of Serbian music. The opening music continues to appear, though now developed (as Finnissy's character evolved) into a quite different and more enigmatic state, and it draws this part to its close.

*Folklore 4* is clearer and less labyrinthine than the previous part, presenting at first alternations between Indian- and Korean-derived music, as well as a freer chromatic material. Longer sections of Chinese-derived melodies lead towards a long Burroughsian random 'cut-up' of many short fragments from elsewhere in the piece and other pieces, as well as from Sousa marches. This is in contradistinction to the further Chinese melody that follows, which leads to another setting, less distinct than previously, of 'Deep River'; out of this two voices emerge, which bring the work to its conclusion. From the large percentage of European-based material in the first and second parts, *Folklore 4* has moved to the Pacific Rim: the Far East and America, which could be construed as a prediction of the future locus of power and influence. *Folklore 4* presents a unique view of the world. Perhaps it could only have come from the pen of a composer from one of the 'mongrel' Anglo-Saxon countries, where ethnicity has so many different determinants. Yet for all the diversity of the source materials (which are often heavily mutated so as to become, in every sense, music by Finnissy) one impression, to this listener at least, remains for a long time in the mind: that of the human voice, expressed through the long passages of monody (even those that imitate solo instruments, which could still be said to have a greater degree of singularity and 'presence' than a group), singing and continuing to sing even as the most drastic upheavals go on around it (Example 6).

The Joycean connexion that I mentioned earlier is more obvious in works that similarly combine texts from different countries and eras, such as *World* (1968-74) for 6 solo voices and chamber orchestra. We may not usually connect the words of Mayakovsky, Holderlin and Hopkins, yet Finnissy's combination of these poets and others will inevitably cause us to compare them and notice continuities. Some may happen by chance, others as a result of shared evolutionary characteristics of human beings; whatever, it all combines to produce the glorious diversity that Finnissy revels in. This is the panorama, the consequence of an age where we can access information from all around the world at the touch of a button. Musics, sounds, literatures, arts, theatres, cultures, ideologies, histories, natural phenomena and abstract ideas - Finnissy wishes to partake of the kaleidoscope that provincial Britain shuns in its island mentality, but also to look beyond the variegation of the surfaces to deeper truths. His celebration of diversity is less the 'hedonistic' sense celebrated in Roland

Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*,<sup>3</sup> which can be little more than an elevated game of train-spotting (Berio's *Sinfonia!*), more a far-reaching quest for comprehension of forces which ominously threaten to engulf; the closest musical parallel I can think of is B.A. Zimmermann's *Requiem für einen Jungen Dichter*.

But one can also 'see infinity in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower' (Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*, which provides the title for Finnissy's *Wild Flowers* (1974) for two pianos). 'To see the world, look into yourself - why World is described by the composer as an avowedly autobiographical work. Finnissy's preference, as a boy, for the variety show above other forms of theatre or opera (and subsequently for the sectional Italian operatic tradition over the organic operas of Wagner) has perhaps to do with a view of life as an array of multi-directional, tangential, conflicting events. The directness of popular theatrical forms is of infinitely greater importance to Finnissy's several works of music-theatre than the wordy, drawing-room English tradition; the above premise is the genesis of *Vaudeville* (1983/87), a 'metaphor of the human condition', presenting the seven ages of man in the form of a vaudeville show, involving music, dance, theatre, circus. Despite Finnissy's love for the sheer differentiation, many elements are negative (what else would one expect from a composer who has continually received criticism for changes of focus?). In particular, a poignant scene features the pathetic figure of an ageing vaudevillian, unable to produce sound when he tries to imitate opera singers (Finnissy here indulges in a little self-parody in this character's listing of operatic 'types') and sometimes forgetting that which he has already performed. Variety performers were often societal 'misfits', some from ethnic minorities, whom their audience would not wish to encounter outside the safe distance obtained when they enacted roles. An army of marginalised and displaced characters from literary and operatic history inhabit *Soda Fountain* (1983) for 4 voices, often entering into peculiar liaisons, despite their historic or cultural dissimilitude. Similarly, many of the composers whom Finnissy most admires (Handel, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Grieg, Ives, Busoni, Grainger) are deemed secondary figures by the apostles of 'high' modernism.

But there is a dark side to a world which makes a naive fetish of stylistic diversity. Many critics put artists on pedestals, pigeon-hole them into stylistic categories and then berate them for not conforming to our chosen stereotype. Finnissy delivers a devastating critique of this attitude: in *Nine Romantics* (1992) for piano, is a tribute to the Victorian artist Simeon Solomon, whose career was destroyed when he was found 'cottaging', thus shattering the society's misguided perceptions of the romantic artist. The work is possibly also an essay in self-criticism, at least of the self as Finnissy is caricatured. Three types of 'romantic' material are presented (tempestuous/operatic, monotone, from Hebrew chant, and slow encroaching chromaticism); then each is heard in the 'guise' of the others, undermining their very foundations, and producing a profoundly disturbing result. It strikes at the heart of the bourgeois notions of 'character' that are promulgated by 'style' magazines today.

Thus, the Cageian panorama of extra-intentional sounds, the panoramic range of possible perspectives on musical works or styles, the panorama of the entire culture of a composer such as Verdi; the panorama of compositional/ transcriptional techniques,

---

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1975, French original 1973).

the panorama of world cultures, the panorama of the different 'high' as well as 'popular' arts, the panorama of the self, 'overdetermined' in the Freudian sense - a multitude of infinite spaces in which to interact.

For all the 'periods' of Finnissy's work (which, allowing for overlap, one might crudely categorize them as formally experimental/cinematically derived, theatrical, improvisatory, structurally monolithic, folkloristic, modal and critical) I hope to have made clear the coherent development of his world-view. Michael Finnissy has shown that it is not necessary either to resort to crass manipulation nor retreat into an extreme solipsistic personal mythology in order to create music that is powerful, evocative, emotional, dramatic and intellectually stimulating.

*I would like to express my gratitude to Helen Thomas and Sarah Beedle at Oxford University Press, Henrietta Brougham and Christopher Saward at United Music Publishers, Eric Forder and Miranda Jackson at Universal Edition and Fredericke Zimmermann at Edition Modern for kindly supplying scores, tapes and programme notes, without which this and other articles would not be possible, and most of all to Michael Finnissy, also for providing scores and tapes, but most of all for lending periods of time for fascinating conversations.*

The following is a personal selection of the key works (selected from a total of nearly 200!) of Finnissy.

*Le Dormeur du Val* (1963-4/66/68)  
*Horrorzone* (1965-66/71/87)  
*Songs 1-18* (1966-78)  
*As when upon a trancèd summer night* (1966/68)  
*Transformations of the vampire* (1968-71)  
*World* (1968-74)  
*Tsuru-Kame* (1 971-73)  
*Cipriano* (1974)  
*Ives-Grainger-Nancarrow* (1974-80)  
*Pathways of Sun and Stars* (1976)  
*Mr Punch* (1976-77/79)  
*Lost Lands* (1977)  
*English Country-Tunes* (1977/82/85)  
*Tom Fool's Wooing* (1975-78)  
*Piano Concertos Nos. 3* (1978), *4* (1978-80/96) & *6* (1980-81)  
*Fast Dances, Slow Dances* (1978-79)  
*Alongside* (1979)  
*Sea and Sky* (1979-80)  
*Kelir* (1981)  
*Duru-Duru* (1981)  
*Keroiylu* (1981)  
*Verdi Transcriptions 1- 15* (1972/82-85/88/95)  
*Ouraa* (1982-83)  
*Vaudeville* (1983)  
*Ngano* (1983-84)  
*String Quartet* (1984)  
*Cabaret Vert* (1985)

*String Trio* (1986)  
*The Undivine Comedy* (1985-88/95-)  
*Gershwin Arrangements* (1975-88) and *More Gershwin* (1989-90)  
*Red Earth* (1987-88)  
*Obrecht Motetten I-V* (1988-92)  
*Unknown Ground* (1989-90)  
*Maldon* (1990)  
*The Cambridge Codex* (1991)  
*Seven Sacred Motets* (1991)  
*French Piano* (1991)  
*Nine Romantics* (1992)  
*Thérèse Raquin* (1992-93)  
*Folklore* (1993-94)  
*5 Yvaroperas* (1992-95)  
*Traum des Sangers* (1994)  
*Violet, Slingsby, Guy and Lionel* (1995-96)  
*Speak its Name!* (1996)

Ex. 6.

Freely wavering tempo [♩ ≈ approx. 138]

\*pp subito

\*'Hodrocin'

7:5

7:5

7:5

6:5g

6:5g

6:5g

ff

pp subito